

God's Plan of Reconciliation

Our New Identity

Ephesians 2:19-22

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Our New Identity

Scripture

Today I am concluding a series of sermons on Ephesians 2 that I am calling, “God’s Plan of Reconciliation.”

Ephesians 2 has two main sections. The first is verses 1-10, and the second is verses 11-22. Each section addresses our past, our present, and our future. Regarding our past, the Apostle Paul taught that all people were alienated from God and from one another. Then, he set down our present in which he described our reconciliation with God and with one another. And finally, Paul explained our new identity in Christ. That is what we shall examine today.

Let’s read about our new identity in Ephesians 2:19-22:

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

Introduction

On Friday, July 4, 2008 my family and I drove to the Convention Center in Tampa, FL. We were going to attend a Naturalization Ceremony, at which time I was going to take the *Oath of Allegiance* to become a citizen of the United States of America. I believe there were 704 of us who took the *Oath of*

Allegiance that day. The Convention Center was packed with family and friends.

I found the Naturalization Ceremony very powerful and highly emotional. After checking in at arrival, I turned in my Permanent Resident Card (aka Green Card) and took my seat. A short while later the Naturalization Ceremony began. After a meaningful introduction, I finally took the *Oath of Allegiance*. Then I went to the front and received my Certificate of Naturalization. As I left the auditorium I registered to vote, and applied for a U.S. Passport, which I received a few weeks later.

I think that naturalized U.S. citizens have a profound appreciation for the process. We renounce our allegiance to our former country, and then take the *Oath of Allegiance* to the United States of America. Once we do that, we have a new identity, with a new status, privileges, and responsibilities.

As the Apostle Paul came to the end of Ephesians 2, he explained that the Christians in the church in Ephesus had a new identity. They had transferred their allegiance from their former way of life, and they now had a new identity in Christ.

Lesson

Ephesians 2:19-22 gives us a portrait of our new identity in Christ.

Let's use the following outline:

1. We Are Citizens of God's Kingdom (2:19a)
2. We Are Members of God's Family (2:19b)
3. We Are Stones in God's Temple (2:20-22)

I. We Are Citizens in God's Kingdom (2:19a)

First, we are citizens in God's kingdom.

Paul said in verse 19a, **“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints.”** Paul was writing at a time when Roman citizenship was highly prized. Most likely, many of the Ephesian Christians were also Roman citizens. Paul himself was a Roman citizen. However, in this verse, he was referring to citizenship in God’s kingdom. John Stott says,

Now [Paul] writes of another citizenship. Although he does not develop the metaphor, he appears to be alluding to citizenship of God’s kingdom. The kingdom of God is neither a territorial jurisdiction nor even a spiritual structure. God’s kingdom is God himself ruling his people, and bestowing upon them all the privileges and responsibilities which his rule implies. To this new international God-ruled community, which had replaced the Old Testament national theocracy, Gentiles and Jews belonged on equal terms. Paul is writing while the Roman Empire is at the zenith of its splendor; no signs had yet appeared of its coming decline, let alone of its fall. Yet he sees this other kingdom, neither Jewish nor Roman but international and interracial, as something more splendid and more enduring than any earthly empire. And he rejoices in its citizenship more even than in his Roman citizenship.¹

Before I became a naturalized U.S. citizen, I was a Resident Alien. (I always thought that E.T. and I had something in common!) However, once I became a naturalized U.S. citizen, I was now a fellow citizen with all you natural-born U.S. citizens. For 25 years, I would stand to attention but I did not sing the National Anthem or say the Pledge of Allegiance. But, once

¹ John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 105.

