Reconciled Together

Diego Silva

Passage: "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both *one*, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 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, and that He might reconcile them both to God in *one* body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity" (Eph 2:13-16, NKJV).

Introduction: Adolf Hitler was appointed chancellor by German President Paul von Hindenburg on January 30, 1933.[1] The "Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service," passed on April 7, 1933, included a clause (Section 3, Article 1) referred to as the Aryan Paragraph (*Arierparagraph*).[2] Section 4 stated that "civil servants of non-Aryan descent are to be retired" and that "Civil servants who are married to a non-Aryan may be dismissed from the service." This was the first legal formulation used to exclude Jews from organizations, professions, and other aspects of public life.[3]

On April 15, 1933, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a twenty-seven-year-old pastor and theologian, predicting the challenges that anti-Jewish laws in Germany would create for the church, warned, "To exclude persons who are racially Jewish from our ethnically German church would mean to make it [the German church] into a church of the Jewish Christian type."[4] A church of "the Jewish Christian type" is a church that sets up racially-based tests of fellowship.[5] "The church-community *doing the excluding* would thus be constituting itself as a *Jewish Christian* community."[6] Bonhoeffer, based on his reading of Paul, radically redefines "church" as the place

---

[1] On August 2, 1934, following the death of Hindenburg, he merged the offices of chancellor and president.

[2] For Nazis, 'non-Aryan' applied foremost to Jews, who were identified as the main racial threat to German society.

[3] On September 15, 1935, the "Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor" was enacted. It forbade "marriages between Jews and subjects of German or related blood…" Organizations throughout Germany, including private or religious ones, would follow suit, introducing an Aryan clause for membership.

[4] Clifford J. Green and Michael P. DeJonge, eds., *The Bonhoeffer Reader* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 377.

[5] Bonhoeffer was alluding to the issue of Gentile inclusion in the early Christian church, which was something Paul worked very hard to achieve in his ministry to the Gentiles. Bonhoeffer saw the German church doing the very thing Paul was reacting against in many of his letters.

[6] Clifford J. Green and Michael P. DeJonge, eds., *The Bonhoeffer Reader* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 377.

"where Jew and German together stand under God's Word."[7] The German church's ability to "support fellowship … with Jews" will demonstrate "whether or not the church is still church."[8]

Bonhoeffer quoted Martin Luther's words written in 1523, "If the apostles, who also were Jews, had dealt with us Gentiles as we Gentiles deal with the Jews, there would never have been a Christian among the Gentiles. Since they dealt with us Gentiles in such brotherly fashion, we in our turn ought to treat the Jews in a brotherly manner in order that we might convert some of them."[9]

On July 13, 1933, a news item entitled "Main Outlines of the Constitution" implied that a recently signed German Evangelical Church[10] constitution would extend the Aryan paragraph's exclusion of Jews to the sphere of church leadership.[11] Bonhoeffer interpreted that the constitution was implying "the exclusion of non-German baptized Christians from positions of ecclesiastical leadership."[12] He responded by stating that such exclusion of ethnically Jewish Christians would undermine the church's very nature. For Bonhoeffer,[13] the "exclusion of the Jewish Christians" from the communion of the German church would mean "the excluding Church is erecting a racial law as a prerequisite of Christian communion" and "in doing so, it [the German church] loses Christ himself….A Church which excludes the Jewish Christians puts itself under the Law; it is then a Church of Jewish Christian type."[14]

"Concerning admission to the ministry," Bonhoeffer asserted, "only ecclesiastical viewpoints are decisive, i.e., right doctrine, Christian conduct, and spiritual endowments alone qualify for the

---

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Quoted in Clifford J. Green and Michael P. DeJonge, eds., *The Bonhoeffer Reader* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 371.

[10] The German Evangelical Church (*Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*, DEK) was a Protestant church body in Germany that existed from 1933 to 1945. It was created by the unification of the 28 regional Protestant churches in Germany under a single national church body. The German Christian (*Deutsche Christen*) movement was a pro-Nazi faction of the German Evangelical Church. In 1934, a group of Protestant Christians formed the Confessing Church (*Bekennende Kirche*) in opposition to the DEK. Independent Protestant denominations, such as the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Germany, did not join the DEK.

