

Belonging to the Household of God

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] our worship of God today, and we're singing firstly in Psalm 122. Psalm 122, we'll sing the whole of the psalm on page 416, if you're using the psalm books.

Psalm 122, a psalm that celebrates the coming together of God's people for worship, going back to the days when they made their way to the temple in Jerusalem and came to join together in worship there.

And that follows on, of course, into our own practice for gathered worship, for public worship, as we usually call it. And let's seek to rejoice in that, as the psalmist here is.

I joyed when to the house of God go up, they said to me, Jerusalem, within thy gates our feet shall standing be. Singing the whole psalm, I joyed when to the house of God.

I joyed when to the house of God.

[1 : 02] Go up, they said to me, Jerusalem, within thy gates our feet shall standing be.

Jerusalem, as our city is, compactly built together.

To that place the tribes go up, the tribes of God go thither.

To Israel's testimony there. To God's name thanks to pay.

For thrones of judgment in the thrones of David's house of Sersay.

[2 : 20] Pray that Jerusalem may have peace and felicity.

Let them that love thee and thy peace. I'll sell prosperity.

Therefore I wish that peace may still within thy walls remain.

And ever may thy policies prosperity retain.

Now for my friends and brethren, say, peace be in thee I'll say.

[3 : 35] And for the house of God our Lord, I'll seek thy good away.

Now we're going to call upon the Lord in prayer, so let's join together in prayer. Our gracious and loving God, we thank you for the reminder and teaching these words have given us, of the unity with which your people come together to worship you, and of the privilege that we have in gathering together as worshipers of the Lord God.

We thank you, we thank you, Lord, for all that comes to us by way of worshiping your holy name.

The benefits that are described for us in your word, that your people experience when they come together to worship you.

The benefits not only of fellowship one with another and sharing in the matters of your salvation, but the benefit especially of waiting upon yourself, waiting for the blessing of your spirit to touch our lives again, waiting for your own blessing of us inwardly, in such a way that our hearts may be stirred and moved to love you more and to serve you in a way that would proceed with our commitment to you.

We thank you, Lord, today that we are gathered in this place. We thank you for every other gathering in many places throughout the world today that gather as we do to worship the same God.

[5 : 13] And we thank you, Lord, for the privilege of belonging to your children, belonging to your church in this world, belonging to that household of faith, that household and family of God, belonging in a way of citizenship, belonging to the inheritance your people have in heaven.

And we give thanks, O Lord, today that you build your people up as a place of habitation for yourself, a spiritual house in which you are pleased to dwell.

And we give thanks, O Lord, today for all that that means to us and for the way that you challenge us separately, individually as well as collectively, to look at ourselves and to look at our relationship with you and to look at how we relate today to the privilege we have of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Lord, we ask today that you would help us to draw near to you through him. We know that he is the way, the truth and the life, as he himself declared during his time here in this world.

And we thank you for all that that means to your people, that they are brought into your very presence through that new and living way that he is. We thank you today for all that he has accomplished through death and resurrection on his own part, to lay a foundation for us upon which we could build, a foundation that will last us and will remain unchanged and will not be subject to removal or change throughout all eternity.

[6 : 47] Oh, bless us, we pray today through your Holy Spirit. Bless us, Lord, in such a way as would know that we have indeed met with God, that you have been pleased to come to show to us your way, to teach us your paths.

Help us as we come before you, Lord, to realize that we have sinned to confess, that we have hearts that need to repent of our sin. But we come not only through faith, but also in repentance. And grant us, Lord, that as we do repent, we may know your forgiveness, the washing of us clean from our sins, the guidance of us into further ways of obedience and commitment to your name and to your cause.

Oh, Lord, remember today we pray all who are bound to you in bonds of love and of grace throughout this world. And we thank you today that we can pray for one another, that we can bring before you people we've never met, but we hear about, people who serve you in different parts of the world, in very different circumstances, many of them to our own.

We pray especially for those today who serve you in difficult and challenging circumstances of persecution, of war, or various other circumstances in your providence that come upon us from time to time.

