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Foundations for a Harmonious Society in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

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Abstract: Paul's letter to the Ephesians provides a comprehensive framework for laying theoretical foundations for a harmonious society. This article first locates an epistemological basis for harmony in the revelation of God given in Scripture; then outlines Paul's understanding of ontology as it relates to social harmony. Finally, the ethical instructions in *Ephesians* for working out harmony in the family, church, and larger society are briefly described. A few comparisons with Confucius, another major proponent of social harmony, will be made during the course of the article.

Key words: harmonious society, epistemological basis, ontology, ethical instruction, comparison

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INTRODUCTION

Building a harmonious society is not just an urgent priority for the current Chinese government; nor is it only a long-held ideal for Chinese since the time of Confucius; it is also a universal human desire.

Over the centuries, Christians have found resources in the Bible for promoting social harmony; indeed, if you include the concept of brotherly love in your idea of social harmony, then you will see the profound connection between fundamental Christian doctrines and the longing which we all have for loving relationships with others.

As Ephesians 1:10 shows, Paul's letter to the Ephesians① focuses on social, even cosmic, unity, which is one word he uses to express the concept of "a harmonious society."② Indeed, the

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① For a variety of reasons, the Pauline authorship of Ephesians has been disputed. For a recent denial, see Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Dallas: Word, 1990). For a strong and, to me at least, convincing defense, see Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 37 - 47.

② For a brief commentary of Ephesians in Chinese, see my 新约中的保罗：得胜以弗所書精義. Pauline theology in general is well treated in Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986); Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975); and G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993). Morris and Ladd's books have been translated into Chinese.

future "summing up" of "all things" in Christ is the goal towards which this epistle constantly looks, so that this verse is the "pivotal statement," not just of the introductory passage,[3]but of the entire letter. As O'Brien puts it: "Cosmic reconciliation and unity in Christ are the central message of Paul's letter to the Ephesians."[4] Another term important in *Ephesians* is peace, which is mostly used objectively, as the state of reconciliation and therefore of ontological unity.[5]

Our study will move in the following direction:

First, the epistemological basis for Paul's proposal for universal peace (unity, harmony). Without a solid grounding in reliable truth, no plan for a harmonious society will be sustainable.

Second, the ontological basis for universal peace. Without a correct understanding of fundamental reality, including the true nature of man and woman, social harmony cannot be attained.

Finally, Paul's ethical teaching on social harmony. We shall examine:

The various spheres in which he urges his readers to strive for peace (i.e., family, workplace, church [a small society], and society), and the specific instructions for individuals in each sphere.

The motives for striving towards peace with others.

The obstacles to social harmony.

Power to overcome obstacles to harmony with others.

The role of peace with God in seeking social harmony

The eschatological framework for social harmony today.

Along the way, we shall briefly note a few comparisons and contrasts between Paul's program and key principles found in the *Analects* of Confucius.[6]

Ancient Greek and Roman philosophy had three categories: epistemology, ontology, and ethics. Western philosophy has general followed this pattern, and in that order.[7] First: Is there any truth? Can we know the truth? How can we know truth? What is the truth that we know? Second: What does this "truth" tell us about reality? The universe; "God" (or gods); mankind; ethical principles; other realities (such as spirits, etc.) Finally: Based on a knowledge of truth about reality, we build an ethical system that accords with reality.

Epistemology, then, forms the basis for all other thinking and action.

HARMONIOUS SOCIETY IN PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

Epistemology

Paul's writing, including his epistemology, flows from certain assumptions, which he does not try to prove. These include:

There is a God who has revealed himself. Like the rest of the Bible, Paul's letter to the Ephe-

③ T. Moritz, "Summing Up All Things: Religious Pluralism and Universalism in Ephesians," in *One God, One Lord*, eds. B. W. Winter and A. D. Clarke (Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1991), 96, quoted in O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 111, n. 96.

④ O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 58.

⑤ O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 193—195.

⑥ Since this paper is about Paul's thought, not that of Confucius, references to the latter will be confined to listing of passages in the Analects and a few other books on Confucianism and Christianity. For a detailed comparison of Confucius and Jesus, see my *Confucius and Christ* (孔丁與耶穌 簡稱 V.S. 聖哲對話錄). Ralph R. Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ: A History of the Gospel in Chinese* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986); includes such a comparison in his helpful survey of Christianity and Chinese cultural interactions.

