

**Ephesians 2:11-22<sup>1</sup>**E. New Position Corporately ([2:11-22](#))1. Statement of the union ([2:11-13](#))

<sup>11</sup>Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called "uncircumcised heathens" by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. <sup>12</sup>In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. <sup>13</sup>But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.

**Notes**[2:11](#)

**Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders.**—The words "used to be" is a translation of the Greek indefinite particle of time "formerly" (*pote* [<sup>TG</sup> <[G4218](#)>, <sup>ZG</sup> 4537]), which is in contrast to the adverb "now" (*nuni* [<sup>TG</sup> <[G3570](#)>, <sup>ZG</sup> 3815]) in [2:13](#). The words "uncircumcised heathens" are a good rendering of the Greek "Gentiles in the flesh."

**who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts.**—This is a good rendering of the Greek text: "the so-called 'circumcision,' which is performed in the flesh by hands." It shows that its physical affects did not guarantee spiritual results.

[2:12](#)

**you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them.**—God made many promises in the OT, but there were specific covenants of promise he made to the nation Israel. These included the covenants made to Abraham ([Gen 12:1-4](#); [15:1-6](#); [17:1-8](#)), and David ([2 Sam 7:8-16](#); [Ps 89:1-4](#)), as well as the new covenant ([Jer 31:31-34](#); [Ezek 36:22-32](#)). The covenants of promise were unconditional promises regarding land, seed, and blessing. The Mosaic covenant is not included as one of the covenants because it was conditional (i.e., God's promises were dependent on Israel's obedience); elsewhere Paul lists it separately from the covenants of promise (e.g., [Rom 4:13-17](#); [9:4](#); see discussion in Hoehner 2002:357-359).

**You lived in this world without God and without hope.**—In the Greek text, the words "God" and "hope" are reversed. The phrase "without God" is a translation from the Greek word *atheoi* [<sup>TG</sup> <[G112](#)>, <sup>ZG</sup> 117], from which is derived the English word "atheist."

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1. Philip W. Comfort, ed., *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary – Volume 16: Ephesians-2 Thessalonians, Philemon*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 53-63.

## 2:13

**But now you have been united with Christ Jesus.**—This phrase indicates two contrasts. First, the conjunction “but” (*de* [<sup>TG</sup><G1161>, <sup>ZG</sup>1254]) marks the contrast between what the Gentiles were before and after conversion. Second, the adverb “now” (*nuni* [<sup>TG</sup><G3570>, <sup>ZG</sup>3815]) reinforces the contrast between what the Gentiles were formerly (*pote* [<sup>TG</sup><G4218>, <sup>ZG</sup>4537]), “used to be”—[2:11](#)) and what they are “now” (*nuni*), that is, belonging to Christ Jesus.

**Once you were far away from God.**—Lit., “you who were formerly far away.” Here the indefinite particle of time, “formerly” (*pote*), is used again in contrast to the adverb “now” (*nuni*) at the beginning of the verse.

**now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.**—Gentiles have been brought near either “through” or “by means of” or “in connection with” the blood of Christ.

### Commentary

Although individual sinners have received the gracious gift of salvation on the basis of God’s favor by faith, they are not isolated but are brought into union with other believers. In [2:11-22](#) Paul develops the concept of corporate unity of believing Jews and Gentiles in the church, Christ’s body (cf. [1:22-23](#)). This forms the basis for the rest of the epistle.

Before discussing the union of Jewish and Gentile Christians, Paul clearly reminds the Ephesian believers of the great chasm that existed between Jews and Gentiles. The Gentiles were formerly outsiders because they did not undergo circumcision, the seal of the covenant, and consequently had no favor with God. The Jews labeled them “uncircumcised heathens.” Without circumcision Gentiles did not have the privileges that God graciously gave to the Jews. The Jews were proud of their circumcision, though often they allowed it to affect them only physically and not spiritually. Thus, though the only difference between Jews and Gentiles was the physical sign in the flesh, the Jews were very proud of this distinction. It gave them the status of insiders and of recipients of the privileges God had promised them. The Gentiles were the outsiders who had no privileges from God.

