



**FROM “FAR” TO “NEAR”!
A PERICOPAL THEOLOGY GUIDE TO PREACHING
EPHESIANS 2:11-22**

ABRAHAM KURUVILLA
*Dallas Theological Seminary
Dallas, TX*

INTRODUCTION

The book of Ephesians lays out, unlike anywhere else in Scripture, God’s grand plan for the cosmos, preordained and purposeful—“the administration [management/ordering] of the fullness of times [the last days, where everything is headed] the consummation [summing up] of all things in Christ—the things in the heavens and the things on the earth in Him” (Eph 1:10).¹ I consider this the key verse of Ephesians, and perhaps, of all of Scripture: “the consummation of all things in Christ” in the cosmos is God’s ultimate goal. Right now, everything is broken, undone, chaotic. But one day, in God’s grand design, everything is going to be integrated, harmonized, and aligned to Christ, the unifying end of the cosmos. The entire universe, both its heavenly and its earthly dimensions—from black holes to badgers, from nebulas to nightingales, from trans-galactic forces to intermolecular forces, from planets to potatoes—everything is being administered. arranged, harmonized, consummated in Christ. This is the grand design of God, the zenith of creation. What a day that will be! The first pericope of Ephesians (1:1–14) raises the curtain on that glorious divine trajectory of all creation—the consummation of all things in Christ. Into this epic plan, all (believing) humans have been recruited—chosen, predestined, engraced, redeemed, claimed, and sealed! We were *blessed* into God’s grand plan, with grace, love, and delight! With this as a backdrop, I would like to analyze 2:11–22 closely, for the

purposes of the themed issue of this *Journal*: the significance of this glorious plan for the constitution of the church.²

OVERVIEW OF EPHESIANS 2:11–22

Broadly, Eph 2:11–22 follows the “formerly–now” schema of the previous pericope (2:1–10): description of plight (2:11–12 and 2:1–4); divine response to plight (2:13–18 and 2:5–9); and implications of that divine response for present existence (2:19–22 and 2:10). Of course, all of Ephesians 2 follows from Paul’s intercession in 1:15–23, where he prays for his readers’ enlightenment, particularly regarding God’s great power acting on their behalf to bring to fruition his grand plan of consummation. Ephesians 2:1–10 and 2:11–22 are portrayals of this divine might transforming them from what they “formerly” were to what they “now” are. But there is a difference in orientation in between 2:1–10 and 2:11–22, reflected in the way each pericope employs *συν* (*syn*)-prefixed words (translated in this essay with the prefix “co-”). In the former pericope, the relationship of the *individual* to God is in view³; in the latter pericope, it is still a relationship to God that is in view, but the unity of the *body of Christ* is what is showcased—the unity of all (believing) mankind, without regard to ethnic background⁴, and it is the relationship of this *one body* to God that is the purview of 2:11–22.⁵

Eph 2:1–10 (“co-”/with Christ)	Eph 2:11–22 (“co-”/with body of Christ)
As <i>individuals</i> reconciled to God	As <i>one body</i> reconciled to God
συνεζωοποίησεν, <i>synezōpoiēsen</i> “co-enlivened” with Christ (2:5)	συμπολίται, <i>sympolitai</i> “co-citizens” with the saints (2:19)
συνήγειρεν, <i>synēgeiren</i> , “co-raised” with Christ (2:6)	συναρμολογουμένη, <i>synarmologoumenē</i> “co-fitted” as a building (2:21)
συνεκάθισεν, <i>synekathisen</i> “co-seated” with Christ (2:6)	συνοικοδομησθε, <i>synoikodomeisthe</i> “co-built” into a dwelling of God (2:22)

And this unity of all believers furthers the grand and glorious plan of God to consummate all things in Christ (1:10), the theological thrust of the letter as a whole. If all things are going

to be consummated in Christ, well, then, the first place that this unity needs to be manifest is in the body of Christ itself, right here and right now. This emphasis on the unity of (believing) humanity is evident in the structure of the pericope⁶:

A	<i>you [pl.]; in the flesh (x2); strangers; without God (2:11–12)</i>
B	<i>you [pl.]; who were once far ... near; our peace (2:13–15a)</i>
C	<i>that he might create in Himself (2:15b)</i>
D	<i>into one new person (2:15c)</i>
D'	<i>both in one body (2:16a)</i>
C'	<i>killing the enmity in Himself (2:16b)</i>
B'	<i>peace to you [pl.]; far ... near; we have access (2:17–18)</i>
A'	<i>strangers; of God; you [pl.]; dwelling of God; in the Spirit (2:19–22)</i>

