

A Series on Ephesians
“A New Kind of Community: The Hows” (Ephesians 2:11-22)
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I. Introduction

Good morning! Welcome to New City!

Many of you are or have been disillusioned by the church. You've been to churches where they were judgmental, hurtful, hypocritical, racist, etc. In fact, I think a lot of people resonate with the statement: "I like Jesus but I don't like the church." In fact, you say to yourself: why do I need to go to church at all? I can listen to great sermons on the web. I can worship God alone in the living room listening to great worship song. Why do I need the church at all? I believe in Jesus. I am going to do my spirituality alone. I'll pray alone. I'll fast. I'll meditate on Scriptures. Read books and do Bible study. Alone.

As we have been going through the Book of Ephesians, I have been struck by Bible's view of the church. It's not just an assembly. It's not just a drop in center or a place to learn. It has an extremely high view of the church. I don't think we are there but I think we really need to get our hands around it and understand it and make it a part of who we are.

Let's read Ephesians 2:14-22.

¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²²And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

In 2:1-10, Paul said that the first purpose of the cross is to take us from death to life. It is to transform broken people by grace through faith leading to grace-based work. I think we like to hear this. We like stuff that's going to change us. We tend to be individualistic, and this stuff right along. I want God to change me. This is great stuff.

But right afterwards, Paul is saying that the second purpose of the cross to create a new humanity ("create in himself one new man out of two"), and create a new community—this body, this God's household, family, this temple--of people who didn't get along before. This means that God's plan is not individualistic. It is communal. His purpose is to create a new kind of community where people who are different, people from different ethnicities, people from different socio-economics, people from different lifestyles, people from different background, people from different neighborhoods come together and do community together—be family together, be a body together, be a building together.

That's one of the reasons Jesus died. He died to bring us together as one. Isn't that what the passage said: "His purpose was to create one new man (or humanity) ... one body...through the cross."

Now, what I want to do today is to continue to dig into this passage and see HOW we can be and build such radical community.

And we are going to do that by looking at the three imageries for the church that Paul uses in this passage. (1) it says it is we are citizens of God's kingdom; (2) it says we are members of God's household; and (3) it says that we are stones that built together to become a temple of God. We are going to look at see what we can learn about **how** we can build this new kind of community looking at these imageries.

II. A Citizen of God's Kingdom

In verse 19, he says: "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people."

We are now citizens of God's kingdom. Our primary identity is not Asian, not Black, not white, not Latino, not Mexican, not Korean, not American, or whatever. It is that we are a citizen of the kingdom of God. That's our primary citizenship. In that kingdom, Paul says: there is no division among the races, cultures, there is no division

among the rich and the poor, and there is no division among the sexes. According to one historian, he is the first person in the history of mankind to ever write that all people are created equal under God. Why? It is the kingdom of God. In that kingdom, things are not measured by where you are in the pecking order. It's not measured by your performance. We have all messed up and in this kingdom, we have all been given citizenship not based on what we have done, but based on his grace. It is a gift.

It is an upside down kingdom. The first shall be last and the last shall be first. The greatest is the one who serves. It's a place of radical generosity. It is a place where we are called to treat each other just as God treated us. Give better than they deserve. It's not just about fairness and self interest. It's about demonstrating grace and other's first. It's the upside down kingdom of God. It's about the creator God coming down, down, down, and becoming a baby, a helpless baby, growing up in poverty, and ending up on the cross, as a sacrifice of love for others. That's the *modus operandi* of this kingdom.

It's not a political system. It's not capitalism. It's not democracy. It's not socialism. We are not called to take over America for God. We are called to build the kingdom of God. America is not the kingdom of God. There is a dramatic difference between the kingdom of this world—the secular government, and the kingdom of God. The kingdom of this world is a kingdom of power-over. It's the power of the sword. That's what is needed to administer justice and orderly society. But, the Kingdom of God is a kingdom of power-under, the power of unconditional love and sacrifice. The power of service, the power of grace. Jesus didn't come to fuse the Kingdom of God with the Kingdom of this world. Everyone wanted Jesus to take over the Roman Empire for God, but he would have none of it. So, they turned away from him and shouted, crucify him! Crucify him! Our citizenship is not in America first, it is in the kingdom of God first.

