

## **The Trinity and Ecclesiological Foundations: An Exegetical-Theological Assessment of Ephesians 2:19-22**

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### **Abstract**

The doctrine of God seems to be the lynchpin of the entire theological system. The very beginning of the Bible suggests the centrality of God to all other discussions that unfold in the rest of Scripture (Gen. 1:1). It goes to affirm that this centrality of the doctrine of God affects the entire understanding of how God operates and relates to creation, and especially to humanity in the post-sin context. Concerning this, is the redemptive act of God through the agency of Christ, which has been bequeathed on the Church. Important questions arise as a result: How does one understand the concept of biblical theism? What does it mean that God is one, yet three persons? What is the biblical affirmation of the doctrine of God? How does the doctrine of God relate to the doctrine of the Church? What are the implications of the relationship between the doctrines of God and the Church? In response to these questions, the article demonstrates this unique association from the context of Ephesians 2:19-22, which seems to affirm a bond between the two doctrines.

**Keywords:** Trinity, Ecclesiology, Relationship, Salvation, Worship

## Introduction

The doctrine of God is a historical discussion within Christianity.<sup>1</sup> Contemporary Christian debates,<sup>2</sup> however, seem to hinge on theistic or anti-theistic views which peg their beacons between the parameters of “realism and imagination.”<sup>3</sup> Growing deliberations on the doctrine,<sup>4</sup> seems polarized on two ends, the primordial and the consequent.<sup>5</sup> The primordial aspect entails God’s essential, unchanging nature which embodies future ideals and connotes

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Norman Gulley, *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2011), xxv; Alberto R. Timm, *The Biblical Concept of God in the Writings of Ellen G. White* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2020); Kwabena Donkor, *God in 3 Persons in Theology* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015); Daniel Bediako, *God in 3 Persons in the Old Testament* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015); Paul Petersen, *God in 3 Persons in the New Testament* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015); Kwabena Donkor, *Eternal Subordination of Jesus? A Theological Analysis and Review* (Silver Springs, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2022), 1-9; Jacques Guillet, “God” in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed., Xavier Léon-Dufour, trans., P. Joseph Cahill and E. M. Stewart (Ijamsville, MD: The Word Among Us, 1962, repr., 1988), 206; Oliver J. Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion Vol. 1: Theism and Biblical Anthropology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1962), 13; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology Vol. 1: Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1871-1873), 21; John Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, ed., Joseph E. Torres, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015), 39-49; Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., epub (Malden, MA: John Wiley, 2011), 644-722; Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016); Mark P. Cosgrove, *Foundations of Christian Thought: Faith, Learning, and the Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 319-322; Jirâi Moskala & John C. Peckham, ed., *God’s Character and the Last Generation*, epub (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2018), 41-44; 747-786; Fernando Canale, “The Doctrine of God” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed., Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 105-157.

<sup>2</sup> See discussions in, Kirk R. MacGregor, *Contemporary Theology: An Introduction: Classical, Evangelical, Philosophical, and Global Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019); Katherine Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology Vol. 2, The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: Processions and Persons* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Robert Andrew Cathey, *God in Postliberal Perspective: Between Realism and Non-Realism* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Process theology is a growing theological school of thought that seeks to reconstruct the idea of God and His relation to the world. The very idea of reconstructionism entails that every aspect of theology as is understood historically comes into question.

<sup>5</sup> Note, both ends of the discussion are advanced by process theologians.

potential and abstract rather than actual and concrete. In this sense, God is viewed as the soul or immaterial mind of the world.

Concomitantly, the consequent aspect of God entails His present reality or experience which ever changes as He feels the world. This defines the world as the body of God. Therefore, because of His existence in the body, God affects the body (world) in which He exists. However, this effect does not entail that God can compel any actual entity to realize an ideal subjective aim, rather He only persuades it; whereas with every actual entity, there exists free will and self-determination, evil comes as a rejection of God's ideals. On the other hand, as God affects the world, and by the fact of the world being His body, everything that happens in the world affects Him.

Such complexities in the views about God are further confounded by the question of the nature of God. The common issue among Christians is the Trinitarian debate. Historically, this subject has been approached from a theological-philosophical,<sup>6</sup> Old Testament,<sup>7</sup> and New Testament<sup>8</sup> perspectives. Early Christian

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Kwabena Donkor, *God in 3 Persons in Theology*; Norman Gulley, *God as Trinity*; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans., Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993); Thomas McCall and Michael Rea, ed., *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity*, epub (New York: Oxford, 2009); Millard J. Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity: 3 Crucial Questions*, epub (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000); 21-79; Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity* (New York: Oxford, 2011); Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (New York: Oxford, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Daniel Bediako, *God in 3 Persons in the Old Testament*; Norman Gulley, *God as Trinity*, 22-28; Thomas Schirrmacher, *Christ and the Trinity in the Old Testament*, trans., Richard McClary, ed., James Edward Anderson (Hamburg, Germany: RVB International, 2013); R. W. L. Moberly, *The God of the Old Testament: Encountering the Divine in Christian Scripture*, epub (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020); *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013); Wilf Hildebrandt, *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God* (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Paul Petersen, *God in 3 Persons in the New Testament*; Norman Gulley, *God as Trinity*, 29-32; Matthew Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in the New Testament and Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament* (New York; Oxford, 2015).

debates,<sup>9</sup> which led to both the Nicean (AD. 325) and Chalcedonian (AD. 451) Councils, seem to be gaining contemporary momentum. The insidious elements in the debate are dichotomous. And the major polarities seem to be premised on hermeneutics and traditional convictions.

