

A Picture Album of the Church

Ephesians

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What a perfect preparation we've had for the preaching of God's word through those songs that we have sung. The songs are chosen for our services months in advance or at least weeks in advance, several weeks in advance, and they are chosen without any knowledge of what I'm actually going to be at and where I'm going to be in the text in any given time. So when the songs come together as they do today, you are seeing a display, a practical display, of the great providence of God because those things are not consciously coordinated, it just works out that way and it becomes a great encouragement when we understand that. We see that the Spirit of God is directing and working through what we do in order to accomplish what he wants to have occur week by week in his church. And there is something that I want to say by way of preparing your heart for what we have to see today from Ephesians 2, if you want to turn there, there is a sense in which church ministry today is a little bit difficult in terms of setting the proper expectations because the entire church culture has been conditioned by the prevailing seeker-sensitive culture to think the church is about us. We've been conditioned, collectively speaking as people in the church, I'm not speaking just about Truth Community Church, I'm not talking about you, just making a general statement. People are conditioned today to walk into a church saying, with a mindset, "What's in it for me? What am I going to get out of it today? What are you going to do for me?" And so pastors desperately and in increasingly desperate cycles, strive to bring things out of God's word that they think or if it's even out of God's word, I should watch what I say, I guess. But preeminent on the mind is, "How am I going to do something, how are we going to structure this service so that the person who comes in gets something out of it and wants to come back?" And it becomes a very man-centered approach to ministry, a man-centered approach to church life.

What we're going to see in our passage today is that is the exact wrong way to do it. That's not what it's about. That the purpose of the church, the purpose of our gathering together as a body of believers is to serve God and to be a place where God manifests himself through his word, where God is praised and he inhabits the praise of his people and it's obvious that God is at the center and is displayed as the one about whom this meeting takes place. And until people come to understand that, a church like ours is going to seem very strange and awkward for sure and I just want you to know that when we plan our services and as we talk as elders and in leadership, we're mindful of the fact that we're trying to be distinct when we come into this room. We are not trying to have a

situation where someone comes in and says, "Oh, this looks like everything I've seen all week in the world." That's not our intention at all. Our intention is to be distinct because the purpose of the church is distinct from the purpose of the world and our goals and our aspirations and our motivations as we're going to see in our text here this morning are different from that which motivates the world. And if that's true, if at the core there is something different that animates the purpose that we gather together, the purpose for which we exist as a congregation, if that is true and it's vertical, not horizontal, then you should expect to see something distinct in a place where God is truly inhabiting and whether we succeed in that or not is for others to judge. I just want you to know what our aspiration is. The aspiration is not to resemble the world when we come into this room. The aspiration is to do what we can to be servants of the living God and to fulfill the purpose of the church which is the purpose of worship and a vertical focus when we gather together. That's what we're going to see in a delightful passage, if delightful is the right word, here at the end of Ephesians 2.

Paul, throughout chapter 2, has explained how Christ brought Gentiles to God through his shed blood. They were without hope. They were not partakers in the promises that God gave to his people Israel and they had no claim on God. But in his expansive mercy, Christ saved them and shed his blood and brought them near. Whereas they had been far away from God, without God, without hope in the world, not being partakers of the promises that God made to his people, completely on the periphery, completely outside with no basis to approach God whatsoever, no promise that they could claim as their own, in that condition, Christ stepped in, shed his blood, saved them and brought them near and following his death through the teaching of his apostles, preached peace to you who were far away in peace to those who were near. Verse 18, as we finished last time said, "for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father." Through Christ, Jews and Gentiles alike have the same access to God.

