



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Ephesians_2_11-22_Enemies

Ephesians

“Reconciled_1 New Man”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Thank you, Howard. Good morning. We're continuing in our study in the book of Ephesians, and this morning we will look at verses 11 through 22 of chapter 2, so we will finish up this great chapter on the grace of God this morning. Ephesians chapter 2, beginning with verse 11, Paul writes, "Therefore, remember that formerly, you the Gentiles in the flesh who were called uncircumcised by the so-called circumcision, which is performed in the flesh by human hands," and what Paul is doing here is obviously making a distinction between the Gentiles, of whom most of the Ephesians were, it's basically a Gentile church, and the Jewish people, the circumcision. But he's saying so-called circumcision, circumcision in the flesh, meaning that's all it was. It didn't have the spiritual reality behind it because their lives were not changed, they were not believers in Jesus Christ, and so their circumcision meant nothing. But it distinguishes the two along those lines, the circumcision and the uncircumcision.

He says in verse 12, "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." Now, you'll notice he has covenants plural but singular promise. Probably what he means by that is all of the covenants made with Israel, Abrahamic covenant, the Sinaitic covenant, all of the covenants one way or another looked ultimately to the promise of the redeemer to come. You see that in the covenant that was made at Mt. Sinai, a covenant of the law, and yet in the law, there is, in all of the types and symbols, in all of the ceremonies a picture of Christ, it's pointed to him. So that seems to be the significance of the singular word promise.

They're separated in all these ways, but then he says, in verse 13, "Now, in Christ Jesus, you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ, for he himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall by abolishing in his flesh the enmity which is the law of commandments

contained in ordinances, with that in himself he might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it," that is by the cross, "having put to death the enmity. And he came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him, we both have our access in one spirit to the father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone."

I think when he says the apostles and prophets, he's referring to the New Testament apostles and prophets, not New Testament apostles and Old Testament prophets, though the prophets of the Old Testament have very significant voice in the church. This, however, seems to be a reference to New Testament apostles by virtue of the order of the words, first apostles, obviously New Testament, and then prophets. So speaking really of the New Testament itself, the teaching of these men.

"Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone," verse 21, "in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." May the Lord bless this reading of his Word and bless our time of study together, let's bow in a word of prayer. Gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the great privilege we have to come together this morning and open the Scriptures and study them, study them together as the one new man, as the body of Christ, as the church, a people who have been redeemed by the blood of your son, a people who have been joined together in one unit.

Father, we pray that as we consider the teaching of the apostle this morning on this great point of our unity with one another, you might impress that truth upon us. I recognize it is a work of grace, a work of infinite power and love that would take such diverse types of people, the Jew and the Gentile, but all of us and join us together into one body. Father, we thank you for that, for that saving union we have in Christ, a union that has brought us as men and women together in the body of Christ, and we pray that you would help us to understand more fully the greatness of that blessing and privilege and our responsibilities to one another as members of the same family, as building blocks in the same temple. And we pray you'd bless our time of study together and build us up spiritually. We need that, Father, we are constantly in need of your instruction and the edification, the nourishment that we receive from the Word of God, may we have hearts that have greater and greater longing for it. So we pray your blessing upon us spiritually, but also materially and physically. We pray for the sick, we think of Bill Guthrie and pray you'd give him strength and healing, and we pray for others who are ill or who are recovering from surgery or facing that. We pray your blessings upon them, we pray for strength, mercy. We pray for healing.

We pray, Lord, for the financial needs of men and women in the congregation and we know there are many. We pray that you would supply their need. We thank you for

the blessings that you have given us, and those who have employment, which is the vast majority, we thank you for that. We recognize that as a gift of you, from you, and we pray that we would be diligent in the employment and the opportunities you've given us to serve. May we serve you in our employment and all that we do. We pray for our nation, we pray for your blessings upon it, bless our leaders. We pray that you'd give them leaders in the local level, the state level and the national level. Father, we pray that wisdom be given to them, that good decisions would be made and there would be peace in this land, that the church of Jesus Christ might flourish. We pray that it would.

