

# OpenTheo

## March 21st: Proverbs 19 & Ephesians 2:11-22

March 20, 2021



### Alastair Roberts

He who is generous to the poor lends to the Lord. A new temple formed of Jews and Gentiles.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

If you have enjoyed my output, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon ([https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref\\_=wl\\_share](https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share)).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

## Transcript

Proverbs chapter 19. Better is a poor person who walks in his integrity than one who is crooked in speech and is a fool. Desire without knowledge is not good, and whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way.

When a man's folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the Lord. Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man is deserted by his friend. A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will not escape.

Many seek the favor of a generous man, and everyone is a friend to a man who gives gifts. All a poor man's brothers hate him. How much more do his friends go far from him? He pursues them with words, but does not have them.

Whoever gets sense loves his own soul. He who keeps understanding will discover good.

A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will perish.

It is not fitting for a fool to live in luxury, much less for a slave to rule over princes. Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense. A king's wrath is like the growling of a lion, but his favor is like dew on the grass.

A foolish son is ruin to his father, and a wife's quarreling is a continual dripping of rain. House and wealth are inherited from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord. Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger.

Whoever keeps the commandment keeps his life. He who despises his ways will die. Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed.

Discipline your son, for there is hope. Do not set your heart on putting him to death. A man of great wrath will pay the penalty, for if you deliver him, you will only have to do it again.

Listen to advice and accept instruction that you may gain wisdom in the future. Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand. What is desired in a man is steadfast love, and a poor man is better than a liar.

The fear of the Lord leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied. He will not be visited by harm. The sluggard buries his hand in the dish, and will not even bring it back to his mouth.

Strike a scoffer, and the simple will learn prudence. Reprove a man of understanding, and he will gain knowledge. He who does violence to his father and chases away his mother is a son who brings shame and reproach.

Cease to hear instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge. A worthless witness mocks at justice, and the mouth of the wicked devours iniquity. Condemnation is ready for scoffers, and beating for the backs of fools.

Wisdom, as we have seen elsewhere in the book of Proverbs, involves walking by faith, not by sight. The fear of the Lord leads us to trust in the instruction of the Lord over those things that he forbids that seem more promising to our natural understanding. Proverbs chapter 19 opens with a principle that relates to this.

The poor man who walks in integrity is better off than the person who's deceitful and foolish in his speech. This is not immediately obvious. Maybe it becomes more apparent over time.

Recognizing the truth of this statement requires faith in the moral governance of the Lord. Desires that are unchecked and untested by reason are not a good thing. Where knowledge and understanding are lacking, being driven by your desires can lead you into

all sorts of danger.

Unchecked desire is often the cause of precipitous action that brings people into trouble, provoking the sort of hastiness that this proverb describes as causing people to lose their way. However, when the fool loses his way in such a manner, he will far more typically blame the Lord than his own folly. He will blame the Lord for his misfortune, for the family that he put him in, for the neighbors that he has, for some of the circumstances that he's experienced in his life, anything but dealing with his own folly.

Verses 4-7 largely deal with the impact of money upon friendship. Many who feign to be true friends of a rich man are merely driven by mercenary interests. Meanwhile, the poor man, whose friendship may be a financial liability, is someone who's deserted by his friends.

A man who is generous in handing out gifts will find many people clustering to him. Everyone is a friend to such a man, but it's very difficult to discern which of those friends are true, which will stick with him in hard times. The poor man, by contrast, has the opposite struggle.

Even those who are closely related to him may cut him off because they are concerned that he might expect them to provide for him. The person who gets sense, or literally gets a heart, loves his own soul. Such a man, in his quest for wisdom, is seeking his own best interests.

The fool, by contrast, whether he knows it or not, loves death. Verses 5 and 9 are very closely related. Verse 5, a false witness will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will not escape.

And verse 9, a false witness will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will perish. They are very similar, and they're also similar to other verses elsewhere in the book. For instance, in Proverbs chapter 21, verse 28, a false witness will perish, but the word of a man who hears will endure.

