

The Church is One House

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[0 : 00] Ephesians is a pretty simple book in one sense. It tells us two things. Sin divides, but grace unites. Sin alienates, but grace reconciles people.

Sin wages war, but grace brings peace. And the church of Jesus Christ is meant to be a community that is gripped by the gospel of grace, and so gripped by unity.

Gripped by reconciliation and by peace, both with her Lord and with each other. And that's what our passage is about. A community gripped by the gospel of grace, and so unified and reconciled and at peace.

But we're parachuting into quite an intense book in Ephesians. We're going right smack in the middle, and Paul has been telling a big story up to our point. So we need to back up to the first chapter, and then work our way up to our passage as quickly as possible.

So would you open your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 1 with me? Starting in verse 3. Paul begins the book of Ephesians with one ginormous run-on sentence, verses 3 to 10.

[1 : 21] He says, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ, in the heavenly places. And then he goes on verse after verse after verse to unpack those spiritual blessings.

And then he gets to verses 9 and 10. And he does something amazing here. It's almost like he gives us a pair of binoculars, and lets us look through all the contours of history, and finally see where it's going to end up.

It's as if God gives us a great window into the future. He tells us where everything is ultimately heading. Verse 9.

God has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as the plan for the fullness of time.

Fullness of time just means goal or consummation of time. And here's the purpose. Listen to it. To unite all things in him, in Christ.

[2 : 28] Things in heaven and things on earth. Sin divides, but grace unites. And unity in Christ is the major point of heaven and earth.

Unity in Christ is the ultimate purpose of God for humanity. Unity in Christ is where all of history is ultimately going. God is moving all things there, and all things one day will be under his loving lordship and his victorious authority.

And nothing will be outside of it. And we long for that day. But that's not just a future day for Paul. And this is a really important thing.

Is that Paul thinks that unity in Christ, although it's our goal, is something that is actually being given birth to in the present. Unity in Christ is taking shape in our broken and fractured world right now.

And it's happening in the church of Jesus Christ. That's what's so amazing about the church. It's the future crashing into the present.

[3 : 43] It's heaven touching earth. It's God giving us a glimpse of what his purposes are for the whole entire world, starting now with us.

God's plan is to unite all things in Christ. And that brings us to Ephesians chapter 2. Paul shows us what this looks like.

Verses 1 to 10 in Ephesians chapter 2 are Paul talking about the unity in Christ that comes between God and humanity. Vertical relationship. And then verses 11 to 22 talk about horizontal relationships.

Unity in Christ that happens between us. But Paul's not, he's not ignorant of the fact that our lives are deeply broken.

He's not ignorant of the fact that every area of our relationships have been touched by alienation and sin and division and hostility in some sense.

[4 : 49] We know that, right? We feel that. But Paul says, God has come down in Christ and through the cross he has decided he's going to do something about it.

Christ has died. And in the mystery of God's grace, it's the death of Christ that somehow paves the way for restored relationships. We can be in the presence of God now through the cross.

And we can be in the presence of one another now through the cross. And alienation can be turned into reconciliation and division can be turned into unity and hostility can be turned into peace with our Lord and with each other.

Verse 18. For through him, we both have access in one spirit to the Father. And that's the beginning of our passage.

We both, Jews and Gentiles, everybody who's not a Jew, which is most of us, both have access to the Father through Jesus Christ.

[6 : 03] Christ. And in verses 19 to 22 of our passage, Paul begins to describe what this new community looks like.

What a reconciled community looks like. A community that's reconciled with her Lord and with each other. And he says three things. He gives us three images, three metaphors of the church.

Verse 19. We are citizens in God's kingdom. Verse 19. We are members of God's family.

In verses 20 to 22, we are stones in God's temple. Kingdom of God, family of God, temple of God. That is who we are.

And that's what unity crashing into the present looks like. So now we're just going to go through and we're going to unpack one metaphor after another. We are citizens of God's kingdom.