Paul has built a magnificent picture of the work of Christ on behalf of his people and there has been a magnificent, powerful progression in what he has said building up to this great climax that Jews and Gentiles who are believers in Christ share a common access to God. There is no more separation for us who are in Christ. We belong in the presence of God. We have the righteousness of Christ counted to our account so that we have a perfect, confident, bold access to God at any time, at any place, not just as our position but as our very experience as we live as Christians in this world. Paul says we have bold and confident access in Christ. We have freedom to express our thoughts and our minds completely in the presence of God. If we are under the weight of sin, we can come and confess it freely knowing that he receives us. If we are burdened by the weight of trial, we can come and he hears us favorably. We can come with our joys and our praises and even though they come through our inarticulate, imperfect, sinful lips, it finds favor with God because Christ has purchased that perfect access for us with his shed blood.

There is this great accomplishment of Christ of which we are the beneficiaries, Jews and Gentiles alike. Individually we share in this and we share in this common spirit and now what happens as we come to Ephesians 2:19? Paul is bringing this great chapter to a climax. This is the fireworks finale and it is a statement about the glorious consequences

of our salvation in Christ and helps us see the great corporate dimension to the work of Christ. Helps us understand, get this: helps us understand that our purpose in Christ transcends our individual lives. For those of us that are Christians, we are part of something that is much greater than we are and that's why the worship of the church must be transcendent. It must not be oriented toward our daily individual lives and focused on what individuals find pleasing to them. That is to completely miss the point. We are saved in order that we might become part of a corporate body that God is building over the ages of time that would become a redeemed, ransomed people who worship him and serve him gladly and we each have our part. We each fit into that picture and so as God saves us individually, it's as if he saves us as a living stone, as we'll see, and places us in part of a greater building that has a great unity whose focus is the worship of our Lord Jesus Christ and that's why we do what we do. That's why we come together. That's the purpose of our existence as Christians. That's the purpose of the existence of Truth Community Church. That's the purpose of the church universal.

Look at Ephesians 2:19 with all of that in mind. Paul says,

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Now, before I begin the exposition of it, I just want you to see there in verse 21, the corporate dimension that our American individuality is something that we need to see and kind of recognize and set that aside when we come to the church because Paul says that we are being fitted together. He says, verse 22, you are being built together. And so that's why we place such a premium on the unity of the church is that we are meant to be fitted together, individually as believers coming together and fitting together as Christ places us in the body so that we might corporately represent what it means to worship God and to be his people.

Now, Paul in this passage uses multiple illustrations to make that point. He gives us many pictures by which to help us understand God's purpose for the church. We're looking at it from different perspectives but it's all the same reality. You ladies who do photo albums can understand something about this. You have many pictures of your loved ones in your photo albums because one picture alone wouldn't capture the total essence of what that person means to you and so you have formal pictures taken on formal occasions, you might have wedding pictures, pictures of picnics, pictures that are candid, pictures that are staged. There are multiple ways that you use those pictures in order to express, somehow to represent the totality of what that loved one means to you. One picture wouldn't do it justice because it can't simply be captured in that 2 dimension plane, you need multiple dimensions, multiple pictures, multiple views in order to somehow get a measure of what this person's life means to you. Well, Paul, speaking about a much more important reality than a mere human, is expressing what it means for the church to exist,

it's showing us through multiple pictures, a picture album of the church, if you will, so that we would start to grasp the breadth and the depth of the greatness of what it means to be a part of the people of God. That's what we're going to see as we go through this passage.

So as you look at verse 19 with me as we dive into the text here, notice how he starts this section out, he says, "So then." So then. It could be transferred, "wherefore therefore." He's drawing the conclusions that we are supposed to make out of everything that he has said up to this point. Having established that Christians were saved and brought near by the blood of Christ, that he did this individually, he gave us access to God, now then, now therefore, so, as it were, here is what you are to draw from this and understand. This is how verses 19 to 22 connect to what preceded in verses 11 to 18. Paul is saying, "Here is the conclusion that you are to draw from everything that I have been saying." He is introducing his conclusions about the fact that Gentiles have been incorporated into the church with believing Jews and what he does here in verse 19 is and you're going to see this, I wish I could demonstrate it physically because it's so evident in the text. Paul, having said, "Here's my conclusion," now is going to pivot and you can see he makes a very hard pivot in verse 19. He pivots away from, he mentions one final time what these unbelieving or now, formerly unbelieving, now believing Gentiles, he pivots away from their former condition and pivots from that into the very purpose for which Christ has saved them. It's a very hard pivot. He's going in one direction and he stops and he plants his foot and he moves in a different direction and you can see this and you need to understand it so that you can see how he moves to the conclusion in the following 4 verses.