[8 : 17] Let's those beset with poverty, those who are struggling to feed their children, to look after them, particularly where there is also conflict and war at the same time, such as we find in Yemen and other places, Lord, in our world.

Oh, remember them, we pray, O Lord, and provide for them. Help us as we hear of it, as we open our hearts to pray for them, and as we give of what we can physically, materially for them.

We pray for your blessing for them, O Lord, for you can do for them what we cannot, and you are able to do for them and for ourselves more than we are able to ask or even think.

Remember, too, we pray, the situation in Ukraine and all that's related to it. Lord, our hearts go out to the people there, for while we are protected in so many ways from the devastation that has been wrought upon them, O Lord, we do pray for them.

And we pray that you would remember them as a nation at this time. We give thanks for the clarity with which that conviction is portrayed by them, that they wish to remain a nation independent of any other control but their own.

[9 : 31] Lord, we thank you, Lord, that as they seek to maintain the integrity of their citizenship and of the ways in which they would present themselves as a people in the world, Lord, remember them, Lord, at this time, as they are under the devastation and aggression that has come upon them.

Remember those of them who have fled their homes or had to leave their homes, many of them, Lord, with their homes already wrecked anyway, who have gone to other lands, to neighbouring countries, and some perhaps even to our own nation as well.

O remember them, we pray, as they leave so much behind them, and especially as they leave so much of what was their heritage and is their heritage and will remain their heritage, as they, Lord, seek to re-establish themselves meantime elsewhere.

O remember the president of that country as he daily proclaims his resistance to the aggressor, as he daily gives encouragement to his people.

Lord, remember him and all who help him. Remember your church, your people in that nation. Remember them, Lord, as they face such critical times in their experience.

[10 : 46] Look after them, Lord, we pray, and keep them safe, we ask, O Lord. And those of them who again have had to leave the country, remember them, Lord, as they carry their testimony to Jesus with them into these other nations.

We pray that you would bring this devastation and terror to an end, O Lord. And as you preside over all things in your purpose and in your wisdom, we commit this situation to you, O Lord.

We appeal to you, Lord, as one who has made his grace and his compassion and his love of peace known to us through the gospel. And we commit this to you and ask that you would deal with the regime that are perpetrating these evils, Lord, upon this people.

And we ask that you would remove them in your own way. Whatever way is open to you and always are open to you. Whatever it is, O Lord, of your choosing. But we do pray that you would remove this aggression and that you remove those who are perpetrating it at this time.

Lord, we ask in our own weakness and in our own inability to gather together thoughts and words that will ever be adequate to set this situation before you.

[12 : 05] Remember us, Lord, in your mercy. Grant us to continue to persevere in trusting in you and giving thanks to you for your overwhelming goodness to us.

Hear us, Lord, now we pray. Continue with us as a congregation through this week. And as we turn once again to a meeting to elect a successor to the assistantship in our congregation, we remember them.

We remember, O Lord, all of us as we engage in that matter. We pray that you would grant to us, O Lord, a ready mind to deal with that issue prayerfully.

And we commit it to you and ask that you would guide us through it. And we pray for Keniai as he continues his retirement. And we know that he himself will have a measure of relief when someone comes to be appointed as a successor to him.

And while again we thank you for all that he was able to do in the congregation, we commit him to you in these days. We ask that your blessing will be with all today who are ill.

[13 : 07] We pray especially for those who have contracted the COVID virus. We pray for them, for their families, for children that have also caught the virus. Lord, remember us, we pray, and continue to protect us and to watch over us.

And in all of these things, accept now our praise. Continue with us and bless us and pardon our sin for Jesus' sake. Amen. Now let's read God's word as we find this in Ephesians.

Chapter 2, Paul's letter to the Ephesians. And chapter 2. And we'll read from the beginning through to the end of the chapter.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Chapter 2. And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.

Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

[14 : 21] But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved.

And raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. So that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God. Not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Therefore, remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands.

