

Ephesians 2:19-22

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- [0:00] This happens really naturally in some cases. If you're in the Army and you meet someone, you are a private first class or corporal or major or general. I've not been in the Army.
- Some of you know better than I, right? But I know in the academic world, well, I'm a 1L at the law school. Some of us don't even know what a 1L is, but that's a designation.
- If you're in the law school, it just means, okay, now I know where you fit. Now I know. In the medical system, I'm a second-year medical student. I'm a first-year resident. I'm a chief resident.
- I'm a fellow. I'm a super fellow. I'm an extra super fellow. I don't know what all the titles are. But there are all these places, right, that sort of say this is who we are. And there are some of those cultures where it's very stratified and very clear, right?
- But when you walk into a social setting, what does it look like? I think in our culture, it's often that we gravitate towards what we do or what achievements we've had.
- [1:05] But you know what? That hasn't always been true. There are times past, and even other cultures today, where the most important thing to introduce yourself is, you know, I'm Duncan McLeod from the Clan McLeod, if you've ever seen, you know.
- Anyway, that's a cultural reference. If you missed it, just let it go by. You're introducing, this is my father. You know, I'm a part of this family. And that's how you introduce yourself.
- I'm from this family. At some time in history, you would just say, I'm from this town. I've noticed that people who've lived in Connecticut all their lives say that.
- I'm from Bridgeport. I'm from New Haven. I'm from West Haven. For some of us who are from outside, we're like, West Haven to New Haven, isn't that like really close? No. They are different towns and different.
- And it means something to say that's where you're from. All this to say that who we are, these dynamics of how we introduce ourselves and who we are expose a question of our own sense of identity and our desire and longing for a place of belonging in this world.
- [2:23] Of course, we recognize that sometimes we don't feel like we belong. And we don't really know who we are or how we fit in, do we?
- I remember I worked with, this is a fairly trivial instance, but I used to work in campus ministry over at Yale. And I worked for an organization called CRU, Campus Crusade for Christ.
- It's a great organization. Loved it. Mostly, it's big in the South and the Midwest. It's not so big in the Northeast. And so I went to my national staff training in 1996.
- I went to the national staff training. And there was a handful of us from the Northeast, right? And then there were hundreds of people from other parts of the country. And I was at that point from Rhode Island.
- And I kept introducing myself. Like, hi, I'm Matt. I'm from Rhode Island. And people would nod and smile and say, okay. Like, they didn't even know where it was. And then I met this girl from Idaho.

[3:23] And we had this deep moment of commiseration about, oh, you're also from a state that nobody knows where it is. Until she looked at me and said, but at least Rhode Island is an island.

I mean, you can point to it on the map. And I didn't have the heart to say, Long Island is not the same place as Rhode Island. So I experienced it more profoundly the year after college.

I graduated and I moved from suburban New Jersey and Princeton down to Trenton. And I moved into a neighborhood that was primarily African American.

And I was a white college boy, post-college boy. And I had a roommate who was from Spain and a roommate who was Asian American from Southern California. And we lived together.

And the first Saturday after we moved into our apartment, we decided to go out our door. We turned left and walked down the street. And it was quite an experience for us because we felt very much like, man, did we not belong?

[4:32] And this was deeply embedded on us because after having walked for quite a while and met some very interesting people in our neighborhood, a police car pulled up and beckoned to us, hey, come talk to me.

And the cop rolled down his window and he looked at us, what are you doing here? And we were like, we moved into the neighborhood. This is where we live now.

And the cop said, and the cop was Caucasian. So let's just be on, you know, above. He looked and said, I wouldn't walk down the street in daylight with a gun by myself.

Do you want to ride home? And we said, no, no, no, it's okay. This is our neighborhood. And, you know, as I came to learn, if I were a cop, I might not walk down that street either.

Given the tension between the cops and the neighborhood, there were some reasons why the cop might have been afraid of that neighborhood. But we actually made some friends in the neighborhood.

[5:31] And we found that there were ways for us to reach out and connect even though, but we stood out so clearly as feeling like, man, we do not belong here. And I wonder if you feel like that in your context, in your life.