The focus on the oneness of humanity (“one new person”) as it is reconciled to God “in one body” is central (*D, D'*); peace between God and the “one new person,” the church, has been made (*B, B'*) by Christ “in Himself” (*C, C'*). The “far” have been brought “near” and access to God through Christ and in the Spirit has been achieved (*B, B'*).⁷ The remarkable outcome of this is that all believers, irrespective of ethnic or genetic constitution, are united into as the community of God and members of the divine household. Once strangers without God, all believers—without exception, without division, without separation—are now becoming a divine temple, a dwelling of God in Christ and in the Spirit (*A, A'*). What an incredible accomplishment, integral to God’s consummation of all things in Christ—all (believing) humanity—all!—united as one in Christ, by the Spirit, for God!

EPHESIANS 2:11–13

- 2:11** *Therefore remember that formerly you, Gentiles in the flesh, the ones called “uncircumcision” by the ones called “circumcision” in the flesh, hand-done—*
- 2:12** *[remember] that you were at that time without Christ, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and godless in the world.*

2:13 *But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

Notice “formerly” (2:11, 13) and “at that time” (2:12), as opposed to “now” (2:13). Unbelievers were, prior to salvation, “in the flesh”—used twice in 2:11, once of Gentiles, once of Jews: both are peoples without Christ. So it is not only Gentiles who get a pejorative label in 2:11 (“the ones called ‘uncircumcision’”); so do the Jews (“the ones called ‘circumcision’”). The parallel structure of 2:11–12 makes this obvious:

A	“remember that formerly you, Gentiles
B	in the flesh,
C	the ones called ‘uncircumcision’
C’	by the ones called ‘circumcision’ [Jews]
B’	in the flesh, <i>hand-done</i> —
A’	[remember] that you were at that time ...”

However, there is an extra descriptor tacked on for Jews: “hand-done” (χειροποιήτος (*cheiropoiētos*). That is quite deprecatory; the term frequently characterized what was merely human and necessarily evil—often denoting idols in the OT—in contrast to what was divine and spiritual (Mark 14:58; Acts 7:48; 17:24; Col 2:11; Heb 9:11, 24).⁸ So it is not just Gentiles before salvation who are being regarded negatively, so are the Jews pre-salvation. All unbelievers, regardless of ethnicity or genetics, are the same in the eyes of God.

This former status of unbelievers is described as being “without Christ” (2:12), in stark contrast to their current status “in Christ Jesus” when they became believers (2:13). “In Christ” forms the heading of a list of related descriptors that follow. Therefore, being “excluded from the citizenship of Israel” (2:12) pre-conversion must imply a current inclusion within “Israel” post-conversion: this entails a symbolic reading of “Israel” as “the people of God,” the community of God’s people into which new believers had entered. And so, since unbelievers, upon conversion, become part of spiritual “Israel,” the word πολιτεία (*politeia*, “citizenship,” 2:12) is also best taken as the citizenship

of these now-saved people in spiritual "Israel." Indeed, the fact that 2:19 asserts that believers are now συμπολίτης (*sympolitēs*, "co-citizens"—a cognate of πολιτεία) with the "saints" as "members of God's household" indicates that this post-conversion citizenship is with the people of God, not an incorporation of Gentiles with Jews as 2:12 might suggest on the surface. Likewise, in its only other uses in the NT, ἀπαλλοτριώω (*apallotriōō*, "exclude," 2:12) indicates alienation from God, not from ethnic Israel or its unique polity (Eph 4:18 and Col 1:21). Thus the same sense operates in Eph 2:12; the primary focus in this verse is upon the relationship between all humanity together, irrespective of ethnicity or genetics, as the *one* saved people of God, in Christ.

Of course, in the first-century circumstances of the Letter to the Ephesians, Paul was writing to a mainly Gentile audience that had been introduced to the church, which until then was mostly constituted by Jewish believers. But the relationship between these two people groups becomes, in the canonical text of Scripture, a representation of the divisions among humanity on the basis of ethnicity and genetics. But it must be noted that though the "you," is specifically noted to be Gentiles (2:11), that does not necessarily make the subsequent "our" in 2:14 refer to Jews alone. Rather, the first person plural functions the same way as it did in 2:3–7, 10, standing for *all* believers, irrespective of ethnicity or genes, a united body into which all new believers are introduced (be they Gentile, Jew, black, white, Indian, or Chinese): a new "body," a new "person," has been "created" (2:15, 16), reconciled to God!

