One New Man

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For he himself is our peace, who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of the partition, the enmity, in his flesh, invalidating the law of commandments in ordinances, in order that he might create the two in himself into one new man, thus making peace, and might reconcile both in one body to God through the cross, killing the enmity in himself. (Ephesians 2:14–16)

This text indicates that the two, identified in Ephesians 2:11 as Gentiles and Jews, have become one in Christ. Jesus broke down the barrier dividing the two in order to create “one new man” in which there is peace and reconciliation. “One new man” is a metaphor for the church but, in spite of its apparent simplicity, two diametrically opposing views of its nature appear in the literature. Each of these views is underpinned by antithetical perspectives on Israel in the present era inaugurated by the Christ-event.
**Historical Interpretation of “One New Man”**

In Christian tradition, Jesus-believers (whether Jewish or Gentile in lineage) are not bound by obligation to Mosaic Law (though yielding to the “moral Law” is often promoted, those being the timeless moral principles of the Law). An array of texts in the New Testament, including that quoted above, is used to justify this orientation. Consequently, Christian theology often dissolves the ancient biblical categories of Israel and the nations, reclassifying all humans into another binary system comprising those who believe in Jesus and those who do not. The church is thus widely understood to be a people of faith whose spirituality transcends their ethnicity, such that the latter lapses as irrelevant or immaterial. Consequently, Paul’s “one new man” is interpreted as the Christian church comprising former Jews and former Gentiles who are now unable to be differentiated from any theological perspective. Two witnesses, one ancient and one modern, will suffice to testify to this interpretation of Paul’s “one new man.”

Late in the fourth century, John Chrysostom described Jews and Gentiles as “two statues, the one of silver, the other of lead,” which are then “melted down” to produce one new statue that comes out gold, not a mixture of silver and lead. In Chrysostom’s words, Christ “blended them together,” declaring that “so long as they continued still as Jews and Gentiles, they could not have been reconciled.” A similar interpretation was propounded by Martyn Lloyd-Jones in the last century:

> The Jew has been done away with as such, even as the Gentile has been done away with, in Christ. … nothing that belonged to the old state is of any value or has any relevance in the new state.

Lloyd-Jones went on to state that “there is no such thing as a Jewish section of the Christian Church.” Citing 1 Peter 2:9–10, he insisted that the church is “not a mixture of Jew and Gentile, but a new man; Jew finished, Gentile finished, a new creature.” Likewise, Harold Hoehner interprets Paul’s “one new man” as, “A new race that is raceless! … They are not Jews or Gentiles but a body of Christians who make up the church.”

At two separate seminars I attended in 2009, two speakers presented a different interpretation of Ephesians 2:15; they both claimed that the unity of the “one new man” does not imply, let alone require, a flattening of its Jewish and Gentile members into homogeneity. Instead, the unity spoken of in Ephesians 2:14–16 strengthens the case that Jewish identity
of Jews who believe in Jesus is fundamental. The seminars were presented by John Atkinson and Daniel Juster. Their interpretation of the text leads to the conclusion (further explained below) that Gentile Jesus-believers are joined (or added) to Israel, rather than replacing (or displacing) Israel. A growing number of modern scholars support this post-supersessionist view, which includes the “Paul within Judaism” school (also called the “radical new perspective on Paul,” or “beyond the new perspective on Paul.”)

The Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC) states,

One new man does not mean that the distinction and mutuality between Jews and Gentiles are obliterated. Instead, it means that Jews as Jews and Gentiles as Gentiles, with their differences and distinctions, live in unity and mutual blessing in Yeshua … they do not become a new generic, uniform humanity.

Other leading scholars in our generation who presented a similar view include Markus Barth, R. Kendall Soulen, and Justin Hardin.

Does the “one new man” Christ created replace the elements comprising it, or does it signify a renewal (or transformation) of humanity? Does the resultant peace, which is also mentioned in Ephesians 2:15, require elimination of the categories of Jew and Gentile, or is it a peace that triumphs over their differences? This study seeks to answer these questions. Subsequently, I shall briefly discuss the ESV and RSV-NRSV translations’ supply (insertion) of the phrase “in place of” to produce: “one new man [NRSV: humanity] in place of the two.” These clearly favor the replacement paradigm. Is their addition a helpful clarification of the text, or an unintentional obscuration of it?

**Jew-Gentile Distinction and Related Issues**

Distinction theory is my term for the theological framework that understands Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus as distinct in certain significant theological senses, including identity and function (role, service) in the economy of God’s kingdom. That is, a biblical differentiation exists between Israel and the nations within the church similar to that which existed more visibly before Christ. This distinction results in a twofold structure within the church that I label “intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction.” In this framework, the “one new man,” or “humanity” as I shall explain, comprises Jews and Gentiles who together are devoted to Jesus.
My choice of the word distinction is based on its common use in English Bibles to translate *diakrinō* in Acts 11:12 and 15:9, as well as *diastolē* in Romans 3:22 and 10:12. It is not intended to suggest a superior-inferior relationship in any sense. The concept has already been given several other names, including “unity and diversity in the church”,15 “bilateral ecclesiology”,16 or “Torah-defined ecclesiological variegation.”17

In contrast to distinction theory, church teaching for most of Christian history has denied that there is any theologically meaningful distinction between Jews and Gentiles in Christ,18 based on a number of New Testament texts. In my reckoning, the most striking of these texts are Acts 11:12 (in some English translations), 15:9; Romans 3:22, 10:12; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:15 and Colossians 3:11. However, I question whether any of these texts individually, or all of them collectively, provide sufficient evidence to overturn the prevailing Jew-Gentile distinction of the pre-Christian era.

**Analyzing “One New Man”**

Paul wrote that Christ sought to create in himself “*hena kainon anthrōpon*” (“one new man”) in Ephesians 2:15. What exactly did he mean by this? Each of the three words is discussed individually below with special attention to whether or not they speak against intra-ecclesial distinction of Jews and Gentiles. Subsequently, the translators’ supply of the phrase “in place of” in some translations is critiqued. Finally, a literary test is applied to the epistle for a possible validation of the interpretation of “one new man” that emerges from the analysis.