So he says there in verse 19, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens." That's simply summarizing what he has said in verses 11 through 18, particularly what he was saying in verse 12. He says, "remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." He says, "That's what you were like," and now for one final time here in verse 19, he touches on that one final time, simply to bounce off of it in order to explain the purpose of the church with the pictures that he provides. He says, "you are no longer strangers and aliens, you are no longer separated from God, you are no longer like foreigners in hostile territory, you are no longer meandering through a land that is not yours." And for those of us who are Gentile Christians, these are sweet words indeed.

You remember, don't you, those of you that are Christians, don't you remember what it was like to be an unbeliever? Don't you remember looking back on it now even if you didn't fully understand it there, the sense of isolation and separation and purposelessness that marked your existence? Don't you remember when the weight of the conviction of sin came upon you and you realized that you were guilty and separated from God and under his judgment? You remember that, don't you? Don't you remember that? Well, this is what Paul is referring to to the Gentiles is, "Remember, that's what you were like. That's what I've been explaining," Paul says over the past several verses, "but now," he says, "you're no longer like that. Once you did not know God and the Jews mocked you

but now, now, there has been a dramatic change of status. You are no longer like that," he says. "Let's focus on what you really are. You have been integrated into the purposes of God in a way that have far-reaching consequences. You belong."

Beloved, this church of which we've sung, the church's one foundation, "I love thy kingdom, Lord." And the great purposes of God, the human blood of Christ when the eternal Son of God became incarnate and shed his blood on the cross in order to reconcile you, fulfilling a purpose which God established before the beginning of time and the holy councils of the Trinity. Paul is saying that you who are Christians, understand, you belong in the center of that. God has brought you in and incorporated you in the very purpose for which he planned redemption, not just in an isolated sense but that you might be part of a body that belongs to him.

So he's explaining the consequences that flow from the way he has described salvation in verses 11 to 18 and so what he does now is he pictures the consequences of salvation in 3 different ways. He gives us 3 different pictures. He says, "Here's a picture to help you think about what it means to be the church, what it means to be a Christian. Let me show you a picture from a different perspective, a family photo. Let me show you a final picture," and you see yourself reflected. We see the purpose of the church reflected in each of these pictures. Different pictures in a different realm but all expressing a similar reality of the identity of the people of God and their purpose in God's plan.

So first of all, here in verse 19, he pictures us in God's kingdom. He pictures us in God's kingdom. He doesn't use the precise word "kingdom," but you can see the concept there. Look at verse 19, he says, "you are no longer strangers and aliens, but," here's the big contrast, it's a sharp contrast in the original language. Sharply contrasting their former position, he says, "you are no longer like that. Let's not talk about that anymore. That's in the past," and it's in the past in Paul's thinking now as he moves forward to state positive truth about what it means to be the people of God, what it means for Gentiles to now be saved. He says, "You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are," present tense, ongoing reality, "you are fellow citizens with the saints." He says, "you belong. You share citizenship in the same kingdom as believing Jews do."