Paul then itemized the five privileges the Gentiles lacked. First, they were living apart from Christ. It must be carefully noted, however, that unbelieving Jews were also apart from Christ, because Paul also states (in [2:17](#)) that those who were near—namely, Jews—also needed the message of peace. Second, they were also excluded from the citizenship of Israel. This is a political identification—that is, it signifies membership in a commonwealth or state. Third, they were unaware of the covenants of promise made to Israel. These covenants of promise are known as the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New covenants (see note on [2:12](#) above). The Mosaic covenant is not among those covenants because it is not unconditional; it stands in stark contrast to the covenant of promise made to Abraham (mentioned in [Rom 4:13-17](#) and [Gal 3:6-4:31](#)). Fourth, Gentiles lacked the messianic hope enjoyed by Israel, who looked forward to messianic deliverance and blessings from which the Gentiles were excluded. Fifth, though the Gentiles may have worshiped many gods, they did not know the true God revealed in the Scriptures (cf. [Rom 1:18-32](#)). Thus, the Gentile believers had previously lived in a world without any hope and trust in God as Creator and Redeemer. Although Israel had all these privileges, it did not necessarily mean that they took full advantage of them, a fact that is seen both in the Old Testament and the Gospels. Nevertheless, the main point of this passage is that the Gentiles were really in a dire situation.

At one time, Gentiles were unconverted outsiders, “living apart from Christ” and “in this world without God” ([2:12](#)), but their relationships have changed, for they now are “united with Christ Jesus” or “belong to Christ Jesus” ([2:13](#)). There was a change in spheres or realms of life (from “in this world” to

“with Christ”) indicating a change in relationship. Once they “were far away from God” (2:13), but now they are near because Christ shed his blood for their sins. The repetition of the contrasts emphasizes the stark differences in the status of the Gentiles before and after conversion. These contrasts serve to enhance the magnitude of God’s grace. Sinners who were totally apart from God, who deserved nothing but wrath have experienced God’s grace.

## 2. Explanation of the union (2:14-18)

<sup>14</sup>For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. <sup>15</sup>He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. <sup>16</sup>Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.

<sup>17</sup>He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near. <sup>18</sup>Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

### Notes

#### [2:14](#)

**For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people.**—Lit., “for he is our peace, the one having made the both one.” The text portrays Christ as the center of peace. In Greek, the personal pronoun “he” is placed at the beginning of the verse for emphasis. This is also supported by the grammatical structure. The anarthrous subject (“he”) is joined by a copulative verb to an articular predicate (“the peace”); this construction demonstrates that Christ is the personification of peace.

**in his own body.**—This prepositional phrase is difficult to interpret, as is evident in various translations, which present three views: (1) The phrase relates to the previous verse, which signifies that he has broken down the wall of hostility in his flesh (NEB, TEV, NRSV, NLT; Abbott 1897:61-62). Not only did Christ’s death destroy the hostility between mankind and God, but also the hostility between Jews and Gentiles. (2) The prepositional phrase relates to “hostility,” which is equated with “the law” in [verse 15](#): “he broke down the wall by abolishing in his flesh the hostility, that is, the law (KJV, ASV, NASB, NJB; Barth 1974:298; Lincoln 1990:142). The problem with this viewpoint is that it places the law in apposition to hostility, and nowhere in Scripture is the law presented as hostile. Also, it construes the participle (*katargēsas* [<sup>TG</sup><G2673>, <sup>ZG</sup>2934]) in [2:15](#) as meaning “to abolish, to put to death,” when it only means “to make inoperative, to nullify.” The meaning “abolish” is proper for the participle in [2:14](#) (*lusas* [<sup>TG</sup><G3089>, <sup>ZG</sup>3395], translated “broke down” in NLT), but not for *katargēsas*. (3) The last option is that the prepositional phrase is attached to the beginning of the next verse and is translated “he has broken down the wall of hostility by nullifying in his flesh the law” (RSV; so also NIV; NLT; Eadie 1883:174-175). The last view is the most acceptable because it interprets the hostility in apposition to the dividing wall (hence, “wall of hostility”), and the prepositional phrase relates not to the previous participle “he has broken down/destroyed” but to the succeeding participle; hence, “he has rendered inoperative the law in his flesh” or “he has nullified the law by his death.”

