



Join the Wednesday Night Crew for a study of:

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Begins Wednesday, January 5th with Pastor Orleen and Pastor Robin and Michelle Ingram At the FLC, 6:30PM, in the auditorium.

- February 2nd, 9th(gone), 16th, 23rd
- March 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd, 30th
- April 6th, 13th, 20th, 27th

Week1: Welcome to Ephesus – Understanding the History

Week 2: Understanding the Culture of the Time: Individual Self/Collective Self

- WHO they were,
- WHOSE they were and how each Ephesian fit in with the whole of their group,
- WHERE they were,
- And the context, WHEN they were—in the timeline of history,
- Then WHERE were they headed,
- And to WHOM were they trying to reach,
- Once there, WHAT WERE THEY SUPPOSED TO DO?

Week 3: Understanding JC Headship of the Church. His goals for the Church. How/When/Why of being a member of a church.

Week 4: His Genesis – Predestination, What happened before Genesis and how it affects us today

The Goal of Ephesians:

Ephesians 4:1 Unity in the Body of Christ

*4 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to **walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,**² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

WHAT PROBLEMS WOULD EXIST FOR THESE TO BE THE ANSWERS?

REDEMPTION 1:7 (Salvation, Restoration)

DIVINE INTENTION for the human race 1:3-14 (God's plan for us)

GRACE 1:2 (God's favor that we never can earn)

PREDESTINATION 1:4-5 [The Tree DNA in the seed and...]

RECONCILIATION 2:1-21

UNION WITH CHRIST 2:1-21



Week 5: Being One – Not Two

Ephesians 2:10

*¹⁰ For we are **His workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand that **we should walk in them**.*

PAUL IS NOW ASKING US:

WHAT TYPE OF ATMOSPHERE/INFLUENCE DOES MY LIFE BRING?

HOW TO LIVE IN UNION WITH CHRIST

From being no community to being community

Ephesians 2 By Grace Through Faith

2 And ^(A)you He made alive, ^(B)who were dead in trespasses and sins, ²^(C)in which you once walked according to the ^(D)course of this world, according to ^(E)the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in ^(F)the sons of disobedience, ³^(G)among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in ^(H)the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and ^(I)were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

⁴ But God, ^(J)who is rich in mercy, because of His ^(K)great love with which He loved us, ⁵^(L)even when we were dead in trespasses, ^(M)made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up together, and made us sit together ^(N)in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in ^(O)His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸^(P)For by grace you have been saved ^(Q)through faith, and that not of yourselves; ^(R)it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of ^(S)works, lest anyone should ^(T)boast. ¹⁰ For we are ^(U)His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Brought Near...by His Blood [From being no community to being community]

11 *Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is **called** the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—*

[Being called names by others....what names?]

Step #1: Remembering what WAS

- a) Remembering who you were **(HOW?)**
- b) Remembering how you were treated due to human/fleshly behavior **(HOW?)**

Philippians 3:3-4 HCSB

³ For we are the circumcision, the ones who serve by the Spirit of God, boast in Christ Jesus, and do not put confidence in the flesh — ⁴ although I once also had confidence in the flesh.



12 *that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the **covenants** of promise, having no **hope** and without God in the world.*

Covenant – **Genesis 12:7 HCSB** Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your offspring." So he built...

c) Remember: Being WITHOUT Christ (do not forget what this was like) (HOW?)

No hope:

1 Thessalonians 1:3 HCSB

We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work of faith, labor of love, and endurance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1 Thessalonians 4:13 HCSB

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope.

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

Step #2: NOW, Declaring what IS

a) Declaring His redemption in our life: (HOW?)

- o Complete
- o In my place
- o Redemption
- o Forever

Hebrews 9:12 HCSB

He entered the most holy place once for all, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.

14 *For He Himself is our peace, who has made both **one**, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,*

[What does "in one body" mean? Look like? Behave like?]

b) Declaring Him as the *peace* in our life (HOW?)

No middle wall....

Galatians 3:28 HCSB

There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

[come up with a scenario where we can choose peace or discord]



15 *having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace,*

c) Declaring Him as the *unity* in our life (HOW?)

Galatians 6:15 HCSB

For both circumcision and uncircumcision mean nothing; what matters instead is a new creation.

[come up with a scenario where we can choose unity or division]

16 *and that He might (W)reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby (X)putting to death the enmity.*

d) Declaring Him through reconciliation (HOW?)

2 Corinthians 5:18 NKJV

¹⁸ Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and **has given us the ministry of reconciliation,**

Colossians 1:20-22 NKJV

²⁰ and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled ²² in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—

- There is no such thing as get along and play nice with accountability for our own actions.
- Reconciliation involves ownership.
- If it was just as easy as words, why did Christ die on the cross to accomplish the removal of the spiritual consequences of sin? There was no reconciliation for us until that happened.
- Actions create in the physical world as well as the supernatural world.
- Jesus is asking us to walk in valley between the two and reconcile both sides to one another as He did.

"There is no closure without accountability."

Police Officer

The Action of Reconciliation in Old Testament Illustration:

[Note: Someone pays the price of]

Genesis 15:8-20

⁸ And he said, "Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?"

⁹ So He said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." ¹⁰ Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down



the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. ¹¹ And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

¹² Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. ¹³ Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. ¹⁴ And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. ¹⁵ Now as for you, you shall ^[d] go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶ But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

¹⁷ And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. ¹⁸ On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying:

“To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates—¹⁹ the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, ²⁰ the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, ²¹ the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”

The ceremony or ritual described here is somewhat strange. Nonetheless, as Genesis 15:18 clearly states, this ceremony formalizes a covenant between God and Abram. The normal or standard terminology “to cut a covenant” (*kārat bērit*) is used. The interpretation of this mysterious rite is much discussed. The ceremony of covenant making involves an oath in which the covenant partners bring the curse of death on themselves if they are not faithful to the covenant relationship and promises. Walking between the animals cut in half is a way of saying, “May I become like these dead animals if I do not keep my promise(s) and my oath.” Scholars describe this as a self-maledictory oath, that is, an oath where one brings the curse of death on oneself for violating the covenant commitments. The detail with which Covenant-making ceremonies are described varies from text to text. The covenant making in Jeremiah 34:18–20 is also explicit about walking between the pieces of the animal sacrificed for the rite:

Those who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces. The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests and all the people of the land who walked between the pieces of the calf, I will deliver into the hands of their enemies who want to kill them. Their dead bodies will become food for the birds and the wild animals. (NIV)

Ray Vander Laan:

But there’s more. When God made covenant with his people, he did something no human being would have even considered doing. In the usual blood covenant, each party was responsible for keeping only his side of the promise. When God made covenant with Abraham, however, he promised to keep *both* sides of the agreement.

“If this covenant is broken, Abraham, for whatever reason—for My unfaithfulness or yours—I will pay the price,” said God. “If you or your descendants, for whom you are making this covenant, fail to keep it, I will pay the price in blood.”

And at that moment, Almighty God pronounced the death sentence on his Son Jesus.¹

¹ Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2018). [Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants](#) (Second Edition, pp. 287–294). Crossway.



*17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. 18 For through Him we both have **access** by one Spirit to the Father.*

Step #3: Access the Holy Spirit (HOW?)

Access = Gate = Door = Contact = Approach = Admission = Admittance

1 Corinthians 12:13 NKJV

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – **and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.**

1 Corinthians 12

Use the Access to ...The Holy Spirit (HOW?)

NOTE: What did Paul intend when he used the word *ethne* (Gentiles) in this text? In Paul's day a Greek attracted to Judaism had two choices. A male Greek could become a Jew through Jewish baptism, circumcision and the rejection of his Greek culture. Or, he could remain a Greek as a "God fearer" and figuratively sit at the back of the synagogue. Such a person would naturally remain an outsider to the Jewish community. Paul, however, could not accept either option. For him, Jews and Greeks had become one in Christ. Yet each could maintain his/her own language and ethnic identity.

NOTE: The various spiritual gifts are not given to help the believer focus on personal spiritual enrichment. They are for the *sumpheron* (the common good). *Sumpheron* is the noun form of the verb *sumpero*, which Paul uses in 6:12 to describe things that are "helpful." All things are lawful for Paul, but "not all things *sumpherei*" (contribute to the common good). Here Paul is discussing how the manifestations of the Spirit are specifically given for that same common good. The Spirit blows where it wills (Jn 3:8). We are refreshed by its breeze, but cannot control its direction.

At the same time these spiritual gifts are apportioned to each person individually—as *God chooses*. Each believer is important and each must be willing to receive the gift(s) offered. Yet no one can *select* a desired gift. Nor does the community have the right to insist on a particular gift as a requirement for full acceptance. God chooses gift(s) for each believer, and each gift is to be received, honored and used.

Bailey, K. E. (2011). *Paul through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (pp. 325–348). IVP Academic.

Spiritual Gifts: Unity in Diversity

12 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: 2 You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb[mute, silent] idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

*4 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. 6 And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. 7 **But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:** 8 for to one is given the word of **wisdom** through the Spirit, to another the word of **knowledge** through the same Spirit, 9 to another **faith** by the same Spirit, to another gifts of **healings** by the same Spirit, 10 to another the **working of miracles**, to another **prophecy**, to another **discerning of spirits**, to another **different kinds of tongues**, to another the **interpretation of tongues**.*



¹¹ But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

Unity and Diversity in One Body [Unity does not mean sameness]

¹² For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink [ε] into one Spirit. ¹⁴ For in fact the body is not one member but many.

*¹⁵ If the **foot** should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? ¹⁸ But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. ¹⁹ And if they were all one member, where would the body be?*

²⁰ But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” ²² No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. ²³ And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, ²⁴ but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, ²⁵ that there should be no schism [divisions] in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. ²⁶ And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. ²⁸ And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that, miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? ³⁰ Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

[Notes 28-54]

- **Gentile** title
- Do we TRY? [These are NOT natural abilities. These are not responses to deep emotion.]

“Just as Paul’s readers were led astray by their emotions in their idol-worshiping days, even so, if Pneumatology replaces or even trumps Christology they can also be led astray by their emotions in their new faith. If what I feel is not controlled by what I know of Christ, I am intellectually and spiritually adrift and able to attribute horrible things to the prompting of the Spirit. The Spirit of God “never says ‘Jesus be cursed!’ ”

Bailey, K. E. (2011). [Paul through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians](#) (pp. 325–348). IVP Academic.

Section: Wisdom, Knowledge, Faith

Section: Healing, Working of Miracles, Prophecy, Discerning of spirits, Different kinds of tongues, Interpretation of tongues



- Do we take credit for the Holy Spirit's work?
- Do we use the measurement of how good we are with being the 'vessel' as equal to value as a person or maturity as Christian?
- Do I believe/act/treat others that I think what they contribute to the body is not as good as what I do or not good at all? TREATING AS WORTHLESS. [Disunity]
[No Jew. No Greek. No Slave. No Free. No Male. No Female.] Galatians 3
- Human nature naturally separates and puts itself on a pedestal. [self-aggrandizement]
Beware of: I am right. You. Are. Not. [disunity]
- No attempt because I feel I cannot...INEPT, WORTHLESS [Believing a lie from the enemy]
- THIS STUFF is the answer to Remembering & Declaring – Access the Holy Spirit

JUST TRY

Christ Our Cornerstone

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

Psalm 118:22 NKJV

The stone *which* the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone.

Built together

1 Peter 2:5 NKJV

you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Dwelling place

John 17:23 NKJV

I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.



NOteS

HCSB Unity in Christ

¹¹ So then, remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh—called “the uncircumcised” by those called “the circumcised,”^(A) which is done in the flesh by human hands.^(B)¹² At that time you were without the Messiah, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise,^(C) without hope^(D) and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood^(E) of the Messiah. ¹⁴ For He is our peace, who made both groups one^(F) and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. In His flesh, ¹⁵ He made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that He might create^(G) in Himself one^(H) new man from the two, resulting in peace. ¹⁶ He did this so that He might reconcile both to God in one body^(I) through the cross and put the hostility to death by it.^(J) ¹⁷ When the Messiah came, He proclaimed the good news^(L) of peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.^(K) ¹⁸ For through Him we both have access^(L) by one Spirit to the Father.^(M) ¹⁹ So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,^(N) with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone. ²¹ The whole building, being put together^(O) by Him, grows into a holy sanctuary in the Lord.^(P) ²² You also are being built together^(Q) for God’s dwelling^(R) in the Spirit.

