

# Becoming What We Are

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**Bible Text:** Ephesians 2:19-22  
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If you would join me in taking a Bible, we'll turn to the New Testament today, to the letter that Paul wrote to the Ephesians. The book of Ephesians and if you'll turn to chapter 2, Ephesians 2, I'd like to beginning reading at verse 19 and read through the end of verse 22. Paul is writing to the church, believers at Ephesus, in a different time but people like us who have put our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus, he writes,

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.

This is God's word.

You'll see a picture of one of the local congregations here in town. I'd like for us to pray for them as we pray for ourselves.

*Heavenly Father, thank you for the church. Thank you for the church specifically in this community, in Mount Washington. We're grateful for a Christian presence, the church in which you bring forth your mission. We thank you, thank you for the church at Vision Valley Baptist Church. We thank you for that congregation and pray today that as they worship, as they worship that you will be the center, that Christ the cornerstone will be the very center of their lives and that as they build and grow in community and love for one another, this will be the place in which, the environment in which the Holy Spirit does work, work in us and through us. We pray this for us as well. Help us to see things today and understand things in such a way that we see the beauty of Jesus and that we'll be quick to obey what we hear. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

It's been a few years ago now but Katherine and I went to Harrodsburg, Kentucky on I guess it was a two or three day trip. We stayed at the Beaumont Inn, a beautiful place, beautiful old facility. We had a great time there. We traveled to the surrounding communities. There's a lot of nice little small towns that are nearby and Katherine took along a map of antique stores and peddler's malls and those sorts of things, in advance to

kind of lay out the trip, you know, we'd go to this one and then we'd go to the next one, that sort of thing. The very first one we pulled up in front of, I looked at it and I thought, "This place is a dump." In fact, I said, "This is a stinkhole. I don't even want to go in there." It was dilapidated. It just didn't have that, you know, that look and I told her, I said, "I guarantee you there's nothing in there that I want." But we went in, of course, and I want you to know seriously within two minutes I rounded a corner going down an aisle and I ran into this massive used book display. Now if you know me, you would know that that would be just what I'm looking for, but this was out of the ordinary. A lot of these places, you go in and the books are all out of order; they're all laying on the floor; you've got to bend over and get down on your knees and I don't want to do that. They had them all in order. They were nice and they were a selection of books that you rarely run across that are used. I mean, there are some rare things there. I spent one hour right there in that spot without moving. Katherine had to come and get me and say, "Are you okay?" I said, "Yup." And I went on further through the mall and I ran into another display of used books that was even better than that one, and the long story short is this: after spending at least a couple of hours in the store longer, I came out with a stack of quality used books and it turned out that there was something in that store that I wanted, though I didn't believe it.

As I think back about that story, don't you think that there are many who feel that way about the church? They look at the church and they think, "There's nothing in there I want. There's nothing in there that will help me." They're outside the church, maybe they've been invited by you, you've invited somebody and they're like, "Nah. Nothing in there I want. Nothing in there I need." But what if you're wrong? You see, that's one type of a person, the person outside the church looking in and they may be reluctant and say, "I don't want anything to do with that. There's nothing in there I need." But then there's another person I want to think about this morning as well, that's the person who is inside the church but they don't understand and appreciate, 1. how they got there; and they don't treasure it like they should.

Think about it this way. You go into surgery, the doctor has told you ahead of time, "Here's what we're going to do." But you are under anesthesia, you don't know what's going on and you come out of the surgery, it's been a great success, better than what they planned, and you begin to come out of anesthesia and you're groggy and you finally get to a place where you wonder, "What happened? What did they do?" And you want to know what happened. You need somebody to tell you what happened because there was work done on you and you didn't even know it. You were oblivious to it. I tell you that to say this: have you ever noticed, and I hope you've noticed this, if you haven't please look for this, have you ever noticed that the New Testament writers spend a great deal of time informing us as to what happened to us? For example, in chapter 2 of this letter, this is just one of many examples, in chapter 2, the very first verse we're told, Paul says, "You were dead in your sins and trespasses," and then later in that chapter he says, "But God made you alive." You see, we would not know these things unless we were told and taught.