**he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us.**—Walls are instruments of division, and this particular wall was one of hostility.

## 2:15

**ending the system of law.**—The rendering of *katargēsas* [<sup>TG</sup><G2673>, <sup>ZG</sup>2934] as “ending” could be construed to mean “destroy,” which would be inaccurate. The word actually means “to render inoperative, nullify, invalidate.” Thus, it conveys the idea of neutralizing the effect. The nullification of the law applies to both parties—that is, believing Jews and Gentiles. Elsewhere Paul states that Christ is the end of the law to those who believe ([Rom 7:1-6](#); [10:4](#)). The translation “the system of law with its commandments and regulations” is a good rendering of the Greek “the law of commandments in decrees.” It is the whole law and not only a part of the law that was rendered inoperative. Some have made a false dichotomy between moral and ceremonial laws, making only the ceremonial laws inoperative. Here, as elsewhere in the Bible, the whole law, not only part of the law, was rendered inoperative for believers.

## 2:16

**Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God.**—This speaks of reconciliation, not between Jews and Gentiles but between humanity (both Jews and Gentiles) and God.

**our hostility toward each other was put to death.**—In light of the previous statement, this is probably another reference to hostility between humanity and God.

## 2:17

**He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near.**—Lit., “and coming he preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.”

## 2:18

**Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.**—Rather than “can come,” the Greek text has “have access,” which denotes openness. The NLT translates the preposition *en* [<sup>TG</sup><G1722>, <sup>ZG</sup>1877] as “through” (so KJV, NIV) to indicate means, but “in the same Holy Spirit” is a better rendering because the Greek text introduces this verse with “that through him” (*hoti di autou* [cf. *dia* <sup>TG</sup><G1223>, <sup>ZG</sup>1328]) “we both have access”—referring to Christ. It would be unusual for this to be followed with “through the same Holy Spirit.” It is more likely that the preposition *en* [<sup>TG</sup><G1722>, <sup>ZG</sup>1877] (*in*) indicates sphere.

## **Commentary**

After portraying the union of Jews and Gentiles in light of their former disunity, Paul further explains how this union was achieved. This is an important section because it gives added insight into the deep rift between Jews and Gentiles prior to Christ’s work of bringing the two parties into one entity. This section can be divided into two sections: (1) the proclamation of peace between believing Jews and Gentiles and between humanity and God ([2:14-16](#)), and (2) the announcement of peace, explaining both its content and result ([2:17-18](#)). Because of Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross, there can be peace between believing Jews and believing Gentiles. Much had to be changed for this peace to survive. The law, which was so important to the Jews, could no longer be the operating principle, otherwise the old rift would re-emerge.

The centerpiece of this peace is Christ himself, the personification of peace, who makes peace possible between the two hostile parties, namely, Jews and Gentiles. This peace does not just entail the cessation of hostility but also acceptance or friendship between the two parties. The Hebrew word for “peace” (*shalom* [<sup>TH</sup><H7965>, <sup>ZH</sup>8934]) conveys the idea of completeness, safety, and blessings. Paul explained

