

The Middle Wall OF PARTITION



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Introduction

Ephesians 2:11-5:33 has been a battle ground over the nature of the true church and body of Christ. I personally believe the issue is partially resolved when the context is carefully considered, and it is noted that a transition between salvation and works is introduced in Ephesians 2:10. This introduction of “good works” in distinction to salvation, but included along with salvation in Ephesians 2:10 continues in the same parallel fashion. The issue is resolved when it is recognized that both are distinguished from each other in Ephesians 2:10, but presented in a parallel cause and effect relationship, and this same parallel relationship continues throughout Ephesians 2:11-5:33.

Failure to distinguish between the two throughout this passage is the bottom line cause for confusing one with the other which results in the church salvation doctrine of the universal visible or invisible church theory.

Moreover, when another phrase in this disputed passage is carefully considered, it demands the “*church*” in view is the visible institutional congregational assembly of baptized believers. That phrase is “*the middle wall of partition.*” A careful study of this phrase will demonstrate that it refers directly to the visible worship assembly under the Old Covenant as an external segmented worship due to external distinctions. This is placed in direct contrast to the visible worship in the New Covenant institutional house of God which has no segmented public worship, but where all the worshippers are gathered together in one physical assembly without such distinctions or divisions between the worshippers.

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Indeed, once this is clearly recognized, then the universal theory will be seen as incompatible with the New Covenant church, but more in keeping with the Old Covenant institution of a segmented divided worship. That is precisely what the universal “church” doctrine teaches. It teaches that the New Covenant church is segmented in regard to worship just like the Old Covenant house of God where the worshippers were physically divided from each other, each having their own physical assembly (court of Gentiles, court of women, court of men, and court of priests – similar to physically segmented worship in different denominations). Hence, the application to a universal church repudiates the very point Paul is making in regard to the New Covenant house of God wherein all the worshippers are physically united together in the act of worship rather than divided from each other. This physical unity in the act of worship is one more characteristic that makes the New Covenant house of worship superior to the Old Testament house of worship.

Mark W. Fenison
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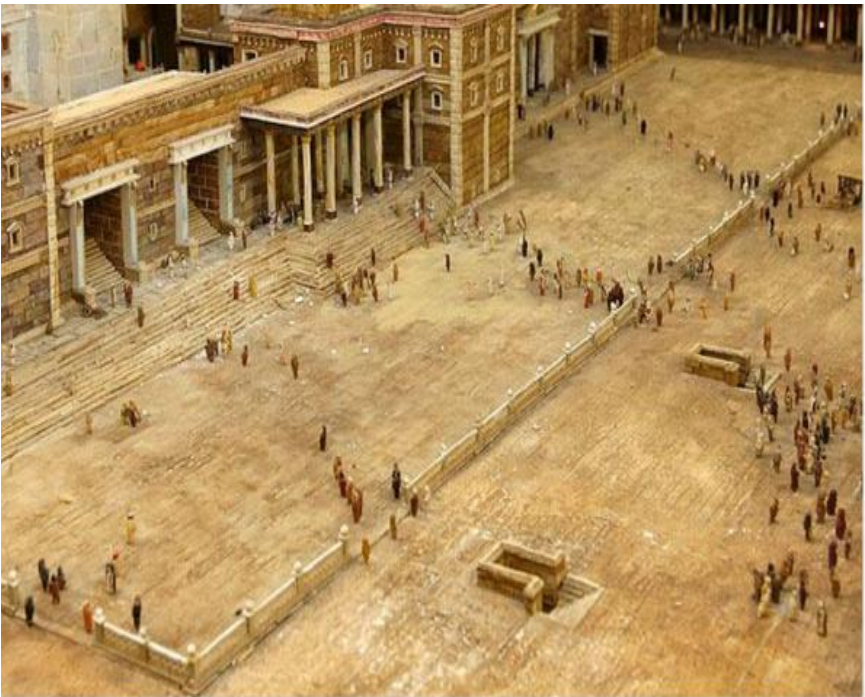
The Historical Context

What is “*the middle wall of Partition*” that Paul refers to in Ephesians 2:14?

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; -

Eph. 2:14

There is almost unanimous agreement among Bible scholars that the phrase “*middle wall of partition*” refers to the low wall that divided the gentiles from the Jews in Herod’s temple.