Now, a citizen belongs to a nation. A citizen has a right to be there. A citizen shares in the civil rights that that society bestows upon its people. Paul was a citizen of Rome and used his Roman rights where it was necessary in the book of Acts. What Paul is saying here is, as he's showing that Gentiles have been completely incorporated into the church and that there is not a first tier status for believing Jews and a second-tier status for Gentiles, he says, "No, we are fellow citizens with the saints. Now that Christ has redeemed you," he says, "understand that you have been redeemed completely and been given the full privileges of people in God's kingdom." So when he says, "you are fellow citizens with the saints," he is recognizing the reality that the same king rules over them, the King Lord Jesus. As citizens, these believing Gentiles have the same privileges and duties as do the believing Jews in the church. Their status is not distinguished on the fact that they did not come through the people of the Jews. As those under the rule of Christ, he says, "you are fellow citizens." There is an equality in the way that God has dealt with

you. Jews, if they are to be saved, must come through Christ. Gentiles, if they are to be saved must come through Christ. And when we both come through that door which is Jesus, on the other side lies equal privileges in the kingdom of God. There are no second-class citizens. There is no caste system in the church. Gentiles have equal footing with believing Jews just as citizens of the same country have equal rights under its laws. Stated theologically: the blessings of justification, sanctification, glorification, free access to God, are equally given to believing Gentiles as they are to believing Jews. There is no distinction.

Look over at Galatians 3:26. Just one book back in your Bibles, one screen up in your iPad. Galatians 3:26 expresses this same truth, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise." He's saying that there is not a preferential salvation for masters versus slaves, for Jews versus Gentiles. We all receive the same perfect justification at the moment we believe and therefore we are on equal standing with each other before a holy God. A perfect equal standing bestowed upon us and that's what Paul means when he says that you are fellow citizens. You have the same rights and privileges that those who came before you do.

Now, just by a manner of clarification and understanding: this does not eliminate role distinctions in the church. Slaves are subject to masters. Wives are subject to their husbands. Children are subject to their parents as Paul will go on and explain later on in the book of Ephesians. It's not to create this false egalitarian view where everyone is the same and everyone does the exact same function in the church and Paul is not doing away with authority in the church as he says these things, rather he is saying that we have an equal standing before God, an equal access to him, even though our roles may differ in what we fulfill in the church. If you think about it, even within the Godhead, the members of the Trinity fulfill different roles in the work of redemption. The Father chose us. Christ purchased redemption at the cross. The Holy Spirit came and applied it to our hearts in time.

So we see that this doesn't eliminate role distinctions but rather it is speaking about an even greater reality about our equal access before God in Christ. There is spiritual equality between believers. My salvation is no better than yours. The rich man's salvation is no better than the poor man's salvation. That's why James can condemn partiality in the church in James 2. He says this has no place in the church. We can't make human distinctions like that as we think about our members because there is the same equal salvation given to all. So whatever classifications there may be in the world around us, we set those aside when we walk into the doors of the church, figuratively speaking. We set that aside in our approach to relationships within the church because we share it common rights in God's kingdom and identical access to him in prayer. We are fellow citizens with the saints. We look at each other and we don't classify each other, we just say, "Ah, my brother in Christ. Ah, my sister in Christ." This is part of God's design that there would be equality between believers who are under his rule.

Now, that's one picture, the picture of God's kingdom. Paul moves on to a second very brief picture, a more intimate picture, to explain the unity and purpose of the church here at the end of verse 19 when he says, look at verse 19 with me again. Point number 2 here: God's family. God's family. He says, "you are fellow citizens with the saints, and," let me introduce another picture, another metaphor, "and you are of God's household." This expresses a warmer tone than the kingdom illustration does because it invokes the picture of a family. It invokes a picture that believers share in a common family. We are brothers and sisters in the household of God. We share in the common love of God the Father which he has poured out upon you and which he has poured out upon me. My access to the Father is not better than yours. Your access to the Father is not better than mine. God has shared a common love upon us and now as the church's spiritual family, there is an intimacy that is involved in being under his spiritual roof, so to speak.

1 John 3:1 says, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are." Scripture speaks of us as the children of God, belonging to the family of God. Having the same genealogy, if I can put it that way, the same spiritual genealogy. It was the same birth that brought you into the family of God as it was me. It was a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit upon your heart that placed you in the family of God. The same thing for me. We were born in a common way to a common Father, by a common salvation, and therefore we share in this love of God, this immense, wonderful, perfect, generous, gracious, giving love of God, we all share in that equally. We are all under the rule of his house. We are all under the care of the same Father.

