**Reconciliating the Two Sides of the Wall of Separation: A Sanctuary Tension and Its Missiological Implications Based on Ephesians 2:14-18**

**Abstract**

Ephesians 2:14-18 (with its immediate context of 2:11-22) presents a temple imagery symbolizing the unity of Gentiles and Jews. It shows a temporal dimension of Gentiles who were “separate from Christ” but now is “in Christ,” and a typological dimension of Jews who had their ceremonial law but now sees its antitype in Christ. Such horizontal change/fulfillment eventually leads to a vertical transformation, making both sides reconciled to God and then to each other.

However, a hindrance of this reconciliation exits: the middle wall of separation. This may refer either to the balustrade that separates Gentiles from Jews (people), or to the misuse of the ceremonial law (the Word) that alienates Jews from God. It indicates a sanctuary tension in people’s hearts and thus a broken relationship. In God’s plan, the purpose of sanctuary is to provide a visual aid to teach people about God’s universal salvation and His mission, but the Jews fail to see it.

Such temporal/typological fulfillment is reflected in the Three-Cultural Model, in which the text is read both messianically and missiologically. Ethnocentrism must be broken down and missionaries are connected to the Word and the people to be served. This is a holistic message that this text provides to reconcile the broken world, making the two one body, one new humanity, and touched by one Spirit.

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**Introduction**

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the challenges facing mankind have become increasingly severe, making people feel like living in a broken world threatened by various confrontations and crises. People have not learned a lesson from the two world wars in the last century, and various nationalist complexes and political correctness are even fueling the world conflicts. The specter of nuclear war looms, and human society is closer than ever to a crisis that may push human civilization to the end. Ironically, such conflicts are disguised in a so-called “sacred land” that both sides believe they are fighting for peace and justice.

Indeed, there is a holy place in everyone's heart, which is sacred and inviolable. As Huntington (1996) says, the area of conflict “often is for one or both sides a highly charged symbol of their history and identity, sacred land to which they have an inviolable right” (p. 253). This holy place may be a geographical location, such as the Eastern part of Ukraine, West Bank, or Kashmir; or it may be an ideological realm, such as freedom, democracy, or communism. In the context of cultural diversity, the interpretation of such holy places varies drastically, and it is just the existence of such holy places that has led to the tension in the broken world today. This reality needs to be considered in missiological studies and it should urge people to seek the wisdom of reconciliation from the Bible. In view of this, this study intends to analyze the brokenness of this world from the perspective of sanctuary tension, based on Ephesians 2:14-18, and explore its missiological implications, so that the Christian church may have a gospel of reconciliation to proclaim to this broken world.

**Dimensions of Reconciliation**

Reconciliation is something people do every day directly or indirectly. It is the remedy to the “broken human relationship at every level,” which is “perhaps the bitterest and bloodiest earthly curse of sin” (Ott, Strauss, & Tennent, 2010, p. 180). Therefore, reconciliation in its nature is the restoration of relationship. People may reconcile with the environments, other people, their past experiences, or even their inner hearts. But there is an ultimate reconciliation, symbolized by sanctuary ministries and services, because all the problems of brokenness in this world lie in the separation between God and man but the sanctuary bridges this huge gap.

In the book of Ephesians, the church stands at “the very heart” of God’s mission to “bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ” (Eph. 1:10; Kirk, 2000, p. 35; cf. Boot, 2016, p. 237). Church is not only “an instrument of the gospel” (Kirk, 2000, p. 35), but itself is the reflection of the gospel, through which the mystery of Jesus’ redemptive work is revealed (Eph. 3:6). Bringing the themes of sanctuary, reconciliation, and church together, we are now coming to the main text of this study.

Ephesians 2:14-18, with its immediate context of 2:11-22, presents a temple imagery symbolizing the unity of Gentiles and Jews in the Christian church. This unity is accomplished in two dimensions: the temporal dimension and the typological dimension. Through these two, the rationale of reconciliation is demonstrated.

**Temporal Dimension**

“One of the prominent formal elements in 2:11–22 is the ποτὲ ... νῦν [then…now] contrast schema” (Lincoln, 1990, p. 124), showing the importance of temporal dimension in this reconciliatory message. “The pre-Christian past is designated by ποτέ, ‘then,’ in vv. 11, 13 and by its equivalent τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ ‘at that time,’ in v. 12;” it is an opposite status compared to “the Christian present, described as νυνί, ‘now,’ in v. 13, and in an equivalent as οὐκέτι, ‘no longer,’ in v. 19” (Lincoln, 1990, pp. 124-125).