[7 : 07] Look at verse 12 with me in chapter 2. Paul says that the Gentiles were once separated from Christ and alienated from the commonwealth or the citizenship of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise.

And then in verse 19, look at verse 19 with me. He says, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints.

You see that? It's absolutely amazing. Paul is saying that you once were separated from all God's promises in the Old Testament, you Gentiles. All of redemption history was going on and it was not your inheritance, you Gentiles.

But now in Christ, it is your inheritance. You are fellow citizens with the saints. And the God of Israel in the Old Testament is now your God as well through faith in Christ.

We get to be citizens of the kingdom of God with all the rights and privileges that that includes. God is our king and he's ruling in our lives through his spirit.

[8 : 22] God is our protector defending us from the enemy. God is our provider taking care of all of our needs. And the good thing about God's kingdom is that there's no second class citizens.

This summer, Susie and I had an opportunity to go to Paris which was awesome. I'd never been to Paris before. We went for a week and I gotta admit, I was fairly nervous going to Paris because I'm an American and I've heard lots of things about the contempt that Parisians have for Americans and so I was a bit scared that I would show up and the second I opened my mouth or they just saw me, they would not like me basically.

And there would be this sense of rejection, right? They just simply for who I was and so I remember getting off the train finally, finally we took the channel from London to Paris and getting off, walking to this apartment to meet this person that Susie and I were renting their apartment for a week and she's been living in Paris pretty much her whole life and so I'm kind of nervous and she walks us up this winding spiral staircase and takes us to the top and she opens a door and there's a little table, the little dining room table, enough for like three or four and on the table are two croissants, two bananas, and two things of orange juice.

It was amazing. It was this sense of, she didn't need to do that but it was this sense of generous hospitality, wonderful graciousness and then after that she walked us around the area and showed us everything we needed to know about the area and she spoke beautiful English which was awesome.

But it was amazing just the generosity that we experienced and I had this sense, wait, I actually belong here. like I'm not a foreigner here. She actually welcomes me in her place and in her presence and friends, I often think that this is what it's like with God.

[10:33] I often think we believe we're second class citizens and when we come into God's presence we realize that he's far more generous and he's far more gracious and he's far more hospitable than we ever would have believed he was and maybe some of you feel like you're second class citizens tonight.

Maybe like God cares about someone else more than you. Like God loves and privileges someone else more than you. Like God would not really accept you if you really opened yourself up to him. If you really came before him and showed him who you were he would reject you but our passage tonight says no. No second class citizens in God's kingdom.

There's simply no such thing. It doesn't matter what your age is. It doesn't matter what your race is. It doesn't matter what your ethnicity is. It doesn't matter your family background or your social circle or your education or your job or your taste in music or clothes or your fears or your failures or your sins or your offenses.

You name it. You are not a second class citizen in the kingdom of the living God. He welcomes you into his presence through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[11:52] There's only one class of citizens in God's kingdom and that's blood bought saints. That's fellow citizens in God's kingdom with all the rights and privileges that includes.

Brothers and sisters I want you to know that that's you tonight. Image number two. We are members of God's family.

Look at verse 19 with me. 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 word alien can literally be translated without a home or outside a home. And then the word members of the household of God could literally be translated kin or family members of God.

And so Paul is saying you were once spiritually homeless but now you have found a home in the family of God. And the image is of those who share the same house together and share the same father.

[13:05] If you look to the next page in chapter 1 verse 5 Paul says this at the very beginning of the book. He says in love God predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will.

We are adopted brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. One of my favorite preachers his name is Brian Loritz and he's a pastor in Memphis, Tennessee often tells a story when he's talking about adoption.

his parents decided they wanted to redo the will. So they go to a lawyer and they sit down with the lawyer and the lawyer before anything started said to them alright Dr. Loritz before you tell us what changes you want to make there's one stipulation that I need to tell you about Georgia state law. It's this. you have some biological children and you have one adopted daughter in your family but Georgia state law stipulates that you can write out your biological children whenever you want but you can never write out your adopted child and that is what God does with us.

he adopts us and it's not second class because what Christ did on the cross brings us into a family that is eternally secure. Biological children can be written out but not adopted children and we are all adopted children.