When we encounter such repeated Proverbs, we should be alert to the way that they play differently in different contexts. We should also consider their more subtle variations, which may be highlighted by the repetition of something in almost exactly the same terms. This may encourage us to reflect upon the finer details.

The repetition of a principle may also encourage us to recognize some literary pattern within the texts in which they are found. On other occasions, the repetition may serve primarily to underline a particular point. It is not clear to me which, if any, of these things are occurring in this particular instance.

However, perhaps if we looked more closely, one of these lines of investigation would reward us with some insight. Verse 10 expresses a principle that might surprise us in our

modern sensibilities. It might be compared in some respects to chapter 17, verse 7. Fine speech is not becoming to a fool, still less is false speech to a prince.

It argues from the lesser to the greater. We know that riches in the hands of a fool are unfitting. We might think of the character of Nabal, for instance.

Great power over princes is even less fitting in the hands of a slave. We might be a bit shocked by this. We think that the slave exercising power over the prince is a great and positive sign of social mobility.

However, the parallel may be instructive. In the case of the fool, the fool has no inner principle by which to produce great wealth. He is someone who will not keep his wealth.

He squanders and wastes it and uses it in an unwise manner, in a manner that accentuates his vices. The wise man, by contrast, stewards his wealth well and uses it for the up-building of the entire community. If the fool lacks the power to produce and to steward wealth well, the slave is someone who does not know how to exercise rule well.

He is not even the master of himself. Being ruled by the slave is a very bad sign that you have come under an intense form of tyranny. When your leaders are weak, dependent, and ruled over by other authorities, they will become mere administrators of an authority that they cannot produce, have not produced, and are beholden to.

The slave is empowered. He is not actually powerful. The prince, by contrast, is someone who has independent power of his own and hence is qualified to exercise rule.

The whole community is poorer off when it is led by weak and dependent persons. If they cannot exercise true power over themselves, how on earth are they going to do so for the wider community? This is a principle that we encounter on several occasions in scripture. For instance, in chapter 30 verses 20 to 21 of Proverbs, And again in Ecclesiastes chapter 10 verses five to seven, Verse 11 expresses a two-stage process, the first which is being slow to anger, not being hot-headed, and the second which is the quality of graciously overlooking an offense.

Being slow to anger gives one the time and the space to think through an issue, to reflect, deliberate, and then come to a wise decision. The person who has this characteristic is someone who's in a position then to figure out how to deal with the situation. To forgive, he can overlook an offense, having considered it, not just reacted against it, but responded thoughtfully and after deliberation to the situation.

Such a man, by virtue of his control over his own spirit, is able to bring healing to a situation. The goodness of a king is described in verse 12. A similar description is found in chapter 16 verse 15.

In the light of a king's face there is life, and his favor is like the clouds that bring the

spring rain. The king's wrath can be a positive thing. The threatening growl of the lion is a warning to any that might come close, and the might of the king described here is something that can bring peace to his realm, as no one will dare attack.

One could think about the conversation that Susan has with Mr. Beaver in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* concerning the lion Aslan. Susan, concerned about meeting a lion, asks whether Aslan is safe, and Mr. Beaver responds by saying, of course he isn't safe, but he's good. The good king is supposed to be like such a lion, terrifying to the enemies of the people of God, but a source of health and peace to all within his realm.

A man can be ruined by a foolish son, and his life can be made a continual misery and frustration by a quarrelsome wife. A successful society has a one body with many members quality to it. When all of the people within such a society are working together and in harmony, all are made stronger by each other.

However, in a quarrelsome society where people are at odds with each other, where counsel goes unheeded, where antagonisms exist, where people are in rebellion against their leaders, and those who are in authority prey upon those under them, the entire society will be weakened as a result. Proverbs describes the dynamics of such a society elsewhere. An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rotteness in his bones.