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.

[15 : 33] But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.

And might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near.

For through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, 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. Amen. May God be pleased once again to bless to us this reading of his word. We'll sing now again to his praise in Psalm 118 and sing Psalms this time. Psalm 118 on page 156. And we're singing verses 15 to 24.

[17:08] Triumphant shouts of joy resound in places where the righteous dwell. The Lord's right hand is lifted high, his mighty hand does all things well.

I shall not die, I shall live. The Lord's great works I will proclaim. The Lord severely chastened me, but rescued me from death's domain.

Verses 15 to 24. And again we'll stand to sing. ú ■■■■ himself. Do you see 153? Give me that. Now that make■■■s hundred and thousand verse. book ■■■ songs a bit western since they arked in search of the church in the Lord's word, ■■AM! In that make■■■s hundred and civilizersh of nostalgic passion.

■■■■ lack thousands of mountains. film, In places where the righteous dwell, Won't end with eyes £1! In resilience temple, In ■■■■■■ heathslit high, In place where the righteous dwell, ship ■■■■ ur Wood it!

4, L mitts. Bethany■y sixth dwarves ■■■■■■ inspired■ ! Thora will seek the Lord's right hand to control all things well that For proclaiming our comfort, does not know them both in their sight. Itweisen. That no, Patricia inf mantener our grace, His mighty hand does all things well.

[18:15] I shall not die, but I shall live. The Lord's great works I will proclaim.

The Lord severely chastened me, but rescued me from death's domain.

Throw wide the gates of righteousness, I'll enter and give thanks to God.

This is the gate of God through which the righteous come before the Lord.

You answered me, I will give thanks. Salvation comes from you alone.

[19:51] The stone the builder shall refuse. Else now become the cornerstone.

Let's now turn for a short time this morning to Ephesians chapter 2.

We're going to look at verses 19 to 22. Ephesians chapter 2 at verse 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, 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. Out of the horrors and the devastation that we're seeing in Ukraine, we're seeing that wonderful sense of identity that Ukrainian people speak about whenever they're interviewed for TV reports, that sense of identity as Ukrainians, a sense of identity that they're determined not to lose, not to be overtaken and overwhelmed by the Russian forces, a sense of identity that's shown in their patriotism, but also in their commitment to their own particular identity and culture and way of life.

And that's such a wonderful thing to see, and so wonderful to see the determination to retain that and not to give in to the aggressor that has come upon them so drastically.

[21:55] And in this passage, in Ephesians chapter 2, it's the identity of God's people that the apostle is dealing with. And as he deals with the identity of God's people, Paul here is leading the Ephesians to consider what they now are, but he does that by beginning with what they once were, what they were once identified as, as Gentiles.

They didn't belong to the Jewish people, the people that had been given by God his revelation throughout these years of the Old Testament. And he's emphasizing here for them that now they've become fellow citizens with the saints.

They are very much fully integrated into God's people and what defines God's people and God's church as it is in this world. You are now no longer strangers and aliens, but are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

They are equally with the Jews, now party to the blessings of the gospel and the salvation that is in Christ.

And you can see in the chapters we read through it, and as I'm sure you've known previously, the distinction that was then in place throughout the world between the Jews and Gentiles.

[23:22] The Jews were people that God had been pleased to reveal himself to, to give them his laws, to give them the regulations that they kept as a people and that distinguished them as a

people down through these years of the Old Testament.

In contrast to all the nations that were round about, that's why in the Old Testament you find such reference to the nations, the nations that were still following a pagan way of life, in contrast to those that had come to be regarded by God as his covenant people, the Jewish people.

And all the way up to the days of the New Testament, you had that division. And it's impossible for us really today to even to begin to estimate or to appreciate just how firm and how wide that division was and how established it was in the world up to this moment of the New Testament age.

Because up until that time, the blessings of God largely were confined to his people, his covenant people, the Jews.

And here in this passage, the apostle is actually bringing the Ephesians, who were, of course, a pagan people in Ephesus, he is bringing them to a greater appreciation of what it now means to be the people of God.