We pray you would bless your people, that we might be a blessing to this land, and preach the gospel, proclaim it not only in word but in deed. And so we pray your blessing upon this country, upon the church in this land and throughout the world, for that matter. Bless us, also, in this hour and then this evening as we come together again to remember our Lord and his death for us and his coming again. Thank you that he is coming and history is moving toward that great climax when he will return with his kingdom and with his reward. May we be living for that. We pray your blessing upon us now as we sing our final hymn. May it be a good preparation of our hearts for the time of study we have together. We pray these things in Christ's name, amen.

[Break in Audio]

Because the first one, by Augustus Toplady was written by a Calvinist and the second by Charles Wesley, who as an Arminian. In fact, they were contemporaries of one another, and had something of a running debate. They would write pamphlets, Toplady representing the Calvinistic perspective and the Wesleys the Arminian, but it was a debate that was sometimes filled with acrimony, and yet they both made a great contribution to the church and they are both together in heaven, and they are both reconciled with one another, as is the whole company in heaven.

Our subject this morning is entitled Enemies Reconciled: One New Man. On November 5, 1945, Winston Churchill delivered an address at Westminster College at a time when communism was advancing cross Europe and Asia. In that address he stated the famous line, "An iron curtain has descended across the continent." 15 years later, a concrete wall went up in Berlin, literally dividing the city east and west, and it became a focal point of international tension. At one point, Soviet tanks and American tanks lined up against each other on either side of the wall. Well, the curtain and the wall are gone now, but the 20th century has known great divisions. Racial and national divisions, barriers of suspicion and hate, it still does, for that matter, but none greater than the division that existed between the ancient Jews and the Gentiles.

The Gentiles were in spiritual darkness. They practiced paganism and lived corrupt lives, while the Jews had been blessed of God, entrusted with the oracles of God, Paul said they had advantage and benefit in every respect. They were God's chosen people. But Jewish status led to a pride in themselves and deep disdain for Gentiles and a bitter division between the two resulted. William Barclay gives us a sense of the alienation

between these two groups. He writes that the Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentile. The Gentiles said the Jews were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell. It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in her hour of greatest need, for that would simply be to bring another Gentile into the world.

To the Jew, the Gentiles were dogs, and the Gentile opinion of the Jews wasn't much better. They thought circumcision was barbaric and the laws of diet and cleanliness were strange. A Greek described their separate way of life as inhospitable and antihuman. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote that the Jewish religion was tasteless and mean. The first century was filled with anti-Jewish feeling and propaganda, and you get a sense of the Roman contempt for Jews in Pilate's response to our Lord, I am not a Jew, am I? Now, we can try to explain these and similar divisions as due to national or political differences or religious differences, but really that doesn't satisfy and that doesn't answer the problems completely. Ultimately, the cause of divisions and hatred is sin. It alienates men from God, and because it alienates men from God, it alienates men from one another. And international diplomacy or government programs and education can't change that, only the grace of God can do that, and that's what Ephesians chapter two is about.

As great as human divisions and hate and sin can be, the love of God is greater. Just as it makes sinners alive and seats them in the heavenlies, as Paul explains in the first part of this chapter, so too it brings sinners together and it turns their alienation into reconciliation, and that's what Paul describes in this second half of chapter two, as he continues to explain the surpassing greatness of God's power toward us who believe. Through the cross, God broke down the barrier. He established peace between the Jew and the Gentile and he made them into one new man, a new society, he made them into the church and the church has been built by the grace of God.

To show the greatness of this grace, to show the power of this grace, Paul begins by reminding the Ephesians just how lost they were, how desperate their condition was. He's already done that in verse one where he writes you were dead in your sins, but here he reminds of how far off they were from God. He lists five ways in which they were separated. First he says in verse 12 they were separated from Christ. They were in sin, they were in spiritual darkness, with no expectation of the coming Messiah, the promises of Christ coming, the prophecies, for example, given in Isaiah 53 were written to the nation Israel. The Gentiles did not have those great oracles of God. They were in darkness, they were in great peril.