**One**

The first notable observation about “one” in “one new man” is its deliberate placement in the text. Paul could have written “a new man” (*kainon anthrōpon*) more simply, since Greek has no indefinite article. Why did Paul specify *one*? It appears he wanted to identify a particular new man, yet could not use the definite article for an entity that he had not yet referenced. Moreover, he wanted to be clear that it was one and not plural. Paul emphasized this unity in innovative ways as he prefixed the preposition *syn* with various verbs and nouns in Ephesians.19 (English Bibles usually translate the Greek prefix *syn* with the English prefix “co–” or with “fellow” e.g., “co-heirs” or “fellow heirs” in Ephesians 3:6.) Notably, these
syn compounds do not merely pertain to interpersonal relationships; they relate to the two groups, Jews and Gentiles in Christ.\textsuperscript{20}

\textit{Hena} assuredly means one, but Jewish and Christian scholars alike are aware that the word is laden with theological import. God, says Deuteronomy 6:4, is one (ʾě·ḥāḏ—hereafter \textit{echad}—or \textit{heis} in the Septuagint, where \textit{heis} and \textit{hena} are inflections of the same word). The \textit{Shema} is the ultimate proclamation of Jewish faith: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (NIV). The main translation concern here is whether the LORD is “one” or “unique,” as the Lexham English Bible translates \textit{echad}. The “oneness,” or unity, of God is often used by Jews to argue against the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, though it may also be translated “unique” or “alone.”\textsuperscript{21} The International Standard Version, Jewish Publication Society, New American Bible (Revised Edition), New Living Translation, and the New Revised Standard Version all render \textit{echad} as “alone.” Doing so “reads the verse not as making a metaphysical statement about God, namely, that he is one and indivisible, but rather that God alone is to be worshiped to the exclusion of all other gods,” Michael Wyschogrod explains.\textsuperscript{22} His aim is not to demonstrate whether God is, or is not, a composite unity but rather that Israel, like God, is unique; Israel has only one God, the LORD, and the LORD has one people alone, Israel, whom he will never divorce or lose compassion for.\textsuperscript{23} Yet he accepts that composite unity in the godhead is not disproved by Deuteronomy 6:4—a crucial element in Christian theology. Even the renowned Jewish philosopher Maimonides acknowledged that the singularity of \textit{echad} with reference to God implies the possibility of a plurality.\textsuperscript{24}

The concept of “one” meaning the unity of differing elements is native to the Bible, with the word being used of well-known composites such as daytime and night time forming “day one” (\textit{yom echad}, Genesis 1:5), and man and woman forming “one flesh” (\textit{basar echad}, Genesis 2:24). The fact that Ephesians was written in Greek is no barrier to employing the concept of composite unity found in these two examples, with “day one” translated as \textit{hēmera mia}, and “one flesh” as \textit{sarka mian} in the Septuagint. (\textit{Mia} and \textit{mian} are feminine inflections of \textit{heis}, as is \textit{hen} in the following example.) The marriage relationship is dependent on the distinction between husband and wife; thus “unity implies distinctiveness and yet complementarity.”\textsuperscript{25} The distinctiveness and complementarity that John Atkinson mentions are crucial for the united couple to represent the image of God, as Genesis 1:27 expresses so clearly. The image is distorted if both members of the couple are of the same sex, or if they are both neuter.
Similarly, the Greek text of John 17 uses the same word for the unity of Jesus’ believers with each other, and the unity of Jesus with God: “so that they may be one [hen], just as we are” (17:11); “that they all may be one [hen], just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, that they also may be in us … in order that they may be one [hen], just as we are one [hen]—I in them, and you in me, in order that they may be completed in one [hen]” (17:21–23).

Paul also provided a good example of the compound unity in the body of Christ in Romans 12:4–6:

For just as in one [hen] body we have many members, but all the members do not have the same function, in the same way we who are many are one [hen] body in Christ, and individually members of one another, but having different gifts according to the grace given to us.

The same metaphor appears in 1 Corinthians 12:12–30, where Paul stressed the simultaneous unity and diversity of the one body of Christ. He pressed that “the body is one”; it is “one body” but its members are “many” and diverse in nature, in function, and in honor. In fact, greater honor is given some parts than to others “in order that there not be a division in the body.” Evidently, the unity of the members of the body is not at the expense of their differences. Rather, the healthy functioning of the body is dependent on its members being different and fulfilling different kinds of roles: “And if they all were one member, where would the body be?” (1 Corinthians 12:19). In both texts cited above, from Romans and 1 Corinthians, Paul stressed simultaneously the unity and diversity of the members of the body of Christ. This is the same body, the church, which he referred to repeatedly in Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:15–16 unequivocally identifies this same “one body” as the “one new man”: “that he might create the two in himself into one new man … and might reconcile both in one body.” By this equation, and with the support of the other epistles cited above, we can deduce that the “one new man” comprises members who are united yet distinct in various significant ways. These distinctions are not arbitrary to God’s purposes, but are deliberate for producing a whole, fully functioning church. Therefore, they are not erased “in Christ,” but the diversity of the members is for mutual blessing within the body, to the glory of God. Moreover, Ephesians 2:11–22 notes that the principal distinction between members of the body is their
status in Israel: They are either members of Israel (Jews), or they are drawn from among the nations (Gentiles/non-Jews) into fellow citizenship with Israel—yet without becoming Jews. Thus, the distinction between Jew and Gentile is not at all altered by the unity Christ brought about between them.