Footnotes

- a. [Ephesians 2:16](#) Or *death in Himself*

Cross references

- A. [2:11](#) : [Gl 6:15](#)
B. [2:11](#) : [Php 3:3](#)
C. [2:12](#) : [Gn 12:7](#)
D. [2:12](#) : [1Th 1:3](#); [4:13](#)
E. [2:13](#) : [Heb 9:12](#)
F. [2:14](#) : [Rm 10:12](#); [Gl 3:28](#)
G. [2:15](#) : [Rv 3:14](#)
H. [2:15](#) : [Jn 11:52](#)
I. [2:16](#) : [Eph 4:4](#)
J. [2:17](#) : [Lk 4:18](#); [1Pt 1:12](#)
K. [2:17](#) : [Is 57:19](#)
L. [2:18](#) : [Jn 10:7-9](#); [Rm 5:2](#); [Eph 3:12](#)
M. [2:18](#) : [Jn 4:23](#); [1Co 12:13](#); [Eph 4:4](#); [Col 1:12](#)
N. [2:20](#) : [1Co 12:28](#); [Eph 3:5](#)
O. [2:21](#) : [Eph 4:16](#)
P. [2:21](#) : [1Pt 2:5](#)
Q. [2:22](#) : [Rm 11:18](#)
R. [2:22](#) : [1Pt 2:5](#)



II. New society

Ephesians 2:11–3:21

4. A single new humanity 2:11–22

'Alienation' is a popular word in contemporary society. There are many people, especially young people in the so-called 'developed' world, who are disillusioned with 'the system', critical of 'the technocracy' and hostile to 'the establishment', who describe themselves as 'alienated'. Some work for reform, others plot revolution, others drop out. In no case can they accommodate themselves to the *status quo*.

It was Karl Marx who popularized the word, having himself taken it from the German theologian, Ludwig Feuerbach. Marx understood the plight of the proletariat in terms of economic alienation. Every worker puts into his craftsmanship a part of himself. When his employer then sells his product, he is guilty, at least in part, of alienating the worker from himself. This according to Marx was the basis of the class struggle.

Nowadays the word is used more generally of the working man's alienation not only from his achievement and its due reward, but also from the exercise of power, especially in decision-making. In other words, the term has become more political than economic. 'Alienation' is partly a sense of disaffection with what is, and partly a sense of powerlessness to change it. This is a widespread feeling in the democratic countries of the West, and Christians would be foolish to ignore it.

But long before Feuerbach and Marx the Bible spoke of human alienation. It describes two other and even more radical alienations than the economic and the political. One is alienation from God our Creator, and the other alienation from one another, our fellow creatures.

Nothing is more dehumanizing than this breakdown of fundamental human relationships. It is then that we become strangers in a world in which we should feel at home, and aliens instead of citizens.

The letter to the Ephesians alludes to both these forms of alienation. Indeed, Paul uses the word in relation to both conditions. The Greek verb is *apallotrioō* and means to estrange, exclude or alienate. In the New Testament it occurs only in these two Ephesians verses, together with the Colossians parallel to one of them:

4:18 'alienated from the life of God' (cf. Col. 1:20, 21)

2:12 'alienated from the commonwealth of Israel'

Now this double alienation, or rather its replacement by reconciliation, is the theme of Ephesians 2. In the first half of the chapter (verses 1–10) human beings are depicted as **alienated from God**. The verb is not actually used there, as it is in 4:18, but this is without doubt what is meant when they are portrayed as 'dead through ... trespasses and sins' and 'by nature children of wrath' (verses 1, 3). We considered in the last chapter the meaning of these phrases.

In the second half of Ephesians 2 (verses 11–22), which is our text in this chapter, human beings are depicted **as alienated also from each other**. In particular, Gentiles are described as



‘alienated from the commonwealth of Israel’ (verse 12). It is almost impossible for us towards the close of the twentieth century AD to think ourselves back to those days when humanity was deeply divided between Jews and Gentiles. The Bible opens with a clear declaration of the unity of mankind. But after the fall and then the flood it traces the origins of human division and separation. It may seem that God himself contributed to the process by choosing Israel out of all the nations to be his ‘holy’ or ‘distinct’ people. But we need to remember that in calling Abraham he promised through his posterity to bless all the earth’s families and that in choosing Israel he intended her to become a light to the nations. The tragedy is that Israel forgot her vocation, twisted her privilege into favouritism and ended by heartily despising—even detesting—the heathen as ‘dogs’. William Barclay helps us feel the alienation between the two communities, and the deepseated hostility between them, especially on the Jewish side. He writes:

The Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentile. 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.

Of this double Gentile alienation—from God and from God’s people Israel—the so-called ‘middle wall of partition’ (verse 14, AV) or ‘dividing wall of hostility’ (RSV) was the standing symbol. It was a notable feature of the magnificent temple built in Jerusalem by Herod the Great. The temple building itself was constructed on an elevated platform. Round it was the Court of the Priests. East of this was the Court of Israel, and further east the Court of the Women. 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 metre 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.’**

The famous Jewish historian Josephus describes this barricade in both his books. 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**’. In his *Wars of the Jews* he is a little more explicit. There was, he writes, ‘a partition made of stone all round, whose height was three cubits. 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”.’

During the last hundred years or so two of the Greek notices have been discovered, one in 1871 and the other in 1935. The former, exhibited in the museum at Istanbul, is a white



limestone slab measuring nearly a metre across. Its exact wording is as follows: ‘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.’

Paul knew all about it from personal experience. Only about three years previously he had nearly been lynched himself by an angry Jewish mob who thought he had taken a Gentile with him into the temple, interestingly enough an Ephesian named Trophimus.

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. Both are mentioned in the second half of the chapter, although in the opposite order:

verse 14 ‘He ... has made both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility (*echthra*).’

verse 16 ‘That he ... might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility (*echthra*) to an end.’

Alongside his destruction of these two enmities Jesus has succeeded in creating a new society, in fact a new humanity, in which alienation has given way to reconciliation, and hostility to peace. And this new human unity in Christ is the pledge and foretaste of that final unity under Christ’s headship to which Paul has already looked forward in 1:10.

[Can I imagine this?]

After this introduction relating to its background and theme, we are now ready to study the text itself:

*Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, **that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two,** so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who*



were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²²in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

It may be helpful if, before immersing ourselves in a more detailed exposition, we grasp the structure of the passage as a whole. Paul traces his Gentile readers' spiritual biography in three stages. Here is the gist of his message to them:

(1) At one time you were alienated from God and from his people Israel.

(2) By his death on the cross Christ Jesus has reconciled Jews and Gentiles both to each other and to God, creating "a single new humanity" (verse 15, NEB).

(3) You are no longer alienated but full members with Israel of God's people and family.' The three stages are marked by the expressions 'at one time' (verse 11), 'but now' (verse 13) and 'so then' (verse 19). And the sequence runs: *Remember that at one time you ... were alienated ... but now in Christ Jesus you ... have been brought near ... for he is our peace ... So then you are no longer strangers ... but ... fellow citizens with the saints ...* I shall entitle the three unfolding stages of God's plan as follows:

- a. the portrait of an alienated humanity, or what we once were (verses 11–12)
- b. the portrait of the peacemaking Christ, or what Jesus Christ has done (verses 13–18)
- c. the portrait of God's new society, or what we have now become (verses 19–22)

1. The portrait of an alienated humanity, or what we once were (verses 11–12)

In verses 1–3 Paul has portrayed all mankind (Jews and Gentiles alike) in sin and death. Here in verses 11 and 12 he refers particularly to the Gentile or heathen world before Christ, to those whom the Jews (*the circumcision*) scornfully called *the uncircumcision*. Circumcision had of course been given by God to Abraham as the outward sign of membership of his covenant people. But both the physical rite and the word had come to assume an exaggerated importance. Gentiles and Jews regularly called each other by derogatory names. Paul emphasizes this here. Gentiles were called 'the uncircumcision' by what is called 'the circumcision which is made in the flesh by hands'. It is as if Paul is declaring the unimportance of names and labels, in comparison with the reality behind them, and hinting that behind 'what is called the circumcision which is made in the flesh by hands' there is another kind, a circumcision of the heart, spiritual not physical, which was needed by and available to both Jews and Gentiles alike.

In verse 12 he drops the business of what Jews and Gentiles called each other, and comes on to the serious reality of Gentile alienation. In Romans he had listed Jewish privileges (9:3–5); here he lists Gentile disabilities. First, they were *separated from Christ*. The expression is the more tragic because in chapter 1 he has unfolded the great spiritual blessings of being 'in Christ', and in the earlier part of chapter 2 he has explained how God has quickened, raised and seated us



‘with Christ’. But *at one time*, that is throughout the whole period BC, the Gentiles were neither ‘in Christ’ nor ‘with Christ’ but ‘separated from Christ’; they even had no expectation of a coming Messiah.

The Gentiles’ second and third disabilities were similar to one another. They were both *alienated from the commonwealth of Israel* and *strangers to the covenants of promise* (literally ‘of the promise’, referring probably to the foundation promise made by God to Abraham). Israel was a ‘commonwealth’ or nation under God, a theocracy, and a ‘covenant people’ to whom he had committed himself by a solemn pledge. Thus he had bound himself to them and ruled over them. But the Gentiles were excluded from this covenant and kingdom.

The fourth and fifth Gentile disabilities are starkly stated: *having no hope and without God in the world*. They were ‘hopeless’ because, although God had planned and promised to include them one day, they did not know it, and therefore had no hope to sustain them. And they were ‘godless’ (*atheoi*) because, although God had revealed himself to all mankind in nature and therefore had not left himself without witness, yet they suppressed the truth they knew and turned instead to idolatry. It was no exaggeration, therefore, to describe the ancient non-Jewish world as ‘hopeless’ and ‘godless’. The golden age of the Greeks was past; they had no promised future to look forward to. Moreover, the gods of Greece and Rome entirely failed to satisfy the hunger of human hearts. The people were *atheoi* not in the sense that they disbelieved (on the contrary, they had a plethora of gods), but in the sense that they had no true knowledge of God such as he had given to Israel, and (because of their rejection of the knowledge they had) no personal fellowship with him.

This, then, was the terrible fivefold deprivation of the ancient Gentile world before Christ. They were cut off from the Messiah, from the theocracy and the covenants, from hope, and from God himself. In William Hendriksen’s summary they were ‘Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless and Godless’. In Paul’s single phrase they were ‘far off’ (13), alienated from God and from the people of God.

And we ourselves in our pre-Christian days, it is necessary to add, were in exactly the same plight. We were alienated from God and from his people. Worse, there was in our hearts the ‘enmity’ to which Paul refers later, so that we rebelled against the authority of God and knew little or nothing of true human community. Is it not the same in today’s world without Christ? Men still build walls of partition and division like the terrible Berlin wall, or erect invisible curtains of iron or bamboo, or construct barriers of race, colour, caste, tribe or class. Divisiveness is a constant characteristic of every community without Christ. We ourselves experienced it. Now the apostle says *Therefore remember* (verse 11), and again *remember* (verse 12). There are some things which Scripture tells us to forget (like the injuries which others do to us). But there is one thing in particular which we are commanded to remember and never to forget. This is what we were before God’s love reached down and found us. For only if we remember our former alienation (distasteful as some of it may be to us), shall we be able to remember the greatness of the grace which forgave and is transforming us.

2. The portrait of the peacemaking Christ or what Jesus Christ has done (verses 13–18)



The parallel between the two halves of Ephesians 2 is obvious. First comes in both cases a description of life without Christ: 'dead' (verses 1–3) and 'alienated' (verses 11–12). Then follows, again in both cases, the great adversative: 'But God' (verse 4) and 'But now' (verse 13). The main distinction is that in the second half Paul is stressing the Gentile experience. Twice he uses the emphatic pronoun *you* (*hymeis*): 'Remember that once *you* were alienated ... But now in Christ Jesus *you* ... have been brought near.'

This, then, in its essence is the difference which Christ has made: *you who once were far off have been brought near*. Such spatial language ('far' and 'near') was not uncommon in the Old Testament. God and Israel were known to be 'near' one another, since God had promised to be their God and to make them his people. Hence Moses could say: 'What great nation is there that has a God so *near* to it as the Lord our God is to us?' Their uniqueness in this respect is repeated in Psalm 148:14, where they are called 'the people of Israel who are *near* to him'. By contrast, the Gentile nations were 'far off', peoples who had to be summoned 'from afar'. But God promised that one day he would speak 'Peace, peace, to the far and to the near', a promise which was fulfilled in Jesus Christ and which is quoted here by Paul with reference to him.³ And this 'nearness to God' which all Christians enjoy through Christ is a privilege we take too frequently for granted. Our God does not keep his distance or stand on his dignity, like some oriental potentate, nor does he insist on any complicated ritual or protocol. On the contrary, through Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit we have immediate 'access' to him as our Father (verse 18). We need to exhort one another to avail ourselves of this privilege.

Verse 13 is more than a statement that we who were 'far off' have now been 'brought near'; it contains in addition two important references to Christ. For it states that our new nearness to God is both *in Christ Jesus* and *in (or by) the blood of Christ*. It is essential, if we are to be faithful to the apostle's teaching, to hold onto these two expressions, and not to emphasize one at the expense of the other. For 'the blood of Christ' (as in 1:7) signifies his sacrificial death for our sins on the cross, by which he reconciled us to God and to each other, whereas 'in Christ Jesus' signifies the personal union with Christ today through which the reconciliation he achieved is received and enjoyed. Thus the two expressions witness to the two stages by which those 'far off' are 'brought near'. The first is the historical event of the cross, and the second Christian conversion, or the contemporary experience of union with Christ. What Jesus Christ accomplished by his cross Paul will explain in the next verses. Meanwhile, it will be wise for us to observe well the phrase 'in Christ Jesus' with which he introduces his whole exposition of Christ's reconciling work. It is not a universal reconciliation that Christ achieved or that Paul proclaimed: it is rather a nearness to God and to each other gratefully experienced by those who are near Christ, indeed 'in' him in a vital, personal union. This means, as John Mackay expresses it, when commenting on these verses, that God's integrating principle for uniting human beings is neither intellectual (philosophy) as in Roman Catholicism, nor political (conquest) as in Islam or Marxism, but spiritual (redemption by Christ, involving union between Jews and Gentiles, man and God and ultimately heaven and earth). These are three alternative 'imperialisms', the first of mind, the second of force, the third of the kingdom of God.