[24 : 40] And as he does so, he brings us many things that we ourselves apply to our own circumstances, very different to the way of life in Ephesus. But these are principles that follow through into wherever God's people are found.

The identity of God's people remains the same as they are found in Christ. And it doesn't matter where they are found in the world, their identity is not in terms of their geographical location, but of their being in Christ, their being the people of God as they are found in Him.

And all the way through here, you find an emphasis on either in Him or through Him or by Him. It's all focused on Jesus as the one, as the ground, as the foundation on which they are set.

But in doing so, he brings us these wonderful images. They're really portraits or pictures of God's people or of the church, if you like, in these verses to help us to understand something of the privilege that we have in being members of the people of God, in having this involvement in this household of God or fellow citizens with the saints, or as he says here, being a holy temple that's growing and being built together for a dwelling place for God Himself.

You have really images there, the three images really, citizenship, your fellow citizens with the saints, and also members of the household of God. That's the image or the picture of a family, an organized family.

[26 : 15] And then, of course, that moves thirdly into the image of the temple, a spiritual temple in which God is pleased to dwell. Now, we're going to take the first of those two together, as you find here in verses 19 and 20.

And you find there an emphasis on, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints. We'll need to look at what that means in itself, but that's joined on very closely to being, also he says, members of the household of God.

And both of these are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus being the cornerstone. And then that naturally provides a link, really, to the next image, which is that of the temple, in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

So that's the run of the thoughts of the apostle as he joins together these wonderful images that help us to understand something of the privilege of belonging to God's covenant people.

Let's look at it firstly, the household of God, taking the reference to the fellow citizens along with that. He says, you are fellow citizens, you are fellow citizens with the saints.

[27 : 30] Remember we mentioned the division a few minutes ago between the Jew and the Gentile, and how that's come now to an end in Christ, and how you are, he says to the Ephesians, now fellow citizens with the saints, with all the people of God that were in covenant with him down through the years of the Old Testament, you've now entered to join with them in covenant with God.

You are now God's people. You weren't once God's people, but now you are. You equally share, he means, in all the privileges of salvation. It all stems from the death of Christ, from the death of the cross, from the death and resurrection of Jesus has come about this wonderful unification of Jew and Gentile in him.

This is what he means in the middle of the chapter there. He means there the two being made one. He is our peace, verse 14, who has made us both, that's Jew and Gentile, he has made us both one, and has broken down in his flesh, through his death, the dividing wall of hostility.

The hostility, the division between Jew and Gentile. He's broken that down, he says, through his death, so that they both come to be one. Now, this was a huge issue in the days of the apostles.

As you read through the Acts of the Apostles and then into the epistles of the New Testament, and indeed in the Gospels too, you'll find that the apostles themselves, to begin with, some of them at least, found great difficulty in understanding this or dealing with this, or appreciating this, or accepting this even.

[29 : 02] When you go to the likes of Acts chapter 10, remember that famous incident where Peter met with Cornelius, and where Peter was prepared for meeting Cornelius with the vision that he was given by God of this great sheet being let down from heaven, containing all kinds of animals, clean and unclean in terms of the Old Testament, but the Lord said to Peter, now he says, kill and eat, rise up, kill and eat.

Peter said, by no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice came a second time to him, what God has made clean, do not call common.

And then Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean. Then the messengers came from Cornelius, this centurion, this Roman, this non-Jew.

And the messengers came and brought to Peter this message that Cornelius was waiting for him and made inquiry for him as had been directed by God himself.

And so as the account continues, you can see the conclusion from verse 34 that Peter came to.

Peter opened his mouth and said, truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation, anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

[30 : 37] As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ, he is Lord of all. You yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea.

And he continues then to speak about Christ and Christ's death. And see how Peter himself had to come to learn and appreciate that that dividing wall of hostility was gone, that no longer were the Gentiles kept outside of the covenant people of God.

They were being incorporated into this relationship with God that the Jews had long enjoyed.