The First Council of Nicaea in 325 CE used the word *homoousios* to describe Jesus and God, the Father, as being of the “same substance” and equally divine in spite of being differentiated. Later, the First Council of Ephesus in 431 CE adopted the term *hypostasis*, or hypostatic union, to express the unity of Jesus’ divinity and his humanity. Both these truths are examples of composite unities, and are accepted as foundational to Christian theology. Certainly the notion that the unity of the saints suggests nowise that they are, or will be in the age to come, the same in every way, stripped of their unique identity. The Bible even maintains ethnic identities for those united in Christ after the appearance of the new heaven and the new earth.²⁸

From these examples, it is apparent that the biblical use of “one” in both Hebrew and Greek allows for a kind of unity comprising diverse elements.²⁹ In fact, such unity seems to have been God’s goal from the beginning; the creation account tells of God making two, Adam and Eve, from “singular” one, Adam, with the intention that the two would be united in “composite” one.³⁰ Is it not therefore reasonable to consider that God’s separation (sanctification) of Israel from the nations was so that the two may ultimately be reunited (not just reconciled), yet remain distinct for the purpose of mutual blessing indefinitely?³¹ Soulen summarizes God’s agenda for mutual blessing like this:

> The church of Jesus Christ is a sphere of mutual blessing between Jew and Gentile where the distinction between them (like that between male and female) is not erased, but recreated in a promissory way, as the eschatological sign and foretaste of messianic peace and mutual blessing among all the peoples of the world.³²

In a similar vein, the UMJC stated, “Together the Messianic Jewish community and the Christian Church constitute the *ekklesia*, the one Body of Messiah, a community of Jews and Gentiles who in their ongoing distinction and mutual blessing anticipate the shalom of the world to come.”³³

The “one new man” of Ephesians 2:15 may indeed comprise Jews and Gentiles who are united yet distinct. Accordingly, Markus Barth wrote,
There is “no distinction” but full solidarity between all men, whether Jewish- or Gentile-born, when the judgment and the grace of God are described (Romans 3:22ff., 3:28ff., 10:12). But the following passages [Ephesians 2:11–20, 3:5–6] reveal that within the equal treatment of Jews and Gentiles a decisive distinction must still not be forgotten.  

Justin Hardin explains that Paul’s language of “oneness” is part of his metaphor of warring parties, which had come to an armistice through the work of Jesus, resulting in a new peace in place of enmity—but “oneness” and “ethnic collapse” are two very different things. When the metaphor of “one new man” is recognized as such, the text in Hardin’s study (Ephesians 2:14–18) “cannot be interpreted literally to mean that ethnic distinctions have deteriorated.” He points out that the two parties, Jew and Gentile, indicated by the “both” of Ephesians 2:14 are still two in 2:18 where the same word, “both,” is used again.

The Israel to which Paul generally refers in his writings, the people to which Gentile believers in Jesus are to attach themselves, is “actual Israel”—including both Jewish Jesus-believers and Jews who do not believe in Jesus. In speaking of the “one new man,” Paul means “both Jews and Gentiles just as they are.” Similarly, Magnus Zetterholm writes, “They are certainly ‘one in Christ,’ but it is precisely as ‘Jews’ and ‘Gentiles’ that they constitute this unity.” This notion is also evident in Romans 9–11, in which Paul wrote that God’s election of Israel stands in spite of Israel’s stumbling. Also in Romans, Paul referred to the Shema (3:30), deducing that the unity, or oneness, of God himself actually requires ongoing distinction between Israel and the nations in the new covenant era. Mark Nanos notes, His oneness has been compromised if he is only the God of Israel, only the God of the circumcised, only the God of Torah, and not also the God of the nations, not also the God of the uncircumcised, and not also the God of those outside the Torah (emphasis original).

Accordingly, Paul’s rationale is that, if the nations have to become Israel to come under God’s reign, then God is not the God of every nation but only the God of Israel. Simultaneously, if Israel has to lose its unique biblical identity in order to submit to Messiah, then the God of Israel has changed his identity, since he affixed Israel to his personal name in Exodus 5:1. God is referred to as
the “God of Israel” about two hundred times in Scripture, often in opposition to the Tetragrammaton. Consequently, for Israel to assimilate entirely into the nations is theologically extremely problematic in regard to God’s unchangeable nature. Similarly, if Israel were exterminated, or if another people took its place (as in replacement theology), the faithfulness of the God of Israel would be called into question; the God of Israel “is identified by fidelity to the Jewish people through time.” Thus, Israel’s identity must be fixed in order for God’s identity to remain constant. On the other hand, Ephesians indicates that Gentile believers are to appropriate a Jewish identity—at least to some extent. “The church is not equated with Israel,” but Israel in Ephesians is central to the believers’ identity and therefore cannot simultaneously be undermined. Indeed, “one cannot be a joint heir with Israel if Israel is an entity only of the past.”

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These truths, therefore, are to be held in tension: Israel’s unique identity prevails; Gentile believers are not to become Jewish, but they are to identify with the Jews, or Israel, as they cleave to Israel’s Messiah and are thus brought into the commonwealth of Israel as co-citizens (but never co-Israelites!). Gentile Christians have an especially close relationship with Jewish believers, who are likewise renewed in Messiah and bind the Gentiles to the life of Israel. Gentile believers must “remember” their dependence on Israel for their relationship with God. This is the unity of the “one new man,” which Christ created: not a unity which erases the differences between Jew and Gentile but one that removes the enmity between the two.

Paul makes a similar Jew-Gentile distinction not only in Romans and Ephesians, but in his other writings as well. Rudolph points out, for example, that “the distinction between Jewish and Gentile identity in Christ is so fundamental that Paul can speak of ‘the gospel of the foreskin’ and ‘the [gospel] of the circumcised’ (Galatians 2:7).” In 1 Corinthians 7:17–24 Paul published his rule for all the churches: Each believer is to remain as he was when he was called (to faith in Jesus). First Corinthians 7:18 states that Jews (“the circumcised”) are to remain Jews (“he must not undo his circumcision”) and Gentiles (the “uncircumcision” or “foreskin”) “must not become circumcised.” A number of other scholars concur with Rudolph concerning the retention of Jew-Gentile distinction within the church, for example, Campbell and Nanos and Tucker. Further, 1 Corinthians 9:20–21 can be aligned with this reading of 1 Corinthians 7:17–24, as Rudolph does most eminently in A Jew to the Jews. These modern readings of Paul provide a consistent, coherent model in which Jewish and Gentile believers...
are united in Christ while remaining distinct such that the particularity of Israel is retained. In other words, they harmonize with the interpretation that the “one new man” in Ephesians 2:15 is a compound unity of differentiated peoples, most essentially of Jews and Gentiles.