⑦ See, for example, "philosophy," in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*: New Edition, ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 702.

sians assumes the existence of God, an all – powerful Creator who also governs the affairs of men and nations in a way that is wise and loving. [8] He refers to this God in a variety of ways, but most especially as the Father, uniquely of the Lord Jesus Christ and of his people as they are related to Christ by faith. [9]

This God has not remained hidden, but has disclosed vital information about himself and his will for mankind. [10] Of course, such information is meant to serve not only as mere data to be known, but as the ground and content of a vital relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. [11] As Creator of the world, God possesses the right to reveal his will and ways to whom he chooses, and at the times and in the manners of his sovereign choice. [12]

Paul says that God has disclosed to his chosen apostles and prophets information about human salvation that no one else has been privileged to know; [13] that he is one of these chosen recipients of revelation; [14] and that the special insight that was given to him concerns the union of people of all sorts with each other through faith in Christ. [15]

God's revelation has come by the work of his Spirit to chosen spokesmen, [16] and is recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures [17]; the Old Testament culminates in the revelation of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ; and, as we have said, we know this through the revelation given to Christ's chosen apostles, of whom Paul was one. The intimate connection between the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament shows up in many ways in Ephesians, perhaps not least in the varieties of images and metaphors used, as well as titles for God and for Christ, that come straight from the pages of the Old Testament.

A few examples would include such words and concepts as: redemption, [18] sin, [19] salvation, [20] temple, [21] praising God, [22] prayer, [23] sacrifice, [24] Law of God, [25] covenant(s), [26] faith, [27] and many more.

This idea of special revelation as the only authoritative source of accurate knowledge about essential truth differs from: rationalism; empiricism; pure intuition; traditional myths and stories. We

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[8] Ephesians 1:1, 4, 11, 19, 22; 2:4, 7; etc.

[9] Ephesians 1:1, 2, 3, 5, 17, and often.

[10] Ephesians 1:9; 3:2 3.

[11] Ephesians 1:13, 15, and often.

[12] Ephesians 3:5, 9.

[13] Ephesians 3:5.

[14] Ephesians 1:1; 3:4, 7, 9.

[15] Ephesians 3:3 – 5, 6.

[16] Ephesians 3:5

[17] Romans 1:1 – 2; 10:11, 16; 1 Corinthians 15:3 4; etc.

[18] Ephesians 1:7.

[19] Ephesians1:7; 2:1.

[20] Ephesians 1:13; 2:5; 5:23.

[21] Ephesians 2:21.

[22] Ephesians 1:3 14.

[23] Ephesians 1:16 ff.; 3:14 – 21; 6:18 – 19.

[24] Ephesians 5:2.

[25] Ephesians 2:15.

[26] Ephesians 2:12.

[27] Ephesians 1:13, 15

can readily discern differences with Confucius' *Analects*, as well as similarities.[58] On the one hand, Confucius does seem to believe that Heaven has granted him some sort of special knowledge;[59] on the other he seems to rely much more on historical tradition[60] and on careful observation of human experience.[61] He is quite modest about his own knowledge.[62]

God's revelation accords with reason, human experience, and our conscience, and it can be known by all those who seek for truth and trust in God's Son Jesus.[63] The central term "mystery" does not refer to an esoteric doctrine hidden deep in God, but an openly – disclosed wonder to be received with faith and spread abroad to the whole world.[64] Indeed, as we shall see, both the nature of the mystery and the wide propagation of it are core elements of Paul's view of harmonious society.

Ontology

On the foundation of this doctrine of knowledge, Paul builds his doctrine of reality; the fundamental nature and structure of all that exists.[65] Very briefly, we can say that Paul believes in the reality of God, as we have seen; the spirit world;[66] the created order;[67] mankind[68]. He also thinks of time as past, present, and future, including an eternal future.[69]

Like the rest of the Bible, in Ephesians we see that there is a God; He is one,[70] holy,[71] just (righteous),[72] loving,[73] wise/intelligent,[74] personal,[75] and, indeed, "social." As Father, Son,

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[58] For a comparison and contrast of Confucius and Jesus, see Xinzhong Yu, *Confucianism and Christianity: A Comparative Study of Jen and Agape* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1996), 53 – 66. For a broader comparison, see: Julia Ching, *Confucianism & Christianity: A Comparative Study* (New York: Kodansha International, 1977).