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Historical Evidence

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus was an eye witness of the destruction of Herod's temple. In his book of wars he describes the temple and says:

*When you go through these [first] cloisters, unto the second [court of the] temple, **there was a partition made of stone all round**, whose height was three cubits: its construction was very elegant; upon it stood pillars, at equal distances from one another, declaring the law of purity, some in Greek, and some in Roman letters, that **“no foreigner should go within that sanctuary”** for that second [court of the] temple was called “the Sanctuary,” and was ascended to by fourteen steps from the first court. (The Complete Works of Josephus, Kregel Publications, 1981, A description of the temple – Book 5, Chapter 5, Verse 2)*

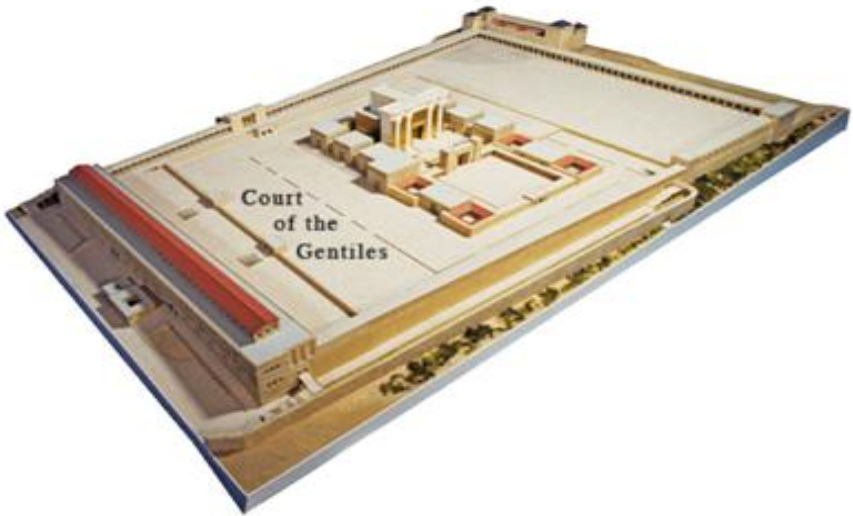
Josephus is describing the wall and sign that separated the Gentile worshippers from the Jewish worshippers in Herod's temple in the outer courts.

Alfred Edersheim is recognized as one of the foremost authorities on Jewish life and the temple. He verifies the existence of the “court of the Gentiles” in the temple of Herod and the sign that warned Gentiles to proceed no further:

Within a short distance in the court, a marble screen 4½ feet high, and beautifully ornamented, bore Greek and Latin inscriptions, warning Gentiles not to proceed, on the pain of death. One of these very tablets, bearing almost the same words as those given by Josephus has

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been discovered in late excavations. – Alfred Edersheim,
The Temple, Eerdmans, 1975, p. 46



Archaeological Evidence

On this wall there was placed an engraved stone sign which has been recovered by archeologists that warned Gentile worshippers from going beyond this wall. The sign was written in Greek and Latin and said,

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“No outsider shall enter the protective enclosure around the sanctuary. And whoever is caught will only have himself to blame for the ensuing death”



[©JewishEncyclopedia.com](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com)

This sign is found in the museum in Constantinople.

Biblical Evidence

The Bible clearly teaches that Gentiles did go up to the Temple to worship God:

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And there were **certain Greeks** among them that *came up to worship at the feast*: - Jn. 12:20

And he arose and went: and, behold, *a man of Ethiopia*, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to *Jerusalem for to worship*, = Acts 8:27

Gentiles who crossed over this wall were in danger of death:

Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. – Acts 21:28

Therefore, there is sufficient historical, archaeological, and biblical evidence to prove the existence of the “*court of the Gentiles*” in Herod’s temple separated from the rest of the temple by “*the middle wall of partition.*”

The Significance of that Wall

Some imagine that this wall distinguished between saved and lost persons under the law. It did not. The Gentiles were there to worship the one true God in the appointed place, with the appointed sacrifice, by the appointed way, as much as the Jews. The Greeks in John 12 and the Eunuch in Acts 8 both had come up to worship God, as much as the Jews.

It is true that this wall restricted both uncircumcised, as well as circumcised Gentiles from further entrance into the temple.

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However, this wall symbolized the extent of their participation in the act of worship, rather than serving as a distinction between lost and saved.

Circumcision was a primary symbol or sign (Rom. 4:11) of the new birth from the time of Abraham. None were to be allowed to worship within the inner sanctuaries of the house of God who were not circumcised in the flesh, or did not profess circumcision of the heart:

In that ye have brought into my sanctuary strangers, uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in my sanctuary, to pollute it, even my house, when ye offer my bread, the fat and the blood, and they have broken my covenant because of all your abominations.

And ye have not kept the charge of mine holy things: but ye have set keepers of my charge in my sanctuary for yourselves.