Paul uses this contrast schema to remind his readers about their past spiritual state and tell them how precious their present identity is. Along with this temporal dimension is the change of identity. They were “Gentiles by birth” and called “uncircumcised;” they were “separated from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world;” they were once “far away” from Christ (Eph. 2:11-13). But now, they are “in Christ…have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13); they are “no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household” (Eph. 2:19).

The contrast between “the pre-Christian past” and “the Christian present” is crucial for reconciliation because it provides a base for the readers to know themselves and others. With this contrast in mind, Christians will be grateful for those who have experienced the same identity change as them, and they will have mercy on those who still live in the spiritual darkness as them before. From the perspective of this contrast, there is no space or reason for alienation. Instead, there is only a brotherly love with each other, or a strong mission sense to share the gospel to those who are still in “the pre-Christian past,” expecting the same identity change to be replicated in them.

Given the importance of this contrast, Paul called his reader to “remember” (Eph. 2:11) what he was going to discuss. The Greek verb used here is imperative, reminding the urgency to hold these things in remembrance. However, the verb “remember” not only means remembering what happened in the past, but also means “looking to the past for its implications for the present and future” (Lincoln, 1990, p. 135). In other words, through remembering the past, the heart of gratitude for what God has done in them arise spontaneously, thus producing a favorable attitude for reconciliation.

Furthermore, when Paul describes the change of identity, he uses the second person plural, namely, “you” (plural). This conveys a direct message to the readers that the one needs reconciliation is not others, but yourself. Once “you” change “your” identity, the reconciliation is achieved naturally. Such self-recognition is often neglected because the human nature usually regards others as the responsible person for reconciliation. The temporal dimension in this passage, however, corrects this bias and put reconciliation on the right track through the contrast schema between the non-Christian past and the Christian present.

**Typological Dimension**

Typology, “as an important hermeneutical key in biblical interpretation” (Gully, 2003, p. 728; cf. Davidson, 1981, pp. 15-111), is often neglected or partly neglected when commentators interpret Ephesians 2:14-18. Indeed, they are right to place Jesus Christ as the foundation of reconciliation, but it is not enough. As an “internal interpretive tool” (Gully, 2003, p. 697) of the Bible, typology can provide deeper insights into the connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament, and between the heaven and the earth. This connection is firstly reflected on the “horizontal plane,” with “events, places, and persons of the Old Testament in relation to their antitypes in the New Testament;” and then on the “vertical plane between the heavenly sanctuary and the earthly sanctuary” (Gully, 2003, p. 698). This function of typology itself demonstrates a kind of reconciliation, from cosmic unity between God and sinners to human unity between Jews and Gentiles.

In Ephesians 2: 14-18, typological dimension of reconciliation is embodied in the three juxtaposed phrases: “broken down the middle wall of separation,” “abolished in his flesh the enmity,” and “[abolished] the law of commandments” (NKJV). These three things are one, namely, Christ has removed the barriers of communication between the two sides through fulfilling the requirements of justice, to make “the two groups one,” and “in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility” (Eph. 2:15-16). All this was accomplished through “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2), the antitype of the sanctuary ministries and services in the Old Testament.

Furthermore, the typological fulfilment of reconciliation is also reflected in the Jewish proselyte baptism, the mark of Gentiles’ entry into Israel (Stagg, 1962, pp. 206, 212-213). “Baptism alone was sufficient to make a Gentile male into a Jew” and “when he has undergone baptism and come up…he is regarded in all respects as an Israelite” (Kirby, 1968, p. 156). After Jesus’ crucifixion, the meaning of baptism goes beyond “rabbinic teaching,” emphasizing “the death and resurrection of the Lord” (Kirby, 1968, p. 156). Both Jew and Gentile now rose from the spiritual death and “were made alive and raised up, and even in this world share in the life of ‘the heavenly places’ with their exalted Lord” (Kirby, 1968, p. 156).

When reconciliation takes place, it is the time that type and antitype meet each other. The promise to Abraham that “all people on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:3) was fulfilled, and “those who have faith are children of Abraham” and “are blessed along with Abraham” (Gal. 3:7, 9). The blessing of reconciliation includes enjoying the fellowship with God and among the humans without barriers. Jesus Christ not only gave blessing, but He is the blessing. He not only made peace (v. 15) or preached peace (v. 17) in the functional sense, but also “He Himself is our peace” (v. 14) in the ontological sense. He is the Lamb of God.