The salient point of this discussion is that being “one” in Christ does not mean being homogeneous; the notion of a compound unity is native to the Bible. Christ’s making Jew and Gentile one in himself—as Paul expressed in Ephesians 2:15—by no means proves that their respective distinctions become erased as they are drawn into undifferentiated membership in the church. The “one new man” is apparently not an international, intercultural, sexless or historical superman. Rather, the evidence suggests that “one new man” is a metaphor for the state of unity with distinction achieved by Christ. This leads to the question of whether the newness of the “one new man” refutes distinction theory, or if it can accommodate old identities in a new body.

New

What did Paul mean when he wrote that the one man whom Christ had created was new? The word “new” refers to something that did not exist before, yet surely elements of the new man did exist, such as the head (Christ himself) and the Jews and Gentiles who comprised the members of his body. Does “new” simply mean that the members are spiritually regenerated? This seems plausible, considering the transforming work of the Holy Spirit since the Pentecost of Acts 2 and 10; but the noun modified by “new” in Ephesians 2:15 is clearly the corporate entity (“man”), not the individual members. One needs, therefore, to identify that which is new about the “new man.” Various answers appear in scholarly literature, of which two diametrically opposing interpretations will be presented in this article. These interpretations have greatly differing implications for Jewish believers in many ways (including their particular ethnicity, their election and roles, their territorial heritage, and their faith tradition and practice.)

Given that the “man” Christ created according to Ephesians 2:15 is “new,” and this new man comprises Jew and Gentile, are not these categories of Jew and Gentile to be relegated to the definition of “old” and discarded in favor of a new binary classification: those “in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 1:1) and those not “in Christ Jesus?” After all, is not every person’s ultimate destiny determined by his faith, or faithlessness, in Jesus? Casting
this differently, does membership in the new covenant not become so allimportant that membership in the Mosaic covenant becomes irrelevant, even as the new covenant replaces the old one?

Framing the question this way clouds the issue by over-exploiting the discontinuity between the eras before and after Christ’s atonement: Before Christ, individuals were categorized as Jew or Gentile; since Christ, individuals are categorized as Christian or non-Christian. This one-dimensional approach is not biblical, for the New Testament abounds with references to Jews and Gentiles of both believing and unbelieving varieties. That is, a two-dimensional cross-classification system is evidenced in the Bible, as the examples in the following table demonstrate:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In Christ</th>
<th>Not in Christ</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Jewish</td>
<td>Cornelius (Acts 10)</td>
<td>Festus (Acts 26)</td>
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*Table 1: Cross-classification system of individuals with biblical examples*

Jewish believers in Jesus continued to live as Jews after the Holy Spirit was poured out in Acts 2. This Pentecost event did not terminate their Jewishness. Moreover, the Gentiles who received the gospel did not convert to Judaism; they continued to live as non-Jews. The examples provided in table 1 demonstrate that one should not let an artificial and overly simplified classification framework—either in Christ or not—dictate the interpretation of “new” in Ephesians 2:15 but should rather identify the possibilities from real people described in the New Testament.

If that which was new about the “one new man” was spiritual rebirth, then the prevailing Jew-Gentile classification might be subordinated to their identity in relation to Christ without being eliminated by it. In other words, one may have a dual identity, both being equally valid simultaneously. This is indeed the witness of Scripture clearly portrayed in Acts and Romans, for example. Thus, in spite of the newness of the “one new man,” his members are really “something old, something new,” as the wedding rhyme goes. Mark Kinzer’s critique of *Lumen Gentium*, a publication of the Second Vatican Council, is helpful:
The biblical concept of newness usually connotes eschatological renewal of an already existing reality. The new heavens and new earth are the old heavens and old earth, glorified and transfigured. The new humanity is the old humanity raised from the dead and transformed. This understanding of eschatological newness is supported by its paradigmatic case—the resurrection of the Messiah. The risen Messiah is new, different, yet the same human being as the one born of Mary.\(^{57}\)

Professor William Campbell also finds Ephesians 2:15 to indicate transformation rather than re-creation: “Pauline transformation in Christ does not mean the creation of a new group without ethnic identity but rather the transformation of those who are Greeks into transformed Greeks, and of Judeans into transformed Judeans in Christ.”\(^{58}\)

The transformation described above—one that retains Jewish and Gentile (or Greek) identity—directly contradicts what I regard to be the more common interpretation of the newness that Christ created. I selected Chrysostom and Lloyd-Jones as well-known representatives of the latter view to demonstrate the great period that it has spanned in Christian history (about sixteen centuries). Chrysostom argued that Paul’s choice of the word “create” (ktizō) rather than “change” is significant in that Jews and Gentiles are not merely changed, they are created anew.\(^{59}\) His argument hinges on the use of ktizō in the Septuagint and in the New Testament, which typically portrays God creating something out of nothing. Lloyd-Jones presented a similar case: “There was nothing there before God created. Creation … is making something out of nothing.”\(^{60}\) He insisted,

> It’s not by modification of what was there before; it is not even by an improvement of what was there before. God does not take a Jew and do something to him, and take a Gentile and do something to him, and thereby bring them together. Not at all! It is something entirely new.\(^{61}\)

Thus, for these two famous preachers of very different eras, Chrysostom and Lloyd-Jones, spiritual regeneration is not enough to account for the newness of Christ’s creation in Ephesians 2:15. For them the prior identities of the members of Christ’s body are blotted out in his work of creating them newly. The juxtaposition above of two interpretations of ktizō (create) and kainos (new) in the text shows them to be polar opposites and thus warrants further investigation.
Psalms 51:10 and 104:30 appear to support Kinzer’s reference to eschatological renewal. Notably, in the Septuagint (where these verses are Psalms 50:12 and 103:30, respectively), they both use forms of the words *ktizō* and verbal cognates of *kainos*:

Create [*ktizō*] in me a clean heart, O God, and renew [*egkainizō*] a right spirit in my inward parts. (Psalm 50:10 LES)

You will send forth your spirit, and they will be created [*ktizō*], and you will renew [*anakainizō*] the face of the earth. (Psalm 103:30 LES)

In both cases, both words imply a renewal, not an entirely new creation ex nihilo. The former objects are renewed and continue to exist; they are not replaced with completely new ones.

Furthermore, it might be reasonable to harness another interpretation of *ktizō* found in the Septuagint, where it can mean “to form” or “to found” (that is, to establish). Though this is speculative, Paul may have implied that nuance in Ephesians 2:15 to mean either “that he might form the two in himself into one new man” or “that he might establish the two in himself into one new man” (emphasis added). These options permit the “new man” to be something new yet made from preexisting entities (namely, Jews and Gentiles) by the transformation or rearrangement of these entities rather than by their elimination. Both definitions fit comfortably with the biblical concepts of “one” and “new,” and neither requires creation ex nihilo.

Another biblical example of renewal is lunar: the Hebrew word for “new moon” is not at all related to the word for “moon” (*yarech*) but rather is derived from *chodesh*, meaning to “make new, restore, renew.” When the Bible speaks of a new moon, it is not referring to a newly created object but rather to one that has been “renewed”; it has waned, disappeared, then reappeared as new although it was old. For a comparison with something new yet not new in New Testament Greek, see Jesus’ commandment in John’s writings on loving one another. The commandment to love one another was not new, but Jesus renewed it by adding a requirement: “Love one another: *just as I have loved you*” (John 13:34, emphasis added).

The context preceding Ephesians 2:15 emphasizes that Gentiles had been formerly “alienated from the commonwealth [or citizenship: *politeia*] of Israel” but were now brought “near by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:12–13). Gentile believers were incorporated into the citizenship of Israel; author Daniel Juster refers to this as “addition theology”—Gentiles were
“added” to the household of Israel through their faith in Israel’s Messiah.\(^{70}\) This change is part of the newness that Paul meant in “one new man.” Accordingly, Kinzer writes,

> The Church should be seen as a renewed Israel, a renewed people of God. It is an eschatological form of Israel, anticipating the life of the world to come by the gift of the Spirit. As an eschatological reality, it is also an expanded Israel, including within its ranks people from all the nations of the world.\(^{71}\)

The idea of a “renewed Israel” fits well with the biblical concept of newness, as demonstrated by the examples above. Elsewhere Kinzer describes the Gentile component of the church as “\textit{a multinational extension of the people of Israel}” (emphasis original).\(^{72}\) This is apt wording to express the non-supersessionist perspective, because (1) an extension is not a replacement, and (2) an extension depends on that from which it is extended for support—it cannot function independently. As Paul expressed it, “You do not support the root, but the root \textit{supports} you” (Romans 11:18 NIV, emphasis added). In fact, Paul referred to the Israelites (presumably only those in right standing with God) as “\textit{holy ones}” or “\textit{saints}.”\(^{73}\) While Paul in Ephesians emphasized the contrast of what Gentile believers once were (pagans) with what they now had become,\(^{74}\) he did not make a corresponding contrast between Jewish believers and “Israelite culture and identity.”\(^{75}\) These points collectively make it very difficult to imagine how the “one new man” can replace Israel as God’s people.

Returning to Paul’s olive tree metaphor,\(^{76}\) we see that Gentiles are as branches of a wild olive tree (neither schooled in nor governed by Torah), but by faith in Jesus they are “grafted in” to the cultivated olive tree, Israel.\(^{77}\) Likewise, Gentile believers “became a sharer of the root of the olive tree’s richness” (Romans 11:17). While this imagery is congruent with the notion that the “one new man” is Israel being renewed and enlarged by the attachment to it of all the nations of the world (as presented above), it is incongruent with the complete disjunction of the church from Israel, as some interpret the newness to mean.

Theologian Charles Ryrie, for example, stated that the church (“\textit{new man}”) is “\textit{not a continuation or remaking of Israel, but something new and distinct from the Israel of the Old Testament.}”\(^{78}\) He stressed a \textit{discontinuity} between the redeemed of this era who are “\textit{in the body of Christ},” saying that they are “\textit{not some sort of Israel}” and going on to explain that “today
redeemed Jew and Gentile belong to God’s family of saints without being members of any kind of Israel.” My assessment of the biblical data above suggests the opposite of Ryrie’s claims. “Renewed” is not only a permissible interpretation of kainos in Ephesians 2:15 but also the best way of understanding it. Yes, the church is a new entity that Christ has created, but it was created not by replacing Jew and Gentile (as in replacement theology); rather, it is by restoring, reconciling, and spiritually regenerating them.

There is yet another facet of newness in the “one new man”: the peace between Jew and Gentile that Christ made by destroying the enmity between them and reconciling them both to each other and to God. For Lloyd-Jones Christ’s peace required the binary Jew-Gentile classification to be discarded: “The moment we begin to bring in those categories there is no longer peace; there is division, separation, enmity.” However, neither the peace nor the reconciliation call for eradication of either Jewish or Gentile identity. The unity in Christ that results from bringing “near” Gentiles who “once were far away” as God’s people does not trigger an “ethnic collapse.” Indeed, it is the peace between the church’s principal differentiated elements, namely Israel and the nations, that is the eschatological sign of God’s sovereignty over the whole world. This peace is not an abstraction nor a future-only reality; it is a present-day sign of the fullness of the peace to come.