[59] Analects, 7.22 (23). See also 14.35. Passages from the Analects are cited from the English translation by Chichung Huang, *The Analects of Confucius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), the book and chapter numbers may vary some from other editions. In this citation, the other citation follows in parentheses.

[60] Among countless passages see, for example, Analects 7:17; 8:8, 11, 18.

[61] E.g., Analects 9:18; 15:13.

[62] See, for example, Analects 9:8.

[63] The late Carl Henry expounded this at great length, especially in *God, Revelation, & Authority*. For a brief treatment of his doctrine of revelation, see G. Wright Doyle, *Carl Henry: Theologian for All Seasons* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 51 – 61

[64] Ephesians 1:9 – 10; 3:1 – 10; O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 108 – 110.

[65] For a comparison of Christian and New Confucian ontology, see Grant Claus, *The Concept of Ultimate Reality in Tu Wei – ming and Cheng Cheng – yin: A Comparative Study of New Confucian and Christian Understandings*, Unpublished dissertation for Trinity International University, Deerfield, Illinois, 2002.

[66] Ephesians 1:3, 21

[67] Ephesians 1:4, 3:9.

[68] Ephesians 1:1; 3:5.

[69] Ephesians 1:4, 10, 21; 3:5.

[70] Ephesians 1:6.

[71] Ephesians 1:4, 4:24.

[72] Ephesians 5:9; Romans 2:26; see also passages in Ephesians which speak of God's judgment/punishment of wickedness, such as 2:2 – 3; 5:5 – 10.

[73] Ephesians 1:4; 2:4; 5:1 – 2.

[74] Ephesians 1:8, 11, 17.

[75] God's personality permeates all of Paul's references to Father, Son, and even Holy Spirit, who can be "grieved" (Ephesians 4:30)

and Holy Spirit, this God has always enjoyed within himself a "harmonious society."[45] As the hymn says, they are a "trinity of love and power." To take only one example, the Son of God is "his beloved".[46]

Confucius seemed also to have believed in some superior being, called Heaven (*Tian*), who seems to have some personal characteristics, such as understanding and will.[47] He does not present a well-developed concept of a supreme being, however, since he realized that he could not know much about things that are not seen.[48] Still, Heaven was assumed to be just and righteous.[49]

With Paul, as in the rest of the Bible, the universe is created by God; it is not self-existent; nor is it radically contingent on anything except the ongoing governance of its Creator.[50] Paul would not accept the Buddhist conception of the world as illusion; or the materialist view that all of reality is contained in the visible world. This has huge implications for our concept of how to build a harmonious society.

Men and women are created by God, in his image.[51] They are thus of great value, and have the potential to know God, love God, and imitate God's moral qualities.[52] Which is to say, we are not only animals, but human beings with a mind and a spirit.[53] We have bodies,[54] and we have a soul.[55] Both are important to God, but Paul would agree with Jesus that the salvation of the soul in this life is necessary for the salvation of both soul and body for all eternity.[56]

Confucius, too, would have valued human life, and he acknowledge an inner, unseen dimension to human nature. We are not just bodies, but we possess ethical and aesthetic sensibilities which must be honored and followed. All of his comments dealing with the moral life demonstrate this conviction of his.

But to continue with Paul there is also a principle of evil in the universe, whose origin remains a mystery. This wickedness is personified in an evil being, Satan, who opposes God's purposes.[57] Long ago, he deceived our original parents into disobedience towards God and disregard of each other's dignity and well-being.[58] As a result, all people are now radically affected by "sin," which is any lack of conformity to God's character and will.[59] As a result, they are unable to love

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[45] Both explicit and implicit references to the Trinity are found in several passages, including Ephesians 1:2, 3, 13, 17; 2:18; 3:14, 16, 20–21; 4:4–6; etc.

[46] Ephesians 1:6.

[47] See, for example, Analects 6.28; 14.35. See also Ching, 112–120; and Yao, 57–60, 76–78, and elsewhere.

[48] As one of his disciples said, "The Master's cultural accomplishments—we get to hear them, but the Master's ideas on human nature and the Way of Heaven—we hardly get to hear them" (Analects 5.13). See also 7.20; 11.12.