Paul's point then is that that should promote unity in the church. Just as we are fellow citizens promotes a sense of equality, so sharing in the common love of God, being in a common family, sharing in that same family life, should promote the unity of the church. We're more than citizens in a kingdom. To become a Christian is to enter God's family and be a part of his greater household. Remember, Paul is speaking in metaphors here. He's giving us pictures and you can see as he's bringing this to a climax and emphasizing this unity, you get a little bit of a preview, you get a foreshadowing of why it is that he says what he says in Ephesians 4. Look at that with me. In chapter 3, Paul is going to pray. Paul is going to connect what we're looking at now with exhortation in chapter 4 by the bridge of a prayer in chapter 3. We'll look at that. But this emphasis on unity is a driving force in what motivated Paul to write this letter and that is why he is concluding and bringing a climax and a finale to the end of this chapter in this way. That's why soon in the letter he's going to say what he says in chapter 4, verse 1, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." Now, we're in a position where we can start to understand that verse a little bit better. You've been called as a fellow citizen, with others. You have been called as members of a family, with others. God has been gracious to you and gracious to the person sitting next to you and we share in this together, not in a spirit of partiality.

So with that in mind, Paul says, "I implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling. Remember this," and then he goes on and says, "What is it that you're after? What about

it, Paul?" "With all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love." Look at verse 3, "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. He's climaxing this discussion of unity at the end of chapter 2 and as he gets to the exhortation in chapter 4, he's picking up this same theme of unity. He's got the same thing in mind all the way through and so if you're going to understand the book of Ephesians, understand the priority of unity in the church, you need to see how all of this fits together. He gives us pictures so that we are prepared to receive the exhortation that comes in chapter 4 and what comes in chapters 5 and 6 and beyond. There is this unity.

Beloved, one of the things that that does is that it makes us just on a real practical level, it should make us slow and hesitant to be critical about each other within the body. There is a place for keeping our complaints to ourselves. There is a place for tolerating different things in different people for the greater sake of this unity. You see, when we really drink this in deeply, when we see that the purpose of Christ in bringing the church to pass in his great counsel, in his great work, as the Spirit baptizes us and places us in the body into a preexistent body, you know, you're born again and you're brought into the church and you're kind of joining a work in progress. You're coming into something that preceded you and if unity is the point, then Paul says, verse 2, chapter 4, verse 2, look at it with me again, "with humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love." There will be times where we get on each other's nerves. I'm sure I've gotten on your nerves many times and you've been very gracious not to call it to my attention. Here we see the theological underpinnings of the way that we deal with each other in the church. We're fellow citizens. We're united. We're fellow members of the family. God loves us and shared that love with us equally and therefore having received this great common love, we are equipped to display it to one another.

Now, you see, these things matter. These things work out in the way that we relate to one another. These things work out in what we say to one another. These things work out in what we choose to make an issue of and it's all designed, not as a rebuke but for Paul to show us what it means to be a church, why this church comes together, what the purpose of Christ is in it and now here's what flows from it. We share in a common salvation. We share in a common love from God and that we display to each other. There is such a moral force to the objective work of Christ to redeem his people. That's what Paul is writing out for us. That's what he's bringing out for us in these pictures.

Now, as we move on to verses 20 and 22, we're going to see the final picture that he gives to us and it's the picture of God's temple. The picture of God's temple where we get a particularly clear view of the purpose of the church and the source of the church. God's temple. By the design of God, individual Christians fit together into a common life that is designed to display the glory of God. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12, he uses another unity and diversity metaphor when he talks about the body and the eyes and the ears and the hands, the feet, you know, that there is one body with a purpose and multiple aspects to the one body. Well, here in a similar way as he talks about God's temple, he's showing how we fit together and it's the design of God for us to be different but to fit together in a seamless way that expresses a common purpose.