Because God has only one church. And in his own way of providing for his church, he's now brought things around in the New Testament so that the Gentiles, all who are outside of the Jewish people of Israel, are incorporated into the church.

That means you and I, of course, as well. And you'll find the same thing all the way through, for example, Ephesians itself, chapter 4 and verses 3 to 6.

You'll find that same similar emphasis there. There is, he says there, only one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call.

[31 : 48] One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. And he goes on to then diverge from that in terms of speaking about Christ's ascension and Christ's giving gifts to his people.

And then, of course, in Romans 15, you find an emphasis there on Paul's concern to gather, to make a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

Those saints of the Jewish section of the church, as it then was, they came to be then, they were making a collection for them in these formerly pagan parts of the world.

Why is he doing that? What is his rationale? What is his argument in favor of that? Well, it's not just that he's going to try and alleviate their poverty and their distress, though that, of course, is something that's important to him.

The reason, beneath all reasons, why he's organizing that and is concerned to bring that collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem is that they belong to the one family, the church in Nehemiah, and these places that were once pagan people, they're now being incorporated, they've been incorporated into the church, they're in Christ.

[33 : 00] And because they're in Christ, the Jewish people in Jerusalem are the same family spiritually as they are. Why do we actually send relief, as far as we're able, to Christians in the likes of Moldova, who have so few of the physical, of the financial and material commodities that we have?

Well, of course, it's to try and provide for them in their poverty. It's because we know that they need these goods so that they can have something more of the kind of comforts that we enjoy, even at a basic level.

But there's more than that to it. We remember these saints, these Christian people, though we don't confine our charity to Christians, of course, but we are required to do good, especially to the household of faith, as Paul himself puts it.

We're doing that because they are the one family, because we belong under the same Father, God, to the one spiritual family in Christ. They are fellow citizens with us and with all other saints, fellow citizens, enjoying the privileges of being people of God.

Remember, we saw citizenship in Philippians 3, not so long ago, Philippians 3, verse 20, where he's talking there about, we have our citizenship in heaven.

[34 : 23] This is the place where our citizenship is recorded, as he said to the Philippians. And that's really how it is for these Ephesians as well. They were once, in a spiritual sense, they were once stateless and also hopeless.

But now they have both. They have a state they belong to, the state of God's kingdom, the state of heaven itself as their inheritance. And they have this hope, this living hope in Christ, this positive hope.

They have all of that themselves. And, you know, Paul is saying to them, you should really appreciate that. They now have a passport. It's been issued by God himself.

It's relevant to their passage from this world to heaven. Their citizenship is marked on it. They carry it with them, spiritually, so in their hearts, in their minds, in their way of life.

And what we're seeing in Ukraine, in the cultural sense, or in the sense of belonging to a certain people, in the ethnic sense, you can translate that very easily into a spiritual sense.

[35 : 35] Walter Scott, a famous Scottish writer and poet, who was well known firstly for poetry, and that was his first love rather than his other writings.

But he said this, Now that's the Christian.

We are wandering on a foreign strand. We are in this world. We are aliens in this world. We don't have a home in this world. We have an inheritance elsewhere. We are citizenship of a heavenly country.

And God has given us the passport through faith in Christ. That's how it is for Paul and for his beloved Ephesians. That's what it means to him to have this privilege of belonging to God's children, to God's people.

And then the imagery moves from that to members of God's household. You are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

[36 : 46] You can see how there's a certain move in advance of citizenship by speaking of members of the household of God. When you're a citizen of the state, as you are when you're a UK citizen, that's a privilege.

Your passport is marked as a citizen of the UK. But then when you think of a family setting, you think of closer relationships than you have between a citizen and the state.

You then have a relationship between children and a father. And so as Paul moves from citizenship, thinking of citizens of the state of heaven, and of course there's a personal relationship with Jesus and with God in that, but he moves to speaking about this as members of the household of God.

And the word household there is exactly the word that's used for family and for family life. They are actually members of the household of God. The household in which God is the Father, over which God is the Father.