[49] See, for example, Analects 8.19.

[50] Ephesians 1:4, 11, 20–22; 3:9.

[51] Ephesians 4:24; though this verse refers to re-creation in Christ, it implies an original creation in the image of God.

[52] See, for example, Ephesians 1:17–18; 3:8, 16–19; 4:32–5:2; 5:17.

[53] The "heart" is also considered to be an organ of knowledge. For the interior composition of humans, see Ephesians 1:17–18; 2:3; 4:17–23.

[54] Ephesians 5:28–29.

[55] Ephesians 6:6, and all other passages referring to the immaterial part of the human person.

[56] Ephesians 1:18; 2:7; 5:5; Matthew 10:28.

[57] Ephesians 2:2; 6:12.

[58] 1 Timothy 2:14; Genesis 3:1–19.

[59] Ephesians 2:1–3; 4:17–19; 5:8

God or each other. [60]

All social conflict and dis – harmony results from this fundamental human condition; thus, all efforts to create social harmony without addressing "sin" will not succeed.

As we all know, this view of the fallenness of human nature does not accord with Confucius' more optimistic outlook. His travels and teachings were not without deep disappointment, but he labored on, convinced that people could be instructed and encouraged to improve themselves.

Soteriology

At this point, Christianity introduces a new category: A teaching about salvation. Precisely because we cannot change ourselves enough to live in harmony with others; and even more because we cannot reform ourselves enough to fulfill God's requirement of moral perfection, but are, instead, destined for his righteous wrath, [62] God must intervene to rescue us from our desperate plight.

The gospel which Paul so gladly proclaims announces that God has done all that is necessary to solve our two fundamental problems: alienation from himself [63] and from each other. [64] Jesus has died as a propitiation for our sins; through his shed blood we have redemption, that is, forgiveness. [65] Those who trust in Christ receive the Holy Spirit, so that now they have ready access at all times to God the Father. [66] They can praise him, thank him, and pray to him, calling upon him for wisdom and strength to know and do his will. [67]

Furthermore, believers in Christ enjoy a fundamental security about the future. They trust that they will be raised up on the last day to enjoy unbroken joy with God forever. This world is not ultimate; they are delivered from that fear of death that holds all of us in bondage. The resurrection of Jesus and the possession of the Holy Spirit assure Christians that they are destined for an inheritance that can never be snatched from them. [68] Christians know that they are fully and fundamentally loved and accepted by the most important personage in the universe God who has made them his beloved sons and daughters in Christ. [69]

Our second problem has also been solved, and in two ways: First, on the deepest level, one that is now really ontological, we are united with all those who trust in Christ. Paul uses powerful metaphors for this new and very real union: the Body of Christ; the family of God; a temple; a commonwealth. [70] This unity exists already, and is grounded in the eternal unity which we can call an eternal "harmonious society" of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. [71]

To enjoy, and to realize on earth what is already ours in the spiritual realm, believers have the very power of God himself, given by the indwelling of Christ through the Holy Spirit, so that they

[60] Such radical moral impotence is expressed by such concepts as being "dead" in sin (2:1, 5); "darkened" in our understanding (4:18); and depraved in conduct (4:19).

[62] Ephesians 2:3, 12; 5:6.

[63] Ephesians 2:3, 12, 13.

[64] Ephesians 2:11 – 12, 14 – 15, 19.

[65] Ephesians 1:7, 2:13, 16, 5:25 26.

[66] Ephesians 1:13 14; 2:18; etc.

[67] Ephesians 1:3; 3:14 – 21; 5:18; 6:18 – 19.

[68] Ephesians 1:11, 13, 14, 18, 20 – 23; 2:7; 3:6.

[69] Ephesians 1:5; 3:14, 15, 19; 5:1.

[70] Ephesians 1:22 23; 2:13 22; 3:6; 4:13 16.