You see, I know we assume, we say we've trusted in Jesus and, "I'm a Christian. I believed in Jesus." Yeah, okay, but we have to be taught and told what happened to us. That's what the New Testament writers are doing. That's what Paul's doing in this chapter, telling us what happened to us, what God did for us in Christ, and what the implications are. That's why we need to read our Bibles. That's why we need to study the Scripture because it's like we've been under anesthesia and all this great work has been done upon us and we don't even realize it; we don't even really appreciate it until we read this and we go, "This is what happened to you." And while our text was written specifically to people inside the church, to believers, this text also has something to say to the person who's outside the church as well. So we're going to look at it in three different ways. I'm going to look at what we were. Paul tells us in this section, what we were. Secondly, what we are now. And most importantly perhaps, how to become what we are.

So, first, what we are. Look at verse 19. I hope you've got your Bibles open. If you don't have your Bible open, to the person next to you, just tap on his shoulder and say, "Why don't you have your Bible open?" Yeah, I know you're going to do that, right? But we ought to. We ought to. "I don't have the Scriptures over here." I believe the Spirit of God can show you things, open your eyes to things that we don't even touch on today but we're going to touch on this.

Look at verse 19, it says, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens." Now just stop there for a moment. Let's take you. Who is he talking to? You. He's talking to Christians because he's written this letter to a church in Ephesus. So this is speaking to Christians. "Christians, you are no longer," now what does that imply? You were, right? You're no longer but you were something. What were we? Look in verse 19, "you are no longer strangers and aliens." Now what in the world does that mean? What is Paul getting at? What is he using that imagery for? And it's imagery, that's what it is. He's saying, "Think about your life before Christ. You were like a stranger and an alien."

Now some of you know your Bibles pretty well and you know, "Hm, that's not the only place in the Bible that we read this phrase, this imagery, 'stranger and alien.'" Let me show you a couple of examples. In Hebrews 11:13, "These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth." Now just pause there for a moment. In this case, the Bible writer is using imagery of stranger and exile or stranger and alien to describe Christians. Another place in 1 Peter, the same thing, "Beloved, I urge you as sojourners," that's strangers and exiles, "to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul."

Notice here in these two places the Bible writers are using this imagery of stranger and alien for believers in Christ who are on a journey toward their true home. In other words, in one sense, as a Christian you are a stranger and an alien. Remember the old hymn, "This world is not my home/I'm just a passing through." That's a way of saying we're strangers and we're aliens. This world is not really our true home. We are citizens of heaven now, but in our text today in Ephesians, Paul is using this imagery of stranger and alien more in a negative way to speak about our life before Christ.

Look at chapter 2, verse 12. Put your finger on verse 12 there and he helps us to understand what he means by stranger and alien. He said, "remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise," notice this, "having no hope and without God in the world." Now what are we learning here? Until we were reconciled to our Creator through faith in Christ, we lived our lives as strangers and aliens. That's what we were but what does that mean? It means this: we were alienated from God. We were alienated from our Creator. In other words, the true God of the Bible was foreign to us. Oh, there were times that we said, "Oh, I believe in God and I think God is this way, and I think God is that way." What that means is we had a god of our own notion. We kind of thought of God in a certain way. It wasn't the biblical God necessarily because the Bible says we were alienated from that God; we did not know that true God; he was foreign to us. His goodness was foreign to us. God would graciously reign upon the unjust and we really didn't appreciate it, we didn't appreciate his goodness, that we're strangers and aliens. Paul is saying that we live in a world that doesn't meet our deepest spiritual desires. We are foreigners, aliens, strangers spiritually.

Maybe this will help. I've been listening to a book on CD, a brand new book called "Rocket Men," and this is something different for me to read or listen to and it's a book about the mission of Apollo 8 back in 1968. We're familiar with Apollo 11 in 1969 when men walked on the moon, but there was another mission just as, or maybe more important than Apollo 11 and that's Apollo 8. It was man's first journey to the moon. Frank Borman, Jim Lovell and Bill Anders were the first humans to see the moon close up. They orbited around the moon numerous times at 69 miles above the surface of the moon so they were able to get multiple pictures, film, all kinds of great stuff and they were fulfilling a childhood dream and desire. All three of these men were specially picked; they were all skilled in what they were doing; and all of them had a dream and a desire ever since they were children to go into space, to go to the moon.

I thought it was interesting that Bill Anders, one of the astronauts said this. After they get to the moon, they're orbiting around, they're getting all these amazing pictures, they're in awe, here's what he said, that the moon wasn't as near interesting as he thought it would be. Wow. Really? What's that say to us? It says that even the things of this world, even the things of this universe do not satisfy the deepest spiritual needs of our lives. He had all these desires, "I've got to go to the moon. It's going to be wonderful! It's going to be great!" Got there and he said, "Eh, wasn't quite as interesting as I thought it would be." It reminded of Kevin Durant, NBA star, makes megamillions playing NBA basketball, and when he won his first NBA championship, after winning the championship he said this, "I've learned that much had not changed. I thought it would fill a certain void but it didn't." What's he saying? We're strangers and aliens in this world. We're incomplete. Without being reconciled to our Creator, without knowing God through Jesus his Son, we are incomplete. We may go to the moon but we'll still be incomplete.