Second he says they were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel. Israel was a unique nation. Israel was a theocracy. That means it was governed by God and he ruled over that nation in his providence and through his laws and those laws look forward to the coming redeemer, they prophesied him, they pictured him. But the Gentiles were outside of that commonwealth. Third, they were strangers to the covenants of promise. The covenants that God made, he made with Abraham and he made with Abraham's physical

descendants. The covenant the he made at Sinai, for example, was made with the nation. It was not made with the nations. God bound himself in a covenant relationship with Israel, and the Gentiles were strangers to those covenants.

And so having no part in the covenants, Paul says, they were separated from hope and from God, those are the fourth and the fifth aspects of Gentile alienation. The Gentiles couldn't look at the future with any real certainty or with any hope. They had no hope in this life, the slaves and the lower classes, which made up a great number of the people in first century Roman society, had no hope in this world. The prospects for bettering their life were nil in the society in which they lived. The conditions of this life were harsh on so many of the people of the first century, but the religions of the Gentiles also offered no hope, in fact offered even less hope. Homer expressed that in his *Odyssey*. At one point in the story, Odysseus, who is the hero of that epic, goes down into Hades. He visits the underworld and there he meets Achilles, who was the great hero of the Trojan War, and he converses with Achilles and Achilles says I would rather live on ground as the hireling of another, in other words as a slave, and that's the lowest form of life that one could have. Plato said that slaves had no souls, but he says I'd rather live on the ground as the hireling of another than bear sway among all the dead that be departed.

In other words, it's better to be a slave among the living than a king among the dead. The afterlife was a grey place. It was a shadowy, joyless realm. It was not a place that the pagan hoped for. They were without hope in the world, Paul says, and without God in the world, literally atheo in the world. Atheists in the world. Now, they were far from atheists in the sense of the word in which we speak of an atheist. There were some of those, but the ancient world was very religious. They had their sacred mountains, the ancient world was filled with their temples. You can visit the ruined temples of Greece and Egypt and Rome today, and other places, as well. Ephesus was the center of religion, the center of the cult of Diana, or Artemis of the Ephesians. The temple of Diana was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and people from all over the empire would come to Ephesus to worship the goddess there.

The Gentiles had many gods, many goddesses, pantheons, religions, temple. They didn't lack for religion. If religion was the answer, then the pagans would've had it. Paul doesn't praise religion, doesn't praise ceremony. They had religion, yet he calls them atheists, because they didn't have the knowledge of the true God, they were without God in the world. And so they lived hopeless, unsatisfied lives. Augustine characterizes life of the unconverted very well in one of the opening statements in his *Confessions*, when he writes that famous line, "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." Now, that could summarize the whole Gentile experience outside of Christ. It's restless. It's without peace. In fact, that's what the Bible teaches.

Prophet Isaiah writes in Isaiah 57, "'There is no peace,' says my God, 'for the wicked, they are a restless people.'" William Hendrickson summarizes this five-fold separation of the Gentile as Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless and godless. In a

word, they were alienated from God, and because they were alienated from God, they were alienated from one another. There deep divisions in the human race. But, Paul says in verse 13, a great change has occurred and here he introduces another one of those magnificent contrasts.

Earlier he said you were dead, but God made us alive, and here he says you were separated, you were alienated, you were far off, but now you have been brought near by the blood of Christ. That's the amazing grace of God's love and the power, the amazing power of the cross of Christ. Paul speaks of Gentile salvation in Romans chapter ten, and he speaks of it with some amazement. The amazement that the prophet had, the prophet Isaiah when he wrote it, because Paul is merely quoting Isaiah 65 when he says in Romans 10, verse 20, "I was found," this is the Lord speaking, "I was found by those who sought me not." That's the Gentiles. They didn't seek God. They were far off. They were in the darkness. They were not looking for God. Gentiles did not seek him, he sought them when they were far off and he found them. It wasn't their doing, it was God's doing.

It's very clear from Isaiah, that's very clear from Paul and he's making that point very clear right here in our text with the verb that he uses, the grammar that he uses. He uses the passive verb. Not that which they did, but that which was done to them. He says they have been brought near, and that's just what the Lord taught in his own teaching in John chapter 6 in verse 44, he says, "No one can come to me," that is no one is able, in and of himself or herself, no one is able to come. No one is able to believe. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." Now, he lays great stress there on the initiative of God. God sent me, he says. We see that other places in the gospel of John, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." We come to him by believing in him, and yet we cannot believe in him because we cannot come to him if God does not draw us. We are dependent upon his grace.