When a husband and wife are working together well, the husband gives his strength to his wife, and his wife glorifies him and brings him honor in the society. In a healthy society, a son receives wisdom from his father, a place in the world from his father, authority from his father, and the son who honors his father in such a society empowers his father even further, as by acting in his father's name, he extends his father's dominion. There is mutual honor between the generations in a healthy society.

Grandchildren are the crown of the aged, and the glory of children is their father's. Proverbs chapter 17, verse six. A similar thing is true of a people and their leader.

A people can be glorified in a wise and good leader, and a king, for his part, is glorified by his people. Proverbs chapter 14, verse 28. In a multitude of people is the glory of a king, but without people, a prince is ruined.

While wisdom builds people up then in mutual honor, folly produces societies where people are always tearing each other down, where everyone is weaker by virtue of the others. In Proverbs chapter 18, verse 22, we were told that he who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord. A similar principle is expressed in verse 14, perhaps to counterbalance verse 13 and to present the positive vision of the wife, the wife as someone who glorifies her husband and is received as a gift from the Lord.

Finding a prudent wife is not something a man can take full credit for himself. Ultimately,

this is a gift of the Lord, a sign of the Lord's favor. Verse 15 describes the way that slothfulness can sap people of their energies.

The person who is slothful will find his energies forsaking him. He is put, as it were, into a stupor, where a person's resolve and their abilities are not engaged, they will gradually diminish. Once again, the source of life is keeping the commandment of the Lord, yet the meaning of the second half of verse 16 is not entirely clear, and different suggestions have been put forward for its interpretation.

Michael Fox suggests that the original text should be read as a reference to a word rather than his ways. However, it is also possible that despising his ways refers to the way that the foolish person has treated his way of life with disregard and contempt. Ultimately, he loves death and hates himself.

The Lord is the patron and the protector of the poor. It is easy to practice a form of charity that makes others beholden to us, that puts others into our debt. However, the Lord as the guarantor of the debts of the poor presents himself as the one who will repay the giver to them.

It is indeed a remarkable notion that we could lend to the Lord, but the fact that the Lord is the guarantor of the poor protects the poor from being put in the debt of other people in a way that might lead to them being controlled. Paul expresses this same principle when he responds to great gifts by saying, At various points in the book of Proverbs, disciplining one's children is seen as a sign of love and concern for them. In verse 18, this is expressed in a particularly stark way.

However, as verse 19 expresses, there are some people who are so set in the ways of folly that any attempt to deliver them will be short-lived and ultimately futile. A man with a hot head will end up getting into trouble again and again. You'll always be bailing him out until that character flaw has been dealt with.

You will always find yourself trying to pick up the pieces after his failures. Far better to address that character flaw when you still have the chance. This is also expressed to the son in verse 20.

To listen to advice and accept instruction sets you on the path to gain wisdom in the future. Proverbs 16, verses 1-3 read, The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit.

Commit your ways to the Lord, and your plans will be established. Once again in verse 21, we see the power and the sovereignty of God as overruling the affairs of men. Whatever we may plan in our hearts, ultimately it is the will of the Lord that will stand.

Consequently, we should commit our ways to the Lord so that our plans and our ways

would prosper. Kindness or steadfast love is the fruit of a man, and a man is better off being a poor man than a liar. It is more beneficial for a man to produce steadfast love and kindness than to produce much wealth.

He would be better off being poor and truthful than to be rich and a fool and a liar. The fear of the Lord is a repeated theme as we have seen in the book, and here again in verse 23, the text returns to it. The fear of the Lord here is said to lead to life.

It is also the source of satisfaction and contentment. The person who has such fear will not ultimately be visited by harm. He may suffer certain misfortunes, but ultimately he will know the Lord's blessing.

The sluggard, even when he has the means for his satisfaction, will not take advantage of them. Solomon compares this to a situation where the sluggard has a dish of food right in front of him and he still cannot even exert himself to bring his hand to his mouth. Such resources are wasted on the sluggard, and as we see elsewhere in Proverbs, he will tend to lose them in time.