We are all called to live upside down lives in this kingdom. Right now, we keep going back to the old kingdom, where it is all about the pecking order: how smart you are, how good looking you are, how connected you are, how successful you are, how adored you are, how rich you are, what you drive and live, how funny you are, or even how good you are. None of these things determine anything in the kingdom of God. Our

citizenship is a gift from God. We didn't earn it. It was given to us by divine action. We are called to live out this radical kingdom ethnics! When we do that, we can break through class barriers, we can break through racial barriers, we can break through all kinds of barriers that divide us.

III. The Second imagery is that of a Member of God's Household

In verse 19, Paul says you are members of God's household. The word for household is this word *oikos*. It means the church is a family. You can pick your friends but you can't pick your family. Look around you: these are your brothers and sisters. The Bible tells us that the spiritual family will outlast the physical family. You are not born into Christianity and left to fend for yourself. You are born into a family. We care for one another, especially new Christian: we need to help them grow and learn and develop their relationship with God and with one another. We also care especially for those in need. Isn't that what a family does? When one of our kids get sick, he or she gets more attention. It's not about what's fair. Did I get my fair share? It's about need. We focus more attention on those who are in need, those who are sick, those who are struggling. That's what it means to be a family.

And in our community, there are people who need help more than others. And we need to take care of each other. We need to learn what they need and help. I know some of us feel like there is so much need. I don't know where to start. I heard about a kid down in Baja coast where millions of starfish got stranded on the beach. He was taking one starfish at a time and throwing it back into the water. And someone came to him and said, there are so many of them. You are not going to make much of a difference. Then, the kid picked up another starfish and threw it back into the water and said, I bet it make a lot of difference for that one. Just help one person. Get to know people who are in a different life situation. Don't just talk about helping the poor as if they are a project. Get to know them, love them, and you'll see that you have a lot of learn from them, that they are not that different than you. If you are in need, do everything you can help yourself but don't be afraid to seek help.

Being a family also means we are called to hang out with one another. We celebrate together, we mourn together, we have fun together, we travel together. We

hang out. We spend time. We learn to love one another. Which leads me to this idea of being a member.

What does it mean to be a member? Is it like American Express? Membership has its privileges. Like Costco membership. You get things for cheaper. Do I get a discount on a wedding? Is it like a membership in a club? We like to play chess so we join a chess club. We like Christian things, so we join a church?

Membership in the biblical sense is membership in the original sense of the word. My arm is a member of my body. My heart is a member of my body. We are a functioning organ of the body. That's what biblical membership means. You are a member of the Body of Christ. It means you are a part of the whole and you have a specific role for the body, for the family.

This means that if you are out of fellowship with a body, with a church family, you are like an organ outside of the body. You are going to shrivel up and die. You can't fulfill your life destiny. You can't go on jumping from one church to another. You can't have organs doing that. You can't hop from one church to another. You have to commit to one church community.

The difference between a member and an attender is a matter of commitment and decision. An attender is a spectator on the sideline and takes a more consumeristic approach to church. What can I get out of this church? What can I learn? Who I can meet? What help can I get? You go to church for yourself and your benefit. But, a member is someone who is committed to the mission of the church, and becomes an integral part of the family, gets involved, contributes to the community. Rick Warren put it this way: "Attendees want the benefit of the church without sharing the responsibility. They are like couples who want to live together without committing to marriage."

If you are just a passive spectator, you can't obey over 50 one another and each other commands in the Bible: we are commanded to love one another, pray for each other, encourage each other, admonish each other, greet each other, serve each other, teach each other, accept each other, honor each other, bear each other's burdens, forgive each other, submit to each other, be devoted to each other, confess your sins to each other. This is what it means to be a member of God's household.

