

**Ephesians 2: 19-21; “Citizens in the City of God”, Message # 17 in a series entitled –  
“The Exceeding Greatness of His Power”, A Bible Study prepared  
by Pastor Paul Rendall on October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019,  
for those gathered at his home.**

The words – “Now, therefore”, in verse 19 are intended by the apostle Paul to draw our minds back to verses 11-18, where he has been explaining to us, all that Christ has done for us Gentiles in reconciling us unto God, and making us one new body, one new man, in the New Testament Church. Christ Himself, by means of His death on the cross, has become our peace. We are no longer at enmity with Him but have received underserved grace and favor. Not only do we have peace with God, not on the basis of our own works, but on the basis of grace. We are no longer strangers and foreigners, but we are fellow citizens with the saints. That is, that both Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ are God’s saints; they are His holy ones set apart to be three things according to our text. 1<sup>st</sup> – God’s saints are Citizens in the City of God. 2<sup>nd</sup> – They are His Spiritual Household. And 3<sup>rd</sup> – They are a building fitted together and growing into a holy temple. May the Lord Himself impress upon us these truths so that we will have a high and reverent esteem of them, in our hearts and minds, for Christ’s Church.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – God’s saints are Citizens in the City of God.**

Verse 19 says – “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints.” It is always good to start, when we are considering God’s Church, to understand Christ’s Church as a great City of people whom God has called and gathered together to meet together to worship His holy name. We should begin by considering the Universal Church and then move to consider individual churches. We who believe in the Lord Jesus are citizens of a great spiritual City. The word “City” is a word picture for the all of people of God, both Old Testament and New. Turn with me over to Psalm 48, and we will read verses 1 and 2, and draw a few lessons from it. “A Song. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah.” “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in His holy mountain.” “Beautiful in elevation, The joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.” “God is in her palaces; He is known as her refuge.”

Now, this Psalm written by the sons of Korah to be sung by the people of God. John Gill says that it is one of the spiritual songs the apostle speaks of in Ephesians 5: 19, and it was occasioned, some think by David’s defeating and spoiling the Philistines, as recorded in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 5: 17. But, as we consider it more carefully, we should understand that it certainly has a much greater and wider application to the New Testament Church, or to the times of the Messiah, as it speaks of Christ’s greatness and the praise and glory which are due to Him as its Builder and Maker. It does no violence to the understanding of this Psalm to read it this way: Great is the Lord Jesus Christ, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, in His holy mountain.

The physical city of Jerusalem as the capital city of the people of God in Old Testament times has been designed by God in its literal physical realities, according to way that it is described here, and in other places in the Scriptures, to be a type and picture of the New Testament Church. Believers in Christ, the Messiah who was coming in the future when this Psalm was written, would make up a part of the Universal Church which is called here “the City of the great King” in verse 2. The great King is our Lord Jesus Christ, and yes, the city of our God and of His Christ, in His holy mountain, is a City within His larger Kingdom of His righteous spiritual rule and reign over all earth. Both this physical city and the spiritual City will become the joy of the whole earth someday.

Spiritual Israel in Spiritual Zion is beautiful in spiritual elevation, just as much as Physical Israel was in physical Mt Zion; indeed much more so. The physical city of Zion is a picture of Christ's Church in the New; beautiful in elevating sinners to the position of saints so that they can become His holy people no matter what physical nation they are from, whatever race they belong to, whatever country that they live in. The New Testament Church is a City which is the joy of every believer in the whole world. And how could it be the joy of the whole earth unless Gentiles were also to be saved and brought into this Universal Church of the people of God, over all the earth? That is what our passage is talking about. Look also with me over at Psalm 46, and verses 4 and 5. "There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God." "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn."

Now, I want you to be able to better understand how to interpret the Bible and prophetic matters in relation to this present age that we live in until Christ comes back again. There are principles of interpretation which can be gleaned from this portion of Scripture which will help us very much. There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God. If you thought of this in simple physical terms, the river would either be the Kidron brook, the river which ran by Jerusalem, or it could refer to the waters of Shiloah, which had different channels and branches which ran through the city of Jerusalem. These supplied water to all of the people in that city. But I believe that by the very words themselves here, we are intended by God to go beyond the physical to see the spiritual in our thinking.

