

The Household of God

Ephesians 2:19-22

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So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. – Ephesians 2:19-22, ESV

Introduction: What Good is the Church?

Have you ever asked yourself, “What good is the church? What purpose or function does it serve in our Christian lives, really?”

As we come to the closing paragraph of Ephesians 2, we come to the conclusion of the thought Paul has been developing since verse 11. We can tell that verse 19 reflects back on the language of verses 11 and 12 and makes this section the conclusion of the whole second half of the chapter. We can also tell because Paul begins verse 19 with “So then . . .” indicating the conclusion of his train of thought.

Over the past several weeks, we have seen in Ephesians 2 that in Christ, by God’s grace, through the work of the Holy Spirit, we are brought from spiritual death to new life in Christ, from being children of wrath to being children of God, from being far off and without God in the world to being brought near and given access to God as our Heavenly Father. We have seen wonderful, breath-taking, soul-stirring truths of the greatness of God’s grace in our salvation.

The things we have seen are true of each individual believer in Jesus. God’s Holy Spirit works this great salvation in the hearts, souls and lives of every individual child of God. We have each personally been brought to life and been brought near. We have each individually been granted forgiveness, salvation, reconciliation and access.

And so we might ask, “If we have truly, personally received such a great salvation, then why do we need the church?” Yes, we have seen language that indicates a corporate aspect to our salvation, that God has broken down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile and has made us one new man in Christ, that He has made peace between believers as well as between believers and God, but honestly, if we’ve received such a great personal salvation from the Lord, what good is the church?

The church, after all, is full of weak, sinful human beings who disappoint and hurt us on a regular basis. The church has a spotty track record of being driven by human political agendas and colored by our cultural biases and prejudices. The best churches are places where you're almost guaranteed to be disappointed and hurt, so what good is the church?

Well, in Paul's conclusion in verses 19-22, he says much about the eternal, glorious value of the church and of our place in it. It's surprising and wonderful and well worth our close and careful consideration.

I. The Members of the Household of God

Paul begins by emphasizing what we are no longer, in language that echoes back to verse 12. In verse 12, Paul had said, *"remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."* Now, in verse 19 he says, *"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God."*

This verse fits well with Paul's pattern in Ephesians 2: You were once, but now you are. In this case, he states it negatively: You are no longer strangers and aliens. Now this has personal significance for our relationship to God's covenants of promise, but it also has profound significance to our relationship to the church. If you come in among God's people as a redeemed believer in Jesus Christ, you should not feel like an alien or a stranger. You should not intentionally remain an alien or a stranger.

Paul uses two words here, both of which describe a foreigner in the land. The first word is simply the word for foreigner or non-native and the second indicates a foreigner or a non-native who is living in the land but is not a citizen. For the first word, we could think of a tourist or a very temporary resident, maybe someone staying for a few weeks on vacation, while the second word indicates someone who lives in the land more-or-less permanently but still without the benefits of citizenship.

Does one of these two words describe your relationship with the household of God? Are you a tourist in church, just visiting for a little while but not thinking of yourself as belonging? Or are you one who has taken up residence but without citizenship?

Paul wants us to know that if we are children of God who belong to Jesus Christ, then we are no longer foreign visitors or resident aliens. We are, in fact, fellow citizens with the saints. We are, in fact, members of the household of God.

The two positive terms Paul uses to describe us both have the strong sense of belonging with privileges:

1. **We are fellow citizens with the saints.** This is a political term which refers to the kingdom of God and probably has reference back to the negative “alienated from the commonwealth of Israel,” which is similar political/civil language. In verse 12, he had literally said, we were “away from citizenship in the citizenship of Israel.” Here we are literally “together-citizens” with the saints. The “saints” here is a reference to all of the people of God, from the beginning of creation until now. All of the redeemed people of God from righteous Abel to the person who was just saved in the past minute are all saints and all have a common citizenship in God’s heavenly kingdom. Israel was the geo-political expression of this kingdom for a long period of time, and the church is now the earthly manifestation of this kingdom.

In Philippians 3:20, Paul reminds the Philippian believers, *“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”*

2. **We are members of the household of God.** This is much more intimate family language. Here we are not just citizens of a kingdom, but we are also members of a family, of a household. The “household” would have been all the family members who lived together in the same house under the authority of the head of the household, who was responsible for their provision and protection, for their education and their spiritual lives. Timothy 5:18 gives us an interesting insight into what it means to belong to a household: *“But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”*

It was unthinkable that a professing Christian would neglect to provide for the members of his household. Even an unbeliever would not do that. And failing to provide for your household was considered to be a denial of the faith. Why? Because God the Father provides for the members of His household absolutely and never fails to provide what is ultimately and eternally best for us. Earthly Christian fathers are called to imitate the Heavenly Father’s provision for His household, just as earthly Christian husbands are called to imitate Christ’s love for the church in their sacrificial love of their wives.

For us, as members of God’s household, we can know with confidence that our Heavenly Father will provide for and protect all the members of His household, including us.

II. The Structure of the Household of God

From the phrase “household of God,” Paul turns to house-building and then specifically to Temple-building, in an explanation of how God builds His house and what purpose it serves.

a. The Foundation

The first thing Paul says about the household of God is that it is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. This is a reference to the New Testament offices of Apostle and prophet, which are named in Ephesians 4:11 as the first two offices given to the church: “*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,*” We’ll deal more specifically with all five of these offices when we get to this text in early February (Lord willing), but for now, we can see that the first two offices named in Ephesians 4:11 are the same two offices identified as being the foundation of the household of God in Ephesians 2:20.

