

Exegesis of Ephesians 2:11-18 with Particular Attention to Verse 14 on the Implication of Jesus Christ Being Our Peace and the Peaceful Co-Existence in the Society

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Abstract

Peace is freedom from disturbance and tranquillity. It is a state in which there is no war or a war has ended and it is desirable in any society. Extant researchers have done lots of rigorous work on the exegesis of Ephesians 2:11-18 and matters relating to peaceful co-existence of Northern Ireland's ethno-nationalist conflicts, such as: Christ our peace, strategies of living at peace in society, restoring peace in Northern Ireland. However, less attention is paid to the relationship between the meanings of peace in Ephesians 2:11-18 and peaceful co-existence in Northern Ireland where there are physical "walls of partition". No known scholar has ever linked these physical "walls of partition" in Northern Ireland with Ephesian 2:11-18. Therefore, this paper aims to present an exegesis of Ephesians 2:11-18 and draw out some implications of Jesus Christ being the peace to the whole world and peaceful coexistence of Northern Ireland as well regardless of the physical walls of partition in that country. The study explored exegetical and descriptive approaches. It is found out that Jesus Christ through the shedding of his blood on the cross brought reconciliation between God and man on one hand

and between man and man on the other hand. There is, therefore, no social barrier between human beings of any race. Though Northern Ireland has been a popular flash point for crisis in the world, the peace that Jesus brought can remove the barrier of relationship. There is also no spiritual barrier between God and man as man can now approach God directly without any intermediary apart from Jesus Christ. Some implications were drawn from this exegetical explanation. Implications like inner peace with God, social justice, forgiveness, and ethical values. The paper then concluded with the fact that human beings should emulate these virtues to have a peaceful society.

Introduction

Peaceful coexistence is a desirable thing in any society. Peaceful co-existence is living peacefully and harmoniously with different people in society. Peaceful coexistence is desirable because human beings are social beings who cannot be an island unto themselves. Every person needs others to succeed in life. Any society that will be healthy and growing positively must embrace peaceful coexistence (Afolaranmi & Amodu, 2022). Existing researchers have done lots of laborious work on the exegesis of Ephesians 2:11-18 and they have written on matters relating to peaceful co-existence of Northern Ireland's ethno-nationalist conflicts, such as: Christ our peace, strategies of living at peace in society, restoring peace in Northern Ireland. However, less attention is paid to the relationship between the meanings of peace in Ephesians 2:11-18 and peaceful co-existence in Northern Ireland where there are physical "walls of partition". No known scholar has ever linked the quiet co-existence of Northern Ireland with Ephesian 2:11-18. This is the lacuna this paper has filled. Therefore, this paper aims to present an exegesis of Ephesians 2:11-18 and draw out some implications of Jesus Christ being the peace to the whole world and peaceful coexistence of Northern Ireland as well regardless of the physical walls of partition in that country. Peace has many meanings. However, peace simply is a state or condition of harmony, quiet, security, justice, and tranquillity. Ephesians 2:11-18 (especially verse 14) is a biblical passage that presented Jesus Christ as "our peace" who broke the barrier of hostility between the Jews and non-Jews. This paper aims at doing an exegesis of this passage and bringing out the implications of the passage to peaceful coexistence of Northern Ireland despite physical walls of partition built to limit the level of relationship among many nationalist Catholic and unionist Protestant areas of Belfast city and some other parts of Northern Ireland (Keane, 2021).