[71] Ephesians 4:1 6

can live the life to which they were called, in imitation of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. [72] The church itself forms the primary locus and focus of this new harmonious society. [73]

A key part of all this is our union with Christ, expressed most often by the prepositional phrase "in Christ" (or, "in him/whom"). [74] Through faith in him and the gift of his Holy Spirit to us, we are united in Christ. [75] In some mysterious fashion, we are identified with Christ in God's sight, so that we are righteous and holy and beloved. [76] As we are in him, we are thus also in each other in some fundamental sense. Our unity is not just a subjective one, but an objective reality in the spiritual realm, which is no less real than the physical world. Notice how my times Paul uses the phrase "in him," "in Christ" etc. just in the first paragraph of the letter. [77] The metaphor of the Body of Christ, with him as our head, also conveys this idea most dramatically. [78]

There are many implications to our being united with God and with each other in Christ. One is that we are not in this status because of our own worth or achievement or performance, but solely by virtue of the person and work of Christ on our behalf, communicated to us by what Paul calls God's grace. [79] Another is that our unity with each other is not based upon any common features which we share or which we produce, but solely upon our incorporation into Christ through election, faith, the Holy Spirit, and baptism. [80] Thus, our unity is assured and unshakeable; as long as we trust in him we can be united in love.

As many have observed, the presence of a doctrine of salvation in Christianity, forming as it does an essential basis for Christian ethics, stands in stark contrast to the teaching of Confucius, who emphasized self-improvement rather than salvation by a higher power. [81]

Ethics

Finally, we are ready to turn to the practical implications of Paul's epistemology, ontology, and soteriology to the building of a harmonious society on earth.

The Various Spheres in which He Urges His Readers to Strive for Peace

Paul begins the second part of his letter, with its detailed instructions for daily living, by urging believers to live in harmony with each other, "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the

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[72] Ephesians 1:19; 3:20; 5:1-2,18; 6:10.

[73] Ephesians 3:10; 4:1-32.

[74] Ephesians 1:3, 4, 6, 7, and often. The centrality of union with Christ in Pauline thought was brought out long ago by James Stewart, *A Man In Christ: The Vital Elements of St. Paul's Religion* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, n.d.)

[75] Ephesians 1:1, 12-13, 15; 2:8, 18-22.

[76] Called "saints" - holy ones, for example: Ephesians 1:1, 15; 5:1.

[77] See note 63.

[78] Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4, 12,16, 25; 5:23.

[79] Ephesians 2:5, 8.

[80] Ephesians 1:4, 5, 12, 13, 15; 5:26.

[81] On this, see Yao, *Confucianism and Christianity*, 15-17, 22, 24, 35, 40, 43, 100, 64; and especially Paulos Huang, *Confronting Confucian Understandings of the Christian Doctrine of Salvation—A Systematic Theological Analysis of the Basic Problems in the Confucian-Christian dialogue* (Helsinki, Finland: Edita Prima Oy, 2006); (The revised English version was republished by E. J. Brill and the Chinese version by Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe)

bond of peace". [62] He notes that each person in the church is different, but shows that these distinctions are meant to complement each other, like the parts of a body. As each person fulfills his or her role, the entire body is built up in maturity and Christ – likeness. [63]

For that to happen, of course, love is required at all times. [64] Harmony in human relationships depends not only on love, however, but upon truth. The two must work together in harmony if genuine peace is to be achieved. Truth must be spoken in love, but it must be spoken. [65]

Confucius also emphasized the critical importance of both love, which he called *ren*, [66] and sincerity, seen especially in honest communication. [67] Of course, there are differences between his view and Paul's, but at least they would have agreed in the need for both kindness and frankness in speech. [68]

Since covetousness and lust fight against contentment and love, Paul spends considerable space urging his readers to forsake the passions which drive us to get rather than to give, to use others rather than serving them. [69] Rather than seeking satisfaction through pleasure or possessions, we are to be content with God gives us and constantly filled with his Holy Spirit, who gives us genuine joy. [70]

Now Paul turns to the family. Husbands and wives are bound together as one unit, which the Bible has from the beginning termed "one flesh." They are thus to submit to each other out of reference for Christ, their common Savior and Lord. Within that mutual submission, the wife is to respect and submit to her husband, while the husband is to love his wife sacrificially, as Christ does the church. [71]

Confucius says virtually nothing about marriage, so we must be careful not to build an argument from silence, but at the very least it would seem that the relationship between husband and wife, and in particular the duty of the husband to sacrifice for his wife, grounded in the relationship between Christ and the church, represents an emphasis largely absent from Confucius' teaching. [72]

Children must obey their parents; but parents should not provoke their children to anger by unnecessary harshness, but train them and teach them according to the revelation of Christ. [73] Though these instructions have been taken by many Chinese Christians to be identical with the Confucian concept of filial piety (*xiao*), and though there are of course profound similarities, in practice it seems that Confucius' teaching emphasized the duty of submission more than the reciprocal duty of fathers to be kind and gentle. [74]

[62] Ephesians 4:2 – 3.