[14:47] Brothers and sisters I want you to know that we all know that we didn't choose each other. We all know that we didn't choose each other to be in the family.

We were brought into a family through adoption and we're brothers and sisters with one another and so God says you're to love on each other as brothers and sisters.

The biggest witness to a community gripped by the gospel of grace is a community of people that are radically different from each other. People that normally wouldn't hang out with each other. People that normally would not like each other coming together and saying brother sister and loving each other like a brother and sister.

Who are you avoiding that you need to love? Who are you resenting in this room maybe that you need to forgive? Who are you slandering that you need to bless with your words?

Who are you hating that you need to embrace? We are family members blood brought brothers and sisters and we're going to be with each other forever.

[16:10] Image three. we are stones in God's temple. Paul switches in verse 19 from a focus on the family to a focus on the building in verses 20 to 22.

And this building is no ordinary building. This is the temple of the living God where God lives. First Peter chapter 2 verse 5 put it this way.

You yourselves are like living stones being built into a spiritual house. The people of God are the temple of God.

A spiritual house. And notice how Paul describes every aspect of this building. It's got a foundation, a cornerstone, it's got a structure, and it has a presence.

Look at the foundation in verse 20. Built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. The apostles and prophets are those whom Jesus Christ passed on the good news of grace to, the good news of the gospel, and they're the ones that proclaim Jesus to the world.

[17 : 24] And we have their writings in the New Testament. The revelation of Jesus Christ. And he, the words about Jesus, are the foundation of the church.

Look also in verse 20. There's a cornerstone. Jesus Christ himself being the cornerstone. Now, we think, we don't often think of cornerstones.

Susie and I just came from Europe over the summer, and you see massive cathedrals all over the place. And when you see a massive stone cathedral, you think of cornerstones. Because it's the stone that aligns everything.

It's the stone that gives direction to everything and is the first thing that sets the shape and the form and the strength of the building. And so what Jesus Christ being the cornerstone means is that every stone that is built into the church, all of you find your alignment from Jesus Christ.

You find your direction from Jesus Christ. You find your shape from Jesus Christ, and you find your strength in Jesus Christ. Because he is the cornerstone of the church.

[18 : 37] The church has a structure. Look at verses 21 and 22. 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. And notice how the verbs in verses 21 and 22 are all in the present tense, meaning they're happening right now. God is doing his work of construction right now. And God is building his church right now. God is creatively making his temple right now.

The church has one resident. God lives in the church. God dwells in his people by the Holy Spirit. Brothers and sisters, this is the amazing thing. God is not building a building so it's nice and pretty so he can stand afar from it. He's not building a building even so that he can move in next door and be a neighbor.

[19 : 50] He's building a building so that he can come straight in the midst of it and live there and never leave. That's why God is building his church. It's because he doesn't just want to dwell with us.

He doesn't just want to dwell among us. He wants to dwell in us. And that's the good news of the gospel, brothers and sisters. It's that God does not just want to pour out his life on the cross so that then we can get a get out of jail free card.

God pours out his life on the cross and ascends into heaven after the resurrection and says, Father, now pour out your Holy Spirit upon your people. It's time for you to dwell with them once again.

And that's the great privilege of being the church of Jesus Christ is that we are his dwelling place in the world.

We are his presence. presence. So when we meet together it's no human affair. This is not just another social club. This is not just another human institution.

[20 : 58] This is God's dwelling place. And God is in our midst. And so when we meet together we come ready to attend to the living God in our midst. And it's wonderful because when you're in his presence it's a presence of love and grace and healing that is so deep that no human mind can possibly fathom it.

No human heart could possibly grasp it in its fullness. No human spirit could possibly contain it in its infinitude.

In his presence we find healing. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.