The Exegesis

Ephesians 2:11-18 deals with the dejected situations of the Ephesians which was inherited. It is as if verse 11 reminds the Ephesians to compare what they used to be with what they are now. Then they had no access to any blessing. The religious leaders were judging them by their physical appearances only but today they are being judged by their faith and their practical Christianity. Verse 12 talks about the time when they were without Christ. Four things were lacking in the lives of the Ephesians namely: (i) access to the rights and privileges of the Jewish; (ii) any benefit to the covenant at Mountain Horeb; (iii) hope concerning the resurrection of the body or the immortality of the soul; and (iv) God, but they possessed many helpless idols. Ephesians 2:13 'you who once were far away...' can be interpreted to mean three things: (i) to be under the disapproval of God; (ii) to be physically far from the altar where sacrifices are being received by God – places, where sacrifices are being received, are considered to be the closest places to God; or (iii) the cultural differences and social status of the Ephesians as non-Jews classified them as being far from any opportunity and benefit that might emanate from the Jews (Louw & Nida, n.d). But, through Christ, the Ephesians are now near the unlimited blessings that the Jews had deprived them of. This is the peace that Jesus Christ brought.

More attention will be paid to Ephesians 2:14 as written in Koine Greek: Αυτος γαρ εστιν η ειρηνη ημων, ο ποιησας τα αμφοτερα εν και το μεσοτοιχον του φραγμου λυσας, την εχθραν εν τη σαρκι αυτου. The English version is: "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility..." (NIV). Some words in this verse need to be examined etymologically. Such words include ειρηνη, μεσοτοιχον, φραγμου, εχθραν and σαρκι.

Ειρηνη

How can Jesus be the peace? What is peace? Peace in Hebrew appears 237 times in the Old Testament and the first one appears in Genesis 15:15 - As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. The Hebrew word translated as peace is shalom (*shaw-lome*) and it means soundness, welfare or completeness. The idea is making amends, or making whole or complete. Shalom is linked with restitution (What Is Peace In The Bible? n.d). In Exodus 22:4, If the stolen beast is found alive in his possession, whether it is an ox or an ass or a sheep, he shall pay double. This signifies that shalom or peace in Hebrew is related to making amendments and of course, amendment leads to peace in relationship. If you plead with someone you have offended and make necessary amendments, the relationship is likely to be more robust. And the result will be peace and harmony among the members of the parties concerned. When you have peace, it implies that you lack nothing and there is no deficiency in your life. You are in a state of completeness and wholeness. In other words, when you have peace, you have pure heart; there is no evil thoughts residing in you.

The word peace in the New Testament is expressed in the Greek word εἰρήνη which means quietness, one, peace, security, and rest. Its origin is from εἰρῶ, which means to join or tie together into a whole. So, εἰρήνη means unity, it is bringing multiple parts together to form a whole or set it as one again. For instance, two parties that reconcile after a disagreement as made εἰρήνη, that is they have come together and their relationship is whole. If the Northern Ireland's ethno-nationalists can come together for a compromise and focus on values that can unite them, there will be unity and peace will be guaranteed. In Matthew 10:13, εἰρήνη is translated to mean joy. In summary, the peace of God is more comprehensive than the peace of the world, it is more than the absence of war or conflict, but it involves taking certain actions to resolve broken situations. It's more than a state of inner serenity; it is a state of wholeness and completeness. The term is used to refer to the experience of salvation that comes from God or the harmonious relationships between persons. Therefore, anywhere there is no unity, there is no peace. All the above characteristics of peace is embedded in the person of Jesus and subsequently, Jesus can be referred to as the peace of the Ephesians, peace of the people residing in Northern Ireland and peace of whosoever believes in him and adopts his way of life (Makanjuola, 2023).