And so, let us see that these words are to be understood in a figurative sense, and they are meant most definitely also to relate to New Testament times. And so, the river which makes glad the City of God is the blessed work of the Holy Spirit in supplying spiritual nourishment and strength, in giving Christ's people grace, and spiritual help, to really live the Christian life. The Holy Spirit supplies the living water of Christ to every believer and thus to all the Church here upon the earth. And with that and by that, we are refreshed. Now, this as a principle of truth applies to all believers during all of this Church age; that there is a river whose streams shall make glad the City of God. God is in the midst of her, and she shall not be moved. These are truths for every believer in all of this Church age to lay hold of, and draw spiritual strength from.

You, dear believers, are fellow citizens with the saints. You are fellow citizens with all of the saints of every age in heaven and earth. Look over at Hebrews 12: 22-24. "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and the church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of the sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel." Now when it says here that you have come to Mt. Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, is the apostle Paul speaking only of the saints in heaven? No, he cannot be speaking of them only, because it says – "You have come to Mt. Zion".

Now, realizing that the Bible was not written for Jews only, but also to us Gentiles, we must think of these things spiritually; that when we first came to Christ, we came to Mt. Zion, the assembly of the Firstborn; on earth, first of all. We came into to the church of the living God when we first exercised faith in Jesus Christ, and we were spiritually baptized into His body. 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12: 13 – "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – And we have all been made to drink into the one Spirit." But eventually, when we die, we shall come to the heavenly Jerusalem in our spirit; to an innumerable company of angels, and to the general assembly and church of the Firstborn who are not only registered in heaven, but they are now actually in heaven. And in that holy place, we will associate with all of the saints who have died and gone beforehand; the spirits of just men made perfect. When we die we will behold our Savior, our Lord Jesus, the Mediator, the

One who has brought us to God, and whose blood availed for us. Because He is the Son of God, His blood shed on our behalf speaks better things than Abel.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> – God’s Saints are His Household.**

Verse 19b – “You Gentiles are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” We see here that God’s design for individual churches is as a household with membership, a household with members in it. Keeping house with the saints of God is not something that you do in heaven, so much as it is an earthly thing. It involves our responsibilities to God in relation to others who are also saints here upon the earth. This is why all Christians should join a church. They are already members of Christ’s body by spiritual baptism, if they have believed in Christ, but they need to recognize their practical responsibilities to serve God in the context of a local church. Sometimes, even Christian people do not care for the concept of church membership, but it should not be that hard a thing to think about when you understand, first of all, that you are already a member of God’s spiritual household in the universal church first, by faith in Christ.

Knowing this, you need to see what you can do for God and for other believers in the context of a local church. Turn with me over 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3: 14-16. “These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” Now, Paul is writing to Timothy to tell him of all the responsibilities, that he should teach others, there in the church at Ephesus. In chapter 1, he tells Timothy to teach them about the law and how although it cannot save, it does teach about how love from a pure heart should be exercised in the local church; that is, from a good conscience, and from a sincere faith. The law is good if one uses it lawfully. He tells Timothy to speak to them about their holding fast to sound doctrine and to the truths of the glorious gospel of Christ in verses 8-11.

In chapter 2, he speaks to Timothy, telling him to speak to them about the importance of praying for all men, and particularly those people in offices in government and having authority. He gives the qualifications for elders and deacons in chapter 3: 1-13. And then in these verses that I just read to you, verses 14 and 15, he tells Timothy how he ought to conduct himself in the house of God; that is among the people of God in that particular church. He says that the local church is the pillar and ground of the truth. It is the local church that holds up the Truth of God’s word through the preaching and teaching of the word; in this case by Timothy and the other elders appointed there. In Galatians 2: 9, Peter and James and John are called pillars. The pillars in a church are those who are the most steadfast in upholding the truth. The believing membership of the church are the ground of the truth; that is the truth rest with them and upon them in being faithful witnesses to the truth in word and deed.

Look also over at Galatians chapter 6: verse 10. “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” The household of faith here refers to all Christians, but especially those who you know in the household of the local church; people who you should be associating with regularly. You are to do good to them, since you are members together with them of the same spiritual, and local, body of believers. All the members of the body of God’s household are important. Turn over to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12: 18-25.