Thus saith the Lord GOD; No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel. – Ezek. 44:7-9

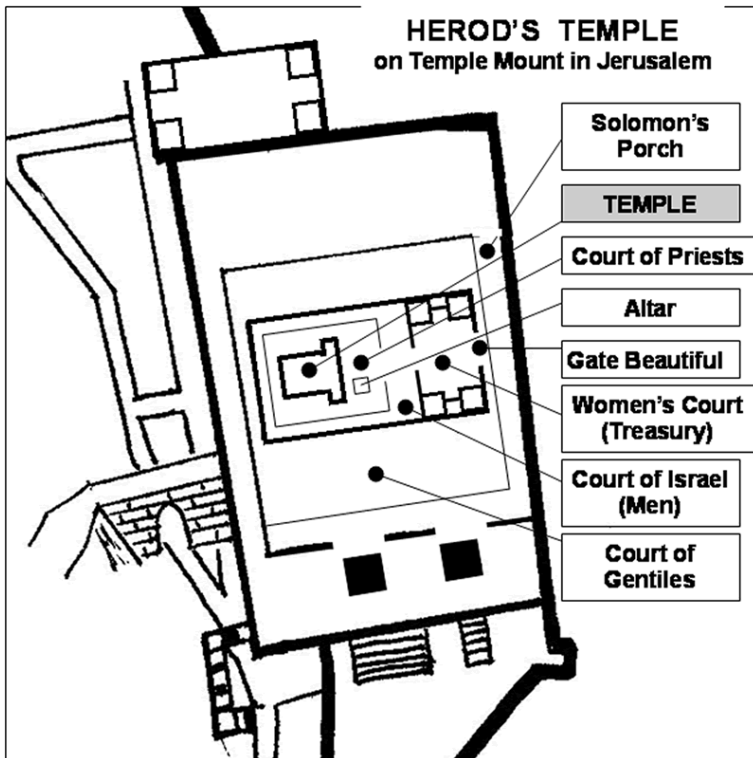
So the distinctions between these classes had nothing to do with their **own personal salvation**. The wall specifically symbolized the segmented worship within the Old Covenant public house of worship.

However, the court of the Gentiles was only the first of a series of walls, or partitions that separated true worshippers from one another in temple worship. There was a further separation between Jewish males and Jewish females as they advanced toward the

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inner sanctuary. This wall separated the Jewish women from the Jewish men and was appropriately called “the court of women.”

Then a further separation between the Jewish males and the Jewish male priests took place, as they approached the holy place. This enclosed area for Jewish males was called “the court of Israel (men).”



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Therefore, true worshippers within the temple compound did not worship on an equal level, or as one physical congregation, but were divided into several physical congregational bodies of worshippers according to their external distinctions.¹ Each had their own court within the temple area. This is what “*the wall of partition*” signified.

¹ Children’s church segregated from adult church violates this principle.

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The Biblical Context

“*The middle wall of partition*” never represented distinction between saved and lost under the law, but signified the distinction between true worshippers of God according to their ethnicity. As seen earlier, this “*middle wall of partition*” was just the first “*court*” used to divide true worshippers of God into classifications of race, gender and class. Removal of this wall signified the removal of all lesser walls of division that separated true worshippers of God in public worship.

In regard to salvation, the Gentile Abraham is set forth not merely as the role model for those saved under the public new covenant administration, but the father “*of all who are faith*” from Genesis to Revelation (Rom. 4:11,16; Gal. 3:6-7). Hebrews 11 lists such “*who are of faith*” beginning in the early chapters of Genesis (Heb. 11:4-5). Therefore, God has never made ethnicity a condition or distinction in salvation. Since the first prophet Abel unto the Apostle Paul, the same gospel of salvation has been preached to “*whosoever*” believeth in Christ (Acts 10:43; Heb. 4:2).

God is the same author of both the Old and New Covenants and there is no confusion in God. The Old Covenant was never given as a means or way to obtain eternal life (Gal. 3:20). It was given to reveal the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20) and the righteousness of God (Rom. 3:21). The holiness of God was revealed in the moral and civil laws of Moses, while the gospel was revealed in the ceremonial law with its sacrifices. The Old anticipated the coming of Christ, while the New Covenant declares the fulfillment of that anticipation in the Person and work of Christ.

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What has significantly changed under the New Covenant is the public house of worship, where Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, male and female are physically joined together as one worshipping body of baptized believers. Therefore, the New Covenant public house of worship shows consistency in the salvation and worship. Just as there was no Jew versus Gentile, or bond versus free, or male versus female in salvation, there is no such divisions within the New Covenant public house of worship.