I wonder if you felt that sense of, where do I belong? We live in a political moment in our culture and in our nation where it's pretty easy to wonder, do I belong?

Am I going to be accepted here because of my race, because of the country I come from, because of my gender? All of these questions seem to have been put on the national stage for us.

Do I belong? Will I be accepted here? Our passage today points us in some directions of what the Bible has to say to us about this.

So go ahead and let's look at Ephesians together. We're going to read our passage. I'm actually going to read the whole section, as Nick mentioned last week. Chapter 2, verse 11 through 22 is one section.

[6:37] We're taking two weeks to talk about it. And actually, as we talk about it, just remind those of you who've been here and just to point out the flow of thought briefly for those of you who haven't.

Paul in chapter 1 writes this beautiful story, this beautiful picture. It's not a story. It's a beautiful picture describing all the richness of what God has done for his people in salvation for Christians, all the things that God has done for us.

And then in the second half, he prays that we would see this and that we would know this and that Jesus would be exalted in the middle of it. And then in chapter 2, he goes back and he says, how did we get there?

And he uses this pattern in chapters 1 through 10 of, you once were this, but now in Christ, God has made you this. And that's a similar pattern that we see here.

You once were this, look at me and now I'll just, he said, you once were aliens and strangers outside of the people of God. But now because of what God has done in Christ, which Nick just beautifully pictured for us last week, what God has done for us in Christ is broken down the divisions of people so that now those who are far off and those who are near can all come together in one new thing that God is making.

[8:00] And this leads us to the passage that we're going to focus on tonight, verses 19 through 22. So let's read this together. 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.

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 expressed in 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 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.

[9:44] Lord, in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Lord, we ask you that you would help us as we look into this word.

Lord, to capture our hearts with the glory and the beauty of it, of the truth that it tells us about who we are because of what you have done. Lord, I pray you would help us to do this.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Well, as we look at this passage, we see that God has given us this new identity, this new place in the world as being God's people.

And in this new identity, we find that there is a greater glory than we ever could imagine. There's a greater glory because we now belong. And there's a greater glory because of the sense of privilege that we have to play a particular role in God's world.

And so this is what we're going to look at. First of all, the sense of God's belonging and then the sense of privilege and how that, the privilege of the role that God gives us. So first of all, the glory that God gives us in sense of belonging.

[10:53] One of the things you have a hard time seeing in your English translation, but it's really fun when you read, this is one of the times when reading Greek is actually really fun because six times there are words that are related to what is basically the word for house in Greek.

Right? Six times. Verse 19, you see it. Right? You are members of the household of God. That's the most clear and evident one. Six times. I only have five on my page.

Maybe it's only five. I might have missed one. I only have five in my notes. You skip down to verse 21. He talks about this whole structure, this whole structure of something.

And that's another word for it. The whole household. Right? And the whole household is being made into a house or joined together is the word that you see in your English translation. But it's being sort of merged into this house is the idea.

And then verse 22, it says again, this is, this is, we're being built together. That is becoming a household together to be a dwelling place. And that's the last one. To be a place where the house where someone dwells.

[12:03] And in all of this language, what Paul is saying is the great place of belonging for this new person is that you are now in the household of God.

Okay. What does that mean? Well, if you are a Roman in the first century, you would have an idea of this in their culture.

A household was a much bigger concept. Not just a nuclear family, but a much broader concept. Right? Where there was a head of the household. And under that head, people lived in his care.

And it obviously meant his spouse, his children. It likely meant his parents. It may have very well meant an extended family, uncles, aunts, cousins.

It meant servants. Even slaves were a part of the household. One commentator says it like this. In the Roman world of the day, to be a member of a household meant refuge and protection.

[13:04] As much as the master provided, it also meant identity and gave security that came from a sense of belonging. And so, whether you were a spouse, a child, or a servant.

If you met someone on the street and they say, who are you? You know what their answer would be? Oh, well, I'm from the household of Paulus. I'm from the household of Stephanus. I'm from the household of Joe Schmo.

You know? Whatever it was. Your household gave you an identity. It said, this is where I belong in this society.

This is who I am. And what Paul is reminding us tonight is that the amazing thing of what God has done for his people in Christ is that he has made them, he has brought them in to say, you are part of my household.

