

## No Longer Strangers

Ephesians 2:19–22 (ESV)

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.

The last few years people who have been friends and family for years all of a sudden became strangers. Families stopped talking to each other. Once friends became bitter enemies. Political views, color of skin and other differences have become the focus and separation and alienation has no longer been the exception, but the rule.

Dr. Martin Luther King in his speech at Stanford in 1967 titled “The Other America” makes a reference to the struggle we still find ourselves in today: “One America is beautiful for situation ... millions of young people grow up in the sunlight of opportunity, But tragically and unfortunately, there is another America. This other America has a daily ugliness about it that constantly transforms the ebullience of hope into the fatigue of despair.”

It’s hard to look at T.V., social media any news outlet and not see the other America.

Last week Pastor Jim began teaching the first section of this passage and we learned about the division that this church in Ephesus had, illustrated by the dividing wall of hostility which was a physical and spiritual wall that separated two groups of people and separated people from God. We learned that those who were once far off have been brought near through the work Christ did on the cross. We learned that we have peace with God and peace with others because that wall has been broken down. We learned that in Christ we have a New Humanity. God has reconciled us all into one body through the cross. A humanity that exemplifies to the world what it looks like to be at peace with God and others.

In verse 19, Paul begins by saying ‘so then’, now what. What does that mean to us who are apart of that New Humanity.

In our text today, Paul tells us that we are no longer strangers. We are fellow citizens who live together as members of the household of God. There are three ‘so thens’, ‘now whats’ that I believe are the result of this wall being torn down and this new humanity being brought to life through Christ.

Because this wall has been torn down...

1. We are no longer strangers separated by differences, but family joined together through deliverance.

Verse 19 says, Ephesians 2:19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

The phrase ‘so then’ is a Greek phrase used when a writer is wanting to sum up his point with what is more than likely a deeper look at his reasoning behind the rest of the passage. He begins by recalling

what he had previously reminded them of in verses 11-13. This is a summary of the explanation of the readers state before Christ and now their position after the work of Christ.

He said you are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens. This is a reference to how far they were from God. Now remember, in this context there were only two kinds of people, Jews or Gentiles. I'm guessing that most everyone in this room would fall under the Gentile description. The word strangers can also be translated as out of place, unusual, the word alien speaks of one who has no home, an aimless wanderer with no connection. So, understand when he is saying you, you can place your name right there. Greg, you were aimless and hopeless without a home. Which is the contrast to the next phrase fellow citizen, which is one word that has as its root the Greek word sym meaning together where we get our English word symphony—a together sound. Paul says we are no longer unusual and out of place, we are no longer aimless without a home, we are now sympolitites together citizens. Citizens, which means you belong. We are citizens that operate like a well-played symphony. Different notes, different instruments, all being played to produce a harmonious work of art.

No longer strangers and aliens, but now fellow, equal, joined in with all believers no matter their nationality or social or economic status because the wall has been torn down. While the Jews were considered to be God's people in the past, now all those who believe are considered God's people. This would also make sense in light of the two groups being made into one, which Jim taught us about last week. This would emphasize the unity by insisting that they are joined with all believers of 'the household of God'.

Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider in their Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament say this, "In contrast to the people of Israel, whose covenantal relationship with God was valid only for them and therefore erected a wall between themselves and foreign nations and abandoned foreigners to separation from God, now no one is excluded from the Christian community because of being a foreigner. In the Church there are only new people, who together have right of domicile in God's house and are "God's house guests."

Whether your collar is blue or white you are new people, whether your political affiliation is elephant or donkey you are new people, whether your skin color is pearl or has an ebony hue you are new people, joined together, brother and sisters in the blood of Christ, fellow citizens. The key word here is fellow citizens not simply citizens, but fellow citizens...

Fellow citizens, with the saints, the NIV translates this as God's people. The reference is to point out that the readers who would have been predominantly Gentiles are now in the household with those who have been delivered and destined to live with God. The idea is, no matter who you are or where you come from, the only way you have access to God is because you have been delivered through the blood of Jesus and invited into the household, been accepted into the family of God.