Apostle and prophet are thus identified as “foundational” offices, meaning that these are special offices God gave to the church for the purpose of forming the foundation of the church. Apostles are those called and commissioned by Christ with His authority to go out and carry the Gospel to the nations. They had an unequalled authority based on their position as eye-witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus who were specifically set aside and commissioned to the apostolic ministry. The word “apostle” means “sent one,” and so the Apostles were special ambassadors for Christ, representing Him personally during the foundational age of the church.

The prophets were those in the early New Testament church who received revelation from God about Christ for the church. There seem to have been two different forms in which prophecy came to the early church. Sometimes it came to the church through prophets and sometimes it came through those who spoke in tongues and those who interpreted the tongues. Thus prophecy and tongues are referred to as the revelatory gifts.

In 1 Corinthians 13:8, Paul says, “*Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease*” (ESV) So Paul identifies the offices of apostle and prophet as the foundation of the church. Why? Because the apostles and prophets received revelation from God that explained and applied the Gospel to the church.

Today, we have the teachings of the apostles and prophets in the form of the New Testament. As foundational gifts, these offices gave us a solid foundation of the church, one that does not

need to be laid again and cannot be repeated. After all, a building doesn't have multiple foundations.

b. The Cornerstone

At the corner of a building in the ancient world, the first and most important stone laid was the cornerstone, which became the alignment and standard for the rest of the foundation and thus the rest of the building. The cornerstone had to be perfectly square and had to be laid perfectly.

Paul says that Christ Himself – again using the emphatic reflective pronoun “Himself” – “*Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.*” The church has the most perfect Cornerstone possible in the Lord Jesus!

But here we leave the normal building metaphors of the ancient world behind and the building becomes a living, growing entity, because in Christ Himself as the cornerstone “*the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.*” So Christ is not only the perfect cornerstone that provides the alignment for the foundation, but He also is the One in whom the whole building- the whole church, the whole household of God- is joined together and grows.

So we see two things about the church in relation to Christ – we are joined together or fitted together in Him and we grow in Him. J. Armitage Robinson, in his commentary on Ephesians, explains that the word translated “joined together” refers to the whole construction process “by which stones are fitted together: the preparation of the surfaces, including the cutting, rubbing and testing; the preparation of the dowels and the dowel holes, and finally the fitting of the dowels with molten lead.” You can imagine that the process of being fitted together was probably not an entirely pleasant one for the stones as rough edges had to be smoothed, parts that didn't fit into the whole had to be removed with violent blows from the chisel and holes had to be drilled into the stones – all so that each stone would fit well in its intended place.

But Christ does something for His building and its stones that ancient stonemasons could not do: He causes us to grow. Sometimes we're too small, too lacking, and Christ grows us where we need to grow.

Together these two actions of being joined together and growing speak of all of the ways in which Christ prepares His church and the people within His church for their final destiny. He knocks away the sin and rough edges in our lives and He grows us up in Himself.

III. The Purpose of the Household of God

What is Christ thus shaping and growing His church into? What is the purpose of the household of God? It is to be a holy temple in the Lord. The word “Lord” here in verse 21 refers to the Lord Jesus and again reflects that all of this activity of being made into a holy Temple is being done in Christ.

Verse 22 then makes it clear what the purpose a holy temple is, in case we didn’t know: *“In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”*

By His Holy Spirit, God is building us together in the church into a dwelling place for God. This kind of language in Ephesians 2 makes it clear that the church’s purpose is much bigger and more eternal in nature than the life of local churches here on earth. But the church’s eternal purpose is not disconnected from the local churches. The “household of God,” the “holy Temple in the Lord,” the “dwelling place for God” is not an earthly, local, time-bound entity, but is rather an eternal and heavenly reality that God is in the process of creating. Local, earthly churches are like mission outposts of this eternal, heavenly household Temple.

This eternal household of God is the “catholic” church we refer to in our creeds, which has visible manifestations in this world, but remains itself invisible to us. Here’s how the Westminster Confession of Faith describes this church in Chapter 25: **“The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of Him that fills all in all.”**

And then the Westminster Confession distinguishes the visible, world-wide church: **“The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.”**

Yet we should not think of the invisible church and the visible church as two different churches, but as two aspects of the same church. The key difference is that not everyone who is in the visible church is, in fact, in the invisible church. The visible church has a form of outward, visible unity bound by our profession of faith in Christ – we all profess the Apostle’s Creed and the Nicene Creed and believe in a Triune God and a Savior who is fully God and fully man. The invisible, eternal church is united by the Holy Spirit and truly united to Christ

the Head of the Church. The visible church may be more or less pure, more or less faithful, more or less successful outwardly in different parts of the world at different times, but the invisible church is invincible- united to Christ and victorious in Christ.

When Christ comes again, the invisible, eternal, heavenly church will be made visible and will come to the New Heavens and the New Earth. This is the New Jerusalem, described in wonderful glorious language in Revelation 21.

Conclusion: What Good is the Church!

So, what good is the church? Yes, the earthly, visible, local church is a messy mix of sinful people with selfish hearts and foolish minds – people like you and me, in other words. But this church is the earthly, visible aspect of the eternal, glorious, invisible church and through the ministry of the church, Christ is working to shape us and grow us into living stones which will form His glorious, eternal Temple-City where He will dwell with us forever.

Let's close our time together by hearing Revelation 21 describe to us the glorious future of the church:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. ⁷ The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. ⁸ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

⁹ Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹² It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed— ¹³ on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. ¹⁴ And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

¹⁵ And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. ¹⁶ The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. ¹⁷ He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement. ¹⁸ The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. ¹⁹ The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, ²⁰ the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. ²¹ And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

²² And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day— and there will be no night there. ²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷ But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.