In verse 20, look at what he says. Having said that you are fellow citizens, you belong to God's household, household kind of prompts him to think about a different metaphor as he goes on and he says in verse 20, "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone." Just in a real overview summary fashion, what Paul is saying here is that revealed truth is the foundation upon which the church stands. He is saying that what God has given in Christ, what God has given through the instruction of the apostles and the prophets, we'll see what that means in a moment, what God has given is what we stand on. In a human realm, what brought about even in a spiritual realm, I suppose, but what brought about your salvation was the truth of God applied to your soul by the Holy Spirit and that truth of God is contained in the 66 books of the Bible and the Spirit of God takes the convicting power of the law and convicts us of sin so that it becomes our tutor to lead us to Christ. By revealed truth, we understand that Christ was the perfect and only substitute for sinners, that in Christ, in his shed blood as a substitute for guilty men and women like you and me, alone could the wrath of God be turned away. Alone could reconciliation with God be achieved.

Those are all revealed truths. You can't discover that by studying creation. You can't find it in human wisdom. The path of the Gospel, the truth of Christ, your salvation depends on what God revealed when he was under no obligation to do so. That's the truth that Paul is alluding to here as he moves from the illustration of a household to the picture of the church as a building. So when he says that you have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, he means that your conversion came through the revelation of God, given through those men in the first century. Jesus appointed apostles to be his representatives, to be a spokesman, to be his ambassadors and in the completed New Testament canon we have what he intended us to have.

Paul mentions there, look at verse 20 with me again, he says, "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets." When you read that for the first time, you might just kind of assume that he's referring to the Old Testament prophets and that he's referring to what the apostles taught and then boot-strapping in the Old Testament prophets by including them. Does "prophets" refer to the Old Testament prophets? Probably not. Paul, first of all, notice here as he's teaching, as he's giving this, that Paul mentions the prophets after the apostles so the apostles are given a primacy of place which you wouldn't expect if he's just thinking chronologically Old Testament, New Testament prophets and apostles. If he was thinking like that, if that's what he meant, you would expect him to reverse the order. That's not what he says. But even more than that, Paul shows later in this same letter that he has in mind men who were part of the New Testament church.

Look at chapter 3 with me, verses 4 and 5, for example. We're just kind of going on a little bit of a side note to clarify who these prophets are. In Ephesians 3:4 and 5, he says, "By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known." And so Paul is saying, "I'm giving you something that the prior people didn't know about but now it has been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit." The Holy Spirit came in Acts 2. He's referring to prophets in the Spirit. He's referring to something that wasn't priorly

known and so these prophets were apparently part of the New Testament order rather than being a reference to the Old Testament prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the others.

That's also confirmed and notice the sequence stays the same in Ephesians 4. Ephesians 4, Paul says in verse 7, "to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." Skip down to verse 11, what was that gift? Well, it was men, "He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers." Notice this, this is very interesting in verse 12, "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ." We saw a few weeks ago the body of Christ is a reference, it is a metaphor for the church. And so Paul here is talking about prophets, not the Old Testament prophets but those men who were prophets in the early New Testament order of the church. These men apparently had a temporary role in providing revelation to the church pending completion of the written canon. So they were the prophets with the primary authority. There were prophets that gave revelation from God to those congregations while they were transitioning from the time of Christ until the canon was completed and God's revelation was finished. There was a transitional role for these men. Scripture refers to some of them: Silas and Judas are called prophets in Acts 15. Agabus has that title in Acts 21. Paul's greater point, don't lose sight of this, is that Gentiles, you and I, came into the church through God's revelation given through the apostles. At the time this was written, there were New Testament prophets but their role ceased with the completion of the canon. They no longer exist. There are no prophets today contrary to the false claims of many in charismatic circles. Paul's greater point is: God's revelation, God's instruction, given through these men who were vehicles of his revelation, that is what your salvation rests upon. That is how you came into the church, it's through the solid, unalterable, perfect revelation of God given through these men who are vehicles of his self-disclosure. Sound doctrine is the basis of the church for it alone leads us to Christ.