[11] The German Evangelical Church constitution of July 13, 1933 emphasized the importance of the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions, but it also contained language that could be interpreted as supportive of the Nazi regime, such as the statement that the church should "promote the German people's national consciousness." In Article 3, it stated that the church was "open to all Christians of German or related blood." This effectively excluded Jewish students from theological study, as they were not considered to be of "German or related blood."

[12] Clifford J. Green and Michael P. DeJonge, eds., *The Bonhoeffer Reader* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 379.

[13] The date for Bonhoeffer's response to this July 13, 1933 news item is unknown. It is believed to have been shortly after.

[14] Clifford J. Green and Michael P. DeJonge, eds., *The Bonhoeffer Reader* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 380.

ministry. It is therefore an ecclesiastical impossibility to exclude, as a matter of principle, Jewish Christian members from any offices of the Church."[15] Bonhoeffer, like other leaders in the Confessing Church, supported allowing individual congregations to decide whether they wanted a Jewish Christian or a German pastor. "It is a different matter if, from case to case, consideration is shown for the weakness of others, so that, for instance, a preponderantly 'German Christian' parish will not have a Jewish Christian assigned to it as sole pastor."[16]

In an appeal to his fellow German clergymen, Bonhoeffer reasoned that the "exclusion of the Jewish Christians" implies an exclusion of all of God's faithful ministers. "How can he who holds a church office administer that office if he knows that there are in the communion brethren of fewer rights to whom such office is not open because of their race? Will he not then best safeguard his Christianity and his churchliness by preferring to be where the most despised brethren are, and no longer sit at the head of the table, 'among those who are first.'"[17] God's blessing does not rest on a church "whose essential nature has been violated," said Bonhoeffer, referring to the exclusion of Jews.[18]

By the late summer of 1933, the German Evangelical Church had not yet officially adopted the Aryan paragraph. However, in April the Brandenburg[19] provincial synod extended the Jewish exclusion to the church and submitted a corresponding resolution to the Prussian[20] General Synod.[21] German Christians like Emanuel Hirsch[22] were calling for segregating Jewish Christians into their own congregations. It was in this context that Bonhoeffer composed discussion theses in preparation for the Old Prussian General Synod of September 5-6, 1933.[23] In

---

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., 380–381.

[17] Ibid., 381.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Brandenburg is a state in northeastern Germany.

[20] Prussia was a state in north-central Germany that existed from 1618 to 1947.

[21] The synod is the highest legislative body of the German Evangelical Church composed of representatives from the regional churches. It is responsible for setting the church's doctrine, liturgy, and organization. This resolution of the 1933 Prussian General Synod targeted not only non-Aryan clergy but also non-Aryan congregants.

[22] Emanuel Hirsch (June 14, 1888 – July 17, 1972) was a conservative German Protestant theologian and philosopher who was a member of the Nazi Party from 1937 to 1945. Hirsch taught at several theological seminaries, including the University of Göttingen, where he became a professor in 1925. He was not a Nazi ideologue, and he expressed opposition to some of the Nazi's most extreme policies. After the war, Hirsch was allowed to return to his teaching position at the University of Göttingen.

[23] The Old Prussian General Synod of September 5-6, 1933, was a meeting of the highest legislative body of the German Evangelical Church of the old-Prussian Union. It was composed of representatives from the provincial synods.

them, he courageously claimed that a racial precondition for church membership undermines the nature of the church, for which the only membership "criterion is the Word of God and faith."

In response to the idea that "non-Aryans are not members of the German Reich Church and are to be excluded through the establishment of their own Jewish Christian congregations," Bonhoeffer wrote, "The exclusion of Jewish Christians from the church-community destroys the substance of Christ's church." This exclusion, he explains, "reverses the work of Paul, who assumed that *through the cross of Christ the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles had been broken down*, that Christ has 'made both groups into one' (Eph. 2), that here (in Christ's church) there should be neither Jew nor Gentile … but rather all should be one."[24]

After quoting Ephesians 2, Bonhoeffer explained that "by putting up this racial law at the door to the church-community, the church is doing exactly what the Jewish Christian church was doing until Paul came … [The Jewish Christian church] was requiring people to become Jews in order to join the church-community. A church today that excludes Jewish Christians has itself become a Jewish Christian church and has fallen away from the gospel, back to the law."[25]