And yet, his grace is great and his grace is broad to save the world, and so we see that same teaching right here with our Lord and with Paul. God is the one who is the author of salvation. He was found by those who did not seek him. He brought them near. His irresistible grace was at work through the Holy Spirit. He drew us through the power of the Holy Spirit because of the atoning sacrifice of Christ's death, the payment of sin. And our Lord teaches that, as well, later on in John's gospel, chapter 12 and verse 32, he says, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." We're not developing that too much. The point is that the cross saves. We are not saved because of our faith, that is our faith doesn't save us. We are saved by the grace of God on the cross. It is called God's great magnet. It draws his people to him. We obtain that by faith, we accept the gift by faith, but we are saved because of what Christ has done.

The cross draws all men, meaning the Jew and the Gentile alike, to Christ in a saving relationship with him and with one another, all who believe in him. And all who do that, all who believe, enjoy the peace of God. Verse 14, "For he, himself, is our peace. He

is the one who reconciles." You'll notice the emphasis that Paul puts upon Christ. He, himself. The peace is found in him because of what he has done. It's found in no one else, in no other way, he is the way and he is the truth and he is the life, no man comes of the Father but through our Lord. So he is the one who reconciles us to God, who gives us peace with God and peace with others. The one who brings the Jew and the Gentile together, who made both groups into one, Paul says, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall.

The barrier was established by the law of Moses with its instructions on being separate, its regulations on food, on clothing, on ceremonial washings, the command not to touch what is unclean. The Gentiles didn't have that law and the Gentiles didn't have these restrictions and so they were viewed as unclean. And so they – the Jew would have no association with the Gentile, he would not touch that which was unclean, would not go into the house of a Gentile, would not dine with a Gentile. And so there was this great invisible barrier between them. What Paul defines as enmity, hostility that was caused or occasioned by the law of Moses. And very likely, Paul is borrowing this illustration of the barrier from a literal wall that was in the temple of Jerusalem and was designed to shut the Gentiles out from entering into the temple.

The way into the temple was through a series of courts, first the court of women and then into the court of Israel and then into the court of the priests, where the alter and the temple itself were located. But the outer court that surrounded the temple was the great court of the Gentiles, and Gentiles could enter it. And from that court, they could see something of the temple and something of Jewish worship, but they could go no farther than that. And to keep them out, there was this low stone barrier, about five feet high, which surrounded the temple, and on it was posted a notice in both Greek and Latin, forbidding men of another race from entering on pain of death.

There was an interesting discovery made back in 1871 while some excavation was going on in that site, near the temple. A discovery was made of a limestone slab, a white slab, on which this – an inscription was written. It's a slab that is now kept in the museum in Istanbul, but it reads, "No foreigner may enter within the barrier and enclosed round the temple. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death. Now, that was posted on that barrier to keep the Gentile out, and it reflects the enmity that existed between the two groups.

The law established separation between Jews and Gentiles and it occasioned hostility between them. But Christ the peacemaker, the Prince of Peace has changed that. He has broken down the barrier of enmity and has made the two groups one. And in verses 15 and 16, Paul explains how he did that, how he reconciled these ancient enemies. He did it first by abolishing in his flesh the law, with its commandments and its ordinances and ceremonies that caused the separation. Through his perfect life and his sacrificial death, he fulfilled the law, he satisfied the just demands of the law so that all who believe

in Jesus Christ, all who are in him are free from the law and escape the wrath of the law, escape the punishment of the law. And the law still has relevance for us.

We are not under law. If we are in Christ, we are not under law. Paul makes that very clear in Romans 6 and 7 and the book of Galatians. That doesn't mean that the law has no benefit for us. It certainly does. We learn from it. It's very relevant for us. It's the Word of God, but we are not bound to it as our code. We are not under its ordinances and ceremonies. It has been fulfilled in Christ, and we fulfill it by coming into him. And so having done that, having fulfilled the law and having abolished it, as Paul says, with all of its separating, dividing ceremonies, he has brought the Jew and the Gentile together into what he calls one new man.