Unbelievers (represented in our text by Gentiles), in their earlier days "separate from Christ," were also at that time "strangers to the covenants of promise" (2:12), similarly implying that now, "in Christ," they were "no longer strangers" (2:19) to these "covenants of promise." This cannot be asserting that the Gentiles are now, after salvation, possessors of the specific promises and covenants belonging to Israel. So the "covenants of promise" must be referring to the Abrahamic covenant that anticipated blessings for all nations (Gen 12:2–3; 17:6,16; 18:18;

22:18; Acts 3:25; Gal 3:8, 14).⁹ That Gentiles are later described as being “co-partakers of the *promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel*” (Eph 3:6) also indicates that these “covenants of promise” in 2:12 relate not to any particular feature of ethnic Israel or of Jewishness, but to the privilege of being in Christ. All that to say, upon conversion Gentiles are not becoming Jews. This section rather focuses on the membership of those now-saved peoples among the rest of the body of believers, composed of all humanity, without respect to ethnic characterization or genetic constitution. In the body of Christ, then, in terms of standing before God, there can be no distinction between peoples. The church ought to be the first place and the primary locus of demonstrating this truth, an adumbration of the consummation of all things in the cosmos in Christ—God’s grand and glorious plan actualized in and among his children here and now!

There is another phrase describing these unbelievers-turned-believers that has to be considered: they were once “far” (2:13), “but now have been brought near” (2:13), contrasting the former and current situations of these peoples.¹⁰ That this nearness has been accomplished “by the blood of Christ” indicates that the proximity refers to a relationship with God, i.e., those who are “near” are the community of God’s people, believers in Christ, a status accomplished by the blood/atonement of Christ (“farness” was their former unsaved state).¹¹ Thus it is the distance from God that these respective labels in Ephesians 2 denote: the once *far* unbelievers had now, after conversion, been incorporated into the church—“brought near by the blood of Christ” (2:13): united with the rest of believers, no matter what their demographic particulars. What Christ accomplished in his atoning work was the inclusion of all (believing) humanity within the boundaries of the community of God: *all* who desired to be “near” could come to God by faith in Christ, an invitation open to one and all by an initiative of divine grace. Ethnic and genetic divisions—or, for that matter, every other kind of division among humanity—were thereby rendered irrelevant for the purpose of entering into a relationship with God and with fellow-believers. In other words, 2:13 is outlining

the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant and the blessing of God upon *all* nations as *one* people, part of God's grand scheme of consummating all things/people in Christ, a divinely engineered union of humanity transcending all boundaries.

EPHESIANS 2:14–18

- 2:14** *For He Himself is our peace, who made both one and who destroyed the middle wall of partition—the enmity—in His flesh,*
- 2:15** *by nullifying the law of commandments in decrees, so that He, in Himself, might create the two into one new person, making peace,*
- 2:16** *and that He might reconcile both in one body to God through the cross, killing the enmity in Himself.*
- 2:17** *And he came and proclaimed peace to you, the ones far, and peace to the ones near;*
- 2:18** *for through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.*

The “for” that commences 2:14 has this verse explaining the bringing “near” of those who were once unbelievers (Gentiles, in the historical situation of the letter); this approximation was accomplished “in Christ Jesus” and “by the blood of Christ” (2:13), as those unbelievers-turned-believers were brought into the community of God, reconciled to God (2:16). No wonder then that Christ is shown as *being* peace (2:14), *making* peace (2:15), and *proclaiming* peace (2:17 [$\times 2$]), accomplishing the union of “both” (2:14, 16, 18) and the “two” (2:15) into “one” (2:14)—“one new person” (2:15) and “one body” (2:16). In the first century, in Ephesus, Gentiles had been admitted into the enclave of the people of God (mostly Jewish). Thus, in the body of Christ of all time and all places, ethnic and genetic divisions had been rendered immaterial for the purpose of being “near”!

The referent of “both” in 2:14 is usually taken by commentators to refer back to the two people groups in 2:11, Gentiles and Jews. But the closest referents of “both” (2:14) are

the “far” and the “near” (2:13). Therefore, the union accomplished by Christ is that of those who were once unbelievers (“far”) and those already believers (“near”). While the former were, in the circumstances of the Ephesian letter, mostly Gentiles, and the latter mostly Jews, the kernel of the issue is that “both” “far” and “near” had now been made one—a single body of believers irrespective of ethnicity and genetics, as those who were formerly unbelievers became believers in Christ as their only God and Savior. There would not be *two* peoples of God (based on ethnic/genetic divisions), but only *one*.¹² The fact that these once-“far” folks now had become “co-citizens with the saints” and “members of God’s household” (2:19) also shows that the “two” parties (2:15) were unbelievers who were now converted and already-converted “saints,” together making up the one new community of God’s people. Christ, “our peace,” had “made both [‘far’ and ‘near’] one”—regardless of ethnicity or genes. How did Christ do this?