Who are you doing these things with?

We are a member of God's family. Let's make a commitment to one another, get involved in each other lives, cross comfort zones, cross cultural boundaries, learn from each other.

IV. The third imagery: you and I are a stone to build a holy temple

Verse 20-22 say that each of you are a stone to build a temple of God. You are a stone! It's interesting that the imagery gets more and more intimate. It goes from fellow citizens of the kingdom to members of family to now, stone stacked on top of each other. We are really close. What does it mean that we are stones built into a holy temple?

First, if you're a stone, it means you are called to live for something bigger than yourself. A stone is not called to be a stone for stone's happiness sake. Its purpose lies being a part of the temple.

We don't even know it, but we are sooo influenced by Western individualism. We have to go against the individualistic tendencies. That's not the Bible. We have to seek to live for something bigger than our own individual fulfillment. People say you should go out and figure out what fulfills you and go for it. Here's the illogic of it: if the greatest cause is to be happy and comfortable, there is nothing worth living for or dying for. There will be nothing you will never compromise on. If it makes you feel bad, you will walk out of marriages. If you are not as comfortable, you leave churches. Is there anything you are willing to die for?

When Jesus was on the cross, when people were laughing at him, and it is good thing he didn't look down, this relationship is not fulfilling me anymore. I am out of here. He had a greater cause than his own happiness. Don't you see we are building blocks? We are not own? It's not about me?

Second, the temple is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. This means that it is built on the Scriptures. It's not built on what I think is right. I recently came across a church that seeks to practice the spirituality of the ancient wisdom. They pray, they meditate, they do all kinds of things. They even tithe. They take from the wisdom of the East—Buddhism, Hinduism and the wisdom of the Islam, Christianity and Judaism and came out with stuff that are common among all the

religions—things like prayer and meditation, things like loving people, things like fulfilling your destiny. The problem here is that we are the ones who determine what is right and wrong spirituality. If you do that, the God you create is not really God at all because you've created that God, and that God can't never change you! That God can never challenge you! Because that God will never disagree with you since you've created that God.

Every time we seek to ignore a part of the Scriptures, we are doing the same. Of course, we have to take the Scripture in its context, but we have to approach the Scripture as our foundation. That's the foundation of our community. That's why we study the word. That's why I so carefully preach the word. We are all subject to the word because it is the foundation.

There is a play that Shakespeare wrote called Merchant of Venice. It's interesting that when you see people doing that play now, they try really hard to down play the anti-Semitism. But, the problem is that Shakespeare was anti-Semitic. In fact, the entire intelligencia at the time of Shakespeare were anti-Semitic. They thought they were so politically correct when they said what they said about Jews. And Shakespeare is smarter than any of us sitting here. He is a once in a Century writer. Yet, he could not escape the wisdom of his age. How do you know that your sensibilities and paradigm of the world will not be ridiculed in 30 years, or 100 years? Wisdom of the world come and go. So, that's why we need to have our foundation of the Scriptures.

If we don't have this common authority, if we don't have this common architect, we can't be a temple together. We'll all want to be something on our own. We have submit to the will of the one who called us out. We are stones. We have to give ourselves to the authority of the Scriptures.

Third, the temple is a place where God lives by his Spirit. It is a holy place. You know, one thing Jesus was more passionate about than anything else was the temple. When the temple was turned in a market, he got really angry and drove out the merchants. When he did this, the disciples remembered that it was written that "the zeal for your house will consume me." The temple is now the church. We are the temple. And the Scripture tells us that the zeal for the church will consume him!

I believe that the church is the greatest hope for the world. I am willing to give my life for the church. Do the things that consume God consume you? Or are you consuming the church? You see, the church is not just a vehicle for something else. It is not just a place to help us grow. It is not just a rescue center. It is his dwelling place. You are I are his body. We are his family. We are his kingdom.