The apostle goes on to elaborate the work of Christ, in terms both of what he did and of how he did it. What he did is plain: *For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility* (verse 14). 'He' (*autos*) is strongly emphatic. It is he, Christ



Jesus, who shed his blood on the cross and who offers himself to his people today to be united to them, it is he who by what he did once and now offers *is our peace*, that is to say, is the peacemaker between us and with God. The 'both' whom he has *made ... one* seems clearly to mean Jews and Gentiles, but the reconciliation was broader than that, for, as we saw earlier, *the dividing wall of hostility* which he *has broken down* symbolized Gentile alienation from God as well as from Israel.

This announcement which Paul makes of the breaking down of the wall by Jesus Christ is extremely remarkable. For literally and historically speaking, the wall was not broken down until the Roman legions entered Jerusalem in AD 70. So it was still standing, still surrounding the temple, and still excluding the Gentiles, while Paul was writing this letter. But though materially it remained, spiritually it had already been destroyed in AD 30 or so, when Jesus died on the cross. As Armitage Robinson put it, 'It still stood: but it was already antiquated, obsolete, out of date, so far as its spiritual meaning went. The sign still stood: but the thing signified was broken down.'

We turn now to the question how Christ did it. What did he do when he died on the cross to get rid of the divisive enmity between Jew and Gentile, between man and God? The answer is given in verses 15 and 16. They are packed tight with theology, and need to be unpacked. Perhaps the best way to clarify the apostle's sequence of thought is to isolate the three successive main verbs which he uses, *viz. by abolishing ... that he might create ... and might reconcile ...* We are told that he abolished the law of commandments in order to create a single new humanity and to reconcile both parts of it to God.

a. The abolition of the law of commandments (verse 15a)

The first assertion Paul makes is that Christ broke down the wall, the hostility, *by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances*. At first sight this is a surprising, not to say a startling statement. How can the apostle declare that Christ abolished the law when Christ himself in the Sermon on the Mount specifically declared the opposite, that he had not come to abolish it but to fulfil it? We shall see that the discrepancy is only verbal; in substance they were referring to the law in two different senses.

In the Sermon on the Mount the context shows that Jesus was referring to the *moral* law. He was teaching the difference between Pharisaic righteousness and Christian righteousness, and urging that Christian righteousness involves a deep and radical obedience to the law. Paul's primary reference here, however, seems to be to the *ceremonial* law and to what NEB calls 'its rules and regulations', that is, to circumcision (the main physical distinction between Jews and Gentiles, verse 11), the material sacrifices, the dietary regulations and the rules about ritual 'cleanness' and 'uncleanness' which governed social relationships. The parallel passage in Colossians alludes to circumcision, and also to 'questions of food and drink', and regulations regarding 'a festival or a new moon or a sabbath' (2:11, 16–21); so it seems probable that these were the *commandments and ordinances* which Paul has in mind here. They erected a serious barrier between Jews and Gentiles, but Jesus set this whole ceremonial aside. And he did it *in his flesh* (surely a reference to his physical death) because in the cross he fulfilled all the types and shadows of the Old Testament ceremonial system.



It seems probable, however, that Paul is making another though secondary reference, this time to the moral, not the ceremonial law. Jesus certainly did not abolish the moral law as a standard of behaviour (it is still in force and binding on his followers); but he did abolish it as a way of salvation. Whenever the law is viewed in this light it is divisive. For we cannot obey it, however hard we try. Therefore it separates us from God and from each other. But Jesus himself perfectly obeyed the law in his life, and in his death bore the consequences of our disobedience. He took upon himself 'the curse of the law' (the judgment it threatens to those who disobey it) in order to free us from it. Or, according to the Colossians parallel, God is able to forgive us all our trespasses because he 'cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross' (2:13–14). Acceptance with God is now through faith in Christ crucified alone, whether for Jews or for Gentiles. The law was a barrier between us, but faith unites us, since all of us have to come to God through Christ in the same way. This had been one of Paul's major emphases in Galatians, namely that we are all brought to the same level at the foot of Christ's cross.

To sum up, Jesus abolished both the regulations of the ceremonial law and the condemnation of the moral law. Both were divisive. Both were put aside by the cross.

b. The creation of a single new humanity (verse 15b)

It is impossible to miss the way in which Paul moves on from the negative to the positive, from the abolition of something old (the divisiveness of the law) to the creation of something new (a single, undivided humanity). In both senses which we have been considering the law had made a deep rift in humanity. Jews and Gentiles were alienated from one another and at enmity with one another. But once the divisive law had been set aside, there was nothing to keep the two parts of humanity apart. Instead Christ brought them together by a sovereign act of creation. Literally, he 'created the two into one new man, so making peace'. 'The new man here', writes F. F. Bruce, 'like the "full-grown man" of Ephesians 4:13, is the Christian community viewed corporately.' What Paul is referring to, in fact, is not a 'new man' but a 'new human race', united by Jesus Christ *in himself*. For although potentially the single new humanity was created when Jesus abolished the divisive law on the cross, actually it comes into existence and grows only by personal union with himself.

This new unity through and in Christ does more than span the Jew-Gentile divide. In other passages Paul says that it also does away with sexual and social distinctions. 'Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all.' Again, '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.' Not that the facts of human differentiation are removed. Men remain men and women women, Jews remain Jews and Gentiles Gentiles. But inequality before God is abolished. There is a new unity in Christ.

c. The reconciliation of Jew and Gentile to God (verse 16)

After the abolition of the divisive law and the creation of the undivided humanity came the reconciliation of both parts of the old humanity to God, *thereby bringing the hostility to an end*. Here the 'hostility' is clearly between God and men, just as in verse 14 it was chiefly between Jew



and Gentile. And just as there the 'hostility' was mutual, I think we need to see a certain mutuality also in the hostility between men and God. It is not just that our attitude to him has been one of rebellion; it is also that his 'wrath' has been upon us for our sin (verse 3). And only *through the cross* have both 'hostilities' been brought to an end, for when Christ bore our sin and judgment on the cross God turned away his own wrath, and we, seeing his great love, turned away ours also. Thus Christ (literally) 'killed' or 'slew' the hostility. 'Christ in his death was slain', comments Armitage Robinson, 'but the slain was a slayer too.' And the hostility in both directions having been decisively dealt with, the result is reconciliation.

This, then, was the achievement of Christ's cross. First, he abolished the law (its ceremonial regulations and moral condemnation) as a divisive instrument separating men from God and Jews from Gentiles. Secondly he created a single new humanity out of its two former deep divisions, making peace between them. Thirdly, he reconciled this new united humanity to God, having killed through the cross all the hostility between us. Christ crucified has thus brought into being nothing less than a new, united human race, united in itself and united to its creator.

This does not mean that the whole human race is now united and reconciled. We know from observation and experience that it is not. But then Paul does not claim this either. There is a further stage in the work of Christ which he goes on to mention. It is that Christ *came and preached peace* (verse 17). Already we have been told that *he is our peace* (verse 14) and that he created a new humanity, *so making peace* (verse 15). But now he *preached peace*, publishing abroad the good news of the peace he had made through the cross. First he achieved it; then he announced it. And since the achievement was at the cross, and logically the announcement must follow the achievement, this preaching cannot refer to his public ministry. It must refer rather to his post-resurrection appearances, in which the very first word he spoke to the apostles was 'Peace be with you',³ and to his proclamation of the gospel of peace to the world through the apostles and through subsequent generations of Christians. Jesus Christ is still preaching peace in the world today, through the lips of his followers. For it is truly a wonderful fact that whenever we proclaim peace, it is Christ who proclaims it through us.

Moreover this good news was addressed from the start to the 'far' and 'near', that is, to Gentiles and Jews equally: *peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near*. And many of each community embraced it, and thereby found themselves united to God and to each other. For *through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father* (verse 18). Although 'reconciliation' is an event; 'access' is the continuing relationship to which it leads. 'Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access ...' *Prosagōgē* (access) conjures up the scene in an oriental court, when subjects are granted an audience with the king or emperor, and are presented to him. The flavour of the word remains, but the emphasis changes because our access is not to a king but to a Father, before whom we have 'boldness and confidence of access' (3:12). And in the enjoyment of this ready access to God, we find we have no practical difficulty with the mystery of the eternal Trinity. For our access is *to the Father, through him* (the Son who made peace and preached it), and *in or by one Spirit*, the Spirit who regenerates, seals and indwells his people, who witnesses with our spirits that we are God's children, who helps us in our weaknesses and teaches us to pray, and who unites us as we pray. For it is *we both*, Jews and Gentiles, who as members of God's new society now approach our Father together. Thus the highest and fullest achievement



of the peacemaking Christ is this trinitarian access of the people of God, as through him and by one Spirit we come boldly to our Father.

3. The portrait of God's new society or what we have now become (verses 19–22)

So then, Paul begins his summing up. He has explained step by step what Christ has done to 'bring near', to God and to his people those in the Gentile world who were previously 'far off'. Christ has abolished the law of commandments, created a single new humanity in place of the two, reconciled both to God, and preached peace to those near and far. *So then*, what is the result of Christ's achievement and announcement of peace? It is this: *you* (Gentiles) *are no longer* what you used to be, *strangers and sojourners*, 'aliens in a foreign land' (NEB), visitors without legal rights. On the contrary, your status has dramatically changed. Now you 'belong' in a way you never did before. You used to be refugees; at least now you have a home.

In order to indicate the richness of their changed position and their new privileges in Christ, Paul resorts to three familiar models of the church, which are developed in many other passages of Scripture. He pictures the new Jew-Gentile community as God's kingdom, God's family and God's temple.

a. God's kingdom (verse 19a)

According to verse 12 the Gentiles used to be stateless and disenfranchised outsiders, 'alienated from the commonwealth (*politeia*) of Israel'. But now, he says to them, *you are fellow citizens (sumpolitai) with the saints*, which seems here to mean the Jewish people, the *saints* or 'holy nation'. Only a few years previously the word *politeia* had been used of Roman citizenship in Paul's conversation with the tribune in Jerusalem. Now he writes of another citizenship. Although he does not develop the metaphor, he appears to be alluding to citizenship of God's kingdom. The kingdom of God is neither a territorial jurisdiction nor even a spiritual structure. God's kingdom is God himself ruling his people, and bestowing upon them all the privileges and responsibilities which his rule implies. To this new international God-ruled community, which had replaced the Old Testament national theocracy, Gentiles and Jews belonged on equal terms. Paul is writing while the Roman Empire is at the zenith of its splendour; no signs had yet appeared of its coming decline, let alone of its fall. Yet he sees this other kingdom, neither Jewish nor Roman but international and interracial, as something more splendid and more enduring than any earthly empire.⁷ And he rejoices in its citizenship more even than in his Roman citizenship. Its citizens are free and secure. The words *no longer strangers and sojourners but ... citizens* emphasize the contrast between the rootlessness of a life outside Christ and the stability of being a part of God's new society. 'We no longer live on a passport, but ... we really have our birth certificates, ... we really do belong.'

b. God's family (verse 19b)



The metaphor changes and becomes more intimate: *you are ... members of the household of God*. A kingdom is one thing; a household or family is another. And in Christ Jews and Gentiles find themselves more than fellow citizens under his rule; they are together children in his family. Paul has just written in the previous verse of the new and privileged access 'to the Father' which Jews and Gentiles enjoy through Christ (verse 18), and earlier in the letter he has enlarged on the blessings of 'adoption' into his family (1:5). Soon he will have more to say about God's archetypal fatherhood (3:14–15) and about the 'one God and Father of us all' (4:6). But here his emphasis seems to be less on God's fatherhood than on the brotherhood into which, across racial barriers, the Father's children are brought. 'Brethren' (meaning 'brothers and sisters') is the commonest word for Christians in the New Testament. It expresses a close relationship of affection, care and support. *Philadelphia*, 'brotherly love', should always be a special characteristic of God's new society.

c. *God's temple (verses 20–22)*

Paul comes now to his third picture. Essentially the church is a community of people. Nevertheless, it may be likened in a number of respects to a building, and especially to the temple. The temple in Jerusalem—first Solomon's, then Zerubbabel's, then Herod's—had for nearly a thousand years been the focal point of Israel's identity as the people of God. Now there was a new people; would there be a new temple, as Jesus had hinted? The new people was not a new nation but a new humanity, international and worldwide. A geographically localized centre would therefore not be appropriate for it. What then could be its temple, its focus of unity? Here in verses 20–22 Paul elaborates his vision of the new temple in greater detail than elsewhere; it will repay careful study. As he develops his image, he refers to the foundation and cornerstone of the building, the structure as a whole and its individual stones, its cohesion and growth, its present function and (at least implicitly) its future destiny.