I am the master who's taking responsibility for your protection, for your provision, for your identity, and for your belonging in the world. You are now under me.

[14:13] And this would have been amazing news to the Gentiles. I don't want to rehash what Nick said last week, but as a Gentile, you were outside of all these things. And the Jews looked at you and said, ew, ick.

You do all those detestable things. And the Gentiles looked at the Jews and said, y'all are weird. And I don't know what you do, but I don't want to be a part of that.

And then the gospel comes, and it begins to bring these people together in an amazing way. And if you were the Gentile, and you were living in Jerusalem, and you looked at this physical temple that was in the middle, that said, oh, to be a part of the people of God is centered around this building.

And you were a Gentile, you knew that you could stay at the outer edges, but you could never go in. You could never go into the inner sanctum. You could never truly belong to God.

Because there were walls and doors. And behind those, there were laws and prescriptions and prohibitions. Said you could never go in there.

[15:21] And again, go back and listen to Nick's sermon. But what God has done in Christ is said, those walls are gone.

The prohibitions are gone. Now, the ick, ew people, and the why would I want to be a part of you people are now brought together into this one thing.

And God says, this is my household. These are the people whom I love. So what does this mean for us?

Well, first of all, it means there's a glory in belonging. Friends, there are no green cards and no visas in the kingdom of God. In Christ, you are brought into full citizenship.

There are no stepsisters and stepbrothers. You are fully brought in and integrated into the family of God.

[16:20] This is now my family under one God. Okay, and here's the crazy thing. Look around. This is it.

These are the people. It's not some ideal group out there that you can imagine in your head. It's not some group of people that meet somewhere else that maybe you've seen on TV.

The household of God that he's called you to is us tonight. This group of people. This group of people in this city. And it's an incredible thing that God wants us to treat with great value.

He wants us to love the church, which means loving one another and saying, these are the people whom Christ died for. These are the people that God broke down the dividing wall between sinful men and God and then between one another so that he might bring us together into this one beautiful, diverse, crazy family.

It's not easy to do. Jesus recognizes this and says, there's a cost to following Jesus.

[17:40] It may mean leaving all of your other identities behind. Leaving behind your family. Leaving behind your worldly success and ambition.

It might cost you that. But he says, what you find in the church is a hundredfold. The riches of being with God's people. All those other identities, the little excursions.

It's not like you lose them completely. You don't stop being a woman. Or you don't stop being Caucasian. Or you don't stop being from Poughkeepsie. Or whatever it is. Those things are not lost, but they are relativized.

Or they are brought into. And in fact, they find the fullness of their expression and richness in being in Christ and in the family of God.

When we see that being in Christ becomes the foundational identity, all of those other things make more sense to us. And we are able to live in them and out of them towards one another in ways that we sometimes struggle to apart from that.

[19:02] How can we look at one another and value one another as a family? Think about how we can honor one another. You know, as I said earlier, our culture often deals with identity in terms of performance and role.

Like, what's my job? That sort of thing. But recognize that that's not true for everyone. So how do we think about how we address one another? Oh, who are you?

Where's your place on the pecking order? No, who are you? How has God made you to be? What has God done in your life? One of the ways that we honor one another in the family of God is by simply saying, hey, how has God worked in your life?

As the first thing I want to know about one another. It's the first thing I want to know about you. How has God worked in your life? It's fun to know all those other things.

What football team do you like and where are you from? And as we get to know one another, it would be much deeper. Wow, what does it look like through the lens of your particular makeup and all the richness of it to be a follower of Christ?

[20:08] How have you used that? How can I learn from you about that? But as we honor one another, we're not threatened by one another. We're not afraid of one another.

And we actually see God use us in one another's lives in beautiful ways. And that's part of what God has called us to as we recognize that as we have this sense of belonging in God's family, he then invites us to take hold of this and to value it and to love the church well.

Maybe some of you are here tonight and you think, I've tried the church thing and I don't fit. I don't fit in very well. Well, I have two things to say to you.

One, the church has a long way to go in living this out. It's not always perfect. And I want to acknowledge that. And I want to say it's not good and it's not right when we don't accept one another within the church for reasons that have nothing to do with being a part of God's family or not.