God's church, claimed the proponents of Jewish exclusion, "is not allowed to undo or to disregard God's orders, and race is one of them, so the church," they concluded, "must be racially constituted." To this, Bonhoeffer responded, "In the church, a Jew is still a Jew, a Gentile a Gentile, a man a man, a capitalist a capitalist, etc., etc. But God calls and gathers them all together into one people, the people of God, the church, and they all belong to it in the same way, one with another. The church is not a community of people who are all the same but precisely one of people foreign to one another who are called by God's Word…. Race and blood are one order among those who enter into the church, but it must never become a criterion for belonging to the church; the only criterion is the Word of God and faith."[26]

To the statement that Jewish Christians "should organize their own churches" and that doing so "is only a matter of the outward form of the church," Bonhoeffer responded, "The issue of belonging to the Christian community is never an outward, organizational matter, but is of the very substance of the church." He then warned, "That part of the church that excludes another is, of course, the one that is truly shut out—that is the particular danger of the German Christians' undertaking."[27]

---

[24] Clifford J. Green and Michael P. DeJonge, eds., *The Bonhoeffer Reader* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 382.

[25] Ibid., 383.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

Bonhoeffer's radical views of the church are seen in his claim that "the church would no longer be the church" if it moved forward in excluding Jews and that "the continuity of the church is in the church where the Jewish Christians remain."[28]

Like Martin Luther before the Diet of Worms, Bonhoeffer boldly protested, "The Aryan paragraph is therefore a false doctrine for the church and destroys its substance. Therefore, there is only one way to serve the truth in a church that implements the Aryan paragraph in this radical form, and that is to withdraw. This is the ultimate act of solidarity with my church. I can never serve my church in any other way than by adhering to the whole truth and all its consequences."[29] German Christians reasoned that an Aryan test for leadership in the German church was for "the sake of patriotic sentiments." Bonhoeffer argued that "if Paul, a Jew, had not proclaimed Christ to the heathen world, without worrying about any patriotic sentiment, there would never have been a German church."[30]

Body:

I. Before believing in Jesus, these Gentiles were alienated from Israel and hopeless (**2:11-13**).

   a. Paul continues to address "you Gentiles," which in context refers to non-Jews from Ephesus and the surrounding region of Western Asia Minor who "heard the word of truth…believed in him, [and] were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (1:13).[31]

   b. He reminds them of the hostilities between ethnic Jews and Gentiles (**2:11**).

      i. Paul refers to "the circumcision" metaphorically as ethnic Jews and the "uncircumcision" as Gentiles (Gal 2:7–9; Rom 2:26–29).

      ii. Circumcision as a practice was a mark of belonging to God's people (Acts 11:1-3).

      iii. Paul is alluding to an ongoing controversy among Jesus' earliest followers concerning the sign that determines who is part of the in-group in contrast to the out-group (Acts 15:1-5; Gal 2:3-5).

      iv. Paul believes that the "seal" that truly determines who belongs to God's people is the Holy Spirit (1:13; cf Acts 11:15-17; 15:8-9).

---

[28] Ibid., 385.

[29] Ibid., 386.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ralph P. Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1991), 32.

v. In many ways, circumcision became like a wall or fence between Jews and non-Jews. Paul did not want this to be the case between believing Jews and believing Gentiles.

vi. Jewish separateness and their unwillingness to mix with Gentiles often resulted in persecution, such as during Haman's rule, Pilate's revenge against zealots (Luke 13:1), the careless way in which this Roman procurator agreed to the execution of Jesus, and Galio's response to a complaint brought against Paul by Jews in Corinth (Acts 18:12-17).

c. Paul calls them to "remember"[32] their past (**2:12**), which was characterized by being "dead in the trespasses and sins" (2:1), and their being:

i. "separated from Christ"

ii. "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel"

iii. "strangers to the covenants of promise"

iv. "having no hope"

v. "without God in the world"

d. "But now" (**2:13**) is similar to Paul's previous "But God…" (2:4; cf 4:20; 5:8).

i. God's intervention "in Christ Jesus" has resulted in "you [Gentiles] who once were far off" having been "brought near [to Jews]."

ii. Paul seems to be alluding to a passage in Isaiah, though the original text referred not to Jews and Gentiles, but to Jews in exile and Jews at home in the promised land (Is 57:19).

iii. This remarkable reconciliation has been accomplished "by the blood of Christ."