And he's their Father. And he's their Father because he has made them his children. He has adopted them into his family spiritually. And so that really brings in the preciousness of that relationship with God as a Father that we have when we come to be members of the household of God.

[38 : 10] When we are in Christ, when God has brought us to Himself through Jesus, and when Jesus is our Savior, when we come to accept Him, then it's really introducing us then into the fatherliness of God as our Father as well.

Look at verse 19, sorry, verse 18 there, the end of verse 18. He's talking here about Jesus, of course, in the verses here. He came and preached peace to you who are far off, peace to those who are near, that's Jew and Gentile, for through Him we both have access in one spirit to the Father.

We both, Jew and Gentile, have access in one spirit to the Father. That word access is important because it means more than just having a way into the presence of the Father.

access does mean that. Access is an opening of a way for us. And Jesus Himself is the way and the truth and the life. But there's more than just access involved in the meaning of the word because the word includes introduction.

Jesus is not just bringing us an access to the Father in Himself. He is the one who introduces us to the Father. That conjures up a wonderful image when you come to know Christ as your Savior.

[39 : 32] It's effectively, in a spiritual sense, Jesus coming into such a relationship with you by His grace and through your faith in Him. You can just picture that as Jesus taking you, as it were, spiritually into the presence of God, the Father, and saying, Father, here is the next member of our family.

Let me introduce you, He says to you, to your Father. This is what's happening. This is what happens in Christ. This is how we come into this relationship with God as our Father.

the preciousness of belonging to the family of God. And you see all the way through here an emphasis on through Him as you have in verse 18.

Through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. Wonderful way of combining the three persons of the Trinity there. I'm not going to go into that.

It's there. The theology of it is there. The Father, the Son who introduces us to the Father and the Spirit who is also involved in our access to God.

[40 : 50] How important is Jesus? How important is Jesus to you personally? Where does He feature in your life?

Is He at the center of your life and of my life today? Is He foundational to your hopes for eternity? Is He the one on whom your hope is founded?

On this rock that Jesus is? Do you know Him today as one who has introduced you to God in such a way as now knows God as your Father?

Because if not, if Jesus is not yours, none of this is yours. If Jesus is yours, then all of this is yours. You see, that's what makes the big difference. That Jesus Himself stands central and foundational in our relationship to God as members of the household of God.

Is there anyone at all here today that doesn't yet know God spiritually, meaningfully as their Father? That has not accepted Christ in the offer of the gospel?

[41 : 57] Not my offer, not the offer of the Kirk Session here, not the offer of the church. It's the offer of God through the gospel that's saying to you and to me every single time we hear the gospel proclaimed and the call of the gospel reaches us.

What He's really saying is, come to me so that I can introduce you to Father. Come to me so that you will rest in me forevermore. Today, Christ is absolutely crucial to every single one of us here. and as Paul is reminding the Ephesians and teaching the Ephesians and as this passage reminds ourselves and teaches us of the privilege of belonging to God's covenant people, he brings us to the very foundation of that, the privilege of knowing and having Christ for yourself.

Whoever else does or doesn't have is really not the most important thing to you, though it is important. Do I have Him? Is my life based upon Him?

Is my eternity sure because of Him? These are the vital questions. These are the things the gospel really sets before us.

[43 : 15] So you, he says, are no longer aliens and strangers, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and you are members of the household of God. And then he says, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

Now, in what sense is he saying you're built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets by which he means New Testament prophets or those who accompanied the apostles in the early days of the New Testament and establishing the church in the early days of the New Testament.

In what sense is this? Well, not in the sense in which the apostles themselves are spiritually the foundation of the church. Jesus is that. And that's why he says, Jesus Christ himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole structure joined together.

Christ is the foundation spiritually. Christ himself is the one on whom everything else is built, on whom you build when you live by faith. But the apostles were foundational in the sense that through their teaching and through the leadership that God gave them uniquely for that time, God established the New Testament church, combining with what was in the Old Testament to be this church of Jew and Gentile.