Besides the abovementioned horizontal typology, there is a vertical typology that should not be neglected when interpreting reconciliation. It brings us to a more profound significance of the sanctuary services. Christ’s death on the cross “put an end to sacrifice and offering” (Dan. 9:27) in the earthly sanctuary, and soon inaugurated his ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. Now, not only the dividing wall was removed, but people can “enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body” (Heb. 10:19-20).

Generally, the typological fulfillment has made the reconciliation between God and man happen from “in sanctuary” to “in Christ,” and from the sacrificial order to the gospel order. Such vertical transformation eventually leads to a horizontal reconciliation, making both sides reconciled to God and then to each other.

**Synthesis**

Kirby (1968) observes that “the sacrament dominates the thought of the epistle” of Ephesians, and “the whole of chapter 2 is little more than a comment on the meaning of it” (p. 154). This observation is reasonable, although his emphasis is only on baptism. In fact, apart from baptism, the rites of the sanctuary cannot be ignored. A careful reading of Ephesians 2:14-18 and its immediate context of 2:11-22 shows their indirect references to baptism and sanctuary services, and there is a chiastic structure with v. 15 as its center (Kirby, 1968, pp. 156-157; Lincoln, 1990, p. 126).

This structure links the two dimensions together, with the typological dimension as the cause, and the temporal dimension as the result. Without Jesus’ fulfilment of the law and the sanctuary services, there would be no identity change, therefore no reconciliation between God and man, and between Gentiles and Jews. Such cause-and-effect relationship can be verified by the text itself. After describing the identity change in the temporal sense, Paul explained the reason of such change: “For he himself is our peace…” (Eph. 2:14), and this explanation continues until verse 18, during which the typological dimension of reconciliation, especially the sanctuary service, is expounded. After that, Paul went back to the temporal dimension in an upgraded level “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers…” (Eph. 2:19), and culminated in the new temple consists of the Jews and Gentiles believers together:

 [You are] “but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Eph. 2:19-22).

This new temple is nothing else, but the body of Christians where the Holy Spirit dwells, symbolizing the ultimate reconciliation among all human beings who believe in Jesus Christ.

The synthesis of the two dimensions shows that the typological fulfilment of the sanctuary with its ceremonial laws is the source of reconciliation. The sanctuary is the holy place that Jews would never abandon. It could lead to reconciliation through the faith in Christ, but if Jews failed to see this typological meaning, the sanctuary would turn out to be the source of obstacles to reconciliation.

**The Sanctuary Tension and Its Impacts**

Paul's epistles were usually written for certain purposes, and Ephesians is no exception. When Paul tried to make the supreme statement about peace, what preoccupied with him was “the greatest division of all, that which separated Jews and Gentiles” (Foulkes, 1983, p. 81). This is true in the text of 2:11-22, where the temporal and typological dimensions of reconciliation were expounded, but “the middle wall of separation” and “enmity” were still a real existence.

This wall of separation and enmity may have two meanings. First, it may refer to the “a material barrier keeping Jews and Gentiles apart” in the temple area in Jerusalem, “warning Gentiles not to proceed farther on pain of death” (Bruce, 1984, p. 297). It is an “outward and visible sign of ancient cleavage between Jew and Gentile” (Bruce, 1984, p. 298). Second, this wall may also refer to the law, which “could be seen as providing a fence around Israel” and “became such a sign of Jewish particularism that it also alienated Gentiles and became a cause of hostility” (Lincoln, 1990, p. 141).

Looking at these two possibilities, it is relatively easy to understand the separation caused by the material balustrade in the Jerusalem temple, but how could the law also create a rift between people? Apparently, the law here refers to the ceremonial law, which the Jews did not see its fulfillment on the cross. But even the ceremonial law did not create enmity, it was “the interpretation the Jews placed upon it, the additions they made to it, and the exclusive and hostile attitudes they adopted as a result, that were the basis of the hostility” (Nichol, 1957, p. 1009).

No matter how to interpret this wall and enmity, it indicates a sanctuary tension in people’s hearts. This tension does not come from the sanctuary itself, because in God’s plan, the purpose of sanctuary is to provide a visual aid to teach people about God’s universal salvation and His mission (Gully, 2011, pp. 439-464), and its nature is reconciliatory and harmonious. The sanctuary bears the messianic significance if people come with the faith because all the sanctuary ministries and services point to the antitype—Jesus Christ the Messiah. It also bears the missiological significance, teaching people about God’s salvation and attracting all nations to draw near to Him.