Jesus Christ made “both” (2:14, 16, 18) and “two” (2:15) into “one” by “destroying the middle wall of partition” (2:14) and “nullifying the law of commandments in decrees” (2:15). Whatever this barrier might be, it is labeled “enmity” (2:14) between the “far” and the “near,” a partition between unbelievers and believers. Later, in 2:16, Christ is said to have reconciled “both” to God, again by “killing the enmity.” Both these instances of “enmity” are abrogated the same way—by Christ, “in His flesh” (2:14), “in Himself” (2:15, 16), and “through the cross” (2:16). Indeed one might add “in Christ Jesus” and “by the blood of Christ” in 2:13 to this listing of how Christ removed the “enmity” and established peace. All this indicates that the barrier, the “enmity,” in both instances is the same entity, standing between the “far” (unbelievers) and the “near” (believers; 2:14–16) *as well as* between sinful humanity and holy God (2:16–18). And this single barrier of “enmity” Christ abolished by his atoning work, bringing peace between the various parties on its either side.

Now we are in a better position to identify what this “enmity” is between unsaved and saved, and between sinful

mankind and holy God, and what exactly was “destroyed” and “nullified” by Christ (2:14b–15a). Commentators have generally assumed that the “enmity” was the Mosaic Law that was abolished by Christ; apparently, this entity “separated Jews from Gentiles both religiously and sociologically, and caused deep-seated hostility.”¹³ No doubt, historically it did, but none of the terms used in 2:14–15 to describe the object of destruction and nullification—“middle wall of partition,” “enmity,” and “law of commandments in decrees”—are found in contemporary Jewish literature to refer to the Mosaic Law. And if it were the Mosaic Law that created division and hostility between Jews and Gentiles, one would be forced to posit a different “enmity” that separated humanity from God (2:16)¹⁴, for the Mosaic Law, given by God himself, an integral part of Scripture that is profitable in its entirety (2 Tim 3:16), could hardly have been the cause of separation between Creator and the created. For the law is never viewed negatively in the Bible, even in the NT: it is said to have been written for all believers (1 Cor 9:8–10) and, frequently, demands of the Christian made in the NT are grounded upon those same OT laws, even in this very letter: Eph 6:2 (as also in Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; 1 Tim 5:18; Jas 2:8–11; 1 Pet 1:15–16).¹⁵ The laws of the OT are God’s laws (Rom 7:22, 25; 8:7; 1 Cor 7:19), and they are declared to be good, holy, righteous, and spiritual (Rom 7:12–14, 16; 1 Tim 1:8). So much so, Paul can “joyfully concur” with this law of God (Rom 7:22) and “establish” it (3:31).¹⁶

What, then, might be the thrust of Paul’s statements in Eph 2:14–15? How can we put the various observations on this text together, to explain the data coherently? I submit that what keeps people from being part of the community of God (the separation between believers and unbelievers—between the “near” and the “far”) is not the law, per se, but the law’s *condemnation of sin*—the sentence pronounced in/by divine law upon contraventions of divine demand: the “far” (unbelievers) are under its condemnation for sin; the “near” (believers) have been released by Christ from that condemnation (Rom 8:1). Such an interpretation makes sense, because then we can explain how it is the very same barrier of law-ordained anti-sin condemnation

that also separates sinful mankind from holy deity. But now that single barrier of “enmity,” that separated both believers from unbelievers, and also separated God from sinful mankind, was removed by Christ’s atoning work for all who have been saved by faith through grace. All that to say, divine demand/law has not been rendered inoperative for those in Christ—all of it is still valid¹⁷; it is only the law’s condemnation for sin that has been removed.¹⁸