II. Believing Jews and believing Gentiles have now been reconciled to God as "one new humanity" (**2:14-18)**.

a. Jesus not only brought peace between Jews and Gentiles, he "is our peace" (**2:14a**).

i. He "has made both [Jew and Gentile] one."

ii. He "has broken broken down the middle wall of separation." How?

iii. By "abolishing in his flesh the hostility."

[32] This is the only imperative verb in Ephesians 1-3.

iv. This "hostility" was induced by "the law with its commands and regulations" (NIV).[33]

b. When Paul says that Jesus "made us both one" (**2:14b**) he is implying "a new race of humanity," or a third race" in which "there is neither Jew nor Greek" (Gal 3:28).[34]

i. Jews and Gentiles, "formerly alienated from each other by reason of fierce nationalism, cultural pride, and religious claim, are united to become 'one'" people in the Messiah.[35]

ii. Jews and Gentiles, previously isolated and estranged, have now been created into a new humanity, and "the old distinction between Jew and Gentile has been transcended."[36]

iii. This does not mean, however, that Jews cease to be Jews and Greeks cease to be Greeks. In other words, their twoness hasn't been dissolved.

iv. The fact that a person's new primary identity is found in Jesus doesn't mean they lose their ethnic identity altogether.

v. What is miraculous about this new humanity is that it is a community of "differents."[37] Paul will later refer to this as a "mystery" (3:3-6).

---

[33] The sentence structure (syntax) of Ephesians 2:14-15 is ambiguous and difficult to translate. Several options are grammatically possible, reflected in several English translations. The overall context of Ephesians helps determine which reading is preferable. Many scholars agree that the direct object of καταργήσας (*katargeō* / "abolishing") is τὴν ἔχθραν (*echthros* / "hostility" ESV, "enmity" NKJV), not τὸν νόμον (*to nomos* / "the law"). The KJV and NKJV reflect this reading, while the ESV and NASB take *nomos* ("law") as the direct object of *katargeō* ("abolishing"). The understanding that *echthros* ("hostility" ESV, "enmity" NKJV), not *nomos* ("law"), is the direct object harmonizes with 2:16, in which Paul states that Jesus killed or put "to death the hostility [*echthros*]," which is a restatement of what Jesus "destroyed" and "nullified" in 2:14–15. Some translations, such as the NASB and the ESV, give the impression that Jesus abolished the torah of commandments. This is not consistent with Paul's use of the Torah in the rest of the letter (cf 6:1-3), not to mention the rest of his writings.

[34] Ralph P. Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1991), 31–32.

[35] Ibid., 34.

[36] F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 295.

[37] New Testament scholar Scot McKnight, in his book *A Fellowship of Differents*, puts forth that God wants his people to be characterized by a fellowship of *difference* and *differents*, a mixture of people from all across the map and spectrum—men and women, rich and poor, black and white, and everything in between.

III. Believing Gentiles are now "no longer strangers," but "fellow citizens with the [Jewish] saints," part of the same family and built together as one temple in the Lord (**2:19-22**).[38]

a. Paul's first metaphor is political—"fellow citizens [συμπολίτης, *sympolitēs*]" (**2:18**).[39]

i. Perhaps the earliest Gentile followers of Jesus in a city like Antioch, having joined a church made up mostly of ethnic Jews, might have felt like "strangers [ξένος (*xenos*)] and aliens [πάροικος (*paroikos*)" (cf Gal 2:11-14).

ii. Believing Gentiles were before "strangers [*xenos*] to the covenants of promise" (Eph 2:12).

iii. Moses was a *paroikos* in the land of Midian (7:29).

iv. In a sense, all disciples are *paroikoi* to this world (1 Pet 2:11).

v. Rather than *xenos* and *paroikos*, believing Gentiles are now *sympolitēs*.

b. Next, Paul uses a familial metaphor—"members[40] of his household" (**2:19b**).

i. The Greek adjective οἰκεῖος (*oikeios*) refers to a person belonging to a household or family.[41]

ii. It is derived from the Greek word οἶκος (*oikos*), meaning "house."

iii. In Galatians, Paul wrote, "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those of the household [oikeios] of faith" (Galatians 6:10).[42]

---

[38] The first Greek words in 2:19 are ἄρα οὖν (*ara oun*), which the NIV translates as "consequently" and the NRSV "so then." Paul is going to draw a conclusion from what he has previously stated (2:11-18).