First, the foundation. Nothing is more important to any edifice than a solid, stable foundation. And Jesus' wellknown parable of the two house builders, with which he concluded his sermon on the mount, taught the need for rock. On what rock, then, is the church built? Paul replies: it is *built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone* (verse 20).

Since apostles and prophets were both groups with a teaching role, it seems clear that what constitutes the church's foundation is neither their person nor their office but their instruction. Moreover, we are to think of them as inspired teachers, organs of divine revelation, bearers of divine authority. The word 'apostles' here cannot therefore be a generic term for missionaries or church planters or bishops or other church leaders; instead it must denote that small and special group whom Jesus chose, called and authorized to teach in his name, and who were eyewitnesses of his resurrection, consisting of the Twelve plus Paul and James and perhaps one or two others. What they taught they expected the church to believe and preserve, what they commanded they expected the church to obey. The word 'prophets' also indicates inspired teachers to whom the word of God came and who conveyed that word to others faithfully. The couplet 'apostles and prophets' may bring together the Old Testament (prophets) and New Testament (apostles) as the basis of the church's teaching. But the inverted order of the words (not 'prophets and



apostles' but 'apostles and prophets') suggests that probably New Testament prophets are meant. If so, their bracketing with the apostles as the church's foundation is significant. The reference must again be to a small group of inspired teachers, associated with the apostles, who together bore witness to Christ and whose teaching was derived from revelation (3:5) and was foundational.

In practical terms this means that the church is built on the New Testament Scriptures. They are the church's foundation documents. And just as a foundation cannot be tampered with once it has been laid and the superstructure is being built upon it, so the New Testament foundation of the church is inviolable and cannot be changed by any additions, subtractions or modifications offered by teachers who claim to be apostles or prophets today. The church stands or falls by its loyal dependence on the foundation truths which God revealed to his apostles and prophets, and which are now preserved in the New Testament Scriptures.

The cornerstone is also of crucial importance to a building. It is itself part of and essential to the foundation; it helps to hold the building steady, and it also sets it and keeps it in line. The temple in Jerusalem had massive cornerstones. Armitage Robinson mentions one ancient monolith excavated from the southern wall of the temple which measured 38 feet 9 inches (about 12 metres) in length. *The chief cornerstone* of the new temple is *Christ Jesus himself*. Elsewhere he is also the foundation stone. But here Paul has particularly in mind the function of Jesus Christ in holding the growing temple together as a unity. For he is *the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows ...* The unity and growth of the church are coupled, and Jesus Christ is the secret of both. Since the 'in Christ' concept is of an organic union, the most natural metaphors to illustrate it are organic metaphors such as the branches 'in' the vine and the members 'in' the body. Here the concept is transferred to construction work. As a building depends for both its cohesion and its development on being tied securely to its cornerstone, so Christ the cornerstone is indispensable to the church's unity and growth. Unless it is constantly and securely related to Christ, the church's unity will disintegrate and its growth either stop or run wild.

Paul moves on from the whole structure of the temple to its individual stones. In both cases union with Christ is indispensable: *Christ ... the chief cornerstone in whom the whole structure is joined together ... in whom you also are built into it ...* The apostle Peter, who also develops the picture of the church as a building, describes individual church members as 'living stones' needing to 'come to him (Jesus) ... and be ... built into a spiritual house'. Here in Paul's picture the extra stones being built into the structure are *you also*, by which he means his Gentile readers. The Jerusalem temple was an exclusively Jewish edifice, as we have seen, which all Gentiles were forbidden to enter. But now Gentiles are not only admitted; they are themselves constituent parts of the temple of God. And since one of the cornerstone's functions was to bind two walls together, it may be that Paul is using this imagery to set Christ forth as the key to Jewish-Gentile solidarity.

What is the purpose of the new temple? In principle, it is the same as the purpose of the old, namely to be *a dwelling place of God* (verse 22). Of course spiritually-minded Israelites knew that God did not dwell in man-made temples and that the whole universe could not contain his infinite being. Nevertheless, he promised to manifest his glory (the shekinah) in the temple's inner sanctuary, in order to symbolize the truth that he dwelt among his people. The new temple,



however, is neither a material building, nor a national shrine, nor has it a localized site. It is a spiritual building (God's household) and an international community (embracing Gentiles as well as Jews), and it has a worldwide spread (wherever God's people are to be found). This is where God dwells. He is not tied to holy buildings but to holy people, to his own new society. To them he has pledged himself by a solemn covenant. He lives in them, individually and as a community.⁴ What, then, has replaced the shekinah glory in the temple, as the symbol of God's presence and the means of its manifestation? Paul answers the question here. The church is both *a holy temple in the Lord* (meaning, as always in the New Testament when not otherwise stated, 'the Lord Jesus') and *a dwelling place of God in the Spirit*. Once more the Holy Trinity claims our attention. For God dwells in his people as his temple 'in the Lord' and 'in the Spirit', or through his Son and by his Spirit.

As Paul was dictating his letter, there stood in Ephesus the magnificent marble temple of Artemis ('great is Diana of the Ephesians'), one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and in whose inner shrine there was a statue of the goddess. At the same time in Jerusalem there stood the Jewish temple built by Herod the Great, barricading itself against the Gentiles, and now also against God, whose shekinah glory it had housed in its inner sanctuary for centuries, but whose glory as revealed in its Messiah it had sought to extinguish. Two temples, one pagan and the other Jewish, each designed by its devotees as a divine residence, but both empty of the living God. For now there is a new temple, *a dwelling place of God in the Spirit*. It is his new society, his redeemed people scattered throughout the inhabited world. They are his home on earth. They will also be his home in heaven. For the building is not yet complete. *It grows into a holy temple in the Lord*. Only after the creation of the new heaven and the new earth will the voice from the throne declare with emphatic finality: 'Behold, the dwelling of God is with men.'

Conclusion

It is marvellous to look back and trace the sequence of the apostle's teaching. He paints on a large canvas with bold brush strokes. Once, he reminds his Gentile readers, you were alienated from God and from his people. But Christ died to reconcile you to both. So now you are no longer the aliens you were, but the kingdom over which God rules, the family which he loves and the temple in which he dwells. More simply still: you were alienated, you have been reconciled, and Christ has brought you home.

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.

That is the vision. But when we turn from the ideal portrayed in Scripture to the concrete realities experienced in the church today, it is a very different and a very tragic story. For even in the church there is often alienation, disunity and discord. And Christians erect new barriers in place of the old which Christ has demolished, now a colour bar, now racism, nationalism or tribalism, now personal animosities engendered by pride, prejudice, jealousy and the unforgiving spirit, now a divisive system of caste or class, now a clericalism which sunders clergy from laity



as if they were separate breeds of human being, and now a denominationalism which turns churches into sects and contradicts the unity and universality of Christ's church.

These things are doubly offensive. First, they are an offence to Jesus Christ. How dare we build walls of partition in the one and only human community in which he has destroyed them? Of course there are barriers of language and culture in the world outside, and of course new converts feel more comfortable among their own kind, who speak and dress and eat and drink and behave in the same way that they do and have always done. But deliberately to perpetuate these barriers in the church, and even to tolerate them without taking any active steps to overcome them in order to demonstrate the trans-cultural unity of God's new society, is to set ourselves against the reconciling work of Christ and even to try to undo it.

What is offensive to Christ is offensive also, though in a different way, to the world. It hinders the world from believing in Jesus. God intends his people to be a visual model of the gospel, to demonstrate before people's eyes the good news of reconciliation. But what is the good of gospel campaigns if they do not produce gospel churches? It is simply impossible, with any shred of Christian integrity, to go on proclaiming that Jesus by his cross has abolished the old divisions and created a single new humanity of love, while at the same time we are contradicting our message by tolerating racial or social or other barriers within our church fellowship. I am not saying that a church must be perfect before it can preach the gospel, but I am saying that it cannot preach the gospel while acquiescing in its imperfections.

We need to get the failures of the church on our conscience, to feel the offence to Christ and the world which these failures are, to weep over the credibility gap between the church's talk and the church's walk, to repent of our readiness to excuse and even condone our failures, and to determine to do something about it. I wonder if anything is more urgent today, for the honour of Christ and for the spread of the gospel, than that the church should be, and should be seen to be, what by God's purpose and Christ's achievement it already is—a single new humanity, a model of human community, a family of reconciled brothers and sisters who love their Father and love each other, the evident dwelling place of God by his Spirit. Only then will the world believe in Christ as Peacemaker. Only then will God receive the glory due to his name.

Covenant Genesis 15:18

The ceremony or ritual described here is somewhat strange. Nonetheless, as Genesis 15:18 clearly states, this ceremony formalizes a covenant between God and Abram. The normal or standard terminology "to cut a covenant" (*kārat b'ērît*) is used. The interpretation of this mysterious rite is much discussed. The ceremony of covenant making involves an oath in which the covenant partners bring the curse of death on themselves if they are not faithful to the covenant relationship and promises. Walking between the animals cut in half is a way of saying, "May I become like these dead animals if I do not keep my promise(s) and my oath." Scholars describe this as a self-maledictory oath, that is, an oath where one brings the curse of death on oneself for violating the covenant commitments. The detail with which Covenant-making ceremonies are described varies from text to text. The covenant making in Jeremiah 34:18–20 is also explicit about walking between the pieces of the animal sacrificed for the rite:



Those who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces. The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests and all the people of the land who walked between the pieces of the calf, I will deliver into the hands of their enemies who want to kill them. Their dead bodies will become food for the birds and the wild animals. (NIV)

In the vision given to Abram, a “smoking firepot and a blazing torch” pass between the dead pieces. What would these represent? When we remember that Genesis was a book given to the Israelite people at the time of entering the land of Canaan, we can see from that perspective—that is, after the exodus event—that smoke and fire are symbols of God’s presence. The angel of the Lord first appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush (Ex. 3:2). During the desert journey, God appears as a cloud of smoke and fire (Ex. 13:21). At Mount Sinai, his presence is manifested by smoke and fire (Ex. 19:18; 20:18). The fact that only God passes between the pieces is quite remarkable and shows that the promise depends on him and him alone.

There may, however, be more to this mysterious rite than that. One commentator, Gordon Wenham, stirred my thinking with the following questions:

While this interpretation could explain the phrase, “to cut a covenant,” it leaves many features of this rite unexplained. It does not explain the choice of these particular animals. Why are only sacrificial types selected? Why must they be three years old? Why are the birds not cut up? Why does Abram drive off the birds of prey? Finally it must be asked whether a divine self-imprecation is really likely. Is it compatible with OT theology for God to say “May I die, if I do not keep my word”? Divine oaths generally take the form, “As I live, says the LORD” (cf. Num. 14:21).

Wenham further notes that every kind of clean sacrificial animal used in Israel’s worship was involved. He suggests that the animals represent Israel. The birds of prey represent the attacks of foreign nations. Abram defends his descendants against foreign attackers. Similarly, Gideon sacrificed a seven-year-old bull to represent the seven years of Midianite oppression (Judg. 6:1, 25). Later on, the deliverance of the exodus is explained as God keeping his oath to Abraham (Ex. 2:24; Deut. 9:5). The animals are three years old, representing the three generations spent in Egypt. The fire and smoke passing between the animal halves represents God walking in the midst of his people (Lev. 26:12).

Recent scholarship has backed away from viewing the ceremony as a self-maledictory oath. Correlating the rite in Genesis 15 with the rite in Jeremiah 34 led some to date the Genesis narrative to Jeremiah’s time rather than to the period appropriate to the patriarchs (ca. 2000 BC). Significant articles by Gerard Hasel and Richard Hess have attempted to show that the account in Genesis 15 corresponds better to cultural evidence known from second millennium BC texts than to that from the neo-Assyrian and Aramaic treaties of the first millennium. This attempt is only partially fruitful, as the data have become somewhat skewed in the ensuing exegesis. Hasel claims,

Jer 34:18–19, however, is definite and clear on one point: Only one covenanting party, namely, “the princes of Judah, the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land” (vs 19) passed between the parts of the cut bull-calf. The similarity between Jer 34:18–19 and Genesis 15:17 rests in the fact that in each case one party passed between the pieces.



Unfortunately, Hasel is entirely mistaken. The only parties making the treaty in Jeremiah 34:8–22 are the persons listed in 34:19. This was not a covenant made *between* these parties and God. It was a covenant made by these parties *before* God (34:15), and in failing to release their slaves, they violated the Mosaic covenant. It is the Mosaic covenant that is between the people and God. That is the clear meaning of 34:18. So in Jeremiah 34, all the parties making the treaty pass between the pieces, and in Genesis 15, only God passes between the pieces. The slaves may have been beneficiaries of the covenant made by the leaders and the people, but they were not parties to the covenant. Mathews's commentary is an excellent example of research that builds on the studies by Hasel and Hess but like them ends up "throwing the baby out with the bathwater."