Closely related to this, is the concept of the Church. Contemporary ecclesiological discussions seem to be framed by divergent views that are dependent on the epistemological grounds that inform the discussant(s). Pluralistic society, pinned to relativistic approaches of postmodern thinking, challenges the foundations of the concept of the Church and how it relates to the doctrine of God. Succinctly, how is the Godhead seen to function in relation to the Church?

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<sup>9</sup> One of the historical trinitarian controversialists is Arius (ac. AD 256-336). His paramount contention is that of the relationship between Christ and God the Father. His point of departure seems to arise from his failure to reconcile Jewish monotheism on which Christianity is built and the reality of Jesus as God. Evident in the life of Jesus, from New Testament records are the appropriations of divine prerogatives that affirm Christ's divinity. Therefore, Arius contends that Christ is not God as the Father. He argues that Christ is rather a creature of the highest order, and as such his divinity may be referred to as "god" to differentiate him from the Father who is "God." His teachings imposed serious theological controversies in the early Church. This led to the Church's convening of the Council of Nicea (AD 325). Through the theological aptitude of Athanasius (ac. AD 296-373) and other theologians, the Church managed to contain Arius's assertion. However, this did not completely or definitively settle the matters Arius was raising. As such, even in contemporary theological discourses, there has been a resurgence of these matters. I am sure, even posterity will face similar matters. Cf. Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea, and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 11-15; Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, rev. ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987, 2001), 48-61; R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318-381* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark, 1997), 99-128; John N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed (Edinburgh, Scotland: A & C Black, 1968), 226-231; Leif E. Vaage, ed., *Religious Rivalries in the Early Roman Empire and the Rise of Christianity* (Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006); Michele Renee Salzman, *The Making of Christian Aristocracy: Social and Religious Change in the Western Roman Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Maxwell Staniforth, *Early Christian Writings* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1968); Michael W. Holmes, trans., *The Apostolic Fathers in English*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006); Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, ed., *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to AD. 325* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994).

What can be made of the revelation of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the context of the functionality of the Church?

This article presupposes the Church as a divine establishment whose function, growth, and future lie in divine revelations as manifested in Scripture. Scripture provides continued assurance that the Church is under the control of its Founder (cf. Matthew 16:18). Therefore, this exegetical-theological assessment proceeds from a Protestant view of the final canonical form of Scripture. It assesses the relationship between the Trinity and ecclesiology. It premises this analysis on Pauline's insights in Ephesians 2:19-22. It progresses with establishing concepts of Christian theism and Christian ecclesiology before discussing the text under consideration. Finally, the article makes a reflection on theological implications for contemporary debates.

### **Christian Theism: A Biblical-Theological View**

The Doctrine of the Trinity<sup>10</sup> is foundational to understanding God's divine operations in the history of humanity. Therefore, Samuel Powell aptly observes that "any theology stands or falls upon [the] doctrine of God."<sup>11</sup> The primary concept is that "God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God."<sup>12</sup> Conversely, this conclusion is controverted among Christian theologians. Avertedly, though not simplistically, Wayne Grudem's affirmation, seem to represent the biblical conception of God.

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<sup>10</sup> It seems evident, within Christianity, that some are uncomfortable using the term Trinity when referring to God. As such, alternative titles such as "Godhead" (cf. Col. 2:9; 1:19; Eph 3:19; 1 John 5:7), "Triune God," or "Members of the Godhead" are used. Therefore, the use of Trinity in this presentation is for theological convenience to refer to the three members of the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (cf. Trinitarian formula - Matt 28:19), a unity of three coeternal persons and sometimes I use the terms interchangeably.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Powell, "What Becomes of the Triune God?" in *The Promise and Peril of Process Theology: God Reconsidered* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill), 48.

<sup>12</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 104.

Although very few biblical texts can be sighted with the Trinitarian formula<sup>13</sup> (cf. Matt 28:19), there is implicit evidence of the three persons – as will be explored. An important affirmation is that the members of the Godhead are of the same essence. They all share the “divine Omnis” and work harmoniously with a common purpose. The unity of the Godhead is seen from the very divine self-disclosure. Scripture affirms “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one” (Deut. 6:4). The context in which this statement is given provides an important foundation for understanding this complex undertaking. It seems contextually evident in Deuteronomy that, while surrounded by idolatrous nations, God desired that His people distinguish Him from other gods of surrounding nations (Deut. 4:35). Strict instructions were given against polytheistic tendencies (Exod 20:3; Deut 6:14; 2 Kgs 17:35; Jer 25:6; 35:15; cf. God’s reaction to apostate Israel and their subsequent repentance: Judg 10:11-16). From an Old Testament perspective, Daniel Bediako illustrates a monotheistic view demonstrated on two fronts: “(1) use of singular verbs and pronouns for God and (2) direct statements regarding the oneness of God.”<sup>14</sup> Further, he develops a concept of the “plurality-in-oneness within God.” He contends the presence of plurality within the Godhead based on the divine self-use of plural nouns such as *Elohim* and *Adonay*.<sup>15</sup> The New Testament seems to be more explicit on this matter. As Paul Petersen observes that the core of the Trinity doctrine is founded on “biblical texts, the worship of