Not new men, though we are that. "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature," Paul wrote to the Corinthians. We are new people in him, but here it is singular. And he is emphasizing the unity that we have in Christ as new creatures joined to one another as one new man. As a new society, without the law dividing us. In Christ, we are a new humanity, the church, and that was the purpose of our Lord's death, to create the church. To redeem a people for himself secondly to reconcile the church to God. Verse 16, "Reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross by it," that is by the cross, "having put to death the enmity."

Now, that's a description of reconciliation. We are reconciled through the cross, we are reconciled in Christ. And reconciliation is one of the great words of the Bible, and it has the idea of bringing enemies together as friends, of establishing peace between them. And so reconciliation assumes or it presumes hostility. It presumes warfare, enmity, and that's just what existed between God and man before Christ. That's what sin produces, separation, it produces hostility, which is how Paul began this chapter describing our former condition as one of hostility toward God. Remember he said that you were sons of disobedience. We practice disobedience. We were hostile toward God. We disobeyed his law, it was the characteristic of our life. Sons of disobedience, and so, he says, children of wrath. Under the wrath of God, the objects of God's wrath. That's what we rightly deserve. Because of our sin, we deserve the wrath of God, but Christ changed that.

He has brought God and man together in peace with one another, he has reconciled us through the cross. That is where Paul says Christ put to death the enmity between God and man. The source of that enmity was sin, and he ended it by putting away our sins. That's what the Lord has accomplished on the cross when he died on the cross as our substitute, as our sin bearer, he took our guilt. He took our sin upon him, he was punished for it, and in that punishment, satisfied the justice of God. And having satisfied the justice of God, having exhausted the wrath of God in that great act of sacrifice, after which he says, "It is finished," he separated our sins as far as the east is from the west.

Cast them into the depths of the sea. Removed all of the guilt from us, that's what he has accomplished, and he has reconciled us to God. He killed the hostility and established peace. And that's the gospel, that is essentially the gospel of the Word of God,

the Good News, that of peace. The war is over for all who believe, and that's what Christ announced after his victory at Calvary. Verse 17, and he came and preached peace to you who were far away, that is to you Gentiles, and peace to those who were near. Now, that's a prophecy from Isaiah 57 and verse 19. But it's the message of victory that Christ spoke after the resurrection. In fact, if you look at that text, it's the Lord who was speaking there. And so Paul understands that as fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and that is exactly the announcement that he gave after his resurrection. You see that in John chapter 20. Following the crucifixion, the disciples were gathered together in a room. They had heard these reports that the Lord had been resurrected. In fact, Peter and John had actually seen the empty tomb. John had gone inside of it.

They were wondering, are these reports true? Is he really alive? They didn't know, they were confused and they were in great fear, fear for their lives. And so they are in hiding behind locked doors when suddenly the Lord appears in their midst. He materializes in their presence, and the first thing that he says to them is peace be with you. Some eight days later, he again appears. This time, Thomas is with them, who's doubting all of this, and the Lord again appears in the same way and says the same thing, peace be with you. That's his message. That's the message following the resurrection. He has established peace, and so he is the Prince of Peace, and as the Prince of Peace, he sent them into the world to proclaim that gospel, to proclaim the Good News that he has established peace with God for all who believe, regardless of who they are. Jew and Gentile alike. Young and old alike. The worst of sinners, the most self righteous of men. The harlot, the Pharisee, all who believe have peace with God through Jesus Christ. That's the gospel.

And the result of that peace Paul explains in verse 18. It's access to God. Because we have peace with him, he says you have access to God, you have access to the Father. We can freely approach the throne of grace in prayer, and through prayer we can have fellowship with God. That access is through Christ, through his blood. You'll notice he says for through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father. So really what have here is the Trinity in our redemption. It's not the work of one person. Our salvation is not simply the work of the son, it is the work of God the father, God the son, God the Holy Spirit, they all have their part interest his and we have access to God, we have access to the throne of grace because Christ has purchased that for us. It is as though he has bought our way into God's presence, and we actually go into the presence of God in our prayers by means of the Holy Spirit, he carries us in there.