[39] The Greek compound word συμπολίτης (συμ, *sym*, meaning "together" or "with," + πολίτης, *polítēs*, meaning "citizen"). The Greek word πόλις (*polis*) means "city." Thus, a συμπολίτης is someone who lives in the same city or country as another person. The word is often used in a political context to refer to people who share a common political identity.

[40] The word "members" is not in the Greek text. The KJV translates καὶ οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ as "and of the household of God." The NASB also omitted the word "members."

[41] Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 494.

[42] This use of the word οἰκεῖος reflects the close-knit community of early Christians, who saw themselves as brothers and sisters in Christ.

iv. In 1 Timothy 5:8, Paul uses *oikeios* for people who are related by blood or marriage.[43]

v. Paul will refer to the church in family terms again (3:14-15; 5:1).

c. Finally, Paul speaks of the church, composed of believing Jews and believing Gentiles, as "a holy temple in the Lord" (**2:21**).

i. Jews and Gentiles, "being joined together," make up "the whole structure" of God's "temple."

ii. The Greek word ναὸς (*naos*, "temple") is "an architectural term used to describe a building regarded as a dwelling place of a deity."[44]

iii. In the New Testament, it is generally used to refer to the Jerusalem temple (Matt 23:16-17, 21, 25; 26:61; 27:5, 40, 51; Mark 14:58; 15:29, 38; Luke 1:9, 21; 23:45; Jn 2:20).

iv. It is also used to refer to the heavenly sanctuary (Rev. 7:15; 11:19b; 14:15, 17; 15:6, 8; 16:1, 17).

v. Jesus also spoke of himself as the temple (Jn 2:19-21).

vi. Paul uses this term to refer both to the physical body of individual believers (1 Cor 6:19) and the church (1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16).

d. God's united, multi-ethnic people become "a dwelling place" in which God lives by his Spirit (**2:22**).

i. Paul recalls God manifesting his presence in the wilderness tabernacle and the Jerusalem temple (Ex 40:34-35; Deut 12:5; 1 Kgs 8:10-11; 8:29).

ii. "As the sanctuary was peculiarly the place of God's presence and manifestation, so the church of God is the temple in which He dwells."[45]

iii. Gentiles, "formerly kept out of the temple now [along with believing Jews] *are* the temple."[46]

---

[43] It can also be used to describe things that are associated with a particular household or group of people.

[44] Sunhee Kim, "Sacred Space," ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

[45] Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6 (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 1012.

[46] Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 139.

iv. The evidence that they are now God's temple is the indwelling of God's Spirit.

Conclusion: In Ephesians 2:11-22, Paul casts his vision for a church that is united across ethnic boundaries that formerly created hostility. Salvation was not for the Jew and the Gentile in an individualized sense. Paul did not "imagine a peace given by God *to* those far [Gentiles] and near [Jews] which would not also be a peace *between* the two. Peace is not simply a matter of the soul or of individuals only; if it is peace from and with God, then it is also peace among men."[47]

God's salvation is seen in transformed social relations. It addresses the problems of alienation, division, bigotry, distrust, and embittered relationships. There is no human solution or hope for the present-day relational challenges between Palestinian patriots and Zionistic Jews, Russians and Ukrainians, North Koreans and South Koreans, etc. There was no hope for healing in Germany without the cross of Jesus. The only hope for conflict in the world is the cross. "The cross is the place where barriers are destroyed. Before the cross we know our own sin, and we cannot stand there without realizing all of us are without defense and have no claim on God. No one has higher value than anyone else. The ground at the cross is level. Any standing we have is God-given, not something inherently makes us better than others."[48]

Bonhoeffer eventually saw that the problem in Germany was much deeper than just how the German Christians were relating to fellow Jewish Christians in Germany. It had to do with the treatment of the Jewish people as a whole, regardless of religious professions. "We must recognize," warns one scholar, "that no barrier that rejects people for who they are is ever justified. All whom we meet are potentially people who will be in Christ and therefore one with us. The grace that has accepted us into Christ is extended to them *by us*. All people regardless of race or status—however defined—are to be valued, enabled, and treated justly."[49]

---

[47] Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3*, vol. 34, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 278.

[48] Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 139.

[49] Ibid.