I remember when I walked into my wife's parents house, knowing that before I left, I needed to ask her father a question. I was going to ask him to let me have his daughter's hand in marriage. I needed him to let me into his family. I was shivering, I was shaking, I could barely speak, because I knew he could say no. So, I mustered up the courage and asked him into the next room and popped the question...and I

waited...and I waited...and I waited... he finally said yes and after I ask for a towel to wipe the sweat off of his floor, I walked in to tell Selena I had been accepted into the family. I was no longer a stranger, but a fellow-citizen of the household of Alfred.

When the wall was broken down, when the peace with God and man was made through the cross, we no longer had to shake and shiver, hoping to have a chance to be in the house, when we place our faith in Jesus, we are in, we are accepted, we are fellow-citizens with all the saints, all the family members in the household of God.

First, we learned that 1-We are no longer strangers separated by differences, but family joined together through deliverance.

2. We no longer march to our own beat, but dance to the same song.

Paul goes on in verse 20 to say, Ephesians 2:20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

Paul says we are built. The word translated here as 'built' in the Greek implies a past action 'having been built'. This new building, this new humanity has been built on the apostles and prophets who were seen as laying the foundation, are now being depicted as being the foundation themselves. That means that the base on which the church is built, is the teaching of the apostles and prophets. The prophets in the Old Testament preached the word of God as they looked ahead to Christ. The apostles in the New Testament preached the word of God as they looked back to Christ, so it is the word of God that provides the solid foundation for God's household, the church.

Jesus is our cornerstone, the stone to which the foundation is aligned to guarantee it is straight and in order. Some argue for this being the capstone which would be the finishing stone, but Jesus is not the piece that finishes the church, because we are pieces of that building, the church is still growing. Jesus is the cornerstone that as others are added to the building, the alignment to the cornerstone ensures that the building continues to stand straight and strong.

My son is in the band at school and at one concert, the band director wanted to show us the parents how important each person is in the band. He asked the members of the band to choose just one note through one whole piece of music and play the wrong note. Each musician could choose any note throughout the whole piece from beginning to end. The conductor raised his baton and from the first beat, the whole song was horrible. It was hard to listen to, it only took one note per person sporadically through the whole piece to throw the whole song off from beginning to end. It was only when they followed the key in front of them to the tee that the band sounded harmonious. It was only when they aligned with the standard set before them that they all played beautiful music.

Jesus is our cornerstone, we are all to be aligned with Him, our standard, so that the Church presents herself as one harmonious song, but when we get out of alignment, even just for a moment, maybe we get out of alignment during an election. Maybe we get out of alignment over who was wrong in a news story about the police and a civilian. Maybe we get out of alignment over our view or understanding of the worship experience. It only takes a little movement out of alignment, and we become a clanging

gong, a sound hard to listen to, a life difficult to follow or an obstacle in the way of leading someone to the Savior. We must stop marching to our own beat and align with the cornerstone and dance to the same song of grace and mercy and peace.

1-We are no longer strangers separated by differences, but family joined together through deliverance.

2-We no longer march to our own beat, but dance to the same song.

3. We no longer sit without hope, but we stand as a strong house.

Paul finishes this thought with verse 21 and 22. Verse 21 says, Ephesians 2:21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

Notice it says the whole building, the whole structure, not all the buildings as some try to translate, this is the universal church called to oneness. We, the body of Christ, is what Paul wants to emphasize.

The Church is God's plan A. The unity and peace we seek in our world does not come by any other means. Notice Paul says being joined together, some translations say, being fitted, the idea, again, is that this building is still growing. The imagery is changed from building to temple to emphasize the church. The dwelling place of God is what is being built.

Some try to interpret that the building is near completion for God to dwell in it. However, one commentary notes the character of the building is derived from God while He inhabits it in its unfinished and still growing stages.

Understand, this is not saying that each part is being made into a different part. This passage does not teach that Jews become Gentiles or Gentiles become Jews. The point is that the Jews in how God made them and the Gentiles in how God made them are to use how God made them, the culture that comes along with them, the backgrounds that were the incubator for their personality, is now, by the work of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, being fitted, joined, united with the cornerstone, adjusted for perfect alignment to Christ and the scriptures, so that the house of God is ready to lead the charge toward Oneness.