In sum, the law’s *condemnation of sin* was the “enmity” between both the “far” (the unsaved, worthy only of divine condemnation), and the “near” (the saved who, in Christ, have escaped divine condemnation). Of course, this selfsame “enmity,” the law’s condemnation for sin, was also a barrier between humanity and deity: divine condemnation of sin, through the divine law, separated sinful beings from the Holy One. Only by being “in Christ Jesus” (2:13), only “by the blood of Christ” (2:13), only “in his flesh” (2:14), only “in Himself” (2:15, 16), only “through the cross” (2:16) and only “through Him” (2:18), could that enmity be removed and access to God gained. But, praise God, by the work of Christ, the once separated “both” groups of humanity (“far” and “near”) were made “one” (2:14), “two” were created into “one new person” (2:15), and “both” were jointly reconciled to God “in one body” (2:16), with “both” given equal access to the Father “in one Spirit” (2:18). The grand benefits of salvation were brought by Christ to *all* (believing) humanity, with no distinction among them. This was nothing short of a new “creation” of “one new person” (κτίζω, *ktizō*, “to create,” 2:15, always indicates the work of God), a significant move furthering the magnificent plan of God to consummate all things—here, all *people*—in Christ (1:9–10), in a sense by redoing creation!¹⁹

In sum, what Christ accomplished in his single act of redemption (2:14–15b) had two closely related purposes, outlined in 2:15b and 2:16:

	Ephesians 2:15b	Ephesians 2:16
Agent	"... in Himself,	"in Himself ...
Subjunctive	might create	might reconcile
Goal	the two into one new person ,	both in one body to God ...
Participle	making peace"	killing the enmity"

By his work of removing the condemnation of divine demand (the "enmity"), two things were accomplished simultaneously by Christ. First, the barrier/"enmity" (the law's condemnation of sin) between "far"-unbelievers and "near"-believers was removed: *all* (believing) humanity had become one, irrespective of tribe, tongue, people, or nation, and race, gender, age, or rank! Second, the barrier/"enmity" (the same one—condemnation of sin by law) between mankind and God was no more: access to the Father was open to all, through the work of Christ, in the Spirit (2:18). "Enmity" in every direction, vertical and horizontal, and in every dimension, had been abolished. The perimeter surrounding the community of God's people was broken down by the work of Christ to include *all* (believing) mankind, and *all* (believing) mankind was thereby equally given access to God. Thus the apostle is describing the new creation of a one-race humanity comprising the people of God, with equal standing before God as his saved children without distinction, ethnic or genetic.²⁰ This is a new unity that transcends old divisions—the beginning of the consummation of all things in Christ.

EPHESIANS 2:19–22

- 2:19** *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are co-citizens with the saints, and members of God's household,*
- 2:20** *having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone,*
- 2:21** *in whom the whole building, co-fitted, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,*
- 2:22** *in whom you also are being co-built into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.*

In 2:19–22, readers are introduced to metaphors from domestic engineering (“household,” 2:19), architecture (“foundation,” “cornerstone,”²¹ “building,” “being built,” 2:20, 21, 22), and sacral institutions (“temple,” “dwelling of God,” 2:21, 22). These pictures depict an astonishing change in the status and privilege of those who were once unbelievers (“far”): they are now believers and “members of God’s household” (2:19; “near”), a united body of God’s people, his new creation.

The theme of the divine “household,” in particular, echoes through this pericope as one of its key motifs, reflected in the six compound words in 2:19–22 that are built off the syllable *ouk-* (*oik-*; from οἶκος, *oikos*, “house”): πάροικος (*paroikos*, “alien,” 2:19), οἰκεῖος (*oikeios*, “household,” 2:19), ἐποικοδομέω (*epoikodomeō*, “build upon,” 2:20), οἰκοδομή, (*oikodomē*, “building,” 2:21), συνοικοδομέω (*synoikodomeō*, “co-build,” 2:22), κατοικητήριον (*katoikētērion*, “dwelling,” 2:22).²² All these *ouk-* words hark back to οἰκονομία (*oikonomia*, “administration”) in 1:10, referring to God’s glorious plan; in other words, this union of humanity in Christ is an integral part of the grand scheme of God to consummate all things in Christ. Unbelievers have become “co-citizens with the saints” and “members of God’s household” of all ages (2:19). And *all* humanity is invited to join this party as the consummation of all things is imminent!

But there is more! “Co-fitted” (2:21) and “co-built” (2:22) also underscore the corporate aspect of this new edifice that believers have become in Christ. Again, the focus is not so much on Jew–Gentile unity, as it is upon the oneness of the body of Christ, irrespective of ethnicity or genetics. Though the church is already the fullness of Christ (1:23), there is a sense in which this is only gradually being accomplished: “being co-fitted” and “growing” (2:21) and being co-built” (2:22) are all in the present tense, indicating the continuous, ongoing activity of temple construction—into “a holy temple” where abides a holy deity (2:19). Of course, the consummation of all things in Christ is also an ongoing process. In any case, there can be no gainsaying the fact that this is truly an astounding transformation in the status of unbelievers who come to Christ—indeed of *all* humanity

constituting the community of God: they are becoming, collectively as one body, a divine temple and the dwelling of the Spirit! From a hopeless and godless circumstance (2:12) to this, as the consummation of all things in Christ presses inexorably on. What privilege could be greater or more magnificent!