The tension arises in people’s hearts and then causes the split of the reality, when the messianic and missiological readings of the sanctuary collapse under the bigotry of Jewish ethnocentrism. Sanctuary and its related ceremonious laws thus become a symbolism of parochial privilege that separates Jews from all nations, instead of being a blessing of all nations as promised by God to Abraham. In this case, on the one hand, the Jews hoped to be reconciled to God through the rites and sacrifice of the sanctuary; while on the other hand, they were alienated from God by rejecting the Gentiles and misusing the ceremonial laws. The expectation of reconciliation and the fact of alienation coexist, and the tension therein cannot be resolved if the sanctuary is viewed through ethnocentric eyes.

It is the existence of such a tension that led to various conflicts in the early Christian times. An example of conflict is the persecution that Jews imposed on the Christians, and Paul was once one of such persecutors. “But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison” (Acts 8:3). Paul also admitted that “as for zeal, [I was] persecuting the church” (Phil. 3:6). After his conversion, and after he realized the typological fulfillment of the sanctuary services, the sanctuary tension in his heart was resolved, but now he himself became the object of persecution. Conflicts and confrontation continue, shifting from one person to another, but its core is the same, the distortion of the holy place in people’s heart. This is also the reason why Paul was arrested because he was accused to have “brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place” (Acts 21:28).

Even among the Christians, this tension was not completely removed. Some believers from Jerusalem, “who belonged to the party of the Pharisees,” taught that “the Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses” to be saved (Acts15:5). Even Peter, esteemed as one of the pillars of the church, originally ate with the Gentiles, but when he saw the people coming from Jerusalem, “he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group” (Gal. 2:12). The sanctuary tension was ingrained in the hearts of Jews, even though Jesus’ fulfillment of the law and the sanctuary ministries had put the circumcision unrelative. “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Gal. 5:6).

If the distortion of the sanctuary and its laws set up by God will cause the conflicts in the world, let alone the “holy places” set up by human beings themselves. When the silversmith Demetrius lost his business because Paul’s evangelism made people realize that the silver shrines “made by man hands are no gods at all” (Acts 19:26), he then appealed to the goddess Artemis of the Ephesians and tried to start a riot in the name of “holy place” to destroy Paul's evangelism. He incited the ethnic and religious complex of the Ephesians: “There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty” (Acts19:27).

It is often efficient to resort to the holy place to incite conflicts, and the Ephesian silversmith did take the city into the riots. This is just an example, showing that the phenomenon of “sanctuary tension” is everywhere when people set up their own holy place out of ethnocentrism. If the “sanctuary tension” that leads to conflict is not eliminated, then the world will always be in a broken state and the conflicts will never end. Geographic locations such as the eastern part of Ukraine and the ideological claims such as democracy and communism are good reasons to set up the holy places in people’s hearts and thus create tensions and conflicts. It does not necessary mean that anyone or any country that insists on certain geographical or ideological claims is wrong and this study has no intention to do such evaluation, but it indeed shows that pursuing these claims merely from the self-centered perspective will surely cause tensions and conflicts in the world. This is the root of the problem in this broken world because the sin originates from the selfish ambition (Isa. 14:12-14).

God created this world in unity with diversity and His blessings are for all nations. His salvation is universal through the illustration of the sanctuary ministries and services. The future of human civilization is not that the West triumphs over the East, or the East triumphs over the West. People from two sides have different logic and thinking patterns (Nisbett, 2003), thus creating different understandings of specific concepts. Any attempt to seek superiority by setting up “holy places” will cause tensions and conflicts. There should be no conflicts among human beings or different cultures, and the only conflict should come between Christ and Satan as revealed in the history of Great Controversy.

**Missiological Implications**

No matter what conflict this broken world experiences, it is simply an old problem in new package. As the Bible says, “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl. 1:9). The sanctuary or the law does not build any wall of separation by and in itself, and “the erection of barriers results from the ways we attribute value, that is, by devaluing those who are different” (Snodgrass, 1996, p. 150). The problem lies in the Jewish self-centeredness when interpreting the meaning of sanctuary, which was regarded as a parochial privilege for the benefit of Jews only.

This problem reflects a kind of dislocation when Jews dealt with the relationships among themselves, the Bible, and the Gentiles. Among these three factors, the Bible should be given priority as the standard for the other two, and the Jews should study the sanctuary in its full meaning according to the whole Bible. Unfortunately, this priority was misplaced, and the Bible became just a tool for Jews to satisfy their sense of superiority. They only saw the Messiah of glory, but not the Messiah of suffering, which led them to reject the suffering Jesus, so they could not see the typological fulfillment of the law and the sanctuary ministries in Jesus Christ. This is the root of all tensions and conflicts.