that peace was accomplished by Christ, who broke down the wall of hostility that separated them, thus uniting them. Some have suggested that this wall may refer to the wall in the Jerusalem Temple precincts that separated the court of the Gentiles from the court of the Jews in order to prohibit entrance by any foreigner. But this is unlikely because (1) there is no reference to the Jerusalem wall in the context, (2) the Jerusalem wall was never known as the wall of hostility, (3) it was still standing when Paul wrote this letter, and (4) it would have been unfamiliar to the average Gentile living outside of Judea. Others have proposed that it refers to the curtain in the Jerusalem Temple that separated the holy place from the Holy of Holies. However, that was a curtain, not a wall, and it separated all people including Jews (except the high priest on the Day of Atonement). Rather than a physical wall, it more likely refers to a metaphorical wall. In fact, some rabbis considered the Mosaic law to be a wall that acted as a “fence” that separated the Jews from the Gentiles (cf. *Letter of Aristeas* 139). And while the protection of the law, not the hostility, is involved in this concept, it is nevertheless true that the same law that protected Jews from the pollution of gentile practices also caused hostility between them. For instance, certain laws prevented Jews from eating with Gentiles or intermarrying with them. It was such that led to the hostility of Jews toward Gentiles, which in turn caused Gentiles to hate the Jews. The hostility, therefore, was not the law itself but attitudes that resulted from its practice. This hostility had been destroyed.

How then has the destruction of hostility between Jews and Gentiles been accomplished? This is explained in [2:15](#), where Paul declares that it was Christ’s death that nullified the whole system of Jewish law. One needs to note that Paul does not say that Christ destroyed the law, since this would contradict Jesus’ statement in the Gospels, “I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose” ([Matt 5:17](#)). Rather, he has destroyed the hostility by rendering the law inoperative. Hence, the nullification of the law has great significance for Jews and Gentiles who are in Christ. Since the law has become inoperative, all believers in the present age are not under its jurisdiction. Christ is the end of the law for believers ([Rom 10:4](#)), and they are no longer under this pedagogue ([Gal 3:25](#)). In fact, they have “died to it” ([Rom 7:6](#)). This does not mean that there are no laws within the Mosaic law that present-day believers are obligated to obey. However, they are obligated to obey those laws that have been reiterated in the New Testament. They are under the new covenant; the old covenant has been nullified. It is no longer the *modus operandi*.

Rendering the law inoperative had a twofold purpose: to create a new person ([2:15b](#)) and to reconcile both Jews and Gentiles to God ([2:16](#)). In the first purpose, Paul clearly states that from the “two” groups (Jews and Gentiles) Christ created in himself “one” new person, thus making peace. In [2:14](#) Christ was portrayed as the personification of peace, and here is the outworking of that peace. The result is cessation of hostility, which had previously existed between these two entities. It needs to be emphasized that this is a totally “new” entity. Gentiles did not become Jews, as gentile proselytes did in pre-New Testament times, nor did Jews become Gentiles. Rather both became “a new person” or “one new humanity.” This new creation does not refer to individual Christians, as in [2 Corinthians 5:17](#), but to the creation of a new corporate entity. The next verse bears this out by stating that this new entity is called “one body,” referring to the church. Hence, believers are no longer Jews or Gentiles but Christians. A whole new race has been formed—a race that is raceless! The result is peace.

The second purpose for nullifying the law was to reconcile the one body of Jewish and gentile believers to God himself ([2:16](#)). This moves the argument one step beyond the prior verse, where the two groups were brought together into one entity resulting in reconciliation between them. Continuing on, [verse 16](#) declares that this wholly new body is now reconciled to God through his Son’s death on the cross. Both the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles and their reconciliation to God exacted a heavy price—the death of God’s Son. In a way, it would seem that in these two verses the two different reconciliations have been mentioned in a reversed order. Normally, one would expect the reconciliation between God and man to be mentioned first and the resulting reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles second. However, in the context of [2:14-18](#) the main point is the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles rather than their

reconciliation to God. (Paul has already explained humanity's reconciliation to God in [2:1-13](#).) Paul stresses this by concluding in [2:16](#) that the hostility between humanity and God was put to death. Peace now exists between believing Jews and Gentiles and between God and people.