This revelatory consistency between salvation and worship in the New Covenant public house of worship is manifested by Paul in Ephesians 2:14:

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; -
Eph. 2:14

The Ephesians Context

In Ephesians 1-2:10 Paul sets forth the commonalities between all the elect in regard to salvation.

They are all equally chosen “*in him before the foundation of the world*” (Eph. 1:4) according to the eternal covenant of redemption (Eph. 1:5-13). They are all equally “*dead in trespasses in sins*” (Eph. 2:1-3), and therefore, they are all equally quickened (Eph. 2:1-10). This act of quickening is the completed action of being “*saved*” described in Ephesians 2:5,8 which is also described as a creative act in Ephesians 2:10a “*his workmanship created in Christ Jesus...*”

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However, in verse 10 “*good works*” are first introduced in connection with their past tense completed state of salvation (perfect tense – vv. 5, 8). The consequence of quickening or being created in Christ is “*good works*.” This association of cause and effect relationship between being saved and serving introduced in verse 10 continues throughout the book.

More significantly, this introduction of “*good works*” in connection with salvation in Ephesians 2:10 lays the foundation for Paul’s deliberation on unity in public worship under the New Covenant between Jews and Gentiles in Ephesians 2:14-3:5.

Prior to the regeneration of these Gentile members in the congregation at Ephesus, Paul characterized them as lost (Eph. 2:2-3), or those spiritually separated (“*dead*”) from God and without hope, without all other blessings for the saved.

That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. – Eph. 2:12-13

However, equal salvation under the Old Covenant would not have made them equal to Jews in regard to public worship. But under the New Covenant, and in the New Covenant house of worship, all such barriers that divided worshippers in the public house of worship are removed. Consistency between the internal (spiritual) character of the saved, and their external (form) public worship is what Paul is establishing in this context. This united form of public worship between Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, male and

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female is the great “*mystery*” revealed to Paul by Christ concerning the nature of the New Testament church. Thus, Christ ushered in a New Covenant public administration that united believers both spiritually and physically, as one people, in one physically united body for public worship.

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; - Eph. 2:14-15

It is their common spiritual unity – “*one new man*” – as one *spiritual* ethnicity that is the grounds for undivided worship as one physical body. Under the New Covenant administration they are no longer “*strangers and foreigners*” (terms descriptive of lost or saved Gentiles in contrast to Jews), but are “*fellow*” citizens in the kingdom of God and equal members in the public house of God (“*household*”), or God’s house of worship.

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; - Eph. 2:19

The New Covenant institutional house of God has one common foundation upon which public worship is established, and it is not based upon external characteristics that divide worshippers from each other:

And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; - Eph. 2:20

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In verses 19-20 Paul refers to the new covenant public house of God in the institutional sense. The institutional sense has only reality in its concrete application, and that is why Paul directly applies it to the concrete congregation at Ephesus in verse 21. In verse 21 he drops the definite article (“the”) and turns from the institutional sense, and directly applies it in its concrete form to the congregational body of baptized believers who had been “*fitly framed together*” under the ministry of the Apostle Paul, according to the pattern for constituting a new house of God (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:41-42), as “*an*” holy temple at Ephesus:

In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: - Eph.2:21

The Old Testament “Mystery” – Eph. 3:1-10

The very existence of such an institution found at Ephesus where all such external distinctions were removed in the act of public worship was a profound “*mystery*” to those under the Old Covenant administration.

From the time of Moses to the ministry of Christ, it would be unthinkable for all worshippers to assemble together as one body for public worship. Even after the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar, when the *synagogue* was established in captivity, such “*walls of partition*” were also built into the synagogue form of worship. Even today, there remains a barrier erected between the Jewish women and Jewish men in the synagogue. Even today, Gentiles are not permitted full privileges of worship in the Jewish synagogue on Sabbath.

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This joint participation in public worship within the house of God between Jew and Gentile was a “*mystery*” until it was universally and systematically taught by Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles.

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: - Eph. 3:1-6

Now, for the first time, under the New Covenant public administration, fellow heirs through faith in the same gospel were coupled with joint participation in “*the same body.*”

However, this “*mystery*” primarily revealed through Paul’s ministry, cost the apostle much persecution and ultimately his life.

The New Testament Obstacle

Although, Christ had clearly commissioned the church to go to “*all nations*”, and to the “*uttermost parts*” of the earth, and preach the gospel to “*all creatures*”, nevertheless, the all Jewish

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congregation at Jerusalem did not preach the gospel to Gentiles, nor admit Gentiles into their worship service for several years.²

God sent a persecution to force them to disperse according to their world wide commission (Acts 8-11), and then had to specifically reveal this equality of Gentiles with Jews in the same congregational body to Peter in Acts 10. God had to repeat the revelation three times to Peter.