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS AND MAPS

Here is the Theological Focus of Eph 2:11–22:

Believers, formerly far from God as unbelievers, have now been brought near, into the community of God's people—all humanity united in one body, one household, by the work of Christ who removed the condemnation of the law and won for this new creation access to God—and are now being grown together into the very dwelling of God in the Spirit, regardless of ethnicity or genetics (2:11–22).²³

Here are a couple of rather threadbare sermon maps²⁴ that you might find helpful in creating your own blueprints.²⁵

I. PAST: The Status of Unbelievers

Christless, stateless, “promiseless,” hopeless, godless (2:11–12)

II. PRESENT: The Station of Believers—their Union

“Far” brought “near” (2:13, 19)

Both unified and created into one new person (2:15)

Move-to-Relevance: Disunity in the church

The work of Christ (2:13, 14, 15, 16, 18)

Once separated from God, now reconciled with God (2:16–18)

III. FUTURE: The “Structure” of Christians—their United Function

Foundation: doctrine of the apostles and prophets (2:20a)

Cornerstone: Jesus Christ himself (2:20b)

Building: believers “co-built” and “co-fitted” (2:21–22)
 Function: the dwelling of God in Christ in the Spirit (2:21–22)

The consummation of all things in Christ (1:10) furthered

Move-to-Relevance: Dysfunction because of disunity

IV. *Join Team Temple!*

Specifics on how unity of believers may be manifested²⁶

Extending the metaphor of building to bricks and mortar, one may create another map:

I. FROM: Loose Bricks—Unbelievers’ State

Christless, stateless, “promiseless,” hopeless, godless (2:11–12)

II. TO: Assembled Bricks—Believers’ Union

“Far” brought “near” (2:13, 19)

Both unified and created into one new person (2:15)

Once separated from God, now reconciled with God (2:16–18)

III. WITH: Mortar—Christ’s Work

The work of Christ (2:13, 14, 15, 16, 18)

Move-to-Relevance: Disunity in the church today

IV. FOR: Building—Christians’ Function

Foundation: doctrine of the apostles and prophets (2:20a)

Cornerstone: Jesus Christ himself (2:20b)

Building: believers “co-built” and “co-fitted” (2:21–22)

Function: the dwelling of God in Christ in the Spirit (2:21–22)

The consummation of all things in Christ (1:10) furthered

Move-to-Relevance: Dysfunction because of disunity

V. SO: *Join Team Temple!*

Specifics on how unity of believers may be manifested

NOTES

1. All translations of Scripture in this essay are my own.
2. Much of the discussion that follows is modified from Abraham Kuruvilla, *Ephesians: A Theological Commentary for Preachers* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), 66–83. My goal here, as the subtitle of this article indicates, is only to provide an exegetical analysis that curates the theological thrust of this pericope (pericopal theology) to aid its preaching, but I shall also provide a couple of sermon outlines to stimulate thought in that direction.
3. While a group is being addressed in 2:1–10, the focus is on individual sins and individual faith, by which one comes to Christ by grace.
4. Our text deals with Gentiles and Jews in the context of the Ephesian letter, but that is canonically intended to be more broadly extrapolated, beyond first-century Palestinian circumstances.
5. Table below is modified from Frank Thielman, *Ephesians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 149.
6. Modified from John Paul Heil, *Ephesians: Empowerment to Walk in Love for the Unity of All in Christ* (Studies in Biblical Literature; 13; Atlanta: SBL, 2007), 22–24. Similar items in corresponding elements of the chiasm are italicized.
7. Also note that there are only four second person plural references in this pericope: in 2:11, 13, 17, 22 (in *A*, *B*, *B'*, and *A'*, respectively), in addition to *as another* in 2:17 within an OT citation. And the only two first person plural references are in 2:14, 18 (in *B* and *B'*, respectively).
8. And in the LXX, see Lev 26:1, 30; Isa 2:18; 10:11; 16:12; 19:1; 31:7; 46:6; Dan 5:4; also see Ps 115:4.
9. See also the blessings to Isaac, Gen 26:4, and to Jacob, 28:14; also see Ps 117:1; Isa 2:2–4; 11:10; 49:6; 60:3; etc. One must also remember that the church participates in the New Covenant (Jer 31:31–34), by virtue of being “in Christ” (Matt 26:28/Mark

14:24/Luke 22:20; Acts 2:32–33; 38–39; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6; Heb 8:6–13; 9:15; 10:16–17; 12:24).