[63] Ephesians 4:11 – 16.

[64] Ephesians 4:16.

[65] Ephesians 4:15, 24 – 32.

[66] Analects, 12:22, where it is defined as "loving men." See also12:1; 12:3; 6:22; 17:5; 6:30.

[67] Analects, 1.4, 13; 2.22; 7.24.

[68] For a detailed examination of the similarities and differences between Confucius and Jesus on this subject, see: Yao's *Confucianism and Christianity*, as well as Ching, 68 – 104.

[69] Ephesians 5:3 – 18.

[70] Ephesians 5:18.

[71] Ephesians 5:22 – 33.

[72] This is granted by Yao, 204. In the Analects, I could find only two passages on close relations with women, apart from immoral sexual relations: 17.24; 14.2. Neither of them offers positive teaching about marriage.

[73] Ephesians 6:1 – 4.

[74] Analects 1.2, 6, 7, 11; 2.5; and often. See also Ching, 97 – 99.

In the workplace, masters and slaves (who represent in our society employers and employees, teachers and students, etc.) have complementary responsibilities. Those under authority should work heartily, as if they were serving Christ himself. Those in authority should treat those under them with fairness, remembering that they too have a Master in heaven, and he will reward each person according to what we have done.[65]

At this point, allow me to reach back into an earlier section of the letter, in which Paul tells his readers not only not to steal, but to work with their hands, so that they might have surplus funds to give to those in need.[66] Since the disparity of income between rich and poor is a source of much discontent in China, this principle of earning money in order to give, not to spend on oneself, is a refreshing antidote to greed and selfishness. If applied, it could diminish the resentment often felt by those at the bottom of the income scale.

Though Paul does not talk in Ephesians about the roles of citizens and rulers, he does so in other places, such as Romans 13:1 – 7 and Titus 3:1 – 2, 8. From these passages, as well as from Paul's own example has we have it recorded in his letters and in the Acts of the Apostles, we know that he intended for believers to submit to government authority; to be kind and gentle to all people; and to engage in good and useful activities that would benefit society as a whole.

The Central Role of the Church

At this point, we should pause to reflect on the central role of the church in Paul's teaching about harmonious society. Most of his instructions deal with relationships among believers in Christ, though of course he speaks also of our obligations to those outside the circle of faith. Christian history teaches us that when followers of Christ begin to put into practice the ethical values of Christ and his apostles, their common life starts to express a kind of harmony and peace not usually found in society as a whole. As outsiders observe how Christians love one another, they are affected, and some, even if they do not come to faith in Christ, try to emulate the sacrificial service and humility that they have seen between Christians. We can also say that those who have been trained, as it were, in their families and churches can then replicate loving and honest behavior in their dealings with non – Christians, and thus act as "salt and light" in the world. The recent series of books by that title gives many examples of Christians who have made a significant contribution to their nation as a result of some contact with Christianity.

These instructions, if followed by Christians, would do a great deal to promote harmony in all domains of society — the home, the workplace, and the wider community. For Paul, as I have said, the primary locus and focus for harmonious living is within the body of believers, where the love of Christ and the truth that God has revealed can created an orderly and yet warm and caring environment for people to flourish.

Obviously, the closest correspondence between Paul's teaching and that of Confucius will be found in this area of ethics. The virtues of righteousness (*yi*)[67]; honesty (*cheng*) and sincere loyalty (*zhong xin*)[68]; filial piety (*xiao*); love and forgiveness (*ren*, *shu*); and respectful courtesy

[65] Ephesians 6:5 – 9.

[66] 4:28.

[67] Analects 4.10; 17.22; see also other passages which indirectly describe righteous conduct, such as 2.24; 17.7; as well as the concept of the moral way (*dao* — See Analects 1.2; 15.24; 1.12; 19.22) and virtue (*de* — See Analects 7.22; 12.19; 19.11).