So we approach God through Christ and in the Spirit, because of Christ and in the power of the Spirit, we have access to God. And not just access to God in prayer, either. I think there's more here than that. Our access is really a characteristic of our life. Earlier, you remember how Paul described us as seated in the heavenlies. That's where we live. That's where our citizenship is, we have been seated there, and so because we are seated

there, we have the life of Christ in us now. We have the life of heaven in us now, and the mind and the life of Christ, of heaven, that whole life and power and authority of heaven is communicated to us down on earth, in the present, through the Holy Spirit. So all of that is ours. We have that access presently because of him.

So our redemption, as I say, is the work of the Trinity. It's the work of the Godhead. Salvation is of the Lord, the triune God, and that's an emphasis not only here but throughout this epistle. But also notice the emphasis of this verse is on our unity with one another, and that's really the point that Paul is drawing here. He says we both have this access, both Jew and Gentile, in the one spirit. They're not two spirits for two different groups. There's one group and one spirit and we are united and have access to God together in that one spirit. Well, that too is a great theme of this book of Ephesians and particularly of this passage here. We have been made into one new man, unified in a new society, a third race, as one of the ancient Christians put it, and Paul continues to develop that idea in the remaining verses with some very interesting pictures of the church. He describes us first as citizens, then as a family and then as a building. In verse 19, we are fellow citizens with the saints.

Citizenship is a great privilege, depending on where you are a citizen, but as Americans, we enjoy a great privilege of our citizenship. Now, I think we often take that for granted. It's easy to do. But when you travel abroad, you get a unique perspective on that, and sometimes you see it for the great privilege that it is. Once, when I was in Romania, I needed to go to the American consulate on behalf of some friends there, and outside the gate of the consulate were hundreds of Romanians who had been there for days, hoping to get an opportunity to enter. They didn't know if they'd be able to, and most were not getting that opportunity, but they stayed there for days, hoping to get access into the consulate so that they might make application for a visa to come to the United States. They all wanted to come to America because they know the blessings that we have here.

All I had to do was approach the gate, show my passport and I was let in. I had immediate access, and that's the privilege of citizenship of a great country. Well, the first century had the great privilege of citizenship, also. It was Roman citizenship, which was a coveted privilege. We get a sense of its importance as we read through the book of Acts and we see how that citizenship worked in Paul's favor on more than one occasion. And the Ephesians were certainly aware of that, they certainly knew the great privilege of Roman citizenship, and so Paul uses that to instruct them on the greater privileges that we have as Christians. Not every member of the church at Ephesus was a citizen of Rome. It was a very Roman city, but there were many slaves in that congregation. That was characteristic of the church. They were the disenfranchised of that society, they didn't have citizenship, they had no rights, no privileges. And yet Paul is saying you have a greater citizenship than anything that Rome can offer, an eternal citizenship. And so he begins to sum up his instruction on the unity and the privilege that we have and that we have through the great power and grace of God by saying so, then you are no longer

strangers and aliens, no longer a people separated from Christ and a commonwealth, but you are fellow citizens with the saints.

And that's what we are. Citizens of heaven, Paul says in Philippians 3. That citizenship is greater than anything Rome could offer, greater than anything that we can have here in our own country. Citizens of heaven is what they have and what we have, with all of the privileges of that citizenship. We can go directly into the government of heaven. We can go directly into the throne of grace. There's no waiting. We have the passport of our justification, of the Holy Spirit, of our union with Christ. And so we are part of a nation, we are part of a spiritual nation, and that's not all. We are also members of the divine family, we are of the household of God, Paul says. This second picture continues the idea of unity, but in a way that is more personal and warm. It's a picture of deep intimacy, and that is what is to characterize the church, a brotherly, family concern for one another.

Robert Louis Stevenson tells a story in his book *Picturesque Notes of Edinburgh* of two unmarried sisters who shared a single room together in closed quarters, but who had a falling out over a matter of theology. The dispute was so bitter that they never again spoke to each other, and they didn't exchange bitter words, they just didn't exchange words. They lived in complete silence, but because of the fear of talk and scandal, they continued to live together in their single room. They drew a chalk line across the floor and lived separate from one another, each on her own side. And each would eat her meals, take her bath, entertain visitors on her side, but in the presence of the hateful silence of the other, and that's how they lived out their lives, divided and bitter.

Now, that would be a sad story if it was two citizens of a city who were divided against each other, but what makes that story tragic is that these were two sisters, members of the same family, and Paul is concerned that that kind of division not occur within the church of Jesus Christ, that we not fall into such disputes and divisions. The dividing wall has been broken down, it's not there. There is no chalk line between us in the church and in the household of God, and we are to live as united and caring for one another. That's not an option. Our Lord told his disciples in John 15, "This I command you, that you love one another." In fact, he says earlier in chapter 13 that that's the sign of the Christian, that's the mark of the Christian. The world will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. So he commands them, love one another.

I was reading that to my daughters one night before bed, and then I tried to make some helpful application, in fact good application for the whole family, and I said, "Now, that means that you are to love one another. You're not only sisters in this family, but you are sisters in the family of God, and so you're not to fight," and got the immediate response, nobody's perfect [*laughter*]. Well, that's good theology. Nobody is perfect. But that's a bad use of good theology. Nobody's perfect, but our goal is to be united. That's what we're to strive for. Not at the expense of theology, I might add. It is not unity at all costs. There's some times when unity cannot prevail, but we are to strive for it. We are to

strive to be united in the truth and united in love for one another, and there never should be a bitter dispute between individuals.

We are a church and we are a family and as a family, we are to be a place of intimacy and love and acceptance. A place where we can relax and we can be ourselves and we can be accepted by one another, and we can develop and receive instruction from one another, and correction from one another, in love and encouragement. Place where we can be built up. Now, that's what Paul is urging upon them, and I think all of that is implied in that great picture that he gives of the church, we're a family.

But the church is also a very holy place and Paul's third picture indicates that. It follows naturally from the second picture, we're not only the household of God but we're also the house of God. And in verse 20, Paul describes the house of God, the temple, which is a holy temple, he says, and he describes it in three parts. First, as a foundation, he describes its foundation and then he describes its cornerstone, and then he describes the building blocks of this temple. There's nothing more important to a building than its foundation. If it's sound, the foundation is sound, then the church will stand, but if the foundation is weak, the building will fall, and foundation of the church is the apostles and prophets, the men through whom the Word of God was given, men of special authority, men who conveyed the revelation of God or wrote the Scriptures, wrote the New Testament. They are not probably to be understood here as the foundation itself, in other words, it's not the foundation that consists of the apostles and prophets, but speaks of the foundation that they laid, that is the New Testament that they wrote.

And so that is our foundation, and a church is as stable as it is grounded in its foundation, as it is grounded in the Bible. That's why Paul's last exhortation, one of his last exhortations to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2 is preach the word. Very simple exhortation but very direct and very comprehensive. Preach the word. I have one thing I can say to you, Timothy: preach the Word of God. And the church that departs from that, regardless of what its doctrinal statement may be, if the Word of God is diminished and it ceases to preach the word, it will have a weak foundation and it will eventually fall. The foundation of the church is the apostles and prophets, it's their teaching, and the cornerstone, he says, is Christ. The cornerstone of a building gives unity and precision to the structure.

A good example of that is seen in the temple of Jerusalem that was built by Herod. Was built with very, very large stones. Some of the outer wall of that temple can still be seen today. In fact, the western wall, which we know as the Wailing Wall is the outermost western wall of that great complex, and you see the massive stones that – of which is was constructed. One of the cornerstones was discovered and it was 38 feet, 9 inches long. Someone has described as being like a boxcar. Huge, massive cornerstone, but that was necessary to give precision and form to that huge building. What Paul is saying here is Christ is our great cornerstone, the one who holds all things together, who holds the universe together and holds the church together, and our connection to him is vital. It is

essential, and he describes that – he explains that in verse 21, where we see the third part of this temple and that is the building blocks or the stones of the temple.

Christ is our cornerstone in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord. And we're not a completed structure, we are being fitted together. The church is still under construction and it will be under construction until the last stone is set in that great structure, until the last of God's people is saved, redeemed and brought into the fold of God. The last of the sheep are gathered in. And so we are growing. A church is not a static structure, it is alive, and Paul is deliberately mixing his metaphors here between a building and a body, between the temple and the one new man, to show that we are a living structure, carefully organized and given life by Christ.