The sentiments of Jewish Christians were echoed by the words of Peter to the Gentile house of Cornelius:

And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. – Acts 10:27

Peter wisely took with him six witnesses (Acts 10:23), as he anticipated that the church at Jerusalem would not react positively to receiving Gentiles members into the church at Jerusalem, or constituting a Gentile congregation at Caesarea (Acts 11:1-17).

² Most New Testament Chronologies date the events of Acts 9 somewhere between 8 to 10 years after the day of Pentecost based upon the time Paul gives for going up to Jerusalem in 2 Corinthians 12:2. The book of 2 Corinthians could not have been written prior to 52 A.D. His arrival at Corinth coincided with the first year of Galileo at Corinth in 49 A.D. and his continued stay at Corinth for a year and a half. Therefore, 2 Corinthians had to be written no sooner than 52 A.D. if not later. 14 years (2 Cor. 12:2) would have been at least 38 A.D. if not later depending on the date Second Corinthians was written.

Of course, this does not deny that there was some necessary developmental preparation (deacon's office added – Acts 6) and practical conditioning needed for an all Jewish congregation to accept Gentiles. However, after 13 years the all Jewish congregation was still not preaching to the Gentiles (Acts 11:19).

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However, even after being given this apostolic witness concerning Gentiles, still none preached unto the Gentiles:

Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. – Acts 11:19

The only ones who preached the gospel to gentiles were Jews of the dispersion who went back to their homelands (Acts 11:20). The twelve apostles separated from Paul with regard to their ultimate mission:

And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. – Gal. 2:9

This continued to be a serious problem among the Jewish congregations, not only in Palestine, but all over the world. The term “*Gentile*” and the term “*world*” were used synonymously among the Jewish Christians and congregations:

*I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness? For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:
- Rom. 11:11-13*

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The apostles who went unto the circumcision (Gal. 2:9) had to repeatedly instruct their Jewish congregations that God loved “*the world....the whole world*” (all humans without distinction of race, gender and class) and not merely the Jewish believers and the Jewish nation. Paul repeatedly instructed the churches that Christ died for “*all*” mankind.³

Because of this very issue, Paul had enemies within the churches, and enemies among the unconverted Jews, who both persecuted, and resisted the revelation of this “*mystery*” of equal and joint worship in the New Testament churches.

The Doctrinal Obstacle

Misunderstanding this “*mystery*” has given rise to the false doctrine of the *universal* church theory, both in its *visible* Roman and Greek Orthodox Catholic expression, and in its Reformed Roman Catholic (Protestant) *invisible* expression.

Universalists (visible and invisible) fail to grasp that the New Testament doctrine of the church is expressed in both an institutional and concrete sense. The institutional sense is provided for general instruction concerning the nature, function, and operation of the church as an institution (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12; Eph. 2-5; etc.). They also fail to grasp that the metaphor of a “*temple*” is equally applied to the individual physical body of the believer (1 Cor. 6:19), as well as for the individual congregational body of

³ Not all human beings without exception, but all human beings without distinction of race, gender or class – Rev. 5:8

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baptized believers (1 Cor. 3:16), such as the one located at Corinth (1 Cor. 12:27).

By interpreting and applying such passages to a universal church, they have taken all the abstract institutional instruction concerning the New Testament church found in the scriptures, and robbed believers of practical instruction on the nature, function and operation of the congregational body of Christ, as realized in its concrete form, wherever it is geographically located.

They also fail to grasp that the prison epistles of Paul were designed for distribution among the churches (Col. 4:16), and therefore were written using generic terms (“*the wife*” “*the husband*” “*the servant*” “*the laborer*” “*the church*” “*the body*” etc.).

However, more importantly, they fail to grasp that the personal pronouns “*we...us...ye...you*” found in the New Testament epistles refer to those who are like faith and order with the writer, rather than post-apostolic Christians, who are divided into conflicting denominations and doctrine.

Finally, they fail to see how Christ as the builder of the church, uses the term “*church*” a total of 23 times. All argue about the nature of the church found in his first usage in Matthew 16:18. However, there is no argument about the next 22 times he uses the same term. In all 22 other uses it refers to a local visible congregation of baptized believers. Why would he claim to build in Matthew 16:18 what he never again uses the same term to describe in all of his following uses of this term? That is the oxymoronic problem that all universalists have to deal with. If

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theological bias played no part, then the obvious truth is that the church he promised to build in Matthew 16:18 is the same institutional church he continues to speak about (Mt. 18:17) and speak unto (Rev. 2-3; 22:16) in its concrete forms.