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<sup>13</sup> The Trinitarian formula has been represented in various diagrammatic expressions. The common being the “Shield of the Trinity” or the “*Scutum Fidei*” which highlights what each of the members of the Godhead is and is not. At the centre of the argument is that all three members of the Godhead are God. Extra-biblical evidence of the Trinitarian formula is also established in the *Didache* (Ded. 7:1) which affirms “... βαπτίσατε εις το όνομα τον πατρός και τον υιον και τον άγιον πνεύματος” the same formular as is in the Matthean text (Matt 28:19). However, some scholars have negated the *Didache* formula as a possible interpolation. However, many Christian denominations and groups hold the formula as an important validation of a believers’ baptism. As such, the absence of the Trinitarian formula may, to some invalidate the baptism. On the other hand, baptism is an essential rite of entry into the body of faith – the Church.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Bediako, *God in 3 Persons in the Old Testament*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Bediako, *God in 3 Persons in the Old Testament*, 9-15.

Jesus Christ, and the story of redemption.”<sup>16</sup> As such, there is a plethora of biblical<sup>17</sup> evidence suggesting Christ’s acceptance of worship, a prerogative only ascribed to the deity.

The human fall has since opened a window to understanding the relationship of the Godhead in the context of the post-Edenic cosmic drama. This is fundamental, especially because of how the three persons of the Godhead relate and interplay their roles in the wake of human salvation. Essential challenges to this rise in the question on the doctrine’s presentation of the oneness of God yet differentiated into three personalities Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup>

Contemporary debates hinge on two major issues. The first is the deity of Christ while the second is the person of the Holy

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<sup>16</sup> Paul Petersen, *God in 3 Persons in the New Testament*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> From the time of His birth, Jesus received worship (Matt 2:11). His self-understanding in the face of Satanic temptation on worship, Scripture seems to suggest that Christ knew that only God could receive worship (Matt 4:10; cf. Rev. 1:8; John 17:3, 5; Isaiah 9:6). As such, every time He received worship during His ministry was an affirmation to His divinity (John 10:30). Hebrews reports that equally, angelic hosts bow to Him in worship (Heb 1:6). It is clear that even His disciples understood that Jesus deserves to be worshipped. Therefore, after His resurrection, when He appeared to them [disciples], Scripture affirms that “they worshipped Him” (Matt 28:9).

<sup>18</sup> See Millard J. Erickson, *Who’s Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate*, epub (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2009), 181-183; and, F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, ed., “Doctrine of the Trinity” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1652.

Spirit.<sup>19</sup> It seems there is consensus among many theologians on the doctrine of God the Father.<sup>20</sup> This issue becomes even more critical given its roots in Jewish monotheistic thought. However, as illustrated in Scripture, we infer that the doctrine of the Triune God – Trinity, is intricately related to the nature, character, and being of God. Through the Trinity, God is presented as relational. He is relational within His being as Triune God, and relational to humanity. Explicitly, God is relational through the incarnation – God becoming eternally relational with humanity (cf. John 1:18; 1:1-3, 14). In “Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Col 2:9 – in context 2:9-14). To relegate any member of the Godhead to a lesser being would render the concerted effort of administering salvation to futility and incomplete. To accomplish and execute the plan of redemption, Christ had to be fully God. Equally, to mediate character transformation and the full display of divine character in humanity, the Holy Spirit needs to be fully God; otherwise, both efforts would fall short of divine requirements for human redemption.

The biblical concept of God may be summed as a trinitarian relationship, bound by a reciprocity of love and eternal unity. The triune members of the Godhead are divine, immortal, and omnipotent. John Peckham conceptualizes biblical theism “as

<sup>19</sup> Donald K. McKim, *Theological Turning Points: Major Issues in Christian Thought* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1988), 16-21.

On the deity of Christ, some scholars have asserted that Christ was not God but was conceived by the Father in eternity past in which He received divine genes. They claim that He is subject to the Father in all things. Regarding the nature of the Holy Spirit, some scholars emphasize that the Holy Spirit has never been God. Before the incarnation, the Holy Spirit was just used by the Father as a force to accomplish His will. Others hold that the Holy Spirit is the exalted form in which God now exists. Given the precincts of these pages on the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, for an expanded analysis and discussion readers are encouraged to consider the work of Norman R. Gulley, *God as Trinity*; John Macarthur and Richard Mayhue, ed., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017); Frame, John M. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (New Jersey: P and R, 2013); Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994); Horn, Siegfried H. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary: Reference Commentary Series, vol 8.* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1979).