“It is a real political and social peace that Christ enables and demands of those who truly belong to His kingdom. As Ephesians 1–2 indicates, through the power of Christ hostility arising from difference can be turned into a cause of celebration of the blessings of God in Christ.” Paul may have been comparing this peace with that which Solomon brought between the northern and southern kingdoms when both those “far” (Israel in the north) and “near” (Judah in the south) worshiped together in the then-new Temple, as various similarities suggest. But the peace and reconciliation brought about by Christ in Ephesians 2:14–16 is not described as a general peace between all nations; it is specifically a peace between the nations and Israel—Gentiles and Jews. Such a peace is somewhat meaningless if, as some writers I have cited claim, there is no more particularity to Israel and Jews “in Christ” are no longer fully Jewish.

The argument presented above shows that ongoing intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction is permissible and even probable in the “one new man” metaphor of Ephesians 2:15 insomuch as the “one new man” is not a Jewish man, neither is he a Gentile; he is a new humanity comprising
Jewish and Gentile members “in Christ Jesus.” Before testing that conclusion with other internal evidence, the least controversial word in the phrase “hēna kainon anthrōpon” (“one new man”), anthrōpos (“man”), needs a brief discussion.

**Man**

It is generally accepted that the “man” Christ created in Ephesians 2:15 is not an individual human being but a people. Paul did not use the word anēr but anthrōpos; both words can mean “man,” “human,” or “husband,” but the latter can also mean “people” as a collective noun, which fits the context best. Paul’s choice of words is remarkable, because humanity itself is a compound unity comprising differentiated elements (members of the human population), often viewed in subgroups according to gender, race, or family. Thus anthrōpos reflects well the kind of entity represented by the body of believers in Jesus. This nuance may not have been conveyed if Paul had chosen another word such as “creature,” “vessel,” or “being.” Recall the metaphor (already presented above) in which Paul described the church as a “body” comprising distinct members.87 Once again, the theme of unity with distinction is a paradigm native to the apostle’s writings.

It is thus surprising that so few English translations use “humanity” (as do the NIV 2011 and the NRSV) or “people” (as the NLT does) to translate anthrōpos in Ephesians 2:15. In this instance “humanity” appears best, especially when taking into consideration Paul’s reference to Christ as the “last Adam” in 1 Corinthians 15:45. In that context Adam is the ancestor of natural humanity, but Christ is the ancestor of a regenerated (renewed!) humanity. Inasmuch as Christ’s divinity did not displace his humanity—indeed, he was bodily resurrected—the spiritual quickening of his followers does not replace their natural bodies. The “one new man” does not displace its members from their current natural identity. Jews remain Jews, and Gentiles remain non-Jews. This point touches on a much larger topic, but we should not lose sight of the fact that those who are in Christ are also the sons of Adam.

**“In Place of” the Two?**

As stated above, some Bible translations explicitly say that the one new man is created “in place of” the two (Jews and Gentiles) in Ephesians 2:15. If this is the case, then replacement theology has an anchor in the biblical text, but where do these words originate? The answer, quite
simply, is in the translators’ theology. No textual variants in any of the ancient sources witness to these words; they are “a gratuitous addition,” as Campbell calls them. The Bible translators supplied “in place of” in order to clarify the meaning, but the meaning they assume does not correspond with the evidence that I have presented.

Unfortunately, their insertion also serves to validate their theology, though I do not suggest any ill intent on their part—all Bible translators have to make difficult decisions and will naturally favor wording that conforms to their understanding of the “right” interpretation. Moreover, the English is awkward without the phrase, seemingly needing “smoothing.” Following the Greek word order, a literal translation of the clause may be “in order that the [accusative] two [indeclinable] he might create in himself into one new man.” There are no significant variant readings. If the logic of the argument presented above is valid, then the critical text does not indicate replacement but rather a new state of unity. I submit that the phrase “in place of” in some English translations of Ephesians 2:15 is misleading and best omitted.

The discussion above has already touched on the profound theological implications of the message of Ephesians that emerges from my (and others’) reading of “one new man,” which is all the more meaningful if the phrase “in place of” is not supplied to Ephesians 2:15. Markus Barth made a drastic statement concerning the message of the letter: “Ephesians makes its readers aware that it is wrong and suicidal for the church … to claim that she alone is the true, the new, the spiritual Israel—at the expense of the old or fleshly Israel” (emphasis added). Later he wrote that “it is the distinctive message of Ephesians that no Gentile can have communion with Christ or with God unless he also has communion with Israel.” Though matters of supersessionism and Jewish-Christian relations are too vast for this article, it is important nevertheless to mention the theological significance—the applied meaning—of “one new man” in Ephesians.

**A Test**

Is there an objective test for my finding that the newer identities of believers and unbelievers in Jesus does not erase the older ones of Jews and Gentiles? Does the letter to the Ephesians itself offer any internal evidence in this regard? If the identity cross-classification scheme portrayed in table 1 is valid, then we might expect potential confusion in the personal pronouns used in the letter such as “we” and “you” (especially in the plural). That is, the writer, who certainly is to be regarded as a Jesus-
believer of Jewish origins, might at times use “we” to denote “we Jews” or “I and the Jews among you” (the audience), while at other times using “we” to denote “we believers in Jesus, regardless of our identity as Jews or Gentiles.” Similarly, “you” might denote either “you Jews and Gentiles to whom I am writing,” or it may refer to “you Gentiles,” excluding the Jews in the audience.

A study of the personal pronouns in Ephesians reveals that this is, in fact, exactly what appears, and the modern reader needs to be particularly careful in interpreting these words. The greeting and opening praises appear to include the whole audience of believers, Jew and Gentile, in the pronouns “we,” “us,” and “our.” But at some point we find a switch in usage such that, by Ephesians 1:12, “we” must refer to Jews who “hoped beforehand [i.e., BCE] in Christ” and “you” to the Gentiles: “When you … believed … [you] were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 1:13). Again, in Ephesians 1:19 the phrase “us who believe” clearly places Gentile believers together with Paul and his believing Jewish kin in the first-person plural pronoun “us.” Yet by Ephesians 2:1 “you” refers to Gentile believers, and “we” in Ephesians 2:3 refers to Jewish believers, each group being differentiated from their unbelieving counterparts. In Ephesians 2:4–7 once again “us” refers to the whole body of believers, Jewish and Gentile, whom God loved, made alive, raised together, seated together for a demonstration “in the coming ages of the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness upon us in Christ Jesus.”