[68] Analects 1.4, 8, 13, and often

(*li*)[89] would be understood and appreciated by the apostle. The epistemological and ontological basis for Paul's system, as well as his eschatological perspective (which we shall discuss below) would be foreign to the great teacher of ancient China, but he would recognize certain similarities between his program and that of Paul.

Differences there are, of course. Confucius' doctrine of *li* involves much more attention to ceremony and ritual than does Paul's simple call for humility, respect, and gentleness in dealing with others, but there is no reason that the apostle would object to the expression of our courtesy in outward acts of the sort which Confucius valued so highly.[90] In fact, many of us from the West greatly admire Eastern manners and forms of polite deference; our brash and brazen self – promotion – I speak as an American here – finds much to learn from what may be merely ritualized habits, but which nevertheless put a brake on our presumption and cause us, however briefly, to slow down and demonstrate at least some consideration for the feelings and even the "face" of others.

The Motives for Striving towards Peace with Others

Why should Christians pursue harmonious relationships with others? What motivating power does Paul's message possess? Without going into much detail, we can note a few of the reasons he gives for acting lovingly towards other people.

We are called to walk "worthy of [our] call".[91] When God created mankind, he did so in his own image, which is one of holiness and righteousness based upon truth.[92] Indeed, he plans for his people to be holy and blameless, like himself.[93] Christ died for the church in order to make her holy and spotless.[94] When believers turn away from lust, selfishness, and pride, and pursue justice and generosity, therefore, they are merely living up to their original purpose and final destiny.

Furthermore, when children of God demonstrate forgiveness towards those who have hurt them, they are reflecting the pardon which God has extended towards them in Christ.[95] Self – sacrificial service of others replicates the action of Jesus upon the Cross.[96] For God's people to imitate him is a natural response to his kindness towards them. Perhaps it could be seen as a type of a proper "return" for grace (*bao en*).

Finally, Christians can look forward to a future reward from God for any good deeds they have performed, even if on earth there is none.[97]

These motives differ from those offered by Confucius, who seemed to believe, along with the Stoics, that right conduct should be practiced for its own sake, to fulfill one's moral purpose, without regard to any future reward, other than the obvious social benefits and personal satisfaction over having done what is good and the knowledge that one is leaving "" behind the great treasure to later

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[89] Analects 1.9, 12; 2.3; 3.1, 4; 3.12,15, 17, 18; 6.27; 7.17; 8.2; and many other places.

[90] On li, see Ching, 168 – 176.

[91] Ephesians 4:1.

[92] Ephesians 4:24.

[93] Ephesians 1:4.

[94] Ephesians 5:26.

[95] Ephesians 4:32 – 5:1.

[96] Ephesians 5:2, 25.

[97] Ephesians 6:8. In this, of course, he was only following the lead of Jesus. See, for example, Matthew 5:5, 12.

generations, by which one has transcended one's limitation and reached the eternal."[66] We infer this from the absence of any concept of future personal rewards from *Tian* in his ethical instruction. The following discussion will also feature elements of Paul's ethical program that are not found in the teaching of Confucius.

The Obstacles to Social Harmony

Of course, achieving harmonious relationships with others will never be easy. As we saw before, all people are in bondage to sin, the structures and patterns of this world, and even the deception of Satan.[67] Even believers in Christ struggle still with what Paul calls the "old self" (4:22). We see vestiges of this "old man" in the racial prejudice, class consciousness, gender conflicts, and will to power, prestige, and possessions with which we all contend in ourselves and in others every day.

Power to Overcome Obstacles to Harmony with Others

For this reason, Paul provides guidelines for conducting ourselves like "children of light" in a morally dark world. We are to renounce the old ways; allow our minds to be transformed by meditation upon, belief in, and obedience to, the truth; and call upon God's strength in prayer, if we are to overcome both our own inborn tendencies towards self-centered living and the lies of the devil.[68] Paul believes that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead can energize his followers to do the good works he has prepared for them to perform,[69] we they will only turn to him at all times in prayer.[70]

We must not underestimate the strategic importance of changed mental attitudes.[71] If know that God loves me, I do not have to earn the love of others. He has given me all that I need; I do not have to trample on other people in order to get what I want. Secure in the knowledge that I shall one day inherit a new heaven and a new earth, I do not have to put all my energy or focus all my hopes and fears on the fleeting things of this transitory life. Aware that I am fundamentally flawed, I shall treat others with the humility and respect they deserve and that merely reflects my own true condition.[72] And so forth. Changed minds lead to transformed lives.