Paul is telling us, "This is what you were, strangers and aliens, without hope, without God in this world." But then he goes on in this letter and we read it in verse 19 to tell the

believers what we are. There's what we were and now what we are. Look at verse 19 again, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens," comma, "but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." Now when you read that, you should, this would be a good thing to do, just go, "Wait! How is this possible? How did this happen? How did I become a fellow citizen with the saints?" In other words, all the saints that have come before us, we are fellow citizens with them; we're all part of the household of God, the doors have been swung open, "Come on in to God's house!" How did this happen?

Look at verse 19 again, those first two words, "So then." So then and what means here is this: something has happened to make this possible and he's just been writing about it. The "So then" is reflecting back upon what he has just written and I want you to take your Bible there in chapter 2 and follow with me. Look at verse 1, it says, "And you were dead," you were dead in your sins. What does that do? Well, we already know, it leaves us as strangers and aliens. Look at verse 4, though, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us," look at verse 5, "even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved." So what do we learn there? God's amazing love, his saving love, and he made us alive. We were dead, we were dead spiritually but he made us alive and that we were saved by grace. Not by works but by the sheer amazing grace of God. Look at verse 13, then, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." That's beginning to open up to us the work of Christ on our behalf. Then look at verse 16, "and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility." So now it's talking about reconciliation, being made at peace. We were alienated from God but now we are at peace with God. Look at verse 18, it tells how it happened, "For through him," speaking of Jesus, "through him we both have access," both Jew and Gentile, "have access in one Spirit to the Father." So what is Paul saying in verse 19? So then, as we have received by faith what God has done for us in Christ, we are now fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

Now just pause with me for a moment. You know and some of you, this may touch you this morning, you know that we live in a world where many people are having what's called an identity crisis; they wonder, "Who am I? What am I here for? Am I a male or am I a female?" So many people are having many kinds and levels of identity crisis. You see, identity refers to who you are or who you believe yourself to be. Now think about it this way, some people they have an identity crisis and they go, "What am I?" So we listen to our friends and we listen to the people at work and we let them tell us who we are, but listen, if God is our Creator, if God is our Creator shouldn't his opinion get the final say? It doesn't really matter ultimately what you say you are or what your friends, family, your enemies even say you are, if you were created by God, what matters in the final most important sense is what he says about you.

What is he saying in this chapter? We've already looked at it, you were dead in your sins and trespasses. Look, if God says you're dead, you're dead. No matter what kind of front you put on, no matter how much goodness you try to bring out, no matter how you try to

dress yourself up and that sort of thing, if God says you're dead, you're dead. But also if he says you were made alive, if he says, "Hey, you are among the fellow citizens," if he says, "Hey, you are part of the household of God," if he says that, that is what is most true about you. Why? Because he's your Creator.

So we have to decide something here when we're talking about identity: are we going to identify ourselves as just a mere good person, "I'm a good person. I'm a good person. I've tried to be a good person," do you want to identify as a good person or do you want to identify as a loved person? What's the difference? You can identify as a good person if you want to but Christians are people who identify as people who are loved by God in Christ, and when God says that about you, that is the truest thing about you. What truly counts is life with God and identity remade and shaped by Christ both now and eternity.

But let's poke into something here in verse 19 just a little bit. Notice it says, "and members of the household of God." Now I want to poke into this a little bit because we need to, okay? Because we live in a world that is becoming ever more individualistic and going it on our own, but notice here, we're members of the household of God. Notice "members" is in the plural, okay? What is this saying to us? First, it says this: all Christians belong to God. All Christians belong to God. White. Black. Asian. Hispanic. Latino. Wherever believers are in the world, all believers, all Christians are part of the household of God. They are part, another way of saying it, they are part of God's family. This imagery here, household of God, it's speaking about the family of God or also the church. The church is the household of God; it's the family of God.