Today, when we read the same sanctuary from the missiological perspective, the relationship among the above-mentioned three factors (Jewish self, the Bible, and the Gentiles) become a new context in which the text is interpreted, thus forming a new three-factor model of interpretation: ourselves/missionaries, the Bible with its context, and the people we are going to reach. These three parts have their respective cultures that may affect the Bible interpretation. In missiology, it is known as the three-culture model by Hesselgrave (1978).

In this model, missionaries stand “on middle ground” and look in “two directions” (Hesselgrave, 1978, p. 72). First, missionaries look to the Scripture, indicating that they are simply “a messenger, an ambassador—a secondary, never a primary source” (Hesselgrave, 1978, p. 73). Second, missionaries look to the mission field and sees the people and their culture as important factors upon which the form of the gospel message is shaped (Hesselgrave, 1978).

These two directions indicate that missionaries’ “first responsibility is to study the Scripture” in terms of the “Bible culture context” (Hesselgrave, 1978, p. 75). This is a task of exegesis which decodes the biblical message. Then, missionaries need to go to the recipients’ culture with “its own world view, value system, and codes of communication” and “encode the message in a culturally relevant form” (Hesselgrave, 1978, pp. 75, 76) so that people in that culture can properly understand what is communicated.

In a later version of the three-culture model, Hesselgrave (2009) not only delineates this model but also heavily emphasizes the missionaries’ duty. In order to communicate the Gospel more effectively, they “must listen, before they can teach” (Hesselgrave, 2009, p. 426). Missionaries need to learn from the people they are going to serve before they can evangelize them. Generally speaking, the ultimate goal of Hesselgrave’s (2009) three-culture model is “to raise up effective sources of the Christian message from within the target culture” (p. 429).

Apparently, Hesselgrave’s three-culture model is designed for the gospel communication, and it seems to be irrelevant to the message of reconciliation in Ephesians 2:14-18. In fact, that is not the case. A careful comparison of these two can reveal some common spirits and trigger some new insights into how to mediate the broken world.

First, this model provides a basic framework through which reconciliation takes place. In doing reconciliation, we are always facing two factors: the Bible and the people needing reconciliation. Our message must be people-oriented and be responsible to the biblical teachings at the same time. Second, in this model, we missionaries are not the center, but simply “a messenger,” or “an ambassador” of the biblical message. This positioning can effectively avoid the spirit of ethnocentrism, thus remove the sanctuary tension. Third, this model advocates that missionaries’ primary task is to interpret the Bible within its own context, which will certainly lead to a messianic understanding of the sanctuary and see Jesus Christ as the typological fulfillment. Fourth, this model requires to pay attention to the people we are going to serve and respect their culture. The reason for such a respect is because we believe that these people can be transformed by what Jesus had fulfilled, and we, by faith, can see this change in the temporal sense, even though they are now still in the state of enmity.

With these four insights in mind, we realize that the work of reconciliation is not just a reconciliation between the two sides of the wall of separation, but rather, involving the missionaries, as the ambassadors of the Word, as the third part. It is the missionaries who must be reconciled first to each of them respectively with the heavenly message and then make the two sides be reconciled to God and to each other. This is the way how we can remove the sanctuary tension and mediate the broken world through the typological fulfillment in Jesus and the temporal fulfillment in man.

**Conclusion**

Unity is the most challenging issue in this sinful world because the root of division—self-centeredness is also the root of sin. Since the fall of mankind, conflicts and wars have never stopped, and they are still prevalent today, as the world is closer than ever reaching the extent of exterminating the human civilization. The crux of the problem lies in the fact that all conflicts come from and are disguised in the alleged “holy places” in people’s hearts, which become a sanctuary tension driven by the spirit of self-centeredness. This reality makes reconciliation even more challenging.

The process of reconciliation is just the opposite of alienation, namely, it is a process of removing the sanctuary tension and drawing people near to God and then to each other. This process is clearly demonstrated in Ephesians 2:14-18 with its immediate context 2:11-22. Through explaining the nature of reconciliation in the typological and temporal dimensions, the Bible points out the way to peace. This is a holistic gospel message that involves the missionaries, the Bible, and those who need to be reconciled in a dynamic Bible-based system. It provides a fresh perspective to reconcile the broken world and heals the wound of brokenness. In the peace achieved by Christ, the two sides of the wall of separation will be made one body, one new humanity, and “being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Eph. 2:22).

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