But let me also say this more profoundly because I think this is what Paul is saying to us in Ephesians. He said, if you think you don't fit in the church, you're wrong.

[21:25] You do fit. If you are in Christ, God has called you to be a part of the church. Don't forsake it. Don't give up on it. Keep pursuing it because God has called you to be a part of his household.

and his household is experienced in this age in the church. So love it and give up and don't give up on it. But this passage goes on and not only does he address this sense of belonging by saying, yes, you belong in Christ.

You belong because you've now been brought into God's household. But he makes this amazing thing, this amazing argument where he says, now I have brought the Jews in with the Gentiles, or the Gentiles in with the Jews to play a particular role in the church.

And I want to talk really briefly about this history just to put it together. Because when you read through the Old Testament, right, you see God making a special promise to a special group of people to say, I'm going to bless you and make you a great nation and you will be my people and I will be your God.

Now his purpose has always been broader than that because he says, I will make you a nation, I will lift you up to be a light to the nations so that the whole world might know who I am and might turn back to me.

[22:47] That's throughout the Old Testament. But it's not that hard to read the Old Testament and to think, man, being Jewish is really, really special. And if I'm not Jewish, man, I feel like I am the outside on the outside of this.

And so, in this argument, Paul says, look, God is bringing together this new work.

You who once were alien, foreigners and strangers, what's the language he uses in this? It's translated differently in different, you are strangers and aliens.

You aren't welcome. You aren't from here. You who used to be those people. You are now brought in. You are fellow citizens. You are members of the household.

But then he goes on. Verse 20, you are built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. He's saying, this people, you, we as Gentiles, I'm assuming almost all of us are Gentiles here, we now have been brought into something that's a much bigger river than we've ever imagined.

[23:55] It's not just, now I love Jesus and now I know God and that's great. But I'm a part of this whole sweep of history where the prophets beforehand talked about what does it mean that there is a God in the world who is calling a people to himself from every tribe and tongue and nation.

And God did this through the whole Old Testament and in the whole Old Testament the prophets speak of this God and this salvation and how he's going to do it in beautiful and wonderful ways. And we as Gentiles ought to have a great sense of privilege.

I can't believe that I get to be a part of this. It's like marrying Prince Harry. I get to be a part of the royal household of the British Empire.

Yet so much better than that. So he says that, look, not only are we standing on the shoulders of Peter and John and Paul, but we're standing on the shoulders of Abraham and Moses and David as well.

And the beautiful thing of this sense of privilege of being a part of God's people is that it's not something that we can really think highly of ourselves about. Because we just heard, if you've been here for a while, we've just heard in Ephesians 2, 8 and 9 that our entrance into this is by grace, through faith, not of yourselves, not of works, so that no one may boast.

[25 : 23] The thing that should characterize the sense of privilege we have as Christians to be God's people is humility that God would save people like us. Not self-righteousness, not triumphalism, not condemnation, but humility that God would save something like us.

and then he ratchets it up one more in verse 20 and he, sorry, in verse 21 and he says, not only this, but we've inherited the purpose that God had for his people throughout all history.

Think back. When Moses was leading the people out of Egypt and out of slavery and as God was ordering the people and as they camped, in the center of the camp there was what?

A tabernacle. It was a big tent and in the center of the tent what was there? There was a special place and do you know what dwelt there? The very glory of God.

God himself expressed his presence among his people in a tangible way so that the whole nation would know as much as the so that all the nations but the nation of people that his people would know I am in your midst and I will dwell among you.

[26 : 50] And then hundreds of years later when they finally moved into Jerusalem and established the capital and built in the center of it a temple and in the center of the temple with all the barriers there was a holy of holies and in that holy of holies the glory of God descended.

First Chronicles 7. Look it up. And one of the most tragic moments in the whole Old Testament is in Ezekiel 10 where the prophet Ezekiel has a vision of the temple and the glory of God departing from his people and leaving them.

And it leaves the Old Testament with this great cliffhanger. Where is God going to show himself to be among his people? Look at verse 21 with me again.

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.