Look at verse 20 again, Paul says, you have "been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone." The place of preeminence given to Christ, the formative source given to Christ. A corner stone sets the lines and the balance and the angles for the rest of the building. Everything comes down to how that corner stone is placed. For us in the church, everything ultimately comes back to Christ. We know him through the revelation given through the apostles but it's not those men in themselves, it's the truth that they revealed. They pointed us to Christ. So watch the amazing way that Paul has traced things back to Christ. If you think about the rivers that run through this part of the United States, you could start in New Orleans if you wanted to and work your way up the Mississippi and trace back into other rivers until you get to the ultimate source where the water is first given. That's sort of what Paul has done here. In explaining to us what it means to be Christians, he has ultimately led us back to the very fountain, the very corner stone which is Christ himself. He starts and he says, "You have been bought with the blood of Christ. You have been brought near. You now have unity horizontally with Gentiles because you have been saved." How did that happen? It came through the revelation given through the apostles. What was the point of that? What were they pointing to? They were pointing to Christ.

So he starts with their individual position. He traces it into a horizontal corporate reality. Shows that it was based on the teaching of the apostles and that it all came back to the very source, the very fountain, the very corner stone which is Christ Jesus himself. And in this manner, he gives Christ the great priority that he alone deserves. In Christ, all things in the church hold together. Take away Christ and we collapse. Take away the sustaining hand of God and his providence, and the universe implodes. Remove the corner stone and the whole structure comes down. In Christ we have a perfect corner stone. In Christ we have that upon which our building rests, the building of the church of which we are individual members. So Paul has brought us to esteem Christ once again, esteem him for his preeminent place in the church and to recognize that he is the source of it all.

Now, here's a question for you: why? Why? What's the point of all this? What's the point of Jews being brought together with Gentiles? What's the point of apostolic revelation? What's the point of your conversion? What's the point that we are here today? Is there an end in mind or is this simply as writers of old used to say, is this just the opiate of the masses? Is this just our spiritual drug that we use to get through life when others turn to actual literal opiates in order to dull the pain of life? What's the purpose of this? Why are we fellow citizens? Why are we in the same family? Why do we share in the temple of God as that is used as a picture, not a literal building? Why? Look at verses 21 and 22, "in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into," okay, is moving toward this goal, here's the purpose coming to light, "a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." The temple was a symbol of God's presence. The temple was a place where God was made known. The temple was where worship took place. It is where God displayed his glory.

Now, what Paul is saying, now, to elevate the purpose for which we exist, Paul is saying, "Understand that you all are being brought together, the totality of the purpose of the great universal church as it is fitted together as each individual believer is brought to saving faith in Christ, the purpose is that we would be seamlessly brought together so that we might be a place where the glory of God was manifested through the proclamation of his truth and the loving expression of relational loyalty to others in the body of Christ. Where worship transcends human experience. Where what God says is the authority, not the way men sit in judgment on it. The church is uniquely to be a place and we have been saved to corporately come together and be a manifestation of the glory of God." That's our purpose. That's why we're not trying to look like the world. The world is not the place where God displays his glory, he does it in the church. That's why we don't want to look like the world in what we do and what we say and what motivates us.

We have been called out for a different purpose. Paul is saying, "You have been formed together to be a temple, a place where God is displayed, where he is manifested, where he is worshiped, where his glory is in view." It's stunning. It's humbling. It's almost frightening. It's gloriously frightening. It's frighteningly glorious to realize that that is the exalted purpose of God for believers. That there is a corporate dimension to the display of his glory and that now since the coming of Christ, since the foundation of the church, he