“*The church*” of the New Testament is an institution established by Christ in his own personal ministry and commissioned to reproduce after its own kind until He returns.

It is this kind of “*church*”, or congregational body, where the “*middle wall of partition*” is removed in the act of public worship.

Indeed, the universal theory continues the Old Covenant divisive physical separation between true worshippers of Christ. That kind of church consists of physically divided worshippers. That kind of church never has and never will in this world physically unite true worshippers together. This was true of the Old Covenant public house of worship and it is true of the Roman and Reformed theory of the church.

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The Visible Covenant Administration Paradigm

Very little work has been done by Baptist, or by evangelical scholarship in general, in regard to the paradigm of the visible covenant administration, that I believe is clearly found in the scriptures.

There is a direct hint of this paradigm in Hebrews 9:1. This visible covenant administration paradigm is clearly outlined in the Old Testament concerning the Old Covenant Administration with regard to the coming New Covenant Administration.

1. Public Chosen Prophet - Moses like unto Christ - Deut. 18:18
2. Public Ratification - Mount Sinai versus Mount Calvary
3. Public House of God - Tabernacle/temple versus church - 1 Tim. 3:15
4. Public confirmation - immersion in Shekinah glory – Ex.40:35/Acts 2:1-3
5. Public qualified ministry - Leviticus versus 1 Tim. 3:1-13
6. Public qualified ordinances - Leviticus versus Lk. 7:29-30/Mt.26
7. Public confirmed body of Scripture - Isa. 8:16-20/2 Tim. 3:16-17
8. Public building pattern for God's House – Exodus; Mt. 28:19-20
9. Public Commission - Jewishness versus Gentiles
10. Both have their ultimate source with the same God
11. Both reveal the eternal covenant of God in different clarity.

Instead of considering all these things as inter-connected within the visible covenant administration paradigm, most scholars mistakenly regard them as events somewhat isolated from each other and the covenant administration. However, when all these

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things are regarded as inseparable characteristics of a visible covenant administration, then they can be interpreted properly.

This public covenant administrative paradigm, when recognized, sheds considerable light on such issues as the gospel and way of salvation, the multi-aspects of the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost, the baptism in the Spirit, regeneration under covenants, the progress, miraculous confirmation and completion of the Biblical canon.

This paradigm in regards to the public house of worship is seen in the developmental stages under the Old Covenant from the tabernacle by Moses to the more glorious temple by Solomon. The Tabernacle was made from the skins of living beings (animals) and then transitioned into the more permanent structure of stones. These things foreshadow the public house of worship under the new covenant. The new covenant house of God consists of what characterized both the tabernacle and temple or the combination of "*living stones*" and God tabernacling (in the skins) in the corporate body of baptized believers in this present age. It also foreshadows the transitioning between the present unglorified but "*chaste virgin*" (as under Moses) being transformed into the glorious "*bride*" (as under Solomon) after the coming of Christ.

Indeed, it was impossible for the Jewish mind to conceive of the public house of worship apart from all other aspects of the covenant administration. The institutional Jewish "*house of God*" was inseparable from the institution and public administration of the whole Old Covenant economy. The institution of the Old Covenant was inclusive of the institution of "*the house of God*" at Mount Sinai along with all of its divine confirmation, ordinances, and ministry, all in keeping with a divine pattern, in direct

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connection to Judaism's first great Prophet (Moses), and first written scriptures (Genesis through Deuteronomy). The "*house of God*" was the visible embodiment of all this and the visible administration of that covenant where the scriptures were publicly taught. It is in this administration connection that the institutional "*house of God*" was indeed "*the pillar and ground of the truth.*"

Therefore, the words "*the house of God*" instantly brought to the Jewish mind, a qualified, confirmed (Ex. 40:35; 2 Chron. 7:1-3), and appointed place for public worship (Deut. 12:5-11) where a qualified and appointed public ministry (1 Tim. 3:1-13) administered qualified, and appointed public ordinances, in connection with the public teaching of the scriptures, thus making the institutional house of God "*the pillar and ground of the truth.*"

When the Jewish Paul wrote Timothy (pastor of the congregation at Ephesus), who was raised by a Jewish mother and grandmother, he identified "*the church*" as "*the house of God*" (1 Tim. 3:15) in direct connection with a qualified public ordained ministry (1 Tim. 3:1-13). To the Jewish mind this could only mean one thing! The church is the confirmed (Acts 2:1-3), qualified, appointed place for public worship, where a qualified appointed public ministry taught the word of God, and administered qualified, and appointed ordinances, as the visible embodiment of, and public administration of the New Covenant.