So what should we get from this? And I want to point this out in case you're not seeing it. It is saying that as Christians we are designed to experience and know Jesus together, not individually. In fact, look at verse 21, "being joined together." Verse 22, "being built" together. Do you see those words? We are designed to experience and know Jesus together, not individually. It is not Jesus and me, it is all of us and Jesus, right? Oh, I know, I know that there are those who unplug from church, they unplug from church, "I'm not going back. This happened. That happened. I think it can be just Jesus and me." No. No, it is not just Jesus and me, it is all of us and Jesus and if you are determined to go another route, then you need to find you another God. You do because the God of the Bible is building a household with members, not just you and Jesus, you see. You see, the God of the Bible is about a family. It's about others. It's about together.

This is a reality here we need to realize. I want to read you something that really caught my attention. This is a true story. Hillary Harris, when she learned the name of her next-door neighbor, it set off some mental alarm bells and led to an unexpected family connection. Having been raised in a loving adopted family as a newborn, Harris has always been curious about her biological family but that curiosity turned into necessity when she and her husband were expecting their first child. According to CBS News, Harris put in a request to unseal her adoption records in order to ascertain her family medical history. "That had all my health history. It had a letter from my birth mother. It also disclosed that my birth father, Wayne, had passed away in 2010," Harris said. Then it had the names of two sisters, two half-sisters, Rene and Dawn. Then right here it says,

"Dawn Johnson of Greenwood." The following year, Harris and her husband, Lance, noticed they had new neighbors and Lance went out to meet them. Lance comes in and it's like, "Yeah, I met the neighbor next door, her name is Dawn." "Dawn from Greenwood?" Lance is like, "Yeah." Hillary said, "I'm like, you don't get it." He's like, "What are you talking about?" She recalled, "And I pulled out all my adoption paperwork and I said, 'Dawn. Greenwood. Sister?'" Lance said, "Oh, my gosh." It turned out that she was living right next door to her sister.

Can I just say this to you this morning? If you're here today and you are a believer, there's a good chance that you're sitting right next to your brother and sister in Christ. Did you know that? I know, believe me, I know that we don't often think in these terms but we should. Right in front of you or behind you is a fellow believer, a brother and sister in Christ. That is the reality and God works powerful in our lives to the degree that we understand this. God works powerfully in our lives to the degree that we are in community together.

Let me flesh this out for just a moment. It's possible that someone is here today and you are in trouble and nobody knows it, maybe. You know, it's possible that you're here, you're in trouble, it might be this bad, you might be involved in behavior that would make a prostitute blush and you wonder, you've been wondering, you've been wrestling with this, "How did I get here?" And you're all alone. You're all alone and you've fallen off the track and you're alone and you're receding more into the dark recesses of life. Do you know what you need? You desperately need a brother and sister in the Lord who cares about you. You really do. You need a brother and sister that you can talk to and say, "Hey, this is what's happening in my life. This is what I'm struggling with." You need a brother and sister in Christ that you could be so close to that they'll not condemn, they'll not beat you up, but somebody that will sit with you and help you find your way back.

I heard about a little girl this week, a true story. She came home from school covered in mud from her waist down to her feet. Her mother, of course, was shocked and said, "What in the world happened to you today?" She said, "Well, you know, one of my friends in class, she slipped and she fell into a big mud puddle, a big mud hole, and everybody else was running to get help and so I just sat down in the mud puddle with her to wait with her." And I thought, you know, that is exactly what I'm talking about here. Brothers and sisters in Christ, family of God loving each other, close enough to each other in such a way that we can reach out and say, "Would you sit with me? Would you help me? I have fallen into a pit. I'm in trouble. I need help."

You see, over the last few months, I've heard in this church numerous times and I love it, people who said, "I don't know what people do at times like these without a church family." I've heard that again and again in this church, so thankful for it. But the reality is there are some that are trying to go it on their own and they don't know, they don't know what I'm talking about. They don't know that refrain and it's because, and let's just be honest here, let's just throw this out here, you might be here this morning and you say, "Look, I don't feel all that tight with other believers. I consider myself," you may say, "I consider myself a Christian, I love the Lord Jesus, but to be honest, Brother Van, I don't

feel all that tight with other believers." You might even say, "I really don't see that person as my brother and sister in Christ." Thought they are, you don't see them that way.

And so what do we do about that? We must become what we are. What are we? We were strangers and aliens but what are we now? We are fellow citizens with the saints, members of the household of God. But then you say, "But I don't, I'm sorry, that may be reality but I don't feel all that tight and I don't consider this okay." That's what we mean by we must become what we are.