<sup>20</sup> Donald K. McKim, *Theological Turning Points*, 5.



belief in the one, triune God who is creator and sustainer of the world.”<sup>21</sup> The triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are equal in all aspects. Although Scripture seems to present them in an order that may be misconstrued to seniority; the order of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit might rightly be understood in the context of the order of salvation, rather than seniority or inferiority. However, the unity of the Godhead may not be understood as analogous to human relations. God is to be understood on His terms. Scripture is His revelation.

Consequently, the doctrine of God appears to be the center of Christian theology.<sup>22</sup> The doctrine opens the discussion to fundamental matters relating to the concept of ecclesiology. For example, the oneness of God, would rightly speak to the concept of the unity of believers (cf. Rom 12:16; Gal 3:26-28; Eph 4:3). Second, the perfection and holiness of God (cf. Lev 11:44-45; Isaiah 26:7; Heb 7:25) reflects the exaltation of believers to a similar stature (cf. Psalm 25:8; Matt 5:48; 1 Peter 1:16). Third, the love of God (cf. 1 John 4:8, 16; John 3:16) and how it is manifested to fallen humanity through the sacrificial death of Christ (cf. Rom 5:6-11; 1 Peter 2:24). The important question would be, what is the relationship between the doctrine of the Trinity and ecclesiology? Specifically, how does the Pauline pericope in Ephesians 2 help us understand this intricate relationship? To respond to these questions, the foregoing discussion highlights a broader and narrow contextual analysis of Ephesians 2.

### **Ephesians: Introductory Thoughts**

The book of Ephesians appears to deal with general issues facing the Christian Church in Ephesus. In this regard, the book’s central

<sup>21</sup> John Peckham, *The Doctrine of God: Introducing the Big Questions* (New York: T&T Clark, 2020), 1.

<sup>22</sup> Scholars like Ted Peters agree with the centrality of the doctrine of God in the system of theology. Katherine Sonderegger expands: “Who is God? And what is God? (*Qui sit et quid sit Deus*). These are the questions of an entire lifetime. Nothing reaches so deep into the purpose of human life, nor demands the full scope of the human intellect as do these two brief queries.” Cf. Ted Peters, *God – the World’s Future: Systematic Theology for a Postmodern Era* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 83; Kathrine Sonderegger, *The Doctrine of God*, xi.

locus is the Church and its relations to other facets of spiritual growth. In navigating its motifs, it presents a coherent unity between its structure and its themes. One such theme that echoes through the entire book is the relationship between theology proper and ecclesiology – the doctrines of God and the Church.

### **Ephesians 2:19-22: Interpretive Views**

Scholars demonstrate interest in discussing this (Eph 2:19-22) Pauline pericope. For F. F. Bruce, the pericope presents divine provisions for embracing the Gentiles into the community of believers.<sup>23</sup> In Clinton E. Arnold's view, the pericope unveils the characteristics of the new humanity under the leadership of Christ.<sup>24</sup> Charles H. Talbert perceives this pericope as a prism through which the Jewish-Gentile Christian relationship must be understood. He further sees in it a relationship between the Church and the Jews and their missiological relation in evangelizing the world.<sup>25</sup> Tony Merida's analysis of the passage emphasizes a family fellowship of the Church and its dependence on Christ for growth.<sup>26</sup> It seems from available resources that the emphasis has been on the Church, its membership composition, and its relation with Christ. Little emphasis is paid on the Church's interaction and relation with and the involvement of the Godhead, as it seems deductible from the text.

### **Textual Analysis**

In this pericope, Paul seems to argue that obedience to "Christ-the Chief cornerstone" (Eph 2:19-22) is central to the ecclesiological foundation which gestures the initiative of establishing the new

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<sup>23</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and the Ephesians* (NICNT) (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 301.

<sup>24</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*, epub (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 505, 601-608.

<sup>25</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament: Ephesians and Colossians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 88-89.

<sup>26</sup> Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, epub (Nashville, TN: B & H, 2014), 142-148.

Church (cf. Matt 16:18). Ephesians emphasizes unity in the Church depicted in various imagery expressions such as the Body (Eph 1:22-23; 4:4, 16; 5:23, 30), the building (Eph 2:20-21), and the bride (Eph 5:25). God fits believers together in Christ.<sup>27</sup> Paul acknowledges that the call to faith is a divine initiative before human existence (Eph 1:4-5). Success for the believer rests in God, revealing the knowledge necessary for wisdom (Eph 1:17-18). He highlights that believers are engaged in a cosmic conflict and thereby constantly jostling against forces of evil (Eph 6:12). Consequently, a new Church experience is not free of challenges (cf. 2 Cor 4:7-12) but such as are “common to humanity” (1 Cor 10:13).

