

**Ephesians 2:19-22**

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God (NRSV).

Ephesians is a compressed version of doctrine and practical advice. The Scripture for today starts with words “so then.” This means that information given is based on some information previously given. Therefore, the background information leading up to the text is important. The letter opens with blessing. This reveals the overall attitude of the author. There is joy in what is known and there is joy in revealing what is known to others. The letter informs us that we are adopted through Christ into God’s household. We are redeemed through the Lord’s blood and forgiven of all of our trespasses. This is available to you because you have heard the gospel of salvation and received it. Your salvation is a personal benefit to you but it also brings praise and glory to God.

Chapter two is about being dead to sin. We have all lived a life of sin. But God, through mercy as a great act of love, brought us a new life in Christ. We are saved by God’s grace. We are not saved through our own doing. Salvation is a gift of God. As an act of grace, God has reconciled the saved to each other because Christ broke down the barriers that separate us through his death. God united the reconciled in one body, the church. Christ is our peace. His flesh brings us all together by breaking down the walls that divide us. Christ abolished the law and all of its ordinances to make way for peace and reconciliation, and granted us access to the Holy Spirit.

Since you have all of this – blessing, gift of grace, salvation, reconciliation, peace, and access to the Holy Spirit – we are no longer strangers and aliens. We are all citizens with the saints as members of God’s household. Jesus joins us all together. He is the cornerstone of the church and we are the body. We are the holy temple in the Lord, built together spiritually, into a dwelling place for God. We are no longer strangers, foreigners, or aliens, because we are members of God’s household. Christians are adopted directly into the family of God.

This is a very powerful lesson. We will never achieve perfection no matter how hard we try. If we had to earn our way into heaven, we would never make it because we can never be good enough for God’s grace. This is why Jesus died on the cross – to give us God’s grace. When you look at Jesus you see perfection. Jesus led a sin free, blameless life. He is our example to follow. The problem is that even after pledging to follow him and trying to live a life of devotion, we are still not perfect. God’s grace covers that. God’s grace is big enough to save us all, even when we do not deserve it. We do not think about what we can do to be saved, we think about what God did to save us. God loves us all. God’s house is a church building. God’s household is the church people. The Holy Spirit lives in each one of us. We are built together spiritually as one body of Christ.

Jesus taught us how to love, not a little, but a lot. Not just what we want, not just family, friends, or even neighbors. Not just the people that are nice to us, not just ones that give to us, we are to love all; even our enemies. If you have relationship problems,

someone hurt you; the first question to ask is, if you love them. Then focus on improving the relationship.

When I was a child in church, the talk was about sin and the punishment and was geared toward shaming you into obedience. I got turned off from religion in my youth. One day, in my early adulthood, I decided to read the Bible. I don't remember the motivation, if it was curiosity, education, desire to know more about Jesus, or if I was looking for an answer to some temptation. What I do remember is reading the Bible and discovering the wisdom it contains. As I read, I began to understand more about God's way of relating to people. As I gained perspective I realize that sin is not connected to authoritarian rule but is tied to love. Sin separates us from God and love brings us back through forgiveness. That is why Jesus does not focus on calling out individual sin. The sins he focused on were the hypocrisy and transgression of the self righteous religious establishment that focuses on shaming the guilt of sin. The focus of Jesus is all about love and the reward of forgiveness.

We are all weak but the Lord is strong. I wonder how many people shouted hosanna one day and shouted crucify him another. I wonder how many people want hatred and war when Christ brings love, peace, and spiritual benefits. He does not promise you that you will be exempt from hardship. He does not offer a cure from disease, or a promise success. He offers to each of us a promise of redemption, a full pardon from all of our sins. The Lord sacrificed for us. The Lord did the hard part for us. Our part is easy. We are simply asked to accept his offer of grace.