10. The direness of the Gentiles' past situation is also described in 2:12 as their "having no hope and godless in the world." Of course, without any relationship to Christ, the Gentiles before salvation were effectively also hopeless and godless, for access to God was only through Jesus Christ (as 2:18 makes clear).

11. In the OT, the "near/far" antithesis broadly described the Jew/Gentile distinction, essentially based upon ethnicity and genetics; for Jews as "near" see Isa 57:19 (which is cited in Eph 2:17), and Ps 148:14; and for Gentiles as "far" see Deut 28:49; 2 Chr 6:32; Jer 5:15; Act 2:39; 22:21; etc. But even in that pre-Christ dispensation, Gentile-to-Jewish proselytes could "come near" (Deut 10:18; 12:18; etc.). Indeed, "proselyte," προσήλυτος, *prosēlytos*, derives from the Greek προσελεύσεται, *proseleusetai*, "he will come near."

12. That is not to deny that some divine promises in the OT for the future are directed to ethnic Israel, particularly as they relate to the kingdom and the Davidic incumbent of its throne.

13. Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Eerdmans, 1999), 196.

14. As most commentators on this passage do.

15. And see Matt 5:17–20; John 7:19; Rom 3:31; 1 Cor 14:34.

16. There is no hint in Pauline discussions in the NT that any of God's laws has been nullified. Cranfield describes the common understanding of the law as being abrogated post-Christ as a "modern version of Marcionism" that regards biblical history as "an unsuccessful first attempt on God's part at dealing with man's unhappy state, which had to be followed later by a second (more successful) attempt (a view which is theologically grotesque, for the God of the unsuccessful first attempt is hardly a God to be taken seriously)" (C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* [International Critical Commentary, 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979], 2: 862). Usually, those who explain that the "nullification" of the law in Eph 2:15 denotes its abolition, subsequently attempt to attenuate the force of this cancellation to make portions of the law applicable in the current dispensation:

its “moral” aspects. Others, like Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 376, assert that “[o]nly those [laws] that have been reiterated in the NT” are binding upon believers today. But such a piecemeal approach that cherry-picks divine demand does not work: it has to be all or none (Jas 2:10).

17. There is a seeming inconsistency when Eph 2:15 (that says the law is “nullified,” from καταργέω, *katargeō*) is compared with Rom 3:3 (that says that Paul does *not* “nullify” the law; also from καταργέω). This ambiguity can be resolved only if one understands “law” in Eph 2:15 as the condemnation thereof, and not the law in its entirety (as in Rom 3:3), which, as was noted, Paul quotes approvingly in Eph 6:2 (and elsewhere). So Jesus’ assertion in Matt 5:17, that he came not to “abolish” [from καταλύω, *kataluō*] the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill it, indicates not only his impeccability—the perfect Man essentially fulfilled all of God’s demands—but also the fulfillment, by his atoning work, of the law’s condemnation of the sin of all mankind. But the law was not abrogated; Jesus’s explicit statement goes against that assumption, as also does 5:19, where he declares that to “annul” [from λύω, *luō*] even “one of the least of these commandments” renders one “least in the kingdom of heaven.” Rather, as Jesus continues, the child of God is to keep and teach those divine commandments, upon which greatness in the kingdom is predicated. This is the responsibility of the believer empowered by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:3–4); it is not an attempt by an unbeliever to gain salvific merit. See Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody, 2013), 189–209.

18. Historically, what God demanded of his people was enshrined in the Mosaic Law; later such divine demand included every one of the laws of Scripture, in both Testaments, in every genre. “Basically the word *Torah* means ‘instruction’; specifically, it is the instruction which God gives to mankind as a guide for life. Thus it may include that which is technically law [the Mosaic Law], but it also includes other more general parts of God’s revelation” (Peter C. Craigie, with Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 1–50*

[WBC 19; 2nd ed.; New York: Thomas Nelson, 2004], 60). So what I label “divine demand” encompasses *all* of God’s law / *Torah* in its general sense—pre-Mosaic commands, Mosaic Law, law of Christ, laws of his millennial reign, etc. And by divine demand, I include even non-imperatives in Scripture; in short, every pericope in every genre of the Bible depicts a view of how God’s ideal world should run—its precepts, priorities, and practices. In that sense, every biblical pericope makes a divine demand upon mankind. In the canon of Scripture, even narrative implicitly bears an “ought”—divine demand. This is true for any communication intended for application. When a wife tells her husband, “The trash is full,” though an indicative verb is employed, who could deny that the utterance is an imperative? For an extensive discussion on the *theological* validity of all God’s demands for all of God’s people in every age, see Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!* 151–89. Also see, Abraham Kuruvilla, “‘Applicable’ but Not ‘Obeyable’! Review Essay: *The Lost World of the Torah*,” *JEHS* (forthcoming).