It is necessary and useful to cite Mathews in full and to critique this confusion of the data in important texts dealing with covenants:

The word "pieces" (*beter*) appears in the similar ritual described in Jer 34:18–19. Often scholars appropriate the rite of Jeremiah 34 as the template for explaining the practice in Genesis 15. Two wordplays describe the practice in Jeremiah. A calf was "cut" (*kārat*, v. 18) into pieces, formalizing a covenant that was "cut" ("made," NIV, i.e., "to cut a covenant," *kārat bērit*) between God and the leadership of Judah regarding the freeing of Hebrew slaves. Because they acted treacherously, the people are deemed "transgressors" (*hā'ōbērim*, NIV "the men who have violated," v. 18) who had "walked between" (*hā'ōbērim*, v. 18) the parts signifying acceptance of the sanctions of transgressing the covenant. The threat of death, like the gruesome results of the slaughtered calf, awaited them (v. 18). The Lord threatens that "the birds [*ōp*] of the air" will feast on the violators' dead flesh (v. 20). This imprecatory aspect of the symbolic slaying has parallels with Assyrian and Aramaic vassal treaties of the first millennium. For this reason Genesis 15 is usually dated at the time of Jeremiah or later.

There are, however, significant differences between the practices in the patriarchal account and Jeremiah that make doubtful this conclusion. Although the Jeremiah passage involves the slaughter of a calf and mentions birds, the practice in chap. 15 calls for several animals. Also the description of the ritual cleaving in 15:10 uses the term *bātar* (NIV "cut in two") instead of Jeremiah's word *kārat* (NIV "made") occurring in the idiomatic expression "cut a covenant" (34:18). Also importantly, the threat of curse for failure to observe the covenant is not explicit in chap. 15. When read in light of Jeremiah 34's imprecatory character, it may be implied that God submits to his own self-imprecation by passing through the parts. It is difficult, however, to reconcile this idea of God theologically and impossible to explain how the imprecation could be carried out. More promising are the examples of second-millennium texts from Alalakh involving an oath by a superior that is confirmed by slaying a lamb or sheep. If the Abram incident compares to these promissory oaths, Genesis describes a covenant pledge undertaken by God that is formally ratified by animal slaughter (cp. Ex. 24:3–8).

There are still significant features of Genesis 15 that diverge from the oath rituals at Alalakh. The number and sort of animals and the halving procedure of chap. 15 have no parallel yet found in the ancient Near East. Although the rite of chap. 15 ostensibly affirms the covenant oath, the prophecy that follows (vv. 13–16) hints at an emblematic significance attached to the rite's peculiarities. From hindsight we know that the prophecy previews Israel's Egyptian bondage, exodus, and conquest. Most agree that the smoking firepot and burning torch represent the Lord, a picture corresponding to the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire indicating the presence of God in the wilderness (e.g., Ex. 13:21–22). The "birds of prey" Abram disperses indicate a threat against the slaughtered animals. "Birds of prey" (*'ayit*) differ from the general terms for "birds" (*šippôr*, v.



10; *’ôp*, Jer 34:20) by their ravenous character (Isa. 18:6; Jer 12:9) and are unclean. In the context of the prophecy (vv. 13–16), the animal portions represent Abram’s descendants, and the birds of prey are the nation (Egypt) that enslaves them. The appearance of Abram as defender of the animal portions may refer to his obedient piety that confirmed his loyalty and ensured Israel’s future (e.g., 22:16–18) or his intercessory function as prophet (e.g., 18:16–33; 20:7, 17). Since Abram does not walk through the pieces, he is not under obligation to the Lord to realize the promises. By the passing of the firepot through the severed pieces, the Lord’s presence with enslaved Israel symbolically ensures the preservation and deliverance of Abram’s descendants.

An exhaustive analysis of all texts in the Old Testament dealing with covenants (such as the present study) reveals, first, that certain features of covenant making are constant throughout this period of time (2000–400 BC) alongside a changing typology of covenant documents and, second, that alongside the constant and standard features of covenant making, each instance may have its own peculiar variations. In addition, since the authors considered the details of the rituals to be background information that their audiences already understood, no single passage includes all the features of covenant making. Each narrator relates only what is relevant to his purpose in the context of his storyline. A full picture of the constant features of covenant making can be derived only by consideration of all covenant-making contexts.

Abram belongs to ca. 2000 BC and Jeremiah to 600 BC. Standard features are common to both of these covenant-making rituals. An animal is cut, and covenant-making parties pass or walk between the pieces of the dead animal. Both texts employ the standard terminology *kārat bē’rît*, “to cut a covenant.” These commonalities attest to age-old cultural data in the ancient Near East. The Old Testament is part of that cultural data even if no other texts from the Near East specifically mention “halving an animal.” Why should the accounts describe what is assumed by the culture and is therefore unnecessary to describe in most instances? The texts from Alalakh discussed by Hess do not provide all the details either. One text mentions cutting the neck of a lamb (rather than halving it and walking between the pieces), but it is clearly a self-maledictory oath. The covenant partner curses himself if he takes back what he is giving in the property grant of the treaty.

In Genesis 21:22–34, Abram and Abimelech make a treaty together, which we have already discussed. The ceremony is not described in detail. We are told, “Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant” (21:27 ESV). Presumably, they cut the animals in half and then walked between the pieces just as in Genesis 15 and Jeremiah 34. (Or maybe they cut the necks as in the Alalakh texts? Either way, the ceremony still involved a self-maledictory oath.) Such culturally understood details need not be described in full for the readers. The animals were not gifts to Abimelech, because Abraham set aside seven ewe lambs as a gift (Gen. 21:28–30). This was unusual, and Abimelech called for an explanation. Abraham told him they were a witness that he had dug the disputed well. So here, too, we see features that are constant to covenant making alongside features that suit a peculiar set of circumstances.

Possibly quite similar to the covenant making of Genesis 21 is a document from Mari, ca. eighteenth century BC. This brief text reads as follows: “I had a donkey foal, the young of a she-ass, slaughtered, I (thus) established peace between the Haneans and the Idamaraš.” Here a suzerain has sent his lieutenant to supervise a covenant-ratification ceremony between two of the suzerain’s vassals. The ceremony or ritual itself is not described in full. Why should it be?



Mathews's comment, therefore, that "the number and sort of animals and the halving procedure of chap. 15 have no parallel yet found in the ancient Near East" has little value. No details are provided in Genesis 21 either, but they are in Genesis 15 *because the fact that only one party passes between the pieces is remarkable*. The details are important in this text and are therefore given in full.

The differences adduced by Mathews between Jeremiah 34 and Genesis 15 only prevent correct interpretation of Genesis 15. The vocabulary differences that he lists are due to the author's wordplay in Jeremiah 34 on the one hand and the prophetic symbolism Yahweh wished to convey by the ceremony in Genesis 15 on the other. Nonetheless, both texts use the same standard covenant-making terminology. A calf in Jeremiah 34 is more suitable to a covenant made at a national level. Similarly, oxen and sheep are used in the ceremony between Abraham and Abimelech in Genesis 21. The animals in Genesis 15, however, are chosen for a specific symbolism, as explained by Wenham and appropriated by Mathews. Thus, the evidence does not indicate that we are mistakenly "appropriating the rite of Jeremiah 34 as the template for explaining the practice in Genesis 15."

That the idea of God taking a self-maledictory oath is difficult theologically only shows that we should exercise restraint in imposing on the text our notions of what is possible and right for God. It is also difficult to reconcile theologically that God asks Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice in Genesis 22. May not a critical approach to the text preclude the narrator's right to build mystery and tension into his storyline?

While Mathews asserts that in Genesis 15 the concept of a self-maledictory oath is not explicit, this argument bears no weight. If one can boldly interpret the symbolism of the special features of the ceremony as Mathews does, why not the standard features that are constant in the Old Testament for more than 1,500 years? It seems that a concern to defend a conservative dating for Genesis 15 against interpretation by more critical scholars has resulted in a skewed picture of its meaning.

CONCLUSION

Ray Vander Laan has nicely expressed the powerful communication of the covenant-making ritual in Genesis 15:

What an awesome God we have! What incredible love he has for his creatures!

Imagine! The Creator of the universe, the holy and righteous God, was willing to leave heaven and come down to a nomad's tent in the dusty, hot desert of Negev to express his love for his people.

"Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram ... along with a dove and a young pigeon," God told Abraham. Then, when those animals had been sacrificed and laid out on both sides of their shed blood, God made a covenant. To do that, he walked "barefoot," in the form of a blazing torch, through the path of blood between the animals.

Think of it. Almighty God walking barefoot through a pool of blood! The thought of a human being doing that is, to say the least, unpleasant. Yet God, in all his power and majesty, expressed his love that personally. By participating in that traditional, Near Eastern covenant-making ceremony, he made it unavoidably clear to the people of that time, place and culture what he intended to do.



“I love you so much, Abraham,” God was saying, “and I promise that this covenant will come true for you and your children. I will never break My covenant with you. I’m willing to put My own life on the line to make you understand.”

Picturing God passing through that gory path between the carcasses of animals, imagining the blood splashing as he walked, helps us recognize the faithfulness of God’s commitment. He was willing to express, in terms his chosen people could understand, that he would never fail to do what he promised. And he ultimately fulfilled his promise by giving his own life, his own blood, on the cross.

Because we look at God’s dealings with Abraham as some remote piece of history in a far-off land, we often fail to realize that we, too, are part of the long line of people with whom God made a covenant on that rocky plain near Hebron. And like those who came before us, we have broken that covenant.

When he walked in the dust of the desert and through the blood of the animals Abraham had slaughtered, God was making a promise to *all* the descendants of Abraham—to everyone in the household of faith. When God splashed through the blood, he did it for *us*.

We’re not simply individuals in relationship to God, we’re part of a long line of people marching back through history, from our famous Jewish ancestors David, Hezekiah, and Peter to the millions of unknown believers; from the ancient Israelites and the Jewish people of Jesus’ day to the Christian community dating from the early church. We’re part of a community of people with whom God established relationship in the dust and sand of the Negev.

But there’s more. When God made covenant with his people, he did something no human being would have even considered doing. In the usual blood covenant, each party was responsible for keeping only his side of the promise. When God made covenant with Abraham, however, he promised to keep *both* sides of the agreement.

“If this covenant is broken, Abraham, for whatever reason—for My unfaithfulness or yours—I will pay the price,” said God. “If you or your descendants, for whom you are making this covenant, fail to keep it, I will pay the price in blood.”

And at that moment, Almighty God pronounced the death sentence on his Son Jesus.²

4.3

Gifts and the Nature of the Body

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1–30

IN THIS HOMILY, 12:1–30, Paul discusses the third problem related to worship covered in this essay [see fig.4.3(1)]. In review, the three are:

1. Male and female prophets leading in worship and how they should dress (11:2–16).
2. Gross irregularities at the celebration of the Eucharist (11:17–34).

² Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2018). [*Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*](#) (Second Edition, pp. 287–294). Crossway.



3. *The spiritual gifts and the nature of the body (12:1–30).*

THE RHETORIC

This homily on spiritual gifts is the longest in the epistle. This is primarily due to the extended *parable of the human body* that forms its center. With its nineteen cameos, the overall homily is another example of the high jump format. Four cameos compose the introduction (cameos 1–4) which is followed by the topic of “many gifts” (cameo 5). Paul then turns to “the body of Christ” using four short cameos. The parable of the human body is composed of five cameos (10–14). A second discussion of “the body of Christ” (cameos 15–17) appears followed by a second discussion of “many gifts” (cameos 18–19). The outline is simple and can be summarized as follows:

1–4	Introduction
5	Many Gifts
6–9	The Body of Christ
10–14	The Parable of the Human Body
15–17	The Body of Christ
18–19	Many Gifts

The text of this third discussion is shown in figure 4.3(1).

1. ^{12:1} Now concerning *spiritual gifts*, brethren, INTRODUCTION

I do not want you to be ignorant. Ignorance Unacceptable

2. ² You know that when you were *Gentiles*,

you were led astray to *dumb idols*, Emotion not Enough



however you may have been *moved*.

3.

³Therefore I want you to understand

that *no one* speaking by the *Spirit of God*

ever says, "*Jesus be cursed!*" Jesus Is Honored as Lord

and no one can say, "*Jesus is Lord,*"

except by the *Holy Spirit*.

4.

⁴Now there are *varieties of gifts*,

and the same *Spirit*;

⁵and there are *varieties of ministries* One Spirit

and the same *Lord*, One Lord

⁶and there are *varieties of energizings*, One God

and the same *God who energizes* them
all in everyone.

5a.