It's not a new church. It's the same church, but its dimensions have been increased and enlarged to incorporate the Gentiles. And the apostolic period is absolutely crucial in the setting down of the church from this time onwards.

[44 : 59] That's why we find it very important theologically to confine our theology of salvation to what was established in the days of the apostles.

If you find somebody in the street that tells you actually God has made me an apostle and has given me authority like the apostles in the days of Peter and of Paul and I have that authority and God is revealing to me things which I can now add to what you find in the Bible because I have this position from God.

You can tell them you're either just being deliberately difficult or else you're grievously short in your understanding because the apostles were for that time and just as you have the apostle writing to the Ephesians he's writing truths that are there foundational for the church for that time onwards. So these are crucial things for us to remember as we find variations in understanding among people of what the apostles were really about and who they were and what they were for.

So he's saying the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The teaching about Jesus especially and about God's relationship to his people that was established through the apostles and prophets.

[46 : 27] Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone. The one in whom the church is founded and who establishes the whole structure as it's built in relation to him.

Now that introduces us to the next image which is that of the temple. So there you have the household of God, fellow citizens with the saints, members of the household of God built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

In whom, in Jesus, the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

And that of course is a familiar image from the Old Testament as well.

That as you find in the Old Testament a physical structure called the temple, so that moves into the spiritual reality of the spiritual temple that God's people are.

All of you who are in Christ today are part, they are stones, as Peter calls it, living stones in 1 Peter 2. You as living stones are being built up into this spiritual temple.

[47 : 38] Every time someone is converted, that becomes a spiritual stone that God is placing in the walls of his spiritual temple. So every single person here that has come to know Christ is a living stone in the temple of God.

You have come alongside and in contact with all of those, not only of this generation currently that live in the world, but everyone who has gone before and all who will come after, who will accept Christ, who are in Christ, together they form one, wonderful spiritual edifice, the spiritual temple of God.

And the apostle is emphasizing the privilege of belonging to the people of God, where he's now changing the image, but not changing the emphasis on the privilege of being living stones in the temple of God.

And he's saying, you are being built. You are being built together. It's growing into a holy temple in the Lord. Just as every changed life, every conversion comes to be a living stone that's added to those already who are in Christ.

So he's saying this means the building is being constantly built, and it won't be finished until Jesus returns, until the last living stone is placed in the walls of this temple.

[49 : 02] When that will be, who knows? God knows. But all the time that the church exists in this world, that God's people exist as his covenant people, living stones are being formed and created by God to be placed in this temple.

Let me just make a brief reference to something that's very currently in the news. And that's the plan or plans to have a law in place that bans so-called conversion therapy.

That's not a term that we accept for a start, conversion therapy, because conversion in the Bible, the idea behind this is that people are being forced to change their way of life, to change their chosen way of life, by the likes of Christians who want them to take up a different form of life or way of life.

And that's a gross mistake of what the gospel is about. And it's a distortion of what conversion is. Conversion is not therapy. Conversion is the result or the outcome of being born again through the Spirit of God.

And the gospel and the preaching of the gospel is not spiritual bullying. If somebody tries to force someone else into their way of thinking, that is bullying, that's not what Christians are about.

[50 : 33] That's not what the gospel is about. That's not what our understanding of conversion is about. Because here's one of the benefits of knowing the catechism, for example, that so many

people sadly in our world don't know, and certainly people in positions of authority of politicians and so on, have long since forgotten what is effectual calling.

Effectual calling is God's work, of God's Spirit, persuading us of our sin. And he moves on to say, thereby persuading and enabling us to embrace Jesus Christ as he's offered in the gospel. Willingly we come. We are made willing by God's Spirit. We are not forced into becoming Christians by the church. If the church is up to that sort of activity, then it shouldn't be.

There's no part of the gospel. There's no part of showing the love of God and the grace of Christ. And you know, we have to try and get the message through that this description and what lies behind it of conversion therapy is really a misnomer as far as conversion is concerned.