Punishment can serve not merely to judge and instruct the person who is punished, but also as a means of deterrence and instruction for others. When a scoffer is punished, the simple becomes wise. When a wise man is instructed, he gains knowledge.

Proverbs 21, verse 11 One of the ways that the simple can gain wisdom is by paying attention to the way that others are rebuked and punished for their actions. There is benefit to be gained from cautionary examples. Verse 26 describes a situation where a son squanders his parents' wealth and dishonours them.

We see something similar in Proverbs 28, verse 24. Whoever robs his father or his mother and says, "'That is no transgression' is a companion to a man who destroys." Children must honour and build up the legacy that they receive from their parents. This duty to receive instruction and to walk in the path of wisdom is reinforced in the verse that follows.

The chapter concludes with a condemnation of false witnesses and of wicked people whose mouths feed upon iniquity, presumably in their speech. The fate of such persons is condemnation and beating. A question to consider.

In studying this chapter, we have considered the way that a healthy society is one in which people mutually honour and build up each other by their own gifts. How can we see this principle expressed elsewhere in the scriptures? Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 11 to 22 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands, remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and

without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near. But through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Paul began Ephesians chapter 2 by focusing upon God's work in the lives of his recipients in a more general fashion.

Now, however, he focuses his attention more directly upon what God has done for them as a body of people, especially as Gentiles. Once again he describes their previous condition. Their condition was one of outsidership and otherness, relative to the Jewish people of God.

They were separated from Christ, detached from all of the blessings found in the Messiah. They were alienated from the Commonwealth of Israel, cut off from the many benefits enjoyed by Israel as the people of God. They were strangers to the covenants of promise, foreigners to the promises and to the bond that united God to his people and assured them of future blessings.

In many ways, this second half of Ephesians chapter 2 is covering the ground covered by the first half of the chapter, yet on a higher level. The first time around, our attention was focused upon the deliverance from spiritual death and entrance into new spiritual life but now we are focusing upon our deliverance from alienation, separation and exclusion and our entrance into a new body of fellowship. The previous condition was one in which Jews and Gentiles, the circumcision and the uncircumcision, were divided from each other.

Gentiles were cut off from the Messiah, who was the king of the Jews, not their king. They did not enjoy the blessings enjoyed by Israel, who had the oracles of God entrusted to them, among other things. They were not included in the covenants and they were without God in the world.

They were not marked out by his name as the Jewish people were. Paul is here describing a state of separation, a state of being excluded that is operating on several interrelated levels. New Testament passages such as this can be slightly perplexing to



many readers.

The close attention that the apostle Paul gives to addressing categories of circumcised and uncircumcised, Jew and Gentile can seem quite foreign to us. Belonging to a way of ordering the world and its peoples that has long since passed. Furthermore, why such categories should have any bearing upon or relevance to the operations of God's grace is unclear.

After this passage, Paul proceeds to argue that he has been entrusted with the revelation of a great mystery hidden in ages past, which has since been revealed. The mystery that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. If this is the great mystery that the world has been waiting for, something about it seems anticlimactic.

From our vantage point, the revelation might seem a little like a damp squib. I suspect that much of our struggle to appreciate the significance of the mystery arises from our failure to recognise the centrality and character of the church in Paul's understanding of salvation. For Paul, the formation of the church as a concrete historical polity is not a sideshow in his account of Christ's work.

It's a central feature. In verses 11-12, Paul calls upon the Ephesians to remember their former state, that of uncircumcised Gentiles, aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel, etc. As Stephen Fowle highlights, the designation Gentile only made sense within Judaism or in relation to Judaism.

Within these verses, Paul is calling upon the heroes of the epistle to reconceive their past, to regard their former identities in a manner that is only possible from an in-Christ vantage point. The retrospective nature of this characterisation is noteworthy. Few non-Jews would have considered themselves naturally to be having no hope and no God in the world, nor would they have thought of themselves as being alienated.