Μεσσοτοιχον is from two Greek words: μεσος and τοιχος meaning the wall of a house, or a partition. It is very important to note that this Greek vocabulary μεσσοτοιχον is only used once in the entire New Testament, that is, in Ephesians 2:14. This makes the word very unique and significant. Το μεσσοτοιχον του φραγμου in another words τον φραγμου τον μεσσοτοιχον οντα meaning the middle wall of partition. This vocabulary can only be found once aside from this and that too is in the masculine: τον της ἡονης και ἀρετης μεσσοτοιχον. The enmity between the Jews and the Gentiles is compared to a wall of partition built to separate two apartments to create and establish privacy between the two inhabitants of the building. The purpose of building 'a wall' is different from the purpose of building 'a wall of partition'. The wall that separates the dining room from the waiting room will definitely have a direct entrance within the same apartment which will grant anyone access to the dining room. But a wall of partition is designed to separate two apartments from each other in such a way that one must move out of his apartment and probably seek permission before one can gain entrance into another apartment if it becomes necessary for the dwellers of the two apartments to interact. Partition is a thin wall that separates one part of a room from another it is also an action of separating a country into two or more independent countries. So, the wall of partition connotes individualism, independence, privacy, and 'mind your business type of life'. This is exactly the situation in the Northern Ireland. It is so bad that physical walls were erected to separate the aggrieved parties from interacting with one another. Meanwhile, man is not created to be alone but to socialize freely with people though with caution so as not to learn bad habits. It is this 'wall of partition' that separated the Ephesians from the Jews. In the same vein, it divided the inhabitants of the Northern Ireland to the extent that they deliberately built physical walls that separated different groups within the same country. Jesus broke those walls of partition with his suffering, teachings, crucifixion on the cross,

death, and resurrection. Meaning that Jesus as a rectitude corrected all errors and misconducts of everyone on earth with His suffering and death as believed by the followers of Christ. In some part of the world, for example in Yorubaland of Western Nigeria; a person can forgive someone who offended him or her if a highly respected person pleaded on behalf of the offender. The complainant will no longer focus on the offender, but he will ignore him and pay attention to the 'righteous man' standing as his referee. So also, if the people of Northern Ireland can use this principle in Ephesians 2: 11-18 by accepting Jesus or someone highly respected by the community as rectitude for those who have offended them; there will be peace in the land.

Ἐχθρῶν in the New Testament Greek refers to someone openly hostile, animated by deep-seated hatred. It implies irreconcilable hostility, someone with disgust proceeding out of a personal hatred bent on inflicting harm on the person hated. Ἐχθρῶν connotes deep-rooted enmity. It refers to hostility between the Jews and non-Jews. This was the situation between the people of Ephesus and the Jews before the people of Ephesus accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour (Balz & Schneider, 2004). The indigenes of Northern Ireland are also experiencing this type of deep-rooted hatred among one another.

Σαρκι

Σαρξ, σαρκος, ἡ - flesh

The above noun appears 147 times in the New Testament (only 8 times plural) and is among words with the largest New Testament frequency. Among the anthropological terms, σαρξ stands in third position behind ἄνθρωπος and καρδιά. Σαρξ is one of Paul's favourite words. It appears 72 times in the New Testament, 26 times in Romans, 18 times in Galatians, and is also common in the post-Pauline tradition (25 appearances include the pastorals and Hebrews). It occurs only once in 1 Timothy, Philemon, James, and 2 John 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, Titus, and 3 John do not use the word. Σαρξ as used in many passages means flesh of both human and animal body. It refers, first, to the bodily substance, the *flesh* of circumcision, then the human body itself (frequently with a closer qualification, for instance, ἀσθενεια, the whole person or humanity; in the partial sense: the people of Israel, σαρξ referring to physical lineage and expressing genealogical membership in Israel. In another passage, σαρξ refers to earthly and natural existence and then to the merely worldly existence of human beings (κατὰ σαρξ in combination with a verb). Finally, in Paul's writings, σαρξ implies a theological understanding of mankind subject to the power of sin. In the ancestral logic flesh (σαρξ) refers to the people of Israel, to whom a person belongs through conception and birth (Galatians 4:23), especially verses 23 and 29; Romans 9:3; 11:14), and those members are τέκνα της σαρκος and thus not true children because they were still in the flesh. Paul's usage of σαρξ can be interpreted to mean how human beings are subject to the all-encompassing power of sin especially as in Romans 7:5, 14, 18, 25; 8:5-8. Sin in the flesh man is not capable of coming out of the bondage of inborn sin. This led to the necessity of Jesus' sacrificial suffering and death. "Blood and flesh" refer to the two fundamental