And it's a distortion of what the gospel is about. And as far as we need to, we need to bring that to light. And we need to lay to rest once and for all, that what the Christian church is about is forcing or bullying people into becoming Christians, into changing their way of life from their own preferred choice into that which the church wants them to be.

[52 : 13] That is not what we're about. If people choose to refuse and to resist the call of the gospel, then that's on their own heads. It's not up to us to try and force them into a change of mind.

God is well able to do that himself. And that's what he does. He doesn't force people, but he does change people, and he changes people so they're made willing to accept Christ, to receive his salvation.

If I were to ask every one of you today who knows Christ as your own Savior, were you forced into that? Did the church make you do it? Was it a minister who bullied you into that change of mind, into the mindset you now had?

Of course you would say, if you're a Christian at all, you would say, of course it wasn't. God persuaded me. God made me willing, and I'm glad he made me willing.

I give thanks to him that he made me willing, because my change through his grace has come into the possession of something I would never have achieved by myself, or by my resisting his offer in the gospel, the possession of salvation, of security, of peace, of well-being, of citizenship, of membership of his family, of the hope of eternal life.

[53 : 45] It goes into a holy temple in the Lord, in him, being joined together, it grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him also, in him you also, are being built together into a dwelling place of God by the Spirit. Two things in that, I'm just going to finish with this.

A dwelling place of God means a place God calls home. We're not being built into a spiritual temple with God somewhere out there outside it.

The spiritual temple that God's people are as they are joined together by him and by his grace, they form a dwelling place for him, a place that he is pleased to call home, to make his residence, because the temple is also a palace, the palace of the Lord, the place in which he loves to dwell. temple. It's God with his people. It's God worshipped by his people. That's what a temple is for. And the spiritual temple is especially so, worshipping the Lord as his people.

[55 : 06] Now, let me just finish with this. I mentioned at the beginning the way that Paul moved from emphasizing what they once were to what they now are.

And you can read this through when you've got time carefully for yourself. And just look out for this as you read through the chapter again yourself. Go through the first part of it and see what he's saying about what they were.

You were dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked. You followed the course of this world. You followed the prince of the power of the air, that's Satan, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom, we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, and Paul is not excluding himself, being children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

That's what they were. That's where they once stood. That was their identity then. But now, see what he's saying here in verse 13?

But now, in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. And Paul loves this.

[56 : 21] He loves drawing this contrast. You'll find it elsewhere in his epistles as well. This contrast between what we once were by nature without Christ in our unconverted state, Jew and Gentile alike, what we once were, and he emphasizes that, not so that we can actually have thrown at us the ugliness of our sinfulness, though that's part of it.

It's so that we'll appreciate the wonder of being taken from that into Christ. But now, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

So, he says, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. You see, it is Jesus who makes all the difference.

The difference between what they once were and what they now are. And it's Jesus that makes the difference in your life and my life, individually, personally as well.

And your identity today is in some way or other related to Jesus. Either by not being found in him, and therefore your identity is with the world and with sin and with death, or being found in him, knowing him, having him, and being identified with and being part of the people, the family of God.

[57 : 59] May God bless these thoughts on his word to us. We're going to sing now in conclusion. Our singing this time is in Psalm 27. Again, it's saying Psalms on page 32.

Psalm 27, verses 4 to 6. One thing I'll plead before the Lord, and this I'll seek always, that I may come within God's house and dwell there all my days, that on the beauty of the Lord I constantly may gaze, and in his house may seek to know direction in his ways.

Verses 4 to 6 of Psalm 27. One thing I'll plead before the Lord, and this I'll seek always, that I may come within God's house and dwell there all my days, that on the beauty of the Lord I constantly make ease, and in his house may see eternal direction in his ways.

For in his dwelling he will keep me safe in troubled days.

within his tent he'll shelter me, and on a rock me raise.

[60 : 01] My head will then be lifted I above my enemies.

and in his tent I'll sacrifice with shouts of joy and praise.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.