does it through weak, paltry vessels like you and me. And as we hear these things, as we understand what Paul is saying, it lifts us up and it gives us a view and a sense of identity and purpose that far transcends what it means to our own individual lives. We are part, listen, we are part of something greater than ourselves. We are part of something that precedes our life and that will live long after we're gone. We are part of an eternal purpose of God, brought about in Christ, continued through the teaching of his apostles and manifested and delivered to us through the ages of faithful people, many of whom shed their blood and gave their necks to strangulation so that it might be faithfully transmitted to us, so that the baton might be handed to us. Here we are, having received the baton, doing our little lap in the relay race.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, it's about so much more than our individual lives. The purpose of the church is transcendent and so individually we recognize and understand that and then corporately we commit ourselves to manifesting that and we believe that that is manifested by holding up this revelation of God upon which we stand for our salvation. We elevate it. We proclaim it. We announce it. We explain it. Because it's through this word that God makes his glory known, not through a social Gospel. Not through meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous. Through his word. When a church closes the word and silences God, it forfeits its reason to exist. That's why we do this Sunday after Sunday because this is the foundation on which we stand and individually God saved you to fit you in to be one of the jewels of the building, to be one of the bricks that make up the wall. You have your place without which the building would be incomplete. I have my place without which the building would be incomplete.

Go back to Ephesians 2. You're probably still there but I closed my Bible. Good on you, you kept your Bible open when the pastor closed his. Verse 21 and 22 of Ephesians 2, "in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also," it's emphatic, you also. You belong. You and I mean you, "are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." Individual believers are being fit together to be a place where God is manifested and worshiped. We are a temple not physically but spiritually and God has saved us to display his glory and to make himself known through us. Our purpose is no less than that and we get to be a part of it and we get to do it together.

The Apostle Peter had a similar thought in mind if you would turn over to 1 Peter for just a moment. 1 Peter 2, just after James and before the letters of John. 1 Peter 2:5, let's start in verse 4. 1 Peter 2:4, "coming to Him," that is, coming to Christ, "as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Every believer is vitally connected to the one true church just like every brick is vitally connected to the one overall building. One physical building, many bricks. One universal church, many believers as a part of it. We are part, beloved, of something greater than ourselves. In time, horizontally with men, something greater than ourselves vertically.

Notice that Paul says in Ephesians 2 that you are being fitted together. It has a sense of you're still growing together and the work isn't done. God's work isn't done. New believers are being added as people come to Christ and there is more material, spiritually speaking. I know that's a weird way to talk. But more is being added to this great temple as believers come to Christ and if you think about it, you and I, we're still growing too. We're growing spiritually. We are growing in our sanctification. We're growing in our knowledge of God. We are growing in our love for Christ. We're growing in our submission to the Spirit. So there is this living dynamic organism that is taking place all under the sovereign directing hand of God and through it all, God has a unifying purpose that he is bringing to pass. He is building for himself a people whose top affection, whose singular priority, whose reason for existence is to worship him, is to glorify him.

So we come together as a local manifestation of that body, not to pursue social purposes, not to make as if this were the final goal, our community a better place to live in, let the walls ring out. We exist to glorify the one who saved us. To manifest his truth. To manifest what a holy life looks like. And as we do that, filled with such gratitude that we have been rescued from sin and brought into the people of God, we manifest what it looks like to glorify him, to thank him, to worship him, to praise him, to extol his attributes, to magnify his power, love and grace. That's why we exist. That's what happens in a temple: the God of the temple is made great. That's what we do corporately.

Beloved, it's your call individually as well, to make him great, to exalt and glorify this one who has saved you, made you part of his kingdom. Who has saved you and made you part of his family. Who has saved you and given you an individual unique place in the temple which is his church so that he might be worshiped, that he might be glorified, that we might hit the tape running and have him welcome us, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Let's bow together in prayer.

O God, help us to understand and fulfill the purpose which you have given to your people. Help us not to love this world but to love the Christ who saved us out of the world. O God, build us and complete the work that you have begun in us that we might be proper worshiping instruments of the glory of God, built on the foundation of your revealed truth, Christ Jesus himself being the corner stone and the object of our greatest fidelity, loyalty and affection. We pray in the name of Christ Jesus. Amen.

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