substances of the human body distinguishing it from intangible spirits (Ephesians 6:12, 1 Timothy 3:16) is suggestive of Romans 8:3 and Ephesians 2:14, though the crucial difference is that the appearance of Christ "in the flesh" already in and of itself has revelatory significance. "Flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39) refer to the actual corporeality (appearance in person) of the resurrected Jesus in contrast to an incorporeal and unreal spirit. An investigation of the use of σαρξ must be based not on its use with other terms (flesh and blood, in the flesh, according to the flesh) but on objective criteria since some word combinations can have widely diverging meanings in different contexts. Σαρξ refers, first to the bodily substance, the flesh of circumcision, then of the human body itself. It refers to physical lineage. Secondly, it refers to the merely worldly existence of human beings (κατὰ σάρκα). Thirdly, it implies the theological understanding of mankind as subject to the power of sin (Louw & Nida, n.d.). Hence, it is not strange if there is any disagreement between two persons or group of people like the inhabitants of Northern Ireland, in fact; it is normal for human being to experience conflicts occasionally. It will be abnormal if there is no conflict among human being, but it will also be inexpedient if attempts are not made to resolve the fights. The Greek work Σαρξ exposes the fact that it is natural for human being to commit error and in the process there will be misunderstanding. Therefore, the depth of hatred and separation between the Ephesians and the Jews was so deep and detrimental to the peace of the Ephesians. But when they gave their lives to Jesus Christ, Jesus restored their peace, by healing their wounds. The experience they had with the Jews was very displeasing. But Jesus gave them great relief. In view of this enlightenment, the citizens of Northern Ireland should not take offences of their neighbours too far since it is inbuilt for human being to commit error. At the same time, it is very important not to take one another for granted.

Methods

Exegetical and descriptive approaches used in this work are so important and relevant to this research. Exegesis is primarily the acute interpretation of the biblical manuscript to discover its projected meaning. (Osborne, 2006).) Understanding the meaning of the text of the bible has always been considered a requirement for Jewish and Christian theological guideline, since both faiths are based historically upon the "Holy Writ" that makes up a chief percentage of the Bible. It should be well understood that the biggest share of the Bible is the Hebrew Bible, which is mutual to both Jews and Christians and is stranded in the account of the societies of Israel. (Barton, 2007). Christians add to this the New Testament (in contrast to the "Old Testament" of the Hebrew Bible), much of which is concerned with the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in the light of the Christian community's experience of Jesus. (Gorman, 2020). Ephesians is one of the books in the New Testament and it is categorized under the epistles. The principal drive of exegetical approach employed in this research is to determine the truths and values communicated in Ephesians 2:11-18. (Tuckett, 1987).

On the other hand, descriptive approach originated from a number of fields, such as statistics, linguistics and science. This work uses linguistic description. It has been noted that the first

known descriptive linguistic work was in a Sanskrit community in northern India, around the fifth century BCE. The structuralist revolution, from Ferdinand de Saussure to Leonard Bloomfield, led to a development in the discipline in the late 19th century. (Hayes & Holladay 2007). Descriptive research is a research that defines a phenomenon, occurrence, or event that happens in the present. In this work, grammar and use of language in Ephesians is emphasized, focusing on how the writer actually used certain words rather than how they should be used. (Fee & Stuart, 2014). Therefore, the event that took place in Ephesus which led to the counsel given by the author of Ephesians in relation to peace in the society is now connected to the issue of peaceful co-existence in Northern Ireland. The language used by the writer of Ephesians in 2:11-18 is now made relevant to the contemporary society, especially the Northern Ireland's ethno-nationalist conflicts.