“But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.” “And if they were all one member, where would the body be?” “But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.” “And eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.’” “No, much rather those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.” “And those members of the body which think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need.” “But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the

members should have the same care for one another.” How important it is that we see that God’s saints are a household. Who has set the members in the body? God has. It shows His sovereign choice in the people whom He would have become members of the local church. This ought to tell us something about visitors who come into our church. We might say – Where would they fit in, to our spiritual body? Well, God knows and He has placed them here so that we might consider what part they will play in our church. We need to see membership not only as a formal commitment, but in terms of God’s purpose being fulfilled; of that person in relation to the whole body, and the whole body in relation to that person.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> – God’s saints are a Building, fitted together and growing into a holy Temple.**

Verses 20 and 21 – “The household of God has been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building , being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.” The household of God, every individual local church which would be faithful and true to Christ, is built on the foundation of what the apostles and prophets laid in their word which became the New Testament Scriptures. Each of God’s saints is fitted into that building. We are fitted together in relation to others of the saints in the local church. We grow together into a holy temple, as we interact over our knowledge and experience of Christ, and the spiritual truths of the word of God, with each other. Turn with me over to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 3: 9-17.

“For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building.” “According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it.” “But let each one take heed how he builds on it.” “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” “Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is.” “If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.” “If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” “If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.”

If we were to have taken the time to have read verses 1-8, we would find that God’s fellow workers who are being talked about here are ministers of the word; Paul and Apollos and others. Nowadays, since the offices of apostles, prophets, and evangelists who were apostolic helpers, have ceased, God still uses all pastor-teachers, and preachers, and persons who plant and water the word of God which is sown; all of these could be included. Those whom Paul was writing to, there in the church at Corinth, they were God’s field, and God’s building. How does God build the local church into a holy temple? Yes, He does so by adding them to the church as living stones as it says in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2: 5. But here in these verses, He does so, Paul says, though planting and watering, by preaching and teaching of the word by His servants, His ministers, backed by their consistent godliness and faithfulness, in their building with sound and wholesome doctrine; doctrine and teaching which sets forth the truths of the gospel and builds upon all the truth of the Bible using the gold and silver and precious stones of inculcating doctrines and practices which will be of value in building the church and making it strong and more mature.

The truths which are gold and silver and precious stones are the Biblical and correct doctrines of God and of Christ, of preaching and teaching all that Christ has done and accomplished, of preaching and teaching the doctrines of grace; of how God created man upright, but that Adam fell and plunged our whole race into sin and ruin and misery; of how God had to send His only-begotten Son into the world, the One who was of more value than all of Mankind together, to redeem a people for His name. Of how valuable a truth it is that people know that salvation is all of grace and not of themselves, it is the gift of God. Of how precious

the lovingkindness and patience of God are in relation to each believer's sanctification. Of how good it is to be a part of God's church; His building in which He is glorified by a true worship of God, and the Biblical practice of holiness is cultivated in their midst.

If any man builds upon the foundation, which is Christ, and the precious truths of His word which are able to build them up and give them an inheritance as it says in Acts chapter 20, verse 32, among those who are sanctified; those who are set apart to God's working. Conversely, if a minister, or anyone else trying to preach the word or share it regularly with others, does not build which these sound doctrines and practices flowing from these doctrines, if they compromise the truth with earthly materials of wood, hay, and stubble, that part of their work will be burned up on the Day of Judgment, on which a searching test will take place. The fire of Christ infallible judgment will be able to discern whether that man's work was built on the foundation and whether he used lasting or worthless materials in building the church, and if a man has been faithful, he will receive a reward, but if he has not been faithful, those parts of his work will be burned up, but he himself will be saved, yet it will be through fire.

The principle goes farther, to anyone who is trying to do anything to help in the building of Christ's Church, His temple. You contribute to the building of the Church, to the building of God's saints so that they will truly grow, only if you build upon the foundation of Christ, and only if you use the kind of doctrines which will truly help others, in seeing Christian character formed in their lives. And so, we must ask ourselves in closing – Are the things that I am attempting to teach others sound; so that they will grow up into Christ, and be true worshipers and faithful to the Lord? Am I teaching others those precious truths of the Bible; the gold, silver, and precious stones of the sound doctrine and practice, in accordance with all the righteous principles and attitudes that Christ has commanded?

Is this church that we are a part of, growing into a holy temple in the Lord? Or, am I defiling the temple of God with the wisdom of the world that I try to get others to accept? Am I more interested in inculcating worldly strategies of how people can be successful, or popular, or impressive in the things of this world which are passing away? My brethren, let us resolve to so live that we will have a reward at the that time when we stand before the Judgment seat of Christ and give an account of ourselves. The next time that we are together in Bible Study I will speak to you about our being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.