The "*house of God*" under the Old Covenant acted as the visible administrative representative for the entire nation/kingdom and family of God (Israel). The "*house of God*" under the New Covenant acts as the visible administrative representative (1 Pet. 2:5) for the entire nation/kingdom and family of God (1 Pet. 2:9).

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Therefore, when the old covenant Jewish believer, or the new covenant believer heard the phrase “*the house of God*” what immediately came to mind was the visible representation of the entire covenant economy. Under the old covenant administration the public “house of God” represented the nation of Israel as the professing kingdom of God. Under the new covenant administration the public “*house of God*” was the visible representation of the entire professing kingdom of God because it was in the institutional house of God where the ordinances and laws of God were visibly made manifest in public worship.

After Peter describes the church institution after the analogy given him by Christ in 1 Peter 2:5 he conveys this representative analogy of the church to the “*nation*” or professing kingdom when he says:

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: - 1 Pet. 2:9

The institutional church alone provides the visible representation of these things. Nowhere else on earth can anyone see the kingdom or rule of God at work except in the institutional church. What is seen is the visible manifestation of a “*chosen nation*” and “*a royal priesthood*” that is indeed showing “*forth the praises of him that called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*”

Both the Old and New Covenant public house of worship are described in the abstract institutional sense, but yet find their only reality in concrete form.

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The Covenant Paradigm in the Book of Hebrews

It has already been shown that the phrase “*the middle wall of partition*” has a direct connection with the Old Covenant public house of worship. Indeed, when a Jew heard the words “*the house of God* (1 Tim. 3:15) what instantly came to his mind was the visible embodiment of the paradigm of the whole Old Covenant administration.

The writer of Hebrews also makes this comparison between the visible administration of the Old Covenant and the visible administration of the New Covenant:

In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away. Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. – Heb. 8:13-9:1

The words “*also...and*” demonstrate that under the New Covenant there are public “*ordinances of divine service*” AND “*a worldly sanctuary*.”

No one disputes that baptism and the Lord’s Supper are “*ordinances of divine service*” administered within local visible congregations of baptized believers.

No one should dispute that the New Testament congregation is “*a worldly sanctuary*” for public worship. The term “*worldly*” (Gr. *kosimkos* – earthly) simply means it is located in this world. The “*church which is at....*” Corinth, or Ephesus, or Thessalonica, or etc, aptly defines the nature of this earthly located “*sanctuary*.”

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Furthermore, the writer of Hebrews acknowledges this kind of New Covenant visible administration by encouraging his readers “*not to forsake the assembling*” (Heb. 10:25) themselves together under the “*rule*” of qualified “*elders*” (Heb. 13:7, 17), where qualified sacrifices are being offered up (Heb. 13:15-16). Such is the characterization of the institutional “*house of God*”, as a spiritual house fitly framed together for the purpose to offer up “*acceptable sacrifices*” (1 Pet.2:5).

Hence, “*the house of God*” under both covenants is the visible embodiment, and public administration of the covenant.

Under each covenant, “*the house of God*” is inseparable from, and is the visible administrative expression of, that particular covenant. The New Covenant administration through its unique house of worship, characterized by its ministry, ordinances, and scriptures replaces the Old Covenant administration through its unique house of worship, with its unique ministry, ordinances, and scriptures.

The phrase “*the middle wall of partition*” characterizes the Old Testament house of worship, and thus the whole visible covenant administration. The removal of such a “*wall of partition*” from the New Covenant house of God, characterizes the visible unity of the New Testament house of worship, in direct contrast to the segmented public worship found in the Old Covenant house of God.

The public institution of a qualified congregational body of baptized believers is the visible unified expression of the New Covenant administration on earth. Here is where the world can see unified expression of worship, manifested in obedience to His

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Word, under the leadership of a qualified public ministry, where qualified public ordinances are administered. Here is where the Kingdom and family of God find visible unified visible expression in this world. Here is where unity in spirit (Eph. 4:1-3) is expressed by unity of doctrine (Eph. 4:4-7) as a manifest visible unified congregational body of baptized believers, so that they are no longer “*tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine*” (Eph. 4:14). Here is where a mature and loving expression for Christ is visibly manifested between the members, working harmoniously together, in order to glorify Christ (Eph. 4:15-16). There is no other unified visible manifestation, or visible unified administration of the New Covenant outside of, or apart from, the New Testament congregational body of baptized believers.

Church of the Firstborn Ones – Heb. 12:22

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect – Heb. 12:22-23

They had not yet come to heaven. Their names were written in heaven, but they were still on earth. Yet in some sense they had indeed come into the presence of heaven and all that are in heaven. They had come into the presence of heaven and all in heaven in the very same sense that Israel when it was gathered as an organized and qualified assembly came into the presence of God and angels

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at Mount Sinai (vv. 18-21). They were the “*church of the firstborn ONES.*” The Greek text uses the plural not the singular.