Implications

These Bible verses, especially verse 14, have many implications for peaceful coexistence in the society. Among these implications are:

1. **Unity and Harmony:** Jesus Christ has brought peace and unity between Jews and Gentiles, reconciling them both to God and to one another. Olorunnimbe and Abolade (2024) explained this peace with God and peace with man further in a study. Unity or harmony is a concept closely related to peace (Anedo, 2012). Therefore, people should learn how to live in harmony and peace with one another. This unity and harmony that Jesus brought is applicable to the Northern Ireland. If the indigenes of Northern Ireland can embrace Jesus from their heart and allow flesh to bow for the Holy Spirit, both the invisible and visible walls of partition will disappear.
2. **Social Justice:** the concern of Jesus Christ for the marginalized and oppressed encourages efforts toward justice and equality in society. His example of breaking the social barrier between the Jews and the so-called Gentiles challenges structures of injustice and calls for compassion and fairness in all human relationships (compare John 4:7-26). Social justice is paramount in any society that will experience peace including the Northern Ireland (Müller, 2010).
3. **Forgiveness:** forgiveness is a way of giving up bitterness or claim to retribution on account of an offense or wrong doing in order not to escalate a brewing conflict. It plays a significant role in effectively handling many conflicts (Paleari, et al 2010). Forgiveness is essential for resolving conflicts and restoring harmony. It is a requirement for reconciliation (Osa, 2019). Jesus Christ portrayed Himself as peace by teaching forgiveness in Matthew 6:13-15 and by praying for people that crucified him on the cross (Luke 23:34). People ought to follow this example to live in peace with other in the society. Forgiveness is a major problem to the peace talks in the Northern

Ireland as many people still find it difficult to forgive people or even the descendants of people that have wronged them during 'The Troubles'.

4. **Inner Peace:** Knowing Jesus Christ as the peace brings inner equanimity and freedom from guilt, fear, and spiritual chaos. This peace transcends ordinary understanding and provides a stable foundation amidst life's uncertainties.
5. **Peace-making:** Jesus teaches that peacemakers are blessed (Matthew 5:9) and calls his followers to actively pursue peace. This involves seeking reconciliation, promoting dialogue, and working towards reconciliation rather than division. This is the goal of any stakeholder in peacebuilding – working towards a peaceful coexistence in the society. The case of the late Bishop Desmond Tutu after the apartheid period in South Africa is a good example.
6. **Ethical Framework:** the teachings of Jesus Christ emphasize love, forgiveness, and reconciliation as demonstrated in Ephesians 2:11-18. These values form the basis for the ethical behaviour of people, and they promote peaceful connections among individuals and communities. Balica (2017) reiterated these ethical values in a study.

The Peace Walls of Northern Ireland

Some examples of "walls of partition" in the modern world are The Peace Walls of Northern Ireland that "separate many nationalist Catholic and unionist Protestant areas" of Belfast city and some other parts of Northern Ireland (Keane, 2021). These walls were built during 'The Troubles' – the civil unrest or ethno-nationalist conflicts in Belfast and many other parts of Northern Ireland "from the late 1960s until the Good Friday Agreement in 1998" (Imperial War Museums, 2024). The walls serve as barriers to opposing parties from causing more havoc to the unrest. However, Northern Ireland's government set up an initiative in 2013 to remove all of these walls by 2023 (Gormley-Heenan, Morrow, & Byrne, 2015). This is to pave the way for total peace in Northern Ireland.



Figure 1: One of the Peaceline Walls in Belfast (Source: The Troubles Archive, 2014)

These walls in Northern Ireland still serve as barriers to free movement of people in the areas where they are. They also serve as a reminiscence of the over thirty years of civil unrest and killings of many people in the country. Removing them will erase such memories to a large extent from people's hearts as the people try to forget the past and move on with life. This will also promote oneness, peace, and forgiveness among the people.

Conclusion

Comprehending the fact that Jesus Christ is the peace, as Ephesians 2:11-18 presented him, has two-fold implications: it changes persons spiritually by offering reconciliation with God and inner peace, and it guides societies towards ethical behaviour, social justice, unity, and effective conflict resolution. Therefore, embracing the teachings of Jesus Christ on peace leads to a more harmonious co-existence in societies and promotes a society where love, forgiveness, and justice prevail.

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