19. The verb κτίζω had already been encountered in 2:10, to describe this new body/person/entity of believers as a divine “workmanship, having been *created* in Christ Jesus for good works.”

20. Or a two-race humanity, if you will—the people of God and everyone else.

21. The word ἀκρογωνιαίος (*akrogōniaios*) could mean either a cornerstone or a capstone. In fact, Luke 20:18 seems to give such a structure *both* senses: people fall over this stone and the stone also falls on them! In either case, the thrust of Eph 2:19–22 remains unchanged: the whole building is in conformity with this (corner/cap)stone, Jesus Christ, “in whom” (2:21, 22 [×2]; also “in the Lord,” 2:21) the building is becoming a dwelling and temple of God in the Spirit.

22. The one doing all the building is, of course, God; the divine passive in 2:20, “having been built,” indicates the Builder.

23. I exhort my readers to consider this reduction of the passage, what I call its Theological Focus, as being important only for sermon preparers, not necessarily for sermon listeners. In fact,

reductions are produced after the fact, fabricated after the interpreter has caught what the text is *doing*. In other words, *after* the discernment of the text's thrust (i.e., pericopal theology, that cannot be expressed without significant loss in any format other than that of the text itself), it is subsequently reduced to the expressible and lossy format of the Theological Focus to serve as a convenient label or shorthand for that pericopal theology. These reductions are composed for preachers' own purposes: to keep them directionally focused in sermon preparation as illustrations are collected, moves-to-relevance made, applications derived, and especially as sermon maps are created. Of course, I don't have anything against employing reductions as occasional summaries of some sort within sermons, as well—a necessary accompaniment of all oral-aural (mouth-to-ear) communication (Abraham Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching: The Journey from Text to Sermon* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019], 130–36, 195–97). All that to say, a reduction of pericopal theology, like my Theological Focus above, is of no particular value for listeners, for if we preachers can catch the thrust of the text *before* a reduction is concocted (and we do), then what we preachers must do for our listeners is, in turn, curate the text for them so that they, too, catch the thrust as we preachers first did—*sans* reduction. For the differences in structure, function, derivation, and context between my reductive Theological Focus and the standard distillation of the Big Idea, see Abraham Kuruvilla, "Time to Kill the Big Idea? A Fresh Look at Preaching," *JETS* 61 (2018): 825–46. This article and a couple of rounds of responses to it (from others) and rejoinders to each of these responses (from me) are all available at <http://homiletix.com/kill-the-big-idea/>.²⁴ I have chosen to call these "maps," rather than "outlines." An *outline* has some self-imposed constraints: its points are constructed as full sentences (usually propositions with subjects and complements), with main points subsuming subsidiary points, and so on, all of which are unnecessary for a *map* that aids the sermonic curation of "text+theology" (the pericope and its theology as a unified and inseparable entity). For my opinion of what needs to change from how we have traditionally viewed

preaching, especially in light of our fast-advancing understanding of how language works and how the brain works to comprehend texts and speech, see Abraham Kuruvilla, “‘What is the Author *Doing* with What He is Saying?’ Pragmatics and Preaching—An Appeal,” *JETS* 60 (2017): 557–805 (available, with a colleague’s response and my rejoinder to that, at <https://homiletix.com/kuruvillajets2017>).

25. Try to figure out how I moved from the Theological Focus reduction to these maps. As I mentioned, this is one good use of a reduction of pericopal theology: to create sermon maps. For more on this, see Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 87–109.

26. Applications need to be more specific than just *Join Team Temple!* of course. The preacher should ask: What might be a first concrete step for God’s people to take towards creating a body characterized by unity, without respect to ethnicity or genetics? What can believers specifically do to further that ideal in their communities? I’ll let you figure out the perfect application for your audience, in your community, and in your circumstances. I am sure the other articles in this themed issue of *JEHS* will stimulate your creative juices. For more help on deriving application, see Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 57–86.