Having established the basis of peace between Jews and Gentiles and between God and humanity, Paul directs his attention to God's proclamation of that peace and its result ([2:17-18](#)). At the beginning of [2:17](#), the Greek text has a coordinating conjunction, *kai* [<sup>†G</sup><G2532>, <sup>ZG</sup>2779] (and), that most likely makes the present statement parallel to "Christ himself has brought peace" (or "he is our peace") in [2:14](#). Thus, not only is Christ our peace but also he preaches peace. The recipients of this message of peace are the Gentiles who were far away from God and the Jews who were near. The fact that the word "peace" is repeated for both those far away and those near emphasizes that both parties need the message of peace, not just those who were far away. It also reinforces the formation of the new entity. The content of this peace was discussed in the previous verse—namely, peace horizontally between Jews and Gentiles and peace vertically between them and God—all made possible by Christ's work on the cross.

As a result of this newly found peace, both Jewish and gentile believers have access to God the Father ([2:18](#)). The fact that "both" have such access further substantiates their reconciliation. The idiom translated "can come" can mean "have introduction" or "have access" to one such as a king. Typically, an introduction makes access possible; the Greek text distinctly states that believers have access to the Father through Christ. This access is "in the sphere of" or "in connection with" the one Spirit, clearly the Holy Spirit, perhaps referring to the power of the Spirit. In this verse, as in [1:4-14](#), [17](#), the three persons of the Trinity are involved (cf. [4:4-6](#)). In [1:4-14](#) all three persons of the Trinity work to redeem humanity. Here the three are involved in the believer's access to God. Not only the initiation, but also the continuation of humanity's relationship to God involves all three persons of the Trinity, thus demonstrating the intensity of God's personal interest.

In conclusion, in [2:14-18](#) the union of Jews and Gentiles is explained in four different ways: (1) We are made all *one* people ([2:14](#)). (2) Christ created in himself *one* new person from *two* groups ([2:15](#)). (3) Christ reconciled *both* groups together as *one* body ([2:16](#)). (4) Christ gave *both* Jews and Gentiles access to God in *one* Spirit ([2:18](#)). This new union replaces the old hostility.

### 3. Consequence of the union ([2:19-22](#))

<sup>19</sup>So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. <sup>20</sup>Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. <sup>21</sup>We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. <sup>22</sup>Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

## Notes

### [2:19](#)

**So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners.**—The Greek does not specifically state "you Gentiles" but only "you." Nevertheless, the pronoun most likely refers to the Gentiles.

## [2:20](#)

**the foundation of the apostles and prophets.**—Does this refer to OT or NT prophets? Most likely they are NT prophets for the following reasons. First, here and elsewhere in the NT ([3:5](#); [4:11](#); [1 Cor 12:28, 29](#)), when mentioned together, apostles are mentioned first and prophets second. If it were a reference to OT prophets, it seems probable that they would have been mentioned before the apostles. Second, in [3:5](#), Paul reveals the mystery of the church—that is, the union of believing Jews and believing Gentiles. There it states that this mystery had been hidden from former generations but now is revealed “by his Spirit” to “his holy apostles and prophets.” This assertion is evidence that the prophets were contemporaries with the apostles, both receiving from the same Spirit the revelation of the former (OT times) hidden mystery. Hence, it is best to see these as NT prophets (Best 1998:282-283; O’Brien 1999:214-215).

**And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself.**—Although some have suggested that the Greek word *akrogōniaios* [<sup>TG</sup><G204>/A, <sup>ZG</sup>214] means the “capstone” or “topstone” of a gate or column (Joachim Jeremias, “κεφαλή γωνίας—Ἀκρογωνιαίος,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 29, no. 3/4 [1930]: 264-280; idem, “Eckstein—Schlußstein,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 36, no. 1/2 [1937]: 154-157; Barth 1974:271, 317-319; Bruce 1984:304-306; Lincoln 1990:154-156; Best 1998:284-286), most scholars think it means the “cornerstone” of the foundation (BDAG 39-40; L&N §7:44; W. Mundle, NIDNTT 3.390; Calvin 1965:155; Eadie 1883:198-199; Abbott 1897:70; Schnackenburg 1991:123-124; O’Brien 1999:216-218; Hoehner 2002:404-407).