⁷To each is given the *manifestation of the Spirit* A. *MANY GIFTS*

for the *common good*. Spiritual Gifts—For the
Common Good

b. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit a
word of *wisdom*,
to another a *word of knowledge*
according to the same Spirit,
⁹to another *faith* by the same Spirit,
to another *gifts of healing* by the one
Spirit,



Week 5: Ephesians 2:11-22 Being One – Not Two

¹⁰to another the GIFTS
working of miracles,

to another *prophecy,*
to another the ability to *distinguish*
between spirits,
to another various *kinds of tongues,*
to another the *interpretation of tongues.*

c. ¹¹All these are *inspired by one and the same*
Spirit,

who apportions *to each one* Spiritual Gifts—For the
individually as he wills. Individual

6. ¹²For just as the *body is one* B. THE BODY OF
CHRIST

and has *many* One Body—Many
members, Members

7. and all the *members of the body,*

though many, CHRIST
are one body,

so it is with (one and many)
Christ.

8. ¹³For by *one Spirit* we were all
baptized into one body—

Jews or Greeks, SPIRIT
slaves or free—

and all given to (one and many)
drink of one
Spirit.

9. ¹⁴For the body does *not* consist of
one member



but of *many*.

One Body—Many Members

10a.

¹⁵ If the *foot* should say,

C. THE PHYSICAL BODY

“Because I am *not a hand*,
I do *not belong* to the body,”
that would *not make it any less* a part of the *body*.

(a parable)

b. ¹⁶ And if the *ear* should say,

“Because I am *not an eye*,

I DO NOT

I do *not belong* to the body,”
that would *not make it any less* a part of the *body*.

Belong

11.

¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye,

where would be the *hearing*?

ALL ARE

If the whole body were an *ear*,
Where would be the sense of smell?

Needed

12.

¹⁸ But as it is, *God arranged the organs in the body*, each one of them as *he chose*.



19 If all GOD
were a ARRANGES
single
organ,

where God
would the Chooses
body be?

²⁰ But as it is, there are *many parts*,
yet *one body*.

13.

²¹ The *eye* cannot say *to the hand*,

"I have *no need of you*," ALL ARE

nor again the Needed
head to the feet,

"I have *no need of you*."

14a.

²² On the contrary, the *parts of the body*

which seem to be *weaker*
are *indispensable*,

b.

²³ And those *parts of the body* I AM

which we think Inferior
less honorable

we invest with *greater honor*,

c.

and our *unpresentable parts*
are treated with *greater modesty*,

²⁴ which our *presentable parts*
do not require.



d. But God has so *adjusted the body*,
to the *inferior part*,
giving the *greater honor*

15. ²⁵that there may be *no discord* in the body,
but that the members may
have the same care for one
another. *B. THE BODY OF CHRIST*

16. ²⁶If *one* member *suffers*,
all suffer together;
if *one* member is *honored*,
all rejoice together.

17. ²⁷For you are the body of Christ
and individually members of it.

18. ²⁸God has appointed in the church *A. A VARIETY OF GIFTS*

first apostles,
second prophets,
third teachers,
then workers of miracles,
then gifts in healing,
helpers,
administrators,
speakers in
various kinds of
tongues.

19. ²⁹Are all apostles?

Are all prophets?

Are all teachers?

Do all work miracles?

³⁰Do all possess gifts of healing?

Do all speak in tongues?

Do all interpret?



- | | | |
|-----|--|----------------------|
| 7. | ⁶ All we <i>like sheep</i> have gone astray; | PARABLE OF THE |
| | we have turned every one to his own way; | Lost Sheep |
| 8. | and the Lord has laid on him | HE SUFFERED |
| | the iniquity of us all. | For Us |
| 9. | ⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, | HE WAS OPPRESSED |
| 10. | yet he opened not his mouth; | He was Silent |
| 11. | <i>like a lamb</i> that is led to the slaughter, | PARABLE OF THE |
| | and <i>like a sheep</i> that before its shearers is dumb, | Suffering Lamb/Sheep |
| 12. | so he opened not his mouth. | He Was Silent |
| 13. | ⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away. | HE WAS OPPRESSED |

Figure 4.3(2). The suffering servant (Is 53:3–8a)

Each of the three parts of figure 4.3(2) climaxes with a concrete image. The first is the *parable of the man no one can look at*. The second affirms that *we are like sheep*. In the third the suffering servant *is like a sheep*. That means—he is like us!

Isaiah 40–66 contains fifteen other occurrences of parables/metaphors placed in the centers of ring compositions. This style also appears in Luke’s Gospel.³ Here in chapter 12, Paul’s artistic



skills are again on display. Not only does he place a parable in the center but he expands that center into a full-blown ring composition with five cameos, most of which have multiple parts. Paul’s method can be described as “wheels within wheels.”

COMMENTARY

Four cameos make up the introduction [see fig. 4.3(3)].

In his introduction to the epistle (1:5–7), Paul praised his readers for their knowledge and their spiritual gifts. Now he is ready to focus on their *lack of knowledge* and their *misunderstandings of the gifts*. Again, the gentle touch is first followed by reproof and correction.

Paul is talking about the *pneumatikon*, the “*spiritual gifts*.” The English language has taken the word *gifts* and secularized it to mean “*natural abilities*.” North American public schools have special courses for “*gifted students*.” There graduate degrees in this subject and parents press to have their children classified as among the “*gifted*.” **This has nothing to do with the Spirit of God.** The secularization of this important biblical word has come home to roost, and in the life of the church many voices are raised urging people to “*use their gifts*” for the kingdom of God. The intent of this language is to urge people to use their time, education, experience and natural abilities to serve others. All of this is highly commendable, but is not focused on what Paul is discussing in this text.

1. ¹ Now concerning *spiritual gifts*, brethren,

I do not want you to be *INTRODUCTION*
ignorant.

2. ² You know that when you were *Gentiles*,
you were led astray to *dumb idols*,
however you may have been *moved*.

3. ³ Therefore I want you to understand
that *no one* speaking by the *Spirit of God*
ever says, “*Jesus be cursed!*”
and no one can say, “*Jesus is Lord,*”
except by the *Holy Spirit*.

4. ⁴ Now there are *varieties of gifts*,
and the same *Spirit*;

⁵ and there are *varieties of* SPIRIT
ministries,

and the same *Lord*, LORD



⁶and there are varieties of GOD
energizings

and the same *God who energizes* them
all in everyone.

Figure 4.3(3). Cameos 1–4 (1 Cor 12:1–6)

In contrast, Paul is reflecting on the unique gifts of the Holy Spirit that come to those who believe and are baptized in the name of Christ. **They are spiritual gifts, not natural abilities.** They are “manifestations of the Spirit” (12:7), not native intelligence or education. Every believer is invited by Paul to reflect on, “How can I build up the body of Christ by using the spiritual gifts and energy given to me *through the Holy Spirit* who filled my life when I believed and was baptized?” Chapter 12 is devoted to this subject.

Cameo 2 reads:

²You know that when you were *Gentiles*,
you were led astray to *dumb idols*,
however you may have been *moved*.

Paul uses the striking phrase “when you were *ethne* [Gentiles]” and expresses amazement that they had followed idols that could not talk! How ridiculous! Not only that, but they were *deeply moved* in their worship of these mute leaders. The centuries-old test of “it feels right” is not an accurate measure of truth, insists Paul. **Deep emotion alone is not an adequate guide for the divine pilgrimage.**

Furthermore, Paul did not write “back when you were *unbelievers*.” Instead he said, “back when you were *Gentiles*.” Had they become Jews? Obviously not, because he had just told them, “For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God” (7:19). At the same time, in 10:1 he wrote, “*our fathers* were all under the cloud.” As argued earlier, surely with this language he was addressing both Jewish and Gentile readers. The whole church was now part of the community of God that could speak of ancient Israel as “our fathers.” Yet, as seen in our earlier discussion (9:19–23), Paul was careful not to say, “To the Gentiles I became a Gentile.” No one was expected to cast aside any ethnic identity when he/she came to faith in Christ, but rather to purify and enrich it.

Paul was writing in Greek, not Hebrew, and he never dropped the slightest hint that Greek was inadequate to explain the mysteries of God. In the process Paul abandoned the very idea of a sacred language and thereby jettisoned commitment to any sacred culture. What then does Paul mean when he writes, “when you were Gentiles”?

One easy way to dismiss this problem is to translate *ethne* as “heathen” (RSV). But the KJV reads “ye were Gentiles” and the Vulgate translated *Scitis quoniam cum Gentes essetis*. The two Hebrew versions of the New Testament consulted use the word *goyim* (Gentiles) and the Peshitta Syriac has *hanefo* (Gentiles). The twenty Arabic versions, which stretch from the ninth to the twentieth centuries, are divided. Four early versions use some form of the word *wathaniyin* (idolaters). But eight versions examined read *umam* (Gentiles).



Two early Arabic versions simply omitted the phrase. One of these, the earliest of all extant Arabic versions (Vat. Ar. 13 [8th–9th cent.]) reads, “You were led to the idols.” The other (Mt. Sinai 155 [9th cent.]) translates, “You know that you, indeed you, to the idols that do not speak or raise their voice, were dragged and led” (my translation). These two versions are of great interest. Perhaps the translators omitted the phrase “when you were Gentiles” out of fear lest their readers think the apostle was trying to turn the Corinthians (and others) into Jews. For if they were no longer Gentiles, what else could they be?

What did Paul intend when he used the word *ethne* (Gentiles) in this text? In Paul’s day a Greek attracted to Judaism had two choices. A male Greek could become a Jew through Jewish baptism, circumcision and the rejection of his Greek culture. Or, he could remain a Greek as a “God fearer” and figuratively sit at the back of the synagogue. Such a person would naturally remain an outsider to the Jewish community. Paul, however, could not accept either option. For him, Jews and Greeks had become one in Christ. Yet each could maintain his/her own language and ethnic identity. To categorize baptized Greeks as Gentiles involved the huge risk of drawing an indelible line between them and us. The book of *Jubilees*, written in Hebrew about 150 B.C., has some extremely harsh things to say about the Gentiles. It records an imaginative blessing Abraham supposedly used to bless Jacob. Much of this “blessing” is in the form of advice, a part of which reads:

Separate yourself from the Gentiles,
and do not eat with them,
and do not perform deeds like theirs,
and do not become associates of theirs.
Because their deeds are defiled,
and all of their ways are contaminated, and despicable, and abominable.

Paul had already told the Galatians (literally translated) that in Christ, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is no slave nor free, there is neither male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). Acts 6:1–6 describes a disagreement between Christians with Jewish names and Christians with Greek names. The two groups are described as “Hellenists” and “Hebrews.” (The word *Gentile* is avoided.) Early in 1 Corinthians Paul took pains to describe the cross in ways that both Jews and Greeks could understand (1:17–2:2). **There seems to be a studied avoidance of the word *Gentile* when speaking about Greeks who had believed and been baptized.** They were “members of the household of faith” (Eph 2:19) and, in this very homily, will be called members of the “body of Christ” (12:27). They were called into “the fellowship of his Son” (1:9). As such they were built into the new temple and God’s Spirit was already present among them (3:16–17). Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13). One can almost hear Paul saying to his Greek readers,

Once we called you “Gentiles,” and with that word we shut you out. We drew a line that you could not cross because you were born on the other side of it. You could become “God fearers” and remain outsiders. You could even become proselytes and still not be trusted by many. No more! I have accepted your language as a sacred language that can express the deep things of God. We are one family, and all of you are my brothers and sisters. Each of us can keep his or her ethnic skin and on that level of identity we will be different. But we can and have created a new identity



in Christ that unites us on a level that is deeper than our ethnicity. Together we share that new identity. We Jews refuse to think of you as “Gentiles.”

Paul had just written, “Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God” (1 Cor 10:32). The very “church of God” about which he speaks was composed largely of Jews and Greeks, and yet they were more than what those identity markers signified. They had a new and deeper identity as “the church of God,” “the holy temple” and “the body of Christ.”

Peter thought through the same issue, and borrowing language from Hosea 1:10–2:1, he wrote, “Once you were no people but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy” (1 Pet 2:10). This topic peeks out at the reader throughout 1 Corinthians. Paul’s non-Jewish listeners were once “Gentiles,” but that community-dividing word no longer applied to Greeks who had become a part of “the fellowship of his Son” (1 Cor 1:9).

The third cameo in the introduction has troubled interpreters for centuries. Thoughtful and extended reflections are available in the major commentaries. **Just as Paul’s readers were led astray by their emotions in their idol-worshiping days, even so, if Pneumatology replaces or even trumps Christology they can also be led astray by their emotions in their new faith.**

If what I *feel* is not controlled by what I *know of Christ*, I am intellectually and spiritually adrift and able to attribute horrible things to the prompting of the Spirit. The Spirit of God “never says ‘Jesus be cursed!’ ”

During the 1950s C. S. Lewis carried on an extended correspondence in classical Latin with Dom Calabrie of Italy. On one occasion Lewis was on the eve of a visit to Ireland and wrote Dom Calabria, “There [in Ireland] indeed both yours and ours ‘know not by what Spirit they are led.’ They take lack of charity for zeal and mutual ignorance for orthodoxy.”

