

Close Relationship For All

Ephesians 2:19-22

This morning I want to pick up our study of the book of Ephesians. I hope many of you were blessed by the word given last week in regards to the grace of God. I liked the idea that we all sit at the King's table not because we are any more special than anyone else, but simply because of God's unmerited favor. We have been looking at the idea that within the church there tends to be way too much comparing, evaluating, and judging.

We have been seeing it in the life of the church in Ephesus because that was what they were struggling with – one side wanted to lord it over the other, imposing their religious interpretations, making the other feel like unworthy recipients of God's grace yet in reality no one deserves the kindness of God.

A church that compares themselves to each other is not a church but a debate team. A church that is not at peace is a church at war. A church that judges others is simply an illegal court that bears in itself no authority to enforce its own self-righteousness.

Therefore, **we need to be a church that sees each other as team mates, those whose soul purpose is to pursue God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength.** For the Church, it is time for the lies to stop, it is time for the gossip (which we tend to label concern) to end, it is time for the evaluating to turn into the support of any pursuit of the God of scripture whether we agree with it or not.

We will not be able to see God if we continue to hold our agenda's always in front of our faces. We will not be able to hear God if all we are giving our ears to offenses or criticism. We will not be able to taste and see if the Lord is God if all we are producing is spoiled fruit. And the world will want nothing to do with it.

If we are to be the physical expression of Jesus Christ, if we are the ones who are portraying Christ in a manner of judgment or turmoil, then who would want anything to do with Jesus Christ, who despite who we make him out to be, is waiting to bring hope and peace and relationship to a people who are lost, in turmoil and who are lonely.

Our own self-righteousness needs to turn into humility. In **Romans 12:3** Paul tells the church:

Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. **Ephesians 4:2**

A man who stands in humility realizes who he is, what he deserves, yet is grateful for what he receives, knowing that he is no different from everyone else, yet is willing to admit where he can find help.

Paul established for the Ephesian Church and for the church today that we are all on a level playing field. We are all equally important to God, we are equally valuable to God, in fact, all of us are the apple of God's eye. No one is to be held back from pursuing their relationship with God in fact we are all to support each other in our endeavor. We now pick up Paul's words in **Ephesians 2:19-22**:

¹⁹ *So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family.*

²⁰ *Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself.* ²¹ *We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord.* ²² *Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.*

Paul establishes for us three levels of equal relationship in the church here in our text this morning: 1. In our heavenly citizenship, 2. In God's family and 3. In being a temple for the Lord. Each one of these three areas are privileges offered to every believer of Jesus Christ. Remember Paul has already stated in **Ephesians 1:18-19**:

¹⁸ *I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.* ¹⁹ *I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him.*

He wants us to understand who we are and what we have because of Jesus Christ. Let's look at each one in a little more detail.

1. Equal Citizens.

When you became a Christian you changed your citizenship and you came under a new authority. We are no longer simply ruled by the laws of the land but a greater law of following Christ – his leading, his teachings, his heart of compassion for the lost. Jesus said in **John 18:36**:

³⁶ *Jesus answered, "My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom.... But my Kingdom is not of this world..."*

His kingdom cannot be seen but it rules over the hearts of men. Like the citizenship of any nation, the citizenship of God's kingdom also requires responsibilities and grants certain privileges. For example, here in the United States part of obtaining citizenship requires that one must learn the history of this nation in order to understand where it came from, the price paid for our freedom, what has made it what it is today, and the privileges available to us.

It is no different for us in the Kingdom of God. **As citizens of God’s kingdom we need to learn about the history of God’s Kingdom and that is why we have the Scriptures, the Bible, to help us understand where we have come from, how human history has shown the hand of God and his intervention, the price paid for our freedom, and the privileges that we now have.**

But notice who Paul tells us we are citizens with in verse 19. In the Revised Standard Version tells us that we are citizens with the “saints”. He is talking about the believers in the Old Testament, like Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Elisha, David, Isaiah and Jeremiah. When Paul calls us equal citizens he also talking about himself and all the great men and women of History. We are just like them. We have the same privileges and we follow the same ruler and we are equal to them.