Friends, not only are the people around you the household of God that you have been brought into but the people around you us together as we gather corporately we are the dwelling place of God in this age.

[28 : 20] People say where is God in the world? Do you know where God dwells? He dwells among his people. He dwells actually in his people. And he does this by his Spirit.

This is one of the incredible promises of the new covenant era of the time post-Jesus is that God himself will come and indwell believers. And he indwells us individually and as we gather together the glory that dwelt in the center of the tabernacle the glory that lived in the Holy of Holies is now meant to be seen burning in our hearts and on display as we gather together in worship.

It is an incredible privilege that we would be the place between now and what is to come where God is showing his glory in this world.

And we know one day because Revelation 21 tells us this Revelation 21 1-5 one of the most important passages in all of scripture talking about how one day God will make everything new and there will be no more tears and no more because a new heavens and a new earth will come down and God is going to bring it all together and there won't be the separation anymore and in the middle of it the angels announce now the dwelling place of God is with man and in a way that I can't even fathom God himself is actually going to live among us.

The only parallel I know is what I could only imagine it was like for Adam and Eve when they walked with God in the cool of the day but we know that that will be true and that's the end but in the meantime God has called his church to be the place in which he shows his presence in this world.

[30:22] This is the dwelling place of God and it is an incredible privilege and an incredible thing that God has done. So how are we to respond to this in closing?

First of all we should be in awe of this. You wake up in the morning to think I'm a part of the dwelling place of God among this world.

Do you ever think that? I don't. Usually I'm like brushing my teeth. You know but to stop and to think this is part of what God has called me into when he's called me into Christ.

The awe of that also comes with a little bit of fearsomeness because the fearsomeness of it is that God has called us as the dwelling place to live in a way that reflects this God.

In some ways the book of Ephesians is a beautiful picture of it. The first three chapters are about who we are what God has done for us and how he has called us to be his people and then in chapters 4-6 he says okay now that you know who you are let me tell you how to live.

[31:36] So he's going to say church live in unity with one another. Church grow in godliness in grace. Church learn how to control your tongue and to curb your anger and how to be kind and gentle to one another.

How to use words to build up and not tear down. He's going to instruct us on how to live in our very core relationships as husbands and wives and parents and children for the glory of God that we would be his people in a distinctive way because God has called us to be his special people.

That doesn't make us great but it does put on us a great obligation a great burden in some ways for us to live this out. But friends this is the great joy is that in Christ God has brought us into his household and he's made us his dwelling place.

A membership in God's family has great privileges and great responsibility. Some of you who have read the passage carefully are like you missed the most important part.

I didn't miss it. I just left it to the end. The foundation of this how do we know this is true? Because it is built ultimately on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ himself.

[33:11] When you lay a cornerstone I'm not a builder I've been told when you lay a cornerstone the cornerstone sets the lines for the building in every direction. If the cornerstone is level the building will be level.

If the cornerstone is set right the walls will be straight the angles will be proper and the building will be strong. Jesus Christ his life his death his resurrection his perfect obedience to the father his love in saying I will die for sinners in their place his resurrection from the dead his victory over sin and death is all a work whereby he has won to himself a people and is grounded in that and in that we find our place of belonging and we find our greatest identity and in that in Jesus Christ we now have the most important thing where we can live from and live out of so friends I hope you're encouraged tonight if you have put your faith in Christ these things are true of you you are members of the household of God you are the dwelling place where God in his by his spirit lives in this world to be his agents to be the place where he displays his glory and at the center of it all is

Jesus and so let us continue to make him the center of all that we are for his glory let's pray Lord thank you for this word and for the encouragement that it is thank you for the great work that you've done for us in Christ Lord we pray that as we go from here that we would remember Lord that we remember Christ that he is the great foundation upon which the lives of all Christians are built Lord I pray that as we see this great gift that you have given us I pray if there's anyone here tonight Lord who has not put their faith in Christ Lord I pray that they would consider and see what a great thing God has done Lord that they would come to him in faith and humility Lord I pray for those tonight who maybe have lost their awe and wonder at being a part of God's people Lord who feel alienated and strangers within

God's people Lord will you encourage them tonight with this word we pray this in Jesus name Amen