Everything depends upon our connection to Jesus Christ, our unity, our development, the order and character of the building, they depend upon our union with him. So when Christ stops being the center of our worship, when he stops being the center of our interests and our thoughts, our devotion and study, we lose direction. We are like a building without a cornerstone, we begin to run wild. Without any shape, without any real direction. That's true of the church. It loses direction, it loses influence in the community, but it's also true of the stones in the church, that is it's true of individual Christians. We lose direction apart from him. And so we are to look to him daily. As the author of Hebrews says, fixing your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.

That's the exhortation in the book of Hebrews, but by implication you could find that all through the Scriptures. We are to focus upon him. We are to take our direction from him. We are to think about him and meditate about him. He is our law, he is our guide, he is our protector. He gives life to the stones. What a picture this is that Paul gives. We are God's temple. These Ephesians, these Gentiles who were shut out of the temple in Jerusalem, there was that wall that separated them, under pain of death, these same gentiles have been chosen by God for his temple, the true temple, and he has breathed life into dead stones and made them living, and he has actually begun to live in them. And that's Paul's final point that he makes about the church as God's temple. He lives in us, we are God's dwelling, he says, in the spirit. What an amazing privilege that is, that we have been made God's dwelling place. We who were far off have been brought near and inhabited by God.

That's the power of grace that would bring such as us from a far place into his very presence. We have been joined together with him and with one another, with Jew and Gentile alike, some from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. That's the church, that's the temple. Christ has ended the warfare, and by his sacrifice, has joined us together into one new man. We are united as citizens. We are united as a family. We are united as a temple, and God actually dwells within us. And so we are to live in unity. Notice again what Paul says in verse 21. We are being fitted together, united together with precision. And so we are to live in that way and we are to guard that unity.

Not long ago, I cited an ancient quote by the pagans, I don't know if it was in this morning's service or on Wednesday night or on the Thursday morning study, but I cited an ancient quote by the pagans who observed the church with amazement. The quote goes back to about the second century, the late second century. They saw in Christians something that they didn't see in their own society and didn't see in their temples, and that was unity and care. And so they were compelled to say see how these Christians love one another. Well, we should ask ourselves, is that true of us at Believers Chapel? Can people look at us and say, "See how those Christians love one another,"? I think it is true of us, but may each of us look in our own hearts and look to the Lord, and ask him to make it increasingly so of us. We, in whom God dwells.

Well, let me conclude with another question, and that is does he dwell in you. Are you part of his temple, are you part of the church? And I don't mean do you attend church, but are you actually one of the stones in the church, a member of this invisible church of Jesus Christ, the body of Christ. You become that through faith and through faith alone. Not through baptism or attending Sunday school or contributing to the offering on Sunday nights, but by simple faith, and faith alone in Jesus Christ, and who he is as the son of God and what he has done as a substitute for sinners. Your sins may be beyond numbering, and they are. They are with all of us. Whether we consider ourselves the chief of sinners or the most self righteous of sinners, our sins outnumber our ability to count. And yet, all of that is wiped away by the cross. And we receive the gift of that and the gift of reconciliation through faith alone.

So if you've never believed in Jesus Christ, I urge you do to so. Look to Christ, trust in him, and enter into the salvation and the forgiveness of sins that is eternal. Become a part of his temple, part of the people of God, a recipient of forgiveness and eternal life. May God help you do to that. May God help each of us to realize more and more who we are, as God's people, and what is at work for us in the grace and the power of God.

Shall we stand now for the benediction. Gracious God and Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the grace that has abounded to us. And each of us, were we to know our condition as it is known by you, would fall down in humility and say we are the chief of sinners. And yet your love and grace are greater than our sin, and where sin increase, grace abounded all the more. And it abounded in the cross, which has paid the price for our sin and has purchased salvation for all who believe. I pray, Father, that if there be any in attendance who don't know Christ, who've not trusted in him, that you might open their eyes to their need, to their sin and the peril of their soul, that they are far off. But that they can be brought near through faith in Christ. And so I pray that you would so work upon their hearts to bring them near. Bring them to faith and a union with Christ and salvation. Pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.