Fowle writes, This act of remembering their past as a Gentile past has a dual function. First, by recalling their state as Gentiles before God, the Ephesians can come to see themselves in the very particular ways in which God saw them. It is equally important, however, that by remembering their past as a Gentile past, a past that is thereby in relation, albeit a negative one, to Judaism, Paul can begin to describe more precisely the nature of the reconciliation accomplished in Christ.

In fact, if Christians fail to grasp this, they may end up misperceiving what is involved in reconciliation today. In the process of describing the Ephesians' former identity, Paul also unsettled Jewish categories. The word called, preceding both the uncircumcision and the circumcision, suggests that Paul questioned the legitimacy or the significance of these designations, an impression that is bolstered by the clause that follows, which is made in the flesh by hands.

Made by hands is elsewhere used of pagan idols or shrines Daniel 5, verse 4 Acts 17, verse 24 demonstrating their insufficiency to accommodate or to represent God. In the New Testament, it is also used in reference to the Jerusalem Temple, where it draws attention to the transitory character of the edifice. Likewise, the term flesh in Paul is typically contrasted with the spirit and its efficacy in the New Covenant.

In suggesting his contestation of these Jewish categories, Paul is probably subtly directing the attention of his hearers to a more fundamental circumcision of the heart by the spirit promised in the New Covenant. Paul declares that the Gentiles who were once alienated are brought near through the blood of Christ, in verse 13. Some hearing Paul's argument to this point might be wrong-footed by the expectation that the Gentiles will have been brought near by being made members of Israel.

They are brought near, however, not by being made members of Israel, but by becoming members of an entirely new polity, the Church. Once again, that which affects our deliverance is the work of Christ. Here, interestingly, though, it is the death of Christ that is more foregrounded, whereas in the earlier section it was the resurrection that was the focus.

Paul's point here about what Christ accomplished in his cross is similar to that which he made in Colossians 2, verses 13-14. And you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

Christ brings about peace, breaking down division. He deals with the law that locks the Jews up and locks the Gentiles out. Christ doesn't just bring peace, though.

As Paul puts it here, he himself is our peace. Christ himself holds together in his body God and man, and man and man. Those formerly divided are now united in the single body of the Messiah.

Some have seen here a reference to the dividing wall between the outer and the inner area of the temple, the latter being restricted to Jews only. This is likely somewhere in the background, especially as he goes on to talk about a new temple being formed. But Paul's point is more general.

This has all occurred in Christ's flesh, and it has occurred through the way that Christ deals with the law. The law stood against both Jews and Gentiles in different ways. It locked the Jews up under its condemnation, while it locked the Gentiles out.

The law is abolished as the law of commandments expressed in ordinances. In Colossians chapter 2 verse 14, a similar expression refers especially to the law as a set of ascetic regulations. It might be most appropriate to see this as an abolishing of the

law as a system of flesh regulation.

The law is of course fulfilled, as Paul makes plain in Romans chapter 8 and elsewhere, but its fulfillment is a transformation. It is no longer the caterpillar of commandments expressed in ordinances, but the butterfly of life in the spirit. The obstacle of the law can be dealt with, of course, because the flesh and the condemnation that lies over it have been dealt with.

The consequence is the peace of which he is speaking, peace between Jews and Gentiles and among men, and peace with God. Enmity has been removed. Christ's message of peace, the message of the gospel, has been declared to those who were far off, Gentiles, and to those who were near, Jews, and it has been declared to both alike.

It is interesting to observe the way that Paul speaks of Christ himself giving this message. Christ is so involved with and active with and identified with his messengers that when his messengers speak to us it is as if he himself was speaking directly to us. The peace that we enjoy is one by which we both alike have access through Christ in the one spirit to the Father.