The evidence grows stronger still in Ephesians 2:11, where Paul uses an over-specification (in discourse terminology) to explicitly identify “you” as “Gentiles in the flesh.” Such over-specification “prompts the reader [to] conceptualize the referent in a specific way”; Paul sought to emphasize that “you” meant “Gentiles in the flesh” and not “the circumcision … in the flesh” (Ephesians 2:11). Note that Paul does not refer to these non-Jewish believers as formerly Gentiles or formerly “the uncircumcision” but rather as formerly “alienated” (Ephesians 2:12). Then he says, “You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints” (Ephesians 2:19), while they yet continued to be distinct from Jewish believers, as “you Gentiles” in Ephesians 3:1 indicates.

Though the difficulty of identifying the referent of personal pronouns in Ephesians has often been noted in the literature, I have sought to use it as an objective test of the letter’s internal evidence. The test results clearly support the notion of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction.
Summary and Implications

The traditional Christian interpretation of the New Testament is that after coming to faith in Jesus, no distinction remains between Jewish believers and Gentile believers. That is, within the church there is to be no differentiation between Israel and the nations. Does Paul’s reference to the “one new man” in Ephesians 2:15 support this claim? Are Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus no longer distinct in any significant way because of their common membership in the community of Christ? No. “One new man” is an assertion of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction. Other keywords in Ephesians 2:14–16, namely “body,” “create,” and “peace,” prove to be congruent with this finding.

The biblical concept of “one” does not necessarily mean a singularity or homogeneity, but it allows for the unity of distinct elements. Ephesians identifies Gentile believers with Israel, not as Israel; Paul retains distinction between the two in this letter as he does in his other writings.

The “new man” of Ephesians 2:15 is not created ex nihilo. While there are aspects of newness to the body of Christ, not all that is old is discarded. The Christ event did not erase the biblical classification of individuals as Jews or Gentiles. Rather, the New Testament classifies people according to whether or not they put their faith in Jesus and according to whether or not they are Israelites—yet without any prejudice against Gentile believers who are welcomed as fellow citizens, a kind of extension to Israel. Christ’s body is a new man because its members are spiritually regenerated. That which is called new in the Bible is often what we today would call renewed. Israel is renewed in Christ, not replaced by the church but expanded to encompass Gentile Christians as co-citizens. Another facet of the newness is the actual peace that Christ brought about between Israel and the nations, which ought to be evident among Jews and Gentiles who, through their faith in Jesus, have become members of his body.

The “man,” or “humanity,” Christ created is a corporate entity: those who belong to Christ. The identities of Jews and Gentiles are not washed away in the waters of baptism. Persistence of Jewish identity in particular is not only defined by ethnicity and culture but also by faith tradition (including Torah-obligation in a manner not required of Gentile Christians) and a unique function (or service) within the body of Christ.

Reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles as Jews and Gentiles (respectively) in Christ is a pledge of Christ’s ability to bring peace to bitterest enemies—something that loses significance if the two are homogenized or blended.
in Christ, reducing God’s work to “a mere historical remembrance rather than a miracle that is continually renewed.”94 Moreover, Christ did not “create in himself one new man in place of the two.” Bible translations that supply the phrase “in place of” potentially mislead readers into the supersessionist paradigm.

Ephesians 2:15 does not by any means prove that its members are no longer Jewish and Gentile. Instead the text allows, and even requires, retention of the Jew-Gentile classification—even among the members of Christ’s body—in a theologically meaningful way, not merely ethnically or culturally. The clause in question in Ephesians 2:15 might best be interpreted “in order that he might establish the two in himself into one new humanity.”

Two major implications of viewing the church as a unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ rather than as a unification that blends the two parties homogeneously follow.

The first is that it permits and even promotes the practice of Judaism by Jewish believers in Jesus—as long as such practice does not contravene New Testament teaching. The modern Messianic Jewish movement thus expresses its Jewish identity through Torah-observance and the development of halachic standards, worship in synagogues following Jewish liturgy and norms, participation in traditional Jewish ceremonies (circumcision and bar mitzvah, for example) and festivals. Typically, all these expressions are adapted to some degree to include key elements of the New Testament, especially regarding Christology. Good examples of these adaptations are included in Standards of Observance (a guide to Messianic Jewish halachah),95 Zichron Mashiach (Messiah’s Remembrance Meal, a liturgy),96 and The Sabbath Table: Prayers, Blessings, and Songs for the Sabbath.97

A second important consequence of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction is that Jewish Jesus-believers form a nexus between Israel and the nations, being both members of the people of Israel and members of Christ’s body. Karl Barth discerned this even before the modern Messianic Jewish movement developed; he recognized that corporately, Jewish Jesus-believers “fulfill their appointed role when they are the ekklesia in Israel and Israel in the ekklesia.”98 Following on closely, his son, Markus Barth, wrote, “Brotherhood with Israel is the very essence, not the possible consequence, of the peace Christ has made.”99 The textual analysis on Ephesians 2:15 presented here concurs with both Karl and Markus Barth on these matters. Thus, I deduce (as others have done before me)100 that Jewish believers in Jesus are a bridge that joins the nations to Israel and,
furthermore, that the Messianic Jewish synagogue is exemplary as the locus of the peace that Christ initiated, he himself being their paragon.