Remember for Paul to be saying this to both the Jews and Gentiles in the Ephesian church had to have stirred things up and changed a couple of people’s paradigms. Paul goes on the gives us another level of relationship and that is in the family of God.

2. Equal Family Members

God sees all of us as his children. Unlike the idea of being a citizen in a country, having the title of a son or daughter to the King grants us even greater benefits. I remember as a child having my father overseeing all the churches in Hong Kong, being the principle of a High School, being in charge of an orphanage, and establishing an Elderly care center, even though he was an important person to the Chinese church, I was able to call him on the phone at any time and he would answer, I could walk right up to him and ask any question. I had the privilege of a son.

Being a child has even greater privileges than that of a citizen. It grants a more intimate relationship with God. Therefore, God is always willing to stop what he is doing and answer our question or cries for help.

During the Civil War when President Lincoln was involved in a very crucial and decisive meeting, there came a knock at the door. There stood Willy, the President’s ten-year old son, wanting to see his father for a moment. Abraham Lincoln laid aside all his duties, left all of the Cabinet members in the room leaving them waiting while he tended to his son. The son outranked all the others. That is why the Apostle John wrote in **1 John 3:1:**

¹ See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are!

The fact that the ruler of my life isn’t just my authority but also my close and concerned father helps me to feel protected and cared for – not just manipulated but guided into a life that is for my benefit and my good. While a king is concerned about

my general welfare, a father wants to know all about my intimate problems. We are the apple of his eye. **Zechariah 2:8** tell us:

He who touches you touches the apple of my eye.

Could anything be more important to God? Can you see a progression here moving from a citizen, to a child of God? It gets even closer and better than this. Look at **verse 20**:

Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself.²¹ We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord.

3. Equal Inhabitation of God.

You would think that there wouldn't be a greater metaphor of closeness than that of a family but the Apostle Paul uses the idea of a building because each piece is always connected to the next. Back in those days each stone was closely joined together, and knit together. If the stone were separated then the building would crumble.

When we ask Jesus to be our Lord and savior, our ruler and father, immediately he turns us into a building in which he lives. You can't ask for a closer relationship than that. God's spirit comes and lives within us, teaches us and leads us and moves us just as it did with the apostles and prophets who were the first or the foundation upon which we find this truth. They all point to the most important part of the temple which Paul tells us is the Cornerstone, Jesus Christ. What is a cornerstone?

When you build a building, you place the cornerstone and all the measurements of that building are taken from the cornerstone. Everything relates to it. The whole building ties together because of the cornerstone.

Everything we have is because of Jesus Christ. Because of Jesus Christ we have been identified as God's children by the presence of the Holy Spirit (God's Spirit) living in us. He has made it possible for anyone to come to him and once again establish the most intimate of relationships – having him in your heart at all times, knowing what's in your heart, and responding to your heart. That is why Paul writes in **Ephesians 1:13**:

And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago.

The Jews could not deny the fact that the work of Christ was offered to the Gentiles as well because the Spirit of God was working in their hearts and changing and leading them just as the Jewish Christians were already experiencing. We all stand equal in the Kingdom of God each given the privilege of citizenship, Sonship and as a dwelling place for God. These privileges are by no means marks of spirituality but of God's unending task of drawing closer and closer to us.

There is always equal access to God, but not everyone will utilize the privilege. My prayer is that we would be a people who will not simply stop at mere acknowledgment of God, but that we would make him our king and authority as citizens of a new heavenly kingdom, that we would then move into a relationship of a son and daughter where our needs for protection and guidance and provision are met, and then we would allow the Holy Spirit to move in and live through us in such a way that the world will see God in us.

All of this is available to everyone of us. Will we take the steps towards greater intimacy with God and will we embrace the inheritance that is ours this morning. God is waiting on us. Let's pray!