From the earliest period in Genesis, the professing people of God were found in a particular family line wherein the “*firstborn*” son in the family was the public and authorized representative of that family to administrator public worship. He acted as the priest in the family in the worship of God. The “*firstborn*” son was not necessarily the first son born as this is made clear throughout the book of Genesis. The “*firstborn*” was more about position and authority with regard to the inheritance of the father and leadership in public worship. The firstborn received a double portion of the father’s inheritance and acted as the authorized administrator of public worship or as the priest in the family.

The professing people of God between Adam and Noah existed in the family line of Seth. The genealogy in Genesis 5 is a genealogy of “*firstborn*” sons who were the authorized representative of the family to administer public worship as the family preist.

The professing people of God between Noah and Abraham existed in the family line of Shem. The “*firstborn*” sons in that family line were authorized representatives to administer public worship.

The professing people of God that lived between Abraham and Moses are found in the line of Isaac. The “*firstborn*” sons in that family line were authorized representatives of the professing people of God to administer public worship.

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The professing people of God that lived between Moses and Christ are found in the nation of Israel. The Levites were chosen in lieu of “*firstborn*” sons to be the authorized representatives of the professing people of God to administer public worship.

The professing people of God between Christ’s first advent and his second advent are primarily found among the gentiles. The institutional “*church of first born ones*” is the authorized representative of the professing people of God to administer public worship.

The writer of Hebrews encourages his readers “*not to forsake the assembling of themselves together as the manner of some*” had already forsaken the public assembly (Heb. 10:25). He encourages them by providing a list of firstborn sons between Genesis and Malachi who continued in faithful public worship of God (Heb. 11). Then in Hebrews 12 he introduces a “*firstborn*” son who did not remain faithful to his birthright, but sold his birth right (Esau). He then immediately contrasts the institution of the authorized public worship system at Mount Sinai with the authorized public worship system authorized by Christ under the new covenant administration in Hebrews 12:18-25.

When the authorized public worship system under the old covenant administration was instituted at Mount Sinai, the nation of Israel came before Sinai as a qualified organized assembly. God and angels were manifest in that assembly, along with the audible and visible signs of the presence of a holy God. The writer tells the Hebrews Christians that they have not come to that Old Testament assembly, but they have come before God and heaven

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as the “*church of firstborn ones*” or as the authorized administrator of public worship.

Even though their names were written in heaven, they themselves, still remained upon earth as “*the church of firstborn ones*.” Even though they remained on earth, when they assembled together as the “*church of first born ones*” all heaven attended when they assembled. It is the house “*of God*” and thus God is present. Angels are in attendance (1 Cor. 11:10; Eph. 3:10). The “*firstborn*” position is the authorized position for administering acceptable public worship. The writer concludes this chapter by admonishing them to “*let us have grace, whereby we may SERVE God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:*” He is not talking about how to get saved or remain saved, but he is talking about the authorized administration of public worship. The next chapter goes on to describe aspects of authorized public worship that includes the officers of the church (elders – 13:7, 17) and public ordinances and offerings.

The book of Hebrews contrasts the whole public worship system or administration under the old covenant with the whole public worship system or administration under the new covenant.

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Conclusion

Understanding that the “*middle wall of partition*” refers to physical separation between true believers in the public house of worship sheds considerable light on the Ephesians 2:10-3:5 passage.

The removal of “*the middle wall of partition*” from the New Covenant house of God means that there are no longer any external divisions within the public house of worship. It means that all members are physically unified together in the act of public worship, and equal before God.

It means the whole visible public administration of the Old Covenant with its ceremonial laws has been abolished, and replaced with something better. It means that the New Covenant “*house of God*” is the visible administrative expression of the New Covenant. It means that the congregational body of baptized believers is where the administration of the New Covenant ministry, ordinances, and worship in a unified expression are made visibly manifest in the world.

Moreover, understanding the Old and New Covenants as characterized by this visible covenant administration helps to see that the coming of the Spirit is connected with a whole covenant administration paradigm. Rather, than looking at the coming of the Spirit, the baptism in the Spirit, spiritual gifts, progressive unfolding of New Testament Scripture, ordinances, Gentile mission, and ordained leadership as all inclusive in the visible administration covenant paradigm, it provides a smoother, and

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more consistent transition between the Old and New Testament scriptures, It also eliminates much of the doctrinal and practical confusion found in Protestant congregations.