## [2:21](#)

**We are carefully joined together in him.**—Lit., “in whom the whole building being fitted together.” The prepositional phrase “in whom” refers back to Christ, the cornerstone in [2:20](#). The concentration is on the building process. There is debate as to whether the adjective *pas* [<sup>TG</sup><G3956>, <sup>ZG</sup>4246] should be translated “every building” or “whole building.” In this context it is talking about one building and thus it is best to render it “all, whole, entire” building (Barth 1974:271-272; Lincoln 1990:156).

**becoming a holy temple for the Lord.**—Lit., “growing into a holy temple in the Lord.” This emphasizes the living dynamic growth of the building process. As discussed in [1:1](#), the word “holy” does not mean inherent goodness but that which is set apart for God’s use or service. Hence, the building is identified as a “holy temple.”

## [2:22](#)

**Through him.**—Rather than “through him,” this phrase could be rendered “in him,” referring back to “in whom” in [2:21a](#), which in turn refers back to Christ Jesus in [2:20](#). Gentiles are joined together in Christ.

**this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.**—Rather than “by his Spirit,” some would render this phrase “in the Spirit”—speaking not so much about the means but the manner in which God dwells in his temple. Either rendering is acceptable.

## Commentary

This section can be divided into two parts: the consequence of the union of Jews and Gentiles ([2:19](#)) and the result of the union ([2:20-22](#)). Paul explained the consequences of the new union in terms of what they are not and in terms of what they are. His opening comment in [2:19](#), “Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners,” is good news because over the years they had been excluded from God’s covenants to Israel. Rather than strangers and foreigners, they had become a part of a company of “saints” or “holy people.” As

mentioned earlier ([1:1](#)) the word “saints” (or “holy people”) does not imply inherent goodness but rather separateness, people set apart to serve God. Hence, Gentiles are fellow citizens with those who are set apart to serve God. Also, they are now members of the household of God or “God’s family.” The question is, “With whom are they fellow citizens and members of God’s family?” There are three interpretations to consider. The first suggests that gentile Christians have become fellow citizens with Jewish Christians (Dibelius 1953:71; Caird 1976:60). But this contradicts the context that has stated that those who become believers are neither Jewish Christians nor gentile Christians, just Christians.

The second interpretation proposes that they are fellow citizens with Israel and, as such, members of God’s family (Westcott 1906:40; Barth 1974:269-270). But Paul mentions “one new people” ([2:15](#)) and “one body” ([2:16](#)), referring to the incorporation of believing Jews and Gentiles into one new race or class, the church, as distinct from a continuation of something old. Also, Paul specifically states that Gentiles are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s family, not fellow citizens with Israel. Clearly, Gentiles before conversion were alienated from the citizenship of Israel ([2:12](#)) and God’s family, but Paul states that after conversion they became fellow citizens with the saints, not with Israel. Rather, believing Jews and Gentiles became fellow citizens with the saints of all ages and became a part of God’s family, even those who lived before the formation of Israel. Paul also explains that this new entity is “built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself” ([2:20](#)). This new entity began at Pentecost, not in Old Testament times. It is true that believing Gentiles are incorporated with the saints of all ages ([2:19](#)), but the incorporation spoken of in the present context speaks of believing Jews and Gentiles united into one new people, which distinctly began when the church came into existence at Pentecost.