How do we do that? Look at verse 22, "In him," that's in Christ, "you also are being," do you see that word? "Being built together." It doesn't say you are built together, it says you're being built together and what does that tell us? Being built together is a process. We're being. It's an ongoing process. It's a process of becoming. We're becoming what we are. In fact, notice a little later in the letter, here's what Paul says, Ephesians 4, "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called," in other words, live out what you are, "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love," now notice this phrase, "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Now I wish we had a lot more time but we don't so I want you to listen to me closely. Notice here it does not say that you and I produce this unity and bond. We don't produce it. It's not what we do, this is something that Christ has produced; this is something, a work of a Triune God in the church. But what does it tell us? We are to maintain it. In other words, you and I as believers are to be eagerly, diligently maintaining, promoting the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace within the church. We're to be actively doing that and in doing so, what we're being told here, in doing so we will become more and more what we are. Now listen, it's going to be difficult if not impossible to do this by merely showing up from time to time on Sunday. I'm serious. We're drilling down into something here that's just not going to like snap our fingers and it'll happen. It's a process but it's something that we, each believer, must be eagerly involved in maintaining and it can't happen just by showing up every once in a while.

So what will help us? What will help us over the hump? I want you to see it in verse 20, okay? Verse 20, "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone." How do we – now listen, here's what we're asking – how do we eagerly maintain and promote unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? What will be the motivator for us? What can we look at to wake us up and to realize, "Look, I've got to be about this. This is what I was made for. I'm made to become this." What will help us? Jesus Christ himself being the cornerstone.

One of my favorite images of Jesus, there are many used in the New Testament, is that of him being a cornerstone and it's used in other places in Scripture. I want to show you one of them in 1 Peter. As you come to know him, that's Jesus, as you come to know him, now notice, "a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house." Now if you notice that, that is almost identical to what Paul is saying in our text but Peter adds something else to it. He says that God the Father chose Jesus to be a cornerstone, living

stone, cornerstone. He's using that imagery to help us to understand the importance of Jesus. You see, a cornerstone is the most crucial stone in a structure, in a building, but what we're told here is that when the human builders inspected the stone, they looked at it, looked it over and said, "Nah. It's unfit." And they threw it out in the weeds. "I'm not going to use that." What we should see is this, what the Scriptures are tell us is when Jesus came to his own people they did not receive him. Oh, they looked at him and thought, "Oh no, he's not what we're looking for. He's not the Messiah. No. No. No. He's not going to fit." You see, as people today, people today, though my may be here right now, you may be watching right now by Facebook, Jesus is okay, Jesus is alright but he's not crucial, he's not a cornerstone in your life. You like to think about Jesus, you like to pray to Jesus when trouble comes but he's not crucial, he's not center to your life. You've looked at him and said, "Well, you know, he's okay but we'll just toss him out here."

Ah, but what does the Holy Spirit want us to see about Jesus? The Holy Spirit wants us to see this, and listen to me and we'll close, the Holy Spirit wants us to see that Jesus Christ left his heavenly home. It was a beautiful place to be from all accounts, it was where there was perfect fellowship, perfect unity among the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus left his heavenly home and he came to this earth and became homeless. "Foxes have holes, birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." Jesus left his heavenly home and he became homeless and, in effect, he became a stranger and an alien. Remember on the cross he would cry out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Oh yeah, Jesus left his home and he became homeless and became a stranger and an alien so that, so that through him, so that through faith in him we might no longer be strangers and aliens and that we could have a home. We're members of the household of God and, listen, because Jesus was precious to and chosen by the Father, those who are in Christ are also chosen by and precious to the Father.

Now let that work on your identity this morning. If you're here and you say, "Well, you know, people have said this about me and people have said this about me," what does your heavenly Father say about you? And if you're in Jesus he says, "This is what's true about you, you are precious. I chose you." Friends, the way that we appreciate and value what we are and what are no longer but what we are, and to become progressively more and more what we are, we must keep our eyes on the cornerstone. We must build every facet of our lives upon the cornerstone and this will produce an eagerness, a diligence to promote unity and peace within the family of God, and as we're being built together, it says, into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit, this will be the setting in which God will work powerfully in our lives.

Don't you long for that, friends? Don't you long for God to work powerfully in your life? To be a reality in your life? It's in community, it's in the family of God, this is where God is doing his work, primarily in his church. Yeah, that store I looked at, I don't want to leave you with the impression that it was perfect, it wasn't, but I'll tell you this, the good I found in that store far outweigh the imperfections and I think that is exactly what we can say about the church. Amen?