I became a naturalized U.S. citizen, I am now able to sing the national anthem and say the Pledge of Allegiance. I am no longer a Resident Alien but a fellow citizen. That is what Paul was referring to when he said of the Ephesian Christians in verse 19a, **“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints.”**

Although Paul did not use the word “kingdom” in this passage, he was clearly referring to the fact that Christians are citizens in God’s kingdom. Note also that God’s kingdom is not territorial. It has no geographic boundaries. It is international and transnational. People from “every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” are citizens in God’s kingdom (Revelation 7:9). James Montgomery Boice writes:

This is revolutionary thinking – and it has proved itself to be revolutionary historically. When Paul wrote these words the kingdom of Rome was at the height of its territorial expansion and glory. Rome dominated the world. Roman armies kept peace and dispensed justice. Roman roads linked the far-flung reaches of the Empire. Rome had stood for hundreds of years and was thought to be able to stand for thousands of years more. But Paul looked at Rome and saw it, not as one great united Kingdom, but as a force imposed on mutually antagonistic factions: rich and poor, free man and slave, man and woman, Jew and Gentile. And in its place, he saw this new humanity, created by God himself, transcending these boundaries. This kingdom was destined to grow and permeate all nations, drawing from all peoples. It is a kingdom that cannot be shaken or destroyed.²

So, first, we are citizens of God’s kingdom.

² James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1988), 90.

Paul's second word picture to illustrate our new identity in Christ is more personal.

II. We Are Members of God's Family (2:19b)

Second, we are members of God's family.

Paul said in verse 19b, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are...**members of the household of God.**" It might have been possible for the Jews and Gentiles to see themselves as being in one kingdom. They could somehow think of a way of coexisting together, perhaps in separate spheres. However, Paul says that their new identity in Christ means something far more intimate than being fellow citizens in God's kingdom; they are in fact fellow members of God's family. That is stunning!

Well, how is it that they are family members? They – and we – are members of God's family because we all have the same Father. Paul made that point in the previous verse. He said in verse 18 that we all have access to "the Father." We are adopted sons and daughters, as Paul asserted in Ephesians 1:5.

And just as no one is a natural-born citizen of God's kingdom, so no one is a natural-born child of God's family. Only Jesus is the natural-born Son of God. The rest of us are adopted into the family of God.

My wife, Eileen, and I have one natural-born child and one adopted child. Lauren, our natural-born child, was born first. Jon, our adopted child, came to us 30 months later. After all kinds of difficulty in the early months of trying to adopt Jon, we were eventually able to finalize his adoption on his first birthday. The judge kindly adjusted his schedule to allow us to have the Adoption Ceremony on his first birthday. Our lawyer was actually a member of the church. So, there were just six of

us in the courtroom that day: the judge, our lawyer, Eileen, Lauren, Jon, and me. Eileen was holding Lauren, and I was holding Jon. After making sure that we were Freddy and Eileen Fritz and some other preliminary matters, the judge addressed us. He said that once he declared Jon to be our adopted son, he would be fully and completely our son. In the eyes of the law, he was as much our son as Lauren as our daughter. We were to give him every opportunity, responsibility, and blessing that we would give to him as if he were our natural-born son. And then, after finishing his speech, the judge declared Jon to be our adopted son! As Jon grew up, we treated him as if he were our natural-born son. Like his sister, he had chores and responsibilities. But, like his sister, he also enjoyed the benefits and blessings of being a member of our family.

So, what does being a member of God's family mean practically? Tony Merida explains it well:

The church is not a building we go to or an event we attend. The church is family, living life together on mission. Be careful not to treat the church as a hotel – visiting a place occasionally, giving a tip if you are served well. Rather, see the church as part of your Christian identity, and understand that we all have a role in God's household.³

Being a member of God's family means far more than merely attending worship services on the Lord's Day. It means connecting with God's people in a small group. And it also means serving the world on a ministry team. Now, I know that most small groups and ministry teams have taken a break for the summer. But, let me urge you to join a small group and a ministry team in September.

³ Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), n.p.

So, first, we are citizens of God's kingdom. Second, we are members of God's family.

Paul's third word picture to illustrate our new identity in Christ would have been vivid for his readers.

III. We Are Stones in God's Temple (2:20-22)

And third, we are stones in God's temple.

The Bible uses all kinds of metaphors, or pictures, to illustrate what it means to be the people of God. God's new community is often pictured as a building or, more specifically, a temple. The temple in Jerusalem – first Solomon's, then, Zerubbabel's, and finally Herod's – had for nearly a thousand years been the focal point of Israel's identity as the people of God. John Stott writes:

Now there was a new people; would there be a new temple, as Jesus had hinted? The new people was not a new nation but a new humanity, international and worldwide. A geographically localized center would therefore not be appropriate for it. What then could be its temple, its focus of unity? Here in verses 20–22 Paul elaborates his vision of the new temple in greater detail than elsewhere; it will repay careful study. As he develops his image, he refers to the foundation and cornerstone of the building, the structure as a whole and its individual stones, its cohesion and growth, its present function and (at least implicitly) its future destiny.⁴

Let us note then the three components of God's temple.