The third interpretation proposes that all holy people are fellow citizens with the redeemed of all ages and that these redeemed people are God’s family (Abbott 1897:69; Lincoln 1990:150-151). This view makes the most sense. Before Abraham, there were saints who were members of God’s family. Subsequently, those who followed in the footsteps of their father Abraham ([Rom 4:12](#)) were considered saints or holy people. In our era, believing Jews and Gentiles composing the church are fellow citizens with the saints of past generations. Though some distinctions exist between the generations, all are fellow citizens and belong to God’s family. All saints have been redeemed and reconciled, and they have fellowship with and access to God.

The high calling, which is ours as fellow citizens with the saints, is possible because we have become the new humanity portrayed here as a holy temple in which God dwells ([2:20-22](#)). Paul moved from the metaphor of a body to the metaphor of a building. The foundation of this new temple is the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone. Some suggest that this contradicts [1 Corinthians 3:10-11](#), where it states that Christ is the foundation, whereas here the apostles and prophets are the foundation. However, it is perfectly legitimate for a writer to use a metaphor in two different ways for different purposes. Also, it is possible that the apostles who laid the foundations ([Rom 15:2](#); [1 Cor 3:10](#)) thought of themselves as foundation stones. Furthermore, this may be a development of Pauline thought. Whereas, previously, Christ was considered the foundation, later he was designated as the cornerstone, the most important stone of the foundation and the building as a whole.

To whom do the foundational “apostles” and “prophets” refer? As discussed previously ([1:1](#)), an apostle is one who is sent as a messenger and represents the full authority of the one who sent him or her. There are three kinds of apostles represented by the New Testament in that era. First, there were those who had been with Jesus in his ministry and had witnessed his resurrection ([Acts 1:21-22](#)). Second, there are those who received the gift of apostleship mentioned in [4:11](#). They would include people such as Barnabas ([Acts 14:4, 14](#); [1 Cor 9:5-7](#)), James the Lord’s brother ([1 Cor 15:7](#); [Gal 1:19](#)), and Apollos ([1 Cor 4:6, 9](#)). The first category is to be regarded as an office, while the second is a gift. Third, there is simply Paul, who seems to be an exception because he was “born at the wrong time” ([1 Cor 15:8-9](#)). Though he had not been with Jesus in his ministry nor witnessed his resurrection, he appears to have



been given the office of an apostle (cf. [Rom 1:1](#); [1 Cor 1:1](#); [2 Cor 1:1](#); [Col 1:1](#); [1 Tim 1:1](#); [2 Tim 1:1](#); cf. [Gal 1:1](#)). In the present context, “apostles” may have reference to all three. Certainly, Paul would have considered himself an apostle and would have been included in the foundation along with those who had been with Jesus in his ministry and those who had the gift of apostleship. The prophets are listed along with other gifts to the church ([4:11](#); [1 Cor 12:28](#); cf. [Rom 12:6](#)). Similar to the Old Testament prophets, the New Testament prophets were involved in receiving and transmitting God’s revelation. We are not told much about the role of the prophet in New Testament times, but it is very likely that, while the Canon was still incomplete, prophets may have received and passed on revelation to complete what was needed in order that every person could be presented perfect before God ([4:12](#); [Col 1:28](#)). Such a prophetic voice was important in the early formation of the church. Of primary importance to the foundation consisting of apostles and prophets is Christ Jesus, the cornerstone. Today a building’s cornerstone is structurally insignificant. Many times it is installed the day a building is dedicated, in other words, after its construction. This was not at all true in the first century. The cornerstone was the first and most important stone of the foundation. It was carefully laid because the builders would line up the rest of the building from that one stone. In fact, in [Isaiah 28:16](#) it is literally called “a stone of testing” by which every other stone in the foundation and the superstructure must be measured. Thus, it was imperative that the church’s foundation of apostles and prophets be correctly aligned with Christ. Moreover, all other believers are built on that same foundation and must also align their lives with the cornerstone, Christ Jesus.