What does it mean to confess “Jesus is Lord”? Marianne M. Thompson offers a thoughtful definition: “To confess that Jesus is Lord is not to confess that in him we have found a way to God, but that in him God has embodied a way to us.” At the same time, the confession “Jesus is Lord” for Paul was not a rationally provable concept. Logic cannot force the mind to that affirmation. **The empire said “Caesar is *Kurios* [Lord].” Anyone who affirmed “Jesus is Lord” was also saying, “Caesar is *not* Lord,” and such a claim was dangerous. The Gnostics were safe. They were only interested in the inner life of the soul and its access to salvation through secret knowledge. But Christians who wanted the kingdom of God to come *on earth* (Mt 6:10) were thereby challenging the cult of the empire. Only the Holy Spirit could move the heart, mind and will to the dangerous and mysterious affirmation “Jesus is Lord.”** There was no other way.

Paul continues his introduction with a fourth cameo which reads:

4. ⁴ Now there are *varieties of gifts,*

and the same *Spirit*;



⁵and there are *varieties of ministries,* Spirit
and the same *Lord,* Lord

⁶and there are *varieties of energizings* God
and the same *God who energizes* them all in everyone.

Figure 4.3(4). Cameo 4 (1 Cor 12:4–6)

This cameo looks both ways. It concludes the introduction composed of cameos 1–4 and at the same time opens the door to the discussion of spiritual gifts and the body of Christ that follows. In cameo 4 Paul again invokes the Trinity. **If I am going to complete any task, I need three things. I need the necessary tools, a specific assignment and adequate energy to complete the job.** Give me a broom, assign me the task of sweeping a particular room, and if I have the energy to do what you say, I can sweep the room.

The first need is for the necessary *gift (the broom).*

The second is the *designated task (the assignment).*

The third is the *energematon (energizing) with which he energon (energizes) us (that is, the energy needed to complete the task).*

These three aspects of the Christian life and ministry Paul identifies with the three persons of the Trinity. *The Spirit* gives us the “spiritual gifts,” which naturally flow from the Holy Spirit. Paul’s readers already know that *the Lord* assigns a *task* to each believer (3:5). Finally, *God* provides the energy necessary to complete that task. *God energon (energizes) us* to carry out the appointed ministry.

In a few verses Paul will repeat the fact that God’s grace made him who he was, and through that grace he “worked harder than any of them” (15:10). The reference to the Trinity in this text complements the extended references to the Trinity that appear in 2:6–16.

In Hebrew, as in other Semitic languages, the word *spirit* is almost always feminine. In Greek the word *pneuma* (spirit) is neuter in gender. But New Testament authors were often thinking in Hebrew as they wrote in Greek. Thinking of the Holy Spirit in feminine terms thus has a serious biblical foundation. If humans were created as *male* and *female* “in the image of God” (Gen 1:27), then to think long thoughts about God in both feminine and masculine terms is biblically based. This idea is as old as the prophet Isaiah, who likened God to a “mighty man” (Is 42:13) and in the same passage compared God to a “woman in travail” (Is 42:14).

Paul now presents a list of some of the spiritual gifts under discussion. He includes:

- 5a. ⁷To each is given the SPIRIT
manifestation of the Spirit



for the *common good*.

For the Common Good

- b. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit a word of *wisdom*,
to another a *word of knowledge* according to the same Spirit,
⁹to another *faith* by the same Spirit,
to another *gifts of healing* by the one Spirit,

¹⁰to another the *working of miracles*,

GIFTS

to another *prophecy*,
to another the ability to *distinguish between spirits*,
to another various *kinds of tongues*,
to another the *interpretation of tongues*.

- c. ¹¹All these are *inspired by* one and the *same Spirit*,

SPIRIT

who apportions *to each one individually as he wills*.

For the Individual

Figure 4.3(5). Cameo 5 (1 Cor 12:7–11)

Paul presents a partial list of the spiritual gifts. As he does so he introduces and concludes the list with two important references to the Holy Spirit. These two bookends seen side by side are:

- 5a. ^{12:7}To each is given the *manifestation of the Spirit*

SPIRIT

for the *common good*.

Common Good

- c. ¹¹All these are *inspired by* one and the *same Spirit*,

SPIRIT



who apportions *to each one* Individually Given
individually as he wills.

The various spiritual gifts are not given to help the believer focus on personal spiritual enrichment. They are for the *sumpheron* (the common good). *Sumpheron* is the noun form of the verb *sumpero*, which Paul uses in 6:12 to describe things that are “helpful.” All things are lawful for Paul, but “not all things *sumpherei*” (contribute to the common good). Here Paul is discussing how the manifestations of the Spirit are specifically given for that same common good. The Spirit blows where it wills (Jn 3:8). We are refreshed by its breeze, but cannot control its direction.

At the same time these spiritual gifts are apportioned to each person individually—as *God chooses*. Each believer is important and each must be willing to receive the gift(s) offered. Yet no one can *select* a desired gift. Nor does the community have the right to insist on a particular gift as a requirement for full acceptance. God chooses gift(s) for each believer, and each gift is to be received, honored and used.

The gifts listed (cameo 5b) fall easily into two categories. The first can be called *non-dramatic gifts* and the second *dramatic gifts*. Paul begins with the non-dramatic gift of “wisdom.” The Corinthians were confident in their “knowledge” (1:5). Paul prefers to start with “wisdom” (the very subject he discussed in the opening of his first essay [1:17–2:2]). The reader is expected to remember that “wisdom” is a serious topic and that the *wisdom of God* was displayed on a cross. Paul is not discussing rhetorical or philosophical wisdom, but rather the wisdom that comes as a gift of God. Some of the Greeks understood a part of this God-given wisdom.

Aeschylus, the Greek tragic poet (525–456 B.C.) wrote, “God, whose law it is that he who learns must suffer, and even in our sleep pain that cannot forget, falls drop by drop upon the heart, and in our own, despite, against our will, comes wisdom to us by the awful grace of God.” For Aeschylus “wisdom” was much more than “acquired knowledge.” The *wisdom* of the wise is not necessarily attached to education. Some of the wisest people I have known are barely literate Middle Eastern peasants.

Paul’s second word—*gnosis*—was another core gnostic-Corinthian term. Across the centuries there have been biblical commentators and dogmatic theologians who have confessed that aspects of their *knowledge* come to them as gifts that reach beyond acquired information.

Faith in the New Testament is composed of intellectual assent, a response in obedience and a daily walk of trust, come what may. Many are gifted in one or more of these three aspects of faith.

All belief requires some faith. But some are gifted with “great faith.”

After this list of three gifts, Paul turns to what can be called *dramatic gifts*. Gifts of *healing* are given at times to doctors and also to simple people of faith. In areas of our world traditionally closed to the gospel, astounding *miracles* are taking place that cannot be forced into a post-Enlightenment worldview. On listening to the telling of such stories, the question becomes: Are we deists or theists? For the deist, God does not act in history. For the theist, he does. *Prophecy* is at least preaching at its best. Many have experienced it to be more; it cannot be less. The ability



to *distinguish between spirits* is an intuition (gift) known in the charismatic community. The text describes no generic form of “tongues.” Paul’s experience included “**various kinds of tongues.**” Did he consider singing in the Spirit as one of the forms of speaking in tongues? Having heard both speaking in tongues and singing in the Spirit, I am inclined to think that he did. The *interpretation of tongues*, as it is currently experienced in charismatic churches and fellowships around the globe, includes interpretation by the one who speaks in tongues, or by a second person.

Is this list suggestive or inclusive? It cannot be inclusive because at the end of chapter 12 other gifts are mentioned. Furthermore, Paul has already described the ability to live a celibate life as a spiritual gift (7:7). It is possible to infer from the same text that Paul considered sacramental marriage to be a spiritual gift. Some Christians sense that their natural abilities have been enhanced by a gift of the Spirit. Is the ability to maintain faith in the midst of great suffering a spiritual gift? What of the fortitude to respond in a Christlike manner to “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune”? Is this related to the spiritual gifts? The questions go on and on.

Regardless of how we read the particulars of this list, for Paul none of them should be separated from the introduction and conclusion that he places around the list. They are gifts *of the Spirit*, not natural abilities with which we are born, nor skills which come with hard work and hard knocks. **They are given to individuals and intended for the common good. All of them are inspired by the same Spirit, and God (through the Spirit) freely distributes those gifts as he chooses.**

Paul then introduces his first discussion of the body of Christ [see fig. 4.3(6)].

6. ¹²For just as *the body is one* **B. THE BODY OF CHRIST**

and has *many members,* One Body—Many Members

7. and all the *members of the body,*

though many, are **CHRIST**
one body,

so it is with *Christ.* (one and many)

8. ¹³For by *one Spirit* we were *all baptized into one body—*

Jews or Greeks, **SPIRIT**
slaves or free—



and all given to (one and many)
drink of one Spirit.

9. ¹⁴For the body does *not* consist of *one member*

but of *many*. One Body—Many Members

Figure 4.3(6). Cameos 6–9 (1 Cor 12:12–14)

In his discussion of sexual practice Paul reflected on “the body,” meaning the human body. At times the words “the body” meant the body of Christ, the church (6:12–20). Here Paul returns to the same image and relates it to the topic of the spiritual gifts and their function in the church. The congregation is composed of many people, and they are different, yet they are one in the body of Christ.

In cameo 8 two metaphors appear. **First**, Paul reminds his readers that they were all baptized into one body. In the sacrament of baptism the recipient *passively* accepts being baptized. Someone does the baptizing; and the water is external to the person being baptized. But Paul continues with a **second** metaphor. He affirms that all are “given to drink of one Spirit.” When offered a glass of water, I must take hold of the glass, raise it to my lips and drink. When I drink, the water enters my mouth and becomes part of my body. Setting aside the long debate as to whether this text is discussing one or two baptisms, we can note the active and the passive. It is not enough that I am baptized. That decision was made by my parents when I was a baby. But I am responsible, on a daily basis, to “drink of one Spirit.” By choosing the metaphor of “drinking,” **Paul affirms that the Christian needs the constant infusion of the Spirit as badly as a physical body needs water.**

In this text Paul does not offer advice on how this infusion is to take place. Yet the reader is inevitably stimulated to reflect on this important question. Gordon Fee writes, “Such expressive metaphors (immersion in the Spirit and drinking to the fill of the Spirit), it needs to be added, do imply a much greater experiential and visible manifest reception of the Spirit than many have tended to experience in subsequent church history.”

Having affirmed that all Christians are members of the one body of Christ through the infusion of the one Spirit, Paul presses on to the extended parable in the center of the homily. The carefully constructed text, composed of cameos 10–14, is displayed in figure 4.3(7).

THE RHETORIC

Paul composed this remarkable parable using ring composition with the following outline:

- 10. I do not belong.
- 11. All are needed.



- 12. God arranges as he chooses.
- 13. All are needed.
- 14. I am inferior.

The climax in the center affirms that God arranges the parts of the body *as he chooses*. Assuming Middle Eastern traditional culture, if the parts of the body were free to choose their own functions, every part of the body would be an eye, a right hand or a head, and the body would die.

Paul imagines the human body as a community. Every part of the body is personified while the foot, the ear, the eye and the head become actors in a drama and each of them gives a speech. The first two (the foot and the ear) may be soliloquies. The last two (the eye and the head) address other members of the body. Some of them are on stage and give speeches, while others are off stage, yet called to mind. The parable is another example of Paul’s creative artistry.

10a. ¹⁵ If the *foot* should say, C. THE PHYSICAL BODY

“Because I am *not a*(a parable)
hand,

I do *not belong* to the body,”

that would *not make it any less* a part of the
body.

b. ¹⁶ And if the *ear* should say,

“Because I am *not an*I DO NOT
eye,

I do *not belong* to theBelong
body,”

that would not make it any less a part of the
body.

11. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an *eye,*

where would be ALL ARE
the *hearing?*

If the whole body Needed
were an *ear,*

Where would be the sense of
smell?



12.

¹⁸ But as it is, *God arranged the organs in the body,*

each one of them as *he chose.*

¹⁹ If all were a single organ,

GOD ARRANGES

where would the body be?

God Chooses

²⁰ But as it is, there are *many parts,*

One—Many

yet *one body.*

13.

²¹ The eye cannot say *to the hand,*

“I have no need of you,”

ALL ARE

nor again the *head to the feet,*

Needed

“I have no need of you.”

14a.

²² On the contrary, the *parts of the body*

which seem to be *weaker*

are *indispensable,*



- b. ²³And those *parts of the* AM
body

which we think *less*Inferior
honorable

we invest with *greater*
honor,
- c. and our *unpresentable parts*

are treated with *greater*
modesty,

²⁴ which our presentable
parts do not require.
- d. But God has so *adjusted the*
body,

to the *inferior part,*

giving the greater honor

Figure 4.3(7). Parable of the physical body (1 Cor 12:15–24)

COMMENTARY

Paul begins his mini-drama (cameo 10a) with the lowly foot. The text reads:

- 10 a. ¹⁵If the *foot* shouldC. *THE PHYSICAL BODY*
say,

“Because I am(a parable)
not a hand,

I do *not belong*
to the body,”

that would *not*
make it any less a
part of the *body.*
- b. ¹⁶And if the *ear*
should say,



“Because I am I DO NOT
not an eye,

I do *not belong*Belong
to the body,”

that would not
make it any less a
part of the *body*.