In his book *Oneness Embraced*, Dr. Tony Evans says this:

"If we, as the church, are going to be the church that Jesus is building, we have no other choice but to embrace our call to oneness. Jesus did not place option B or option C on the table. He did not say that He will build a black church over here, and a white church over there, and a Hispanic church over here, and a National Baptist church over there, and a Southern Baptist church over there, and a denominational church over there, and a nondenominational church over here. Jesus did not give us that option. When we limit ourselves to those options, we have perverted His definition of His church. Rather, we are all individual stones coming together to form a larger, more complete whole upon which Christ, serving as the foundation and cornerstone, will build His church."

That deserves an Amen!

Paul goes on in verse 22 to say, Ephesians 2:22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

The previous verse was speaking of the universal church, as a whole, being fitted together. Now the imagery is brought closer to home with an individual focus. He says, 'You are being built' The writer wants the reader to see how they have come from the alienated state so vividly explained in verses 11-13 to being a dwelling place of God. They have changed from not being able to go into His presence, or experience worship with those who get to sit on the other side of the wall of hostility, to now, having that wall be torn down, broken down by Christ' work on the cross, obliterating any separation, wiping away any manmade differences, to having a continuous presence of the Father in them.

The Spirit is said to be what makes this possible. Paul says, we are being built into a dwelling place for God, BY... the Spirit.

Once again, the Trinity is shown to be involved in this growing and dwelling process. We saw this in verse 18 where Paul says, Ephesians 2:18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Paul teaches us, it is in Christ that we are becoming dwelling places, we are dwelling places of God the Father, through the indwelling presence and power of the Spirit. This oneness is a supernatural work. This is not a oneness that can be orchestrated by legislation, this is not a oneness that can be orchestrated by signed contracts or pinky swears, this is not a oneness that can be acted out by unity circles or singing Kum by Yah by the fire, this is a oneness that only comes by the power of the Holy Spirit given to believers, the power to change hearts, the power to convict us to evaluate our own prejudice, the power to open our eyes to see others as brothers who deserve every right that I have, the power to enable us to stand on the word and proclaim equality for all in every area of our life, the power of the Holy Spirit uniting the children of God under the banner of the blood of Christ. That can not be manufactured, that is the miracle of the two becoming one. Strangers to saints of the household of God.

We must admit, the message of Martin Luther King is still true today, We have somehow created a society that has it's most segregated hour at 11am Sunday morning. What we have failed to see is how Christ did not just die to rid us of our sins, but to bring all together as one. Until we have seen the work of Christ in light of the socio-political effect it had, we have not seen it to be all that it stands for. Jesus broke down the wall between the Jews and the Gentiles, and with that falling of the wall the barrier between all nationalities was broken down. Our world today does not mirror the picture that God desires for it to look like. We as Christians should be at the forefront of this quest to be viewed in the way God intended us to be, but unfortunately, we are not.

Be we must get what Paul is trying to teach us. We are all fellow-citizens together being brought to God as one body. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:12-20 puts it like this, 12 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

14 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

We all had to be reconciled to God. It is only through the blood of Christ that any of us can be associated with the Father.

In 2019 we had the opportunity to go to Africa. One of our destinations was Kenya. One night we had the opportunity to have dinner at a family's house. While we were there, pastor Jim pulled his guitar out and we began to sing amazing grace. But in that room were at least three different languages spoken. So each of us sang the song in our language. What did not change was the melody coming from Pastor Jim's guitar, we then sang the song all at the same time in our individual languages, but the melody of the guitar did not change. As long as we stayed in line with the melody of the guitar, no matter what language we were singing in, we all knew what the other person was singing. We were different, but aligned with the melody we all sang the same song.

Jesus is the cornerstone and the foundation is aligned to that cornerstone whether they are apostles of the new testament or prophets of the old testament because the melody of Jesus the cornerstone is timeless. And on that foundation is being built a dwelling place for God, some stones are African American, some stones are white, some stones are Asian American, some stones are Latino, some of those stones are Indian, some of those stones are French, some of those stones are republican, some of those stones are democrat, but because we are all aligned with the melodic grace of the Cornerstone of Jesus Christ, Though we are different, we are one building, one temple one dwelling place for God to continue to add to the household of God. Though we are different we all are saved by the same Blood, though we are different we all have the same Holy Spirit, though we are different we all will live together in the presence of an Almighty God.

I know at times we don't look like our picture, but I'm here to tell you, God is not finished, so let's keep pressing and keep praying as God continues the work of making us One. One Church. No longer strangers. Just One Church. Praise be to God! Amen! And Amen!