Messianic Jewish synagogues did not exist when Karl and Markus Barth wrote, but today they flourish as places in which Jews and Gentiles express their devotion to Jesus in unity yet with distinction. All participants who have repented and been baptized are invited to the communion table, while typically only the Jewish members wear tzitzit (tassels)\(^{101}\) and observe other commandments issued specifically to the children of Israel. Messianic Jewish synagogues are a place in which representatives from the nations actually attach themselves to the faithful remnant of Israel, remembering with gratitude and humility that the new covenant was formed with “the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (Jeremiah 31:31), not with Gentile nations. Such congregations observably apply the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction; they offer concrete evidence that the “one new man” Christ created (Ephesians 2:15) is a regenerated humanity comprising Jews as Jews and Gentiles as Gentiles—all at peace with one another, in spite of objections by expositors like Lloyd-Jones who have declared this impossible. I am not recommending that Gentile Christians leave their churches for a local Messianic synagogue, which would result in the problem of Gentile numerical dominance in most parts of the world. Church-hosted table fellowship and special worship events could equally demonstrate Jew-Gentile unity with distinction.

Unity and distinction must go hand in hand. Neither unity of nor distinction between Jesus-believing Jews and Gentiles should be emphasized at the expense of the other.\(^{102}\) The interplay between these two aspects of the Jew-Gentile relationship creates a tension of interdependence that results in mutual blessing. In fact, the intimate composition and mutual dependence of Jews and Gentiles is essential to the church:

*The church is a prolepsis of Israel and the nations in the eschaton.*

Interdependence and mutual blessing between Jew and Gentile reflects the *raison d'être* of the church and anticipates the consummation when Israel and the nations, in Torah-defined unity and diversity, will worship ADONAI alone. (emphasis original)\(^{103}\)

To me it seems that Christian training and preaching generalizes the central motif of Ephesians—reconciliation, unity, and peace *between Jews and Gentiles*—by presenting instead *all believers in general* as the parties in focus. Without denying the importance of peace among all Jesus-believers,
I suggest that such generalization results in a diluted and compromised reading of this letter, since Paul specifically identified Jews and Gentiles as the primary parties of Christ’s peace accord.

**Endnotes**

1. Using the Lexham English Bible except where otherwise specified.
3. Ibid., 72–73.
5. Ibid., 277.
6. Ibid.
14. Note that these particular translations do not italicize words supplied by the translators.

Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 1–2; 11–12.


Ibid., 174.


Ibid., 14.

1 Corinthians 12:12–14, 20, 25.


E.g., Revelation 21:3. Most translations prefer the singular collective noun, *laos* (people), as per the Robinson-Pierpont edition of the GNT, but the Westcott-Hort, Tregelles and Nestle-Aland 28 all bear the plural *laoi* (peoples).

Contrast my findings with Lloyd-Jones’ emphatic statement: ‘*The unity of this new body is an absolute unity’* (emphasis original. Lloyd-Jones, *God’s Way*, 277.) He did not provide any support from how the cardinal number, one, is used in the Bible.


On the theme of mutual blessing of Israel and the nations, see Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, and his more recent assessment, “The Standard Canonical Narrative and the Problem of Supersessionism,” in Rudolph and Willitts, *Introduction to Messianic Judaism*, 282–291. Also in Rudolph and Willitts, see Craig Keener (with Paul’s letter to the Romans in view), “Interdependence and Mutual Blessing in the Church,” 187–195. The concept emerges from God’s covenant with Abraham, which purposes that ‘all the families of the earth’ will be blessed through Abraham, and they ought to bless him also (Genesis 12:2–3).


Barth, “Conversion and Conversation,” 5.

Hardin, “Equality in the Church,” 231.

Ibid.


Ibid.


Soulen, The God of Israel and Christian Theology, xi.

Campbell, “Unity and Diversity in the Church: Transformed Identities and the Peace of Christ in Ephesians,” 22.

Ibid., 23.

Ibid., 24.

Ibid., 24.

Barth, “Conversion and Conversation,” 12 (commenting on Ephesians 2:11ff.).

Ephesians 2:14.

Rudolph, “Paul’s ‘Rule in all the Churches’ (1 Corinthians 7:17–24) and Torah-defined Ecclesiological Variegation,” CP8.


David J. Rudolph, A Jew to the Jews: Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

Barth, Conversion and Conversation, 6.


Ibid., 272.


Rick Brannan et al., eds., The Lexham English Septuagint (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2012).

E.g., Isaiah 22:11, 46:11 (Septuagint), aligning with Hebrew yasar.

E.g., Exodus 9:18 (Septuagint), aligning with Hebrew yasad. Lexham Analytical Lexicon to the Septuagint, κτίζω.


John 13:34; 1 John 2:7–8; 2 John 1:5.

Leviticus 19:18.

Chrysostom switched the order, stating that “the Jew is then united to the Gentile when he becomes a believer” (Schaff, ed., Saint Chrysostom, 73). This may have been incidental, but readers of Ephesians will note that it is not Israel that is joined to the Gentiles but rather that the Gentiles are joined to Israel. Paul taught the same principle to the congregations in Rome (see further down in this article).


73 Ephesians 2:19; compare Colossians 1:12.

74 E.g., Ephesians 2:12–13, 19–22.

75 Campbell, “Unity and Diversity in the Church,” 16.

76 Romans 11:13–24.


78 Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dr. Ryrie’s Articles* (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010), 72.

79 Ryrie, *Dr. Ryrie’s Articles*, 72.

80 Ephesians 2:14–16.

81 Lloyd-Jones, *God’s Way of Reconciliation*, 278.

82 Lloyd-Jones and others who oppose the continuation of Jew-Gentile distinction within the body of believers appeal to Galatians 3:28 and similar statements in the New Testament that I identified above as the “no distinction” texts. These require careful investigation as to the rhetoric Paul employed. Suffice it to say that Galatians contains strongly worded instructions to Gentile Jesus-believers to retain their non-Jewish identity, and Galatians 3:28 is hyperbole intended to stress the irrelevance of one’s social status *in comparison to* one’s standing in Christ, which eclipses the former.

83 Ephesians 2:13.


85 Campbell, *Unity and Diversity*, 15.


87 Romans 12:4–8; 1 Corinthians 12:12–30.

88 Campbell, *Unity and Diversity*, 19.


See Numbers 15:37–41; Deuteronomy 22:12.


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