Figure 4.3(8). Cameo 10 (1 Cor 12:15–16)

In Middle Eastern traditional culture feet, and all shoes, are considered to be unspeakably unclean. The left hand is also unclean, but less so than the foot. The right hand is fully honorable. These attitudes are of great antiquity and have persisted up to the present. God asked Moses to remove his shoes because he was on holy ground (Ex 3:5). Unclean shoes must not touch holy ground. Ancient Israel hated Edom, and the psalmist offered the insult of insults to Edom when he wrote, “upon Edom I cast my shoe” (Ps 60:8; 108:9). John the Baptist affirmed his lowliness in comparison to Jesus by stating that he was not worthy to untie Jesus’ sandals (Mk 1:7). Jesus referred to Judas’s betrayal by saying, “He who ate my bread has lifted up his heel against me” (Jn 13:18). The rabbis determined that a new shoe became unclean the moment it was lifted off the shoemaker’s anvil and first touched the floor. Sacred books must never touch the floor, and the sole of a person’s shoe must never be visible to others at home or in any public place. Dalits (untouchables) in India often *feel* that they are worthless. They are not worthless, but that is how they feel. When Saddam Hussein’s statue was pulled to the ground in Baghdad in 2003, many of the Iraqis present beat on the statue with their shoes. In February 2011 Egyptians in Madan al-Tahrir, in Cairo, Egypt, held up their shoes as a sign of their total rejection of then President Hosni Mubarak. Ethiopian Orthodox Christians remove their shoes outside the door of the church as they enter. Across the Arabic-speaking Middle East the very words *foot* and *shoes* are “four-letter words.” A speaker must apologize to an audience before pronouncing them.

It is not by accident that Paul opens his parable with a speech given by the *unclean foot*. The foot is saying, “I am inferior and worthless. Therefore I do not belong.” The ear looks at the eye and gives a similar speech. The ear is a noble part of the body but not as honored in Middle Eastern culture as the eye. **Paul’s point is: What the foot and the ear *think* about themselves is irrelevant. Their *feelings of worthlessness* that lead them to give such speeches have nothing to do with their importance to the body. Such feelings need to be ignored because they do not reflect the truth. Only someone who is not a “foot” or an “ear” can evaluate their worth, and the foot and the ear need to accept that affirming judgment, ignoring how they feel about themselves.**

Paul may have in mind some old Christian slave with no family, health or commercial value. To such a person Paul is saying, “The world may judge you as worthless, but in this new community we are all one body. Indeed we are the body of Christ and each part is of *inestimable value*. Everyone participates, each serves and all belong.”

Cameo 11 says,



11. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye,

where would be the ALL ARE
hearing?

If the whole body were an Needed
ear,
where would be the
sense of smell?

Figure 4.3(9). Cameo 11 (1 Cor 12:17)

Each part of the body has a unique function that gives it worth. In a capitalistic society the corporate model is extremely powerful and tends to dominate the way the church thinks of itself. I cannot help but wonder what would happen if the contemporary Western church took Paul’s model seriously? We pay “the hand” far more than “the foot” because the hand produces more! Ergo: it must be worth more. Paul does not agree.

The climax in the center reads,

12. ¹⁸ But as it is, *God arranged the organs in the body,*
each one of them as *he chose.*

¹⁹ If all were a single GOD ARRANGES
organ,

where would the body God Chooses
be?

²⁰ But as it is, there are *many parts,*
yet *one body.*

Figure 4.3(10). Cameo 12 (1 Cor 12:18–20)

If the organs chose their own functions, the result would be a disaster. God arranges the organs as *he chooses.* The Spirit gives spiritual gifts. Each believer is invited to receive the offered gifts and serve the body through their use rather than rank the worth of the gifts and complain by asking, “Why am I an unclean foot and not an honorable right hand? It’s not fair!” The body needs all of its parts. God arranges those parts into one body. It is not by accident that cameo 12 is in the climactic center of the parable.

Cameo 13 continues:

13. ²¹ The eye cannot say *to the hand,*



“I have <i>no need of you</i> ,”	ALL ARE
nor again the <i>head to the feet</i> ,	Needed
“I have <i>no need of you</i> .”	

Figure 4.3(11). Cameo 13 (1 Cor 12:21)

The emphasis is on the problem of self-sufficiency. This cameo can be understood to reach beyond the status of individual Christians and apply also to congregations. By the time Paul was writing, Christian congregations had sprung up in a wide variety of places around the eastern Mediterranean. Those communities needed each other. As the church grew and spread, in a very few years there were Greek, Latin, Jewish, Syrian and Coptic expressions of the church, each with their own language and culture. **The strong tendency then and now was and is for each tradition to become self-sufficient and say to the rest of the Christian world, “We do not need you! We have our own language, liturgy, history, theology, tradition and culture. All we need we find within ourselves.”** For at least sixteen hundred years Christians have been talking this way to each other forgetting that the mystery of the nature of the church is beyond any of our definitions of it. If 1 Corinthians was written to “all those in every place on whom is called the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:2), then *all of us together* are “the body of Christ” and “the holy temple.” That single body was created by God, and when it is healthy the various parts work together harmoniously. Any disruption of that harmony is a sign of illness. God’s Spirit is not promised uniquely to us in our divergent organizational structures, but in our faith-fulness to the one body of Christ. **The sin condemned is not pride but self-sufficiency. The deepest problem is not, “I am better than you” but rather, “I don’t need you.”** Archbishop Desmond Tutu has said, “A self-sufficient human being is subhuman.... God has made us so that we will need each other.” No church is an island.

Paul’s parable comes to an amazing conclusion in cameo 14. The text (literally translated) is seen in figure 4.3(12).

14a. ²²On the contrary,
the *parts of the body*
which seem to
be *weaker*
are
indispensable,

b. ²³And those *parts of* AM
the *body* Inferior
which we think
less honorable



we invest with
greater honor,

- c. and our *unpresentable parts*
are treated with *greater modesty,*
²⁴ which our presentable parts do not require.
- d. But God has so *adjusted the body,*
to the *inferior part,*
giving the *greater honor*

Figure 4.3(12). Cameo 14 (1 Cor 12:22–24)

A quick glance at this four-part cameo reveals that it is discussing the “unmentionable” genitals. Cameo 14a looks backwards and forward. But the last three parts of cameo 14 refer to the organs of reproduction. The language is very polite but also unmistakable. Why does the parable conclude with this special emphasis? **The simple answer is that the body needs to reproduce itself. Paul is discussing the importance of evangelism.**

This extraordinary emphasis at the conclusion of the parable shines light on at least seven overlapping aspects of Paul’s understanding of evangelism. These are:

1. Evangelism is primarily a very private affair. One person enters into the sacred space of another person’s inner life. Public meetings are important. Yes, Paul affirms in Romans 10:17 that faith comes through hearing the preaching. But here Paul turns that coin over and speaks of the private nature of heart-to-heart communication.

2. Evangelism involves deep personal relations. Only when authentic trust is built between two people can the deep things of God be appropriately discussed and communicated from heart to heart.

3. Evangelism is intended to be sacred and honorable. There must be no manipulation, scare tactics or intellectual or spiritual violence.

4. Long-term commitments are assumed. Love does not win and then dump the beloved. If I break with the past and come to faith in Jesus as Lord—what will happen to me? Authentic proclamation of the gospel is deeply aware of long-term responsibilities that accompany the communication of the gospel.

5. Personal advantage must never be involved. Authentic faith cannot be bought or sold. There can be no “pay me X and I will offer you Y.” In the gospel, faith has its rewards but those rewards are offered to those who do not seek them. They are not bait placed on a hook to snare unsuspecting fish. Peter was called to catch fish *alive* (Lk 5:10) and not kill them in the process.

6. Evangelism must always be motivated by love, not by a will to power. The goal of evangelism is not a successful “membership drive” so that an organization can prosper. Its purpose is to demonstrate the deepest forms of love to people in their brokenness and to make it possible for the lost to be found and for the wounded to find healing.



7. The fact that Paul repeats this theme four times in a row is surely indicative of its importance.

The ring composition of the parable is now complete, but the question remains: Is there any connection between the beginning, the end and the center of the parable (as often occurs in ring composition)? In the center Paul affirms that *God* arranges the body as *he chooses*. This center does indeed relate to the beginning and the end of the parable, but perhaps the center is a summary of all five cameos. And there is more.

As observed earlier in the epistle, Paul (thinking in Hebrew) occasionally omits the verb “to be” in the present tense. The center of cameo 12 is such an occasion. The Greek text behind the English phrase “where would the body be” has no verb “to be.” The Greek reads, “Where the body?” Two-thirds of the twenty-three Arabic, Syriac and Hebrew texts examined for this book maintain this linguistic feature along with its meaning. The assumption behind this phrase is, “The body would disappear?” “Where is Billy?” translates into Semitic languages as, “Where Billy?” In short: Billy is lost. If the body cannot reproduce—it will die and what it represents will be irretrievably lost. So it is with the church.

With his parable complete, Paul continues with a second discussion of “the body of Christ” (cameos 15–17) that matches the first discussion of the same topic (cameos 6–9). This second section is displayed in figure 4.3(13).

15. ²⁵ that there may be *no discord* in the body,
but that the members may have the same care for one another.
16. ²⁶ If *one* member *suffers*,
all suffer together;
if *one* member is *honored*,
all rejoice together.
17. ²⁷ For you are the body of Christ
and individually members of it.

Figure 4.3(13). The body of Christ (1 Cor 12:25–27)

The opening and closing of this section expands and reinforces ideas presented in the earlier matching section (cameos 6–9). In cameo 17 the language is bold and strong. “You [pl.] are the body of Christ.” Paul is not writing to an individual but to “all those in every place on whom is called the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (1:2).” Realizing the full scope of Paul’s intended readership makes all the difference in this text.

This section has two critical additions to the previous discussion of the body of Christ. The first introduces the subject of *discord* that appears repeatedly in the letter. A healthy body maintains balance and harmony. Discord in the body is a disease.



The second new element has to do with suffering and honor. This text is in harmony with Romans 12:15 that admonishes “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.”

To always be able to suffer/weep with those who weep requires enormous stores of energy. When living among those who suffer, compassion fatigue is a major problem. Without the presence of the Holy Spirit, this task is impossible. Paul does not ask his readers to “listen attentively” to those who suffer. Instead, his directive is that they should share the pain of the sufferer. A professional counselor may choose to remain objective and hold pain at a distance. In the body of Christ such professional objectivity is not sought. Instead, “all suffer together.” Who is able for these things? And there is a further problem.

It is *relatively* easy for the whole body to join with the member that is suffering. Many times parts of the body of Christ isolate themselves from other parts that are suffering. Yet the privilege of sharing the suffering of others has its own quiet rewards. The second half of Paul’s command is more difficult.

The word honored is *doksazetai* (literally: clothed in splendor). The wrist receives a gold bracelet that the foot does not acquire. The head receives a crown, not the hand. The finger receives a diamond ring; the leg does not. Your book is published, and my rejected manuscript sits on the shelf. I am then invited to attend a party honoring you for the release of your new book! Your classes are full of students. Some of my courses are canceled due to lack of enrollment. At the end of the term you are honored as the teacher of the year, and we “all rejoice together.” Or do we? This only happens if I am one body with you so that when your heart rejoices, my feet begin to dance!

The final section of the homily returns (as expected) to a second discussion of the variety of gifts [see fig. 4.3(14)].

18. ²⁸ God has appointed in the church
first apostles,
second prophets,
third teachers,
then workers of miracles,
then gifts in healing,
helpers,
administrators,
speakers in various kinds of tongues.

19. ²⁹ Are all apostles?
Are all prophets?
Are all teachers?
Do all work miracles?
³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing?
Do all speak in tongues?
Do all interpret?



Figure 4.3(14). A variety of gifts (1 Cor 12:28–30)

The emphasis is again on “God has appointed.” Paul is not discussing elected church officers or natural abilities, but spiritual gifts. Jesus chose the apostles, and in John’s Gospel Jesus tells the disciples, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide” (Jn 15:16).

James Dunn has translated *antilempseis* as “helpful deeds,” and he prefers “giving council” for *kuberneseis*. The latter word was used for the helmsman who steered a ship and has overtones of “directing the community.” Dunn also points out that both of these words “refer to functions, actions, rather than to people.” Both words are in the plural. He writes, “The charismata therefore are the concrete deeds of helpfulness, the actual giving of guidance on different occasions.”²⁵ *Charisma* in other words is *not a latent power or ability* which may be sometimes displayed and sometimes not. **Only the actual deed or word is the charisma. There are no “rights” in this list, only gifts; no privileges, only responsibilities.**

Paul concludes this extended homily with the phrase, “And [*de*] earnestly seek the higher gifts.” This phrase is a conclusion to the preceding homily and an introduction to the homily on love that follows. It is best translated as a continuation rather than as a contrast, as will be seen in our discussion of chapter 13.³

³ Bailey, K. E. (2011). [*Paul through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians*](#) (pp. 325–348). IVP Academic.