A. The Temple Has a Foundation (2:20a)

First, the temple has a foundation.

⁴ John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 106.

Paul said in verse 20a that Christians are “**...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.**” John Stott says, “Since apostles and prophets were both groups with a teaching role, it seems clear that what constitutes the church’s foundation is neither their person nor their office but their instruction.”⁵ In other words, the foundation is God’s Word. And just as a foundation cannot be changed once it is laid, so God’s Word may not be changed. It is his inspired, authoritative, and sufficient bedrock upon which God’s people are built up in their faith.

B. The Temple Has a Cornerstone (2:20b)

Second, the temple has a cornerstone.

The cornerstone of any building is important, necessary, and, essential. It makes the entire building possible. It is set on the foundation. It keeps the building steady, and the entire structure is built in relation to the cornerstone. Paul said in verse 20b, “**...Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.**” Jesus makes the entire church possible. The entire church is built on Jesus. He keeps the church steady, and the entire church is built in relation to Jesus. Tony Merida says, “While the apostles’ teaching is being emphasized, Jesus’ person and work are also emphasized. Jesus is also how the church grows and is held together. There is no unity or growth if Christ is not the cornerstone.”⁶

C. The Temple Has Stones (2:21-22)

And third, the temple has stones.

⁵ John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 106–107.

⁶ Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, n.p.

Paul said in verses 21-22, **“...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.”** This is where we come in. We are the stones in God’s temple. And just as every stone has a specific place and function in a building, just so every one of us has a specific place and function in God’s temple. James Montgomery Boice says:

The applications of this part of the picture are so obvious as hardly to need elaboration. Let me suggest a few. First, the stones placed into this great structure are chosen and shaped for their position by God. It is his temple; he is the architect; it is not for us to determine where we will fit in or how. Second, the stones are placed into position in relationship to Jesus Christ. They are attached to him; if they are not, they are not part of this building. Third, the stones are of different shapes and sizes, perhaps even of different material, and they are employed for different functions. Some serve in one way, some another. Fourth, the stones are linked to one another. From where they are placed they cannot always see this; they cannot always even see the other stones. But they are part of one interlocking whole regardless. Fifth, the stones of the temple are chosen, shaped, and placed, not to draw attention to themselves, but to contribute to a great building in which God alone dwells. Sixth, the placing of each stone is only part of a long work begun thousands of years in the past that will continue until the end of the age when the Lord returns.⁷

What a glorious picture this is! Every Christian, whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female (Cf. Galatians 3:28), is an important and precious stone in God’s temple.

⁷ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary*, 93.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed our new identity in Ephesians 2:19-22, let us live our lives to reflect our new identity in Christ.

Today's text really confronts the tendency of so many to live in isolation from the church. Far too many professing Christians think that all they must do is attend an occasional worship service, and that is all that God requires of them. But that is not God's design for Christians. God intends for all Christians – not just some Christians, or most Christians, but *all* Christians – to live out their faith in relationship and fellowship with other Christians. Listen to what Merida says:

It is an incredible gift of God's grace to have a family of faith. It is a gift of grace to gather corporately and stir up one another to faith and good works (Hebrews 10:24-25). It is a gift of grace to love one another as Christ has loved us (John 13:34-35). It is a gift of grace to carry one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2). It is a gift of grace to encourage one another and to be encouraged by one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11). It is a gift of grace to be taught and admonished by one another (Colossians 3:16). It is a gift of grace to be allowed the privilege to give financially to further the gospel (2 Corinthians 8-9). It is a gift of grace to come to the table for communion (1 Corinthians 11:26).⁸

All these privileges belong to those for whom Christ died to reconcile us to God *and* to one another. Let us live our new identity in Christ. Let us live as citizens of God's kingdom, members of God's family, and stones in God's temple. Amen.

⁸ Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, n.p.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp.
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