Moving from the foundation, Paul discusses the formation of the building. The NLT directs attention to the people who make up the edifice, whereas the Greek text concentrates more on the building process. Paul has established the composition of the foundation and identified the cornerstone. He now explains that the whole building grows by the joining or fitting together of the various pieces. Today the process of fitting stones together is simple because mortar is used. In Paul’s day, without the use of mortar, stones had to be cut so that they properly fit with one another in order to be perfectly joined together. The stones represent individual believers ([2:16](#)) who, before conversion, were at enmity with one another but now are being joined together into one new humanity, the church. Because each member of this body is aligned to the cornerstone, Christ, all are aligned together as one building. As they are joined, the building grows corporately into a holy temple. The particular term used for “temple” (*naos* [<sup>1</sup>[TG <G3485>](#), <sup>2</sup>[ZG 3724](#)]) refers to the inner sanctuary within the entire temple area (*hieron* [<sup>1</sup>[TG <G2411>](#), <sup>2</sup>[ZG 2639](#)]).

In pagan temples the inner sanctuary was where the gods dwelt (cf. [Acts 17:24](#)), and in the Jewish tabernacle or temple it was the Holy of Holies where God dwelt ([Exod 15:17](#); [1 Sam 3:3](#); [2 Sam 22:7](#); [1 Chr 28:11](#); [Matt 23:16, 21](#)). With the rending of the veil of the temple (*naos* [<sup>1</sup>[TG <G3485>](#), <sup>2</sup>[ZG 3724](#)]; [Matt 27:51](#); [Mark 15:38](#); [Luke 23:45](#)), God no longer dwells in a temple built with stones but in a new temple made up of believers. Its designation as a “holy” temple indicates that this body of believers is set apart for God’s use. It is important to notice that the whole temple grows—giving emphasis not to individual growth but to corporate growth. This new structure’s place of growth is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now that the construction of the building has been described, the function of the building is discussed in [2:22](#). In the previous verse, the metaphor of the joined building stones was employed, and in this verse those stones are identified as Gentiles who are united together with believing Jews. In [2:21](#) the building was described as growing into a holy temple in the Lord, and here Paul characterizes the building as the dwelling place of God, which is being formed as believing Jews and believing Gentiles unite together. As the Old Testament Temple was the dwelling place of God by his manifest glory, so now the body of believers is the dwelling place of God by the Spirit. It is true that the Holy Spirit indwells each individual believer (cf. [John 14:17](#); [Rom 8:9, 11](#); [Gal 3:2, 4:6](#); [1 John 3:24, 4:13](#)), thus each is a “temple” ([1 Cor 6:19](#)), but the present text is not referring to this. Rather, it is speaking of the Spirit’s

dwelling in the new temple (*naos* [<sup>TG</sup> <G3485>, <sup>ZG</sup>3724]) of the corporate body of believers, the church ([1 Cor 3:16](#); [2 Cor 6:16](#)).

In conclusion, Paul has shown that though the Gentiles were formerly foreigners outside of God's household, they are now one new people together with the Jews who became Christians. This new entity is portrayed as a temple built on the foundation of apostles and prophets, with Christ as the cornerstone. This temple is indwelt by God's Spirit. All three persons of the Trinity are here involved: God the Father, the subject of the passage, is creating the new holy temple, consisting of the corporate body of believing Jews and Gentiles; Christ is the cornerstone of this new temple; and the Holy Spirit resides within. Before Christ came, the Jews thought of God as the one who resided in the man-made Temple from which Gentiles were excluded. The pagan Gentiles in Ephesus thought that the goddess Artemis resided in the renowned temple in their city. These were two diametrically different views of who God was and where he resided. After conversion, both believing Jews and Gentiles were created into one new person portrayed as a temple, the foundation of which consisted of apostles and prophets with Christ as the cornerstone and in which God dwells in the person of the Holy Spirit. Whereas there previously was nothing but hostility between Jews and Gentiles, now there is one body of believers called the church.