The Role of Peace with God in Seeking Social Harmony

Clearly, then, our own sense of peace with God must precede our attempts to live peacefully with others. Forgiven, I can forgive. Accepted, I can accept others. Supremely valuable to God, I can acknowledge the inherent worth of everyone around me, and especially the priceless worth of those who have been bought with the blood of Christ. Having a loving master in heaven, I can serve

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[66] Yan, 172. For Stoic ethics, see J. C. Thom, "Stoicism. 2.2 Ethics," in eds. Craig A. Evans & Stanley E. Porter, *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 1140-41.

[67] Ephesians 2:1-3.

[68] Ephesians 4:17-24; 6:10-18.

[69] Ephesians 1:19-22; 2:5-10.

[70] Ephesians 6:18.

[71] Ephesians 4:17-24.

[72] Ephesians 4:32.

my earthly masters cheerfully, and can treat those under my care in the same way that the Lord deals with me. When confronted with intractable situations, I can turn to God in prayer, trusting that his resurrection power can change the present unhappy situation or alter my perception of it and response to it.

The Eschatological Framework for Social Harmony Today

All this implies an eschatological perspective.[69] Paul believes that God will someday unite "all things" under the headship of the risen Lord Jesus Christ.[70] Even though Satan provokes us to embrace wrong values that engender conflict, God's purposes will prevail in the end. Our inheritance is secure. Though seen only vaguely now, the fundamental unity which God's people enjoy with him and with each other will one day become fully manifest, indeed gloriously so.[71]

There is a dark side to this final future, however. The "children of disobedience," if they do not repent and turn to Christ in faith and obedience, will not only not receive any share in the kingdom of God and of Christ, but will be treated as "children of wrath".[72]

Actually, this is a stark reminder that all our efforts to build a harmonious society on earth in this age will be bounded by not only our finiteness but also our fallenness and that of others. There will be no "peace on earth" until the Prince of Peace returns to establish a "new heavens and new earth, in which righteousness dwells".[73] This brutal reality need not discourage us from pressing on in a zealous attempt to fulfill the commands of God and of Christ, but it does inject a note of sober realism that we must accept.

Meanwhile, however, we do not lose hope. Christ has died; Christ has risen; Christ will come again. The Father has given us the Spirit of his Son to indwell us, flood us with his own boundless love, and impel us into the world with a passion that seeks substantial healing of the wounds of this sorrowful world; that creates a community reflecting the eternal harmonious society of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in a limited but very real way; and that rejoices in the hope of a final consummation in which all dissonance will find its ultimate harmonious resolution in the triumphant kingdom of Jesus Christ, who is our Peace.[74]

[69] For the relationship of eschatology to ethics in Paul, see Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids; Zondervan, 1986), 86 - 90; and Herman Ridderbos, *Paul; An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1975), 551 - 562. Both of these volumes, though from a previous generation, possess lasting value as excellent treatments of Paul's theology.

[70] Ephesians 1:10. Interpreters are divided on the meaning of this phrase, whether it includes all people who have been born into the world; all creatures, including angels, demons, and even Satan; or only the elect angels and those humans who have believed in Christ. The last seems more likely in light of such passages as 2:3 and 5:5, as well as many similar statements elsewhere in Paul.

[71] Ephesians 5:26 - 27.

[72] Ephesians 2:2, 3; 5:5,6.

[73] 2 Peter 3:13.

[74] Ephesians 2:14

中文题目：

保罗以弗所书中和谐社会的根基

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提要：保罗的《以弗所书》为和谐社会提供了一个全面的理论基础。本文首先探讨了圣经的上帝启示中关于和谐的认识论根基，其次阐述了与和谐社会相关时保罗对本体论的理解，最后简单描述了《以弗所书》中关于如何在家庭、教会和更大的社会范围内获得和谐的伦理教导。在行文过程中，笔者还把保罗与社会和谐的波及倡导者孔子的思想进行了一些比较。

关键词：和谐社会、认识论基础、本体论、伦理教导、比较