Ephesians presents Pauline allusions to a divine cosmic reconciliation (Eph 1:3-14; 3:20-21); corporate alertness to the Gospel (Eph 1:15-2:10; 3:1, 14-21); and a communal consciousness to ethical praxis in Christian unity (Eph 4:1-6:17).<sup>28</sup> In his analysis of Ephesians, Roy Gane sees Paul presenting the Decalogue “as normative for Christians”<sup>29</sup> which is valuable for Church experience. He acknowledges that sin made believers dead (Eph 2:1); and were considered as children of disobedience (Eph 2:2), under God’s judgment (Eph 2:3), uncircumcised and alienated (Eph 2:11-12). However, through the love of God in Christ (Eph 2:4-5), believers are made alive (Eph 2:1, 6). They obtain divine kindness (Eph 2:7), integrated into the family of the circumcision, and are at peace with God in Christ (Eph 2:13-18).

The pericope of Ephesians 2:19-22 is foundational to ecclesiological discourse in the context of the Trinity. A chiasmic presentation shows Paul’s primary and fundamental thrust in his

<sup>27</sup> See William Hendriksen, “Exposition of Ephesians” in *New Testament Commentary: Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 62; Yves M. J. Congar, *The Mystery of the Temple or the Manner of God’s Presence to His Creatures from Genesis to Apocalypse* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1962), 152-200.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Max Turner, “Ephesians, Book of,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed., Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005) [DTIB], 187.

<sup>29</sup> Roy Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians: Original Context and Enduring Application* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 11.

argument.<sup>30</sup> However, there is explicit reference to the other two members of the Godhead, the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The phrase “God in the Spirit” is a direct reference to the Holy Spirit. The expression is not to be misconstrued as “derivative of,” or “procession from,” rather it refers to the distinct member of the Godhead, who together with the Father and the Son are building and establishing the Church. Norman Gulley aptly argues for the distinctive personhood of the Holy Spirit from the Johannine context (cf. John 14:26). He argues on the grammatical use of the definite article to the masculine noun, *paraklētos*, as evidence to the intentionality of Christ in relating the distinctive personhood of the Holy Spirit.<sup>31</sup> For Gordon Fee, the Holy Spirit is an important theme in Pauline writings.<sup>32</sup>

It is evident in the measure of Christ that none, but one like Him, could fittingly take up His place after His ascension to Glory. He tells His disciples, “I will pray the Father, and He will give you *another* Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth...” (John 14:16-17 – emphasis supplied). To affirm the uniqueness of the Holy Spirit, and the sameness with Him, Christ deliberately employs *állos* as a fitting adjective to qualify the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Holy Spirit possess the same efficacy as Christ and the Father. Consequently, it was appropriate for Christ to give the

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<sup>30</sup> A chiasm is a common Jewish writing technique that highlights the major theme or the focus of a discourse. This technique reverses words or events in successive parallel clauses or sections. Cf. Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006). Köstenberger and Patterson view chiasms as a way to call attention to the center of the account, and a means to balance two subdivisions and stress for comparative examination of the details, cf. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard C. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2011); Gerhard Pfandl, “Understanding Biblical Apocalyptic,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Adventist Approach - Biblical Research Institute Studies in Hermeneutics*, vol. 3, ed., Frank M. Hasel (Silver Springs, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2020), 283-284, note 75.

<sup>31</sup> Norman Gulley, Gulley, *God as Trinity*, 17.

<sup>32</sup> Gordon Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 1-2.

Commandments to His apostles through Him – the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:2).

### **Chiasmic Presentation of Ephesians 2:19-22**

- A. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners,
- B. but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,
- C. Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,
- D. Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,
- C<sup>1</sup>. in whom the whole building, being fitted together,
- B<sup>1</sup>. grows into a holy temple in the Lord,
- A<sup>1</sup>. You also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Paul seems to demonstrate that the work of salvation and liberty from the power of darkness find their full and final consummation in Christ (Eph 1:13; 2:13). At the heart of this discourse is Jesus, the chief cornerstone.<sup>33</sup> He alone can do exceedingly great things for the believer (Eph 3:20-21).

In the work of justification, sanctification, regeneration, and subsequent glorification,<sup>34</sup> Jesus, His life, teachings, and ministry are central. He is the axis of human existence and salvation (cf. Col 1:16-20), and the grand theme of revelation (cf. Rev 1:1; Luke

<sup>33</sup> Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*, 699-707. Gulley illustrates the importance of chiastic structure and suggests that in chiastic formation, the center is the essential part, and highlights the author's intent.

<sup>34</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology. Justification: An instantaneous legal act of God in which He thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ's righteousness belongs to us, declaring us to be righteous in His sight (723). Sanctification: A progressive work of God that makes us free from sin and become like Christ in our actual lives (746). Regeneration: A secret act of God in which He imparts new spiritual life to us (699-706). Glorification: The final step in the application of redemption at the coming of Christ. His definition depends on the platonic dualism of soul and body, which is not a biblical concept. For a biblically balanced definition see John C. Brunt, "Glorification of the Righteous," in *Handbook of the Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed., Raoul Dederen (Washington, DC: 2000), 360-362.*

24:27; John 5:39). In Him, believers find “their new identity.”<sup>35</sup> Paul echoes the former alienation from the commonwealth of believers (Eph 2:11-13). Subsequently, Christ brings hope, reconciliation, and integration seemingly only experienced through the Church. As such, believers have access to the Father through the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:14-18; cf. 2 Cor 5: 17-21; Acts 13:26; Rom 5:10; Gal 3:26-29; John 14:16-17, 26-28; 16:13-15).

### Textual and Theological Analysis

Paul’s use of *oúkēti* signifies the permanency of the accomplished reconciliatory work of Christ.<sup>36</sup> He uses two adjectives *xénoi kai pároikoi* with separate meaning and value to denote the magnitude of the separation. *xénoi* literary means “strangers” in the sense of covenantal estrangement (Eph 2:12); whereas *pároikoi* means “aliens” or “foreigners” considered “residents [yet] having no rights of citizenship.”<sup>37</sup> Paul uses these terms in the sense that people who were strangers now are partakers of covenantal provisions once only a preserve of the Jews. He concludes that under the new covenant, Gentile believers share their citizenship (*sumpolítai*) with the saints (*tón ágíōn*<sup>38</sup>); “with the Saints” is rendered as a genitive of relation or association.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the believers now belong to the commonwealth of believers (*oíkētoi toũ theoũ*) with full rights and privileges (cf. John 1:12; Gal 3:26).

The use of an architectural metaphorical verb *èpoikodomēthēntes* - plural form of *èpoikodoméō* in the aorist passive participle,

<sup>35</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, ed., *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians* [Arnold] (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 147.

<sup>36</sup> Aland and Metzger, “oúkēti” lexical data.

<sup>37</sup> “Strangers and Foreigners,” *SDABC*, 1011.

<sup>38</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax: An Intermediate Greek Grammar*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 47. Genitive of Relationship: The substantive in the genitive indicates a familial relationship, typically the progenitor of the person named by the head noun. This category is not very common. It is a subset of the possessive genitive. The key determinants are (1) whether the noun to which the genitive is related is a family relation noun or (2) whether the noun to which the genitive is related is understood (i.e., must be supplied from the context) and what one supplies is a family relation noun, then the possessive genitive is a genitive of relationship on.

<sup>39</sup> Arnold, 168.

interpreted as a causal participle<sup>40</sup> implies that believers are added continually to the building<sup>41</sup> – which is the Church (cf. Eph 4:12). Signifying that the believer’s responsibility changes “from the persons in the house to the structure itself ... where Christ is presented as the foundation.”<sup>42</sup>

Usually, the challenge in rendering this text comes when reconciling Paul’s use of *tōn ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν* - of the Apostles and [the] Prophets, especially with how to render the genitive. T K Abbott argues on the analogical deductions from Ephesians 3:5 and 4:11 that in this combination, *προφητῶν* refers to the NT prophets.<sup>43</sup> Arnold favors the genitive to be rendered as

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<sup>40</sup> Daniel B. Wallace highlights: that the causal participle indicates the cause, reason, or ground of the action of the finite verb. This is a common usage. It answers the question, why. The thought of this participle can be brought out by since or because. [Other clues:] (1) Aorist and perfect participles are amply represented, but the present participle is also frequently found. (2) The causal participle precedes typically the verb it modifies. *The Basics of New Testament Syntax*, 275-276.

<sup>41</sup> Arnold, 169.

<sup>42</sup> “Strangers and Foreigners,” in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 8 Volumes, ed., Nichol, Francis D. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1980) [SDABC], 1011.

<sup>43</sup> Who are these apostles and prophets? According to Chrysostom, they are the Old Testament prophets. The absence of the article before *προφητῶν* is against this, though not decisive since the O.T. prophets and the apostles might be one class, though this would hardly be natural. The order of the words is also against it and is not satisfactorily accounted for by the apostles’ superior dignity as having seen and heard Christ (Estius). Again, we have the analogy of Eph 3: 5 and 4:11; in both passages, apostles and prophets are named together, and the prophets are New Testament prophets. These passages also disprove the suggestion that the apostles themselves are called prophets. The absence of the article before *προφητῶν* is natural since the apostles and prophets formed one class as teachers of the Church. The objection that the prophets themselves were built on the foundation of the apostles (in whichever sense we take the genitive) loses all force when we consider, first, the high value that Paul sets on the gift of prophesying (1 Cor. 14: 1); and, secondly, that with him “apostles” does not mean the Twelve only. Nor does there appear any reason here why this additional title should call the apostles.

an apposition<sup>44</sup> to foundation<sup>45</sup> because it rightfully confers the meaning, “indicating that the foundation consists of the apostles and the prophets.”<sup>46</sup>

This passage refutes claims of an act of founding the Church on one man<sup>47</sup> – specifically, Peter.<sup>48</sup> Hence it is vital to recognize that early apostles and prophets were instrumental in the formation of the Christian Church. The text suggests Paul’s intention to highlight the pivotal role of the prophets and apostles in the initial stages of the work. They had an unswerving “attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4 NIV).

Paul, about the temple, does not use *ierōn* which connotes the entire temple precincts with its courts and portico provisions; including the area from which Gentiles had access and a place for trade, where merchants and money changers had their place (Matt 21:12-13).<sup>49</sup> Noting the relevance of the change, Paul uses *naōn* which signifies the dwelling place of the deity or the significant place of the presence of the divine, set apart for that purpose.<sup>50</sup> He uses a term that refers only to the Temple at Jerusalem, excluding

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<sup>44</sup> Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax*, 52. Genitive of Apposition (Epexegetical Genitive): The substantive in the genitive case refers to the same thing as the substantive to which it is related. The equation, however, is not exact. The genitive of apposition typically states a specific example that is a part of the broader category named by the head noun. Its use is frequent when the head noun is ambiguous or metaphorical. Like most genitive uses, every genitive of apposition can be translated with *of* + the genitive noun. To test whether the genitive in question is a genitive of apposition, replace the word *of* with the paraphrase “which is” or “that is,” “namely,” or, if a personal noun, “who is.” If it does not make the same sense, a genitive of apposition is unlikely; if it does make the same sense, a genitive of apposition is likely.

<sup>45</sup> “Strangers and Foreigners,” *SDABC*, 1011.

<sup>46</sup> Arnold, 169.

<sup>47</sup> “Strangers and Foreigners,” *SDABC*, 1012.

<sup>48</sup> *Censor Librorum*, and Robert H. Brom, “Origins of Peter as a Pope,” *Catholic Answers*, August 10, 2004, <https://www.catholic.com/tract/origins-of-peter-as-pope>. And Kirsch, Johann Peter. “St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles.” *CE*. vol. 11. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911. 20 Apr. 2017 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11744a.htm>.

<sup>49</sup> Fredrick William Danker, ed., “ἱερὸν”, in *A Greek-English Lexicon and other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2000), 470.

<sup>50</sup> Danker., “ἱερὸν,” 665.



its other courts.<sup>51</sup> In a peculiar consecration of the sanctuary is the unique consecration of the Church for His abiding presence.<sup>52</sup> Believers are part of a “living and dynamic spiritual temple.”<sup>53</sup>

Naõn assumes its unique quality with the prepositional prefix of *sun* to the participle *sunarmologouménē* - which Paul uses to emphasize the idea of corporate unity in the Church. The participle being in the passive implies that the work of joining together is by Christ on whom the foundation is cast.<sup>54</sup> The work of belonging to and acceptance in the household of God is a divine initiative, accomplished and perfected by Him. As such, Paul uses *oikodomēō* to emphasize the carefulness of the deity in bringing together individuals, skillfully blending them together by His own power.

Paul’s charge to believers is to ensure the validity of their calling and election (2 Peter 1:10; Eph 2:22). The charge connotes that though salvation is free in Christ, it does not imply that freedom is unregulated; instead, freedom comes with responsibility. The primary duty is that believers are ambassadors of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5:20). As His divine representatives, they are to demonstrate virtue in their lives (Eph 4:1b-6). He also affirms a need for Christian growth (cf. Eph 2:22) in service (Jas 1:27).

Believers are divinely called and established through the Church.<sup>55</sup> Jesus, the *ákrogōniaíou* (Eph 2:20 cf. Matt 7:24-27), is the foundation of their faith (Heb 12:2). Paul charges believers to stay connected to Christ (Eph 2:20b, 22; cf. John 15:4). Christ, the faith founder (cf. Heb 12:2 ESV), works in believers to “will and act according to His good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). The Creator is the anchorage of faith (Acts 19:26 cf. Isa 37:19; Jer 16:20). Christians build their faith on the foundation laid by Christ and its truth handed down by ancient prophets and the apostles. Christ as far as the usage of *ákrogōniaíou* in the Greek context is concerned,

<sup>51</sup> Arnold, 172; cf. Danker., “ἱερὸν,” 665.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Ivan T. Blazen, “Salvation” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 288.

<sup>53</sup> Arnold, 172.

<sup>54</sup> Arnold, 172.

<sup>55</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 552.

is not just the cornerstone, rather, He is the crowning or cladding stone. He is the perfecting touch to the design.

It is through the presence of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 15:26-27; 16:5-15), that believers experience a personal and intimate relationship with the divine, a means by which believers share in the divine character. First, the Holy Spirit actualizes Christ's envisioned unity among His disciples (cf. John 17:11). Second, believers experience communal access to God (cf. Zech. 3:7; 2 Cor. 3:17; Eph. 2:18; 3:12). Third, as through incarnation the fullness of the Godhead dwells in bodily form (cf. Col. 2:9), through the descension of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 14:16; 16:7; Acts 1:5, 8; 2:1-4) the fullness of God dwells in and among the believers.<sup>56</sup>

The Church is a *katoikētérion* of God – significantly the dwelling or house of God. It seems Paul is making an echo to the Old Testament Hebrew phraseology *lim' on qadešo lāšmayim* translated in the LXX as *katoikētérion* with the English equivalent God's "heavenly holy dwelling" or "holy habitation" (cf. Deut 26:15; 1 Kgs 8:39, 43, 49; 2 Chr. 6:30, 33, 39; 30:27; Psalm 68:5), fundamentally establishing that the Church is a dwelling place of Godhead. A significant demonstration is that God has made His tent among human beings. It gestures divine closeness to humanity and establishing them into a "corporate body of believers."<sup>57</sup> The tone here conveys a connotation of none but members of equal standing coming into close relation with humanity: the Father in the exodus and the tabernacle experiences (Exod. 25:8), the Son in the incarnation (John 1:14), and the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-13); and Eph. 2:19-22 demonstrates how the three equal members of the Godhead work together in the Church. Douglas Farrow fittingly affirms "the Holy Spirit is the Church's animator and guide, its cohesive force and fructifying power. What the Word articulates,

<sup>56</sup> Gordon Fee insightfully argues that believers "...are being built into a habitation of God by the Spirit, which means that God by his Spirit abides among them...by the indwelling of the Spirit, both in the individual and in the community, God (or Christ) indwells his people. Here is the ultimate fulfillment of the imagery of God's presence, begun but lost in the Garden, restored in the tabernacle in Exodus 40 and in the temple in 1 Kings 8" cf. *God's Empowering Presence*, 689.

<sup>57</sup> Arnold, 173.

the Spirit manifests, such that the Church, as the Body of Christ, becomes “the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:17-23 NRSV; 3:14-21...).”<sup>58</sup>

### **Theological Reflections and Implications**

Ephesians 2:19-22 is one of the important Scriptural pericopes in which the trinitarian formula is directly associated with the doctrine of the Church. As with Christ’s birth, baptism (Matt 3), resurrection (cf. Rom. 8:11), the commission (Matt 28:19), Ephesians 2:19-22 provides insights into how the Godhead continues to function through the Church. Therefore, it seems deducible that there is a strong connection between the doctrine of the Church and the Trinitarian motif. To remove the Trinity from the Church would be to leave the Church without its foundation hence the Church would be a social gathering of no eternal importance and divine presence.

The biblical paradigm of ecclesiological foundations reveals the involvement of the three persons of the Godhead (Eph 2:19-22). The blood sacrifice of Christ is the foundation of the new covenant Church (cf. Matt 16:18).<sup>59</sup> Fundamentally, the Church needed, as it continues to depend on the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). Consequently, belonging to the Church is belonging to God (cf. Matt 25:1-3). Believers enter into the Church of God, which is in Christ (1 Thess 2:14; Gal 1:22) and become saints in Christ (Phil 1:1), called to a universal perspective (Acts 8:1); commissioned in the Trinitarian formula (Matt 28:18-20). Christ is the head of the Church (Col 1:18) and the Holy Spirit is the helper (Acts 20:28). The primary calling of the Church is to proclaim His word (cf. Luke 24:48; John 15:27; Acts 1:8b), celebrate salvation (Luke 1:77) and worship God (John 4:20-24; Rev 14:7, 9-12; cf. Rev 4:5-11). In this paradigm of a universal calling is a unique called out – the remnant of covenant faithfulness (cf. Rev 14:12; 12:17).

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<sup>58</sup> Douglas Farrow “Church, Doctrine of the” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed., Kevin J. Vanhoozer, PDF ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 203.

<sup>59</sup> N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2009), 200.

The identity of the Church cannot be separated from the identity of the Triune God. The fundamental factor that identifies the nature of God is love. Love is an important adhesion that holds the Christian bond of brotherhood together. The character and nature of God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). Love is the principle that qualifies every dealing God has with His creation (John 3:16; Eph 2:4-5).<sup>60</sup> God initiated the covenant relationship (1 John 4:10). Every divinely initiated covenant has love as its central theme and unifying quality (cf. Deut 6:5; 7:8-9; 30:20; Jer 31:3; Hos 3:1; Rom 8:39). Humanity, on the other hand, is expected to respond in obedience as an expression of love (cf. John 14:15, 21; 15:9-11). MacCarty affirms that love is the golden rule that “plumbs the depths of God’s commitment inwardly within the Trinity and outwardly to His entire creation.”<sup>61</sup>

God’s purpose for the Church is mission (Matt 28:18-20). This was the first task to which the disciples were empowered with the presence of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; cf. 2:1-5). The contemporary Church, alike, is preserved for its mission (Rev 10). It is to proclaim the everlasting message of hope to the world (Rev 14:6-11). As such, the validation of the mission of the Church is to be in the purview of the work of the Godhead. God’s mission for humanity is the reason for the Church’s existence. Due to the fall of humanity, the plan of God as revealed in Scripture seems to be focused on redemption from sin. This redemption plan is Christo-centric.<sup>62</sup> This is what Ephesians 2:19-22 seems to reflect. The three persons of the Godhead are here depicted as working together in building the Church and ensuring that its purposes are thus fulfilled.

The essential exemplification of unity among the members of the Godhead is foundational to the Church model of unity. Christ prayed “that they may all be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I

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<sup>60</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 17.

<sup>61</sup> Skip MacCarty, *In Granite or Ingrained? What the Old and New Covenants Reveal about the Gospel, the Law and the Sabbath* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2007), 5.

<sup>62</sup> Norman Gulley, *God as Trinity*, 274 – 322.

in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:21). For the unity of the Church, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, work together. Therefore, the Trinity doctrine forms an important footing on which the ecclesiological structure of unity may be perfectly established and uniquely perfected.

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