Once again, the underlying Trinitarian grammar of Paul's gospel can be seen here. We are already here getting an intimation of the argument that he will make in chapter 4 too, where the unity of the church is closely connected to the oneness of God. The death of Christ overcomes not only the condemnation that Israel lies under, but also the division within the human race.

In Christ the quarantining of Israel from the nations has ended, and one new undivided humanity can be formed of the two. The reconciliation of the divided humanity is accomplished as both Jews and Gentiles are reconciled to God, enjoying access in one spirit to the Father. The human race is united as it draws near to God.

Paul describes our state following the work of Christ in verses 19 to 22. No longer strangers and aliens, but full members of the household of God, with all of God's other holy people. Paul infuses his architectural imagery with organic imagery.

We are a structure that is joined together which is growing into a holy temple for God's dwelling place. Verses 21 to 22 are parallel to chapter 4 verses 15 to 16, where Paul writes, Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Here the accent is upon the organic rather than the architectural imagery, but the parallel is illuminating.

The notion of a living and growing temple body is not exclusive to Paul, but can be found in other New Testament passages such as John chapter 2 verses 19 to 21 and 1 Peter

chapter 2 verse 5. It's also implicit in the imagery of Acts chapter 2 and the day of Pentecost. This temple, this building in which Jew and Gentile are brought together in fellowship with God, is built up in conformity to Christ, through acts of communication, speaking the truth in love, and acts of loving mutual service. It is this international body of persons that is the temple within which God now dwells.

This claim is absolutely integral to Paul's understanding of the Christian message. Essential to the progress of the building project is the establishment of loving communication and service between Jews and Gentiles. Even with the wall of division between them removed, the edifice of the new temple would risk being riven and twained by a huge crack were such bonds between Jews and Gentiles not formed and maintained.

This of course is one of the reasons why Paul expresses such passionate concern about the situation in Antioch that he recounts in Galatians chapter 2 where Jews were withdrawing from fellowship with Gentiles. The eschatological temple is a feat of international relations springing up out of the overflowing grace of the gospel. As contemporary Christians reading these passages we can fumble for conceptual rationales for the intensity of Paul's concern to hold Jews and Gentiles together.

The principles that most readily present themselves to the consciousness of readers informed by the tradition of Western liberalism are typically those of inclusivity, equality and non-discrimination. Yet these principles have seldom fuelled quite such an intense impulse towards the concrete outworking of unity between people groups as Paul displays in these epistles. They can commonly focus our attention primarily upon individuals rather than concrete historical communities of people.

In focusing upon such categories we risk missing the character of Paul's concerns and his understanding. Paul's point has less to do with an abstract principle of the equality of individuals and much more to do with the overcoming of divisions between peoples within the arena of history. The oneness he declares is not primarily a rejection of the significance of the differences between Jews and Gentiles but his insistence that difference no longer presents a division or obstacle.

It has been traversed by the grace of Christ's gospel. Likewise, the unity he proclaims does not straightforwardly underwrite liberal values of inclusivity and non-discrimination. The inclusion and non-discrimination that Paul proclaims is not founded upon absolute moral principle but upon a historical achievement.

It is a unity that has been brought forth from a prior situation of divinely established exclusion and discrimination. God had elected Israel and the Gentiles were excluded from that. The mystery is that God's purpose was that this discrimination and exclusion should one day serve the blessing of all.

The difference between Jews and Gentiles established by the Torah is of great importance to Paul, although he presents this difference in terms of its penultimacy to the new covenant order of the Church. The significance given to the difference between those who were aliens and strangers and those who were citizens and members of the household between those who were near and those who were far off is a reminder that the Church is a polity forged through God's decisive action with distinct peoples in history. Differences are not necessarily expunged in this new order.

Love and grace are particularizing. They address us all in our uniqueness. But the divisions they once established are traversed by the working of God's grace.

As the new organic human temple is built up, it is a light to the world, a pattern of how things really ought to be, a foretaste of the future where the nations give up the ways of war and join together as one to feast at God's table. A question to consider what might it mean that the Church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets?