

Monday, January 28th

Read Ephesians 2:19-22

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

With today's reading, Paul's instruction can be paraphrased, "There's no outsider or insider, there's no privileged and non-privileged. We who believe in Jesus are all fellow citizens of God and members of His household."

As we learned a few weeks ago, we are adopted. We are legitimate children of God in every way through faith in Christ. In Him, we are being built to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit. Most Christians think in terms of *attending* church, not *being* the Church. The promise is, Jew and Gentile, all coming together through Jesus to become a temple where God dwells in human hearts. The main takeaway is, He needs all of us to come together as His Church, to be the stage in which God shows His power, tells His story and does incredible things to advance His kingdom.

However, in our brokenness, we are not good at being together. We are not good at truly loving our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus has gotten rid of the walls of hostility, but we keep putting them back up. We erect barrier after barrier that separates us from other believers and from nonbelievers. Walls of racial distinction, walls of economic distinctions and walls of political distinctions, just to name a few. We put up these boundaries, sometimes intentionally and sometimes unintentionally, but it creates division among the people of God. Jesus calls us together so that He can show up through us in power. Which means that when we are not engaged in the work of being together, His story doesn't get told as boldly as it's supposed to, and His glory does not shine as boldly as it is supposed to.

Sometimes, working to bridge gaps and to overcome barriers is uncomfortable. Building a relationship with people who are different is uncomfortable. But this cannot keep us from participating in the work of Jesus bringing us together. We are called to go out to all the earth and share the Gospel with people that are different from us in a variety of ways. We need to commit to overcoming our discomfort of sharing life with those who are different from us. Praise God for what He is doing, as He drives people from every tribe, tongue, and nation together. As Jesus said to His followers before ascending into heaven. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation, every person, every nation."

Smith, Craig. "Identity Theft." *Identity Theft* – Theft_power-of-peace, 21 Nov. 2016, <https://bit.ly/2SEd1zo>

Tuesday, January 29th

Read Ephesians 3:1-6

God's Marvelous Plan for the Gentiles

3 *For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—*

² Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴ In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. ⁶ This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

“For this reason,” immediately makes us ask, for what reason? The answer is God is bringing people together, as one human race. Paul is also causing a pause in his message. Most translations have a little dash at the end of verse 1 to indicate the pause and to emphasize the point he is making. In verses 2-13, Paul is being very intentional, because what he has to say is so important. It is as if he says, “I have to interrupt my own thought for this breaking announcement.”

In some ways, he is going over ground that he's already covered. But he wants to make sure we have a firm grasp on the extraordinary gift of the Gospel. Here, he actually uses the word “grace” and “mystery” synonymously. Grace is undeserved kindness, and the undeserved kindness of God is expressed in the blood of Jesus. The mystery is that God has brought together Jew and Gentile. For 2,000 years, from Abraham to the time of Christ, God's blessings were mostly restricted to the Jews. The Gentiles were excluded from the nation of Israel, were strangers to God's covenants of the promise, and thus they had no hope and were without God in the world. The mystery is that in Christ, God is making one people, one Church out of different people that once were separate. People didn't use to know God wanted to bring everybody together. Paul considers himself one of the instruments by which God makes this mystery known.

Paul also wanted to show the Ephesians that his imprisonment in Rome should not cause them to doubt God or to question Paul's apostleship. Rather than losing heart because of his sufferings, they should see that his tribulations, on their behalf, were actually for their glory. He reminds them again of God's great gift of the gospel and of the gracious privilege of being able to serve and to suffer for Christ's sake. Rather than grumbling about his imprisonment, Paul overflows with joyful gratitude to God.

Paul does not consider receiving grace and kindness to be the end of the story. Paul does not consider himself just a sponge to soak up grace. He also understands that when he received grace, he was to pass it on. What Paul understands is, God never just gives grace, He invests grace. The expectation is if you have received grace, you are also going to be a servant of it. This is a consistent theme throughout the New Testament, as well as the Old Testament. God gives us grace with an expectation that we will pass it on.

Smith, Craig. “Identity Theft.” *Embraced and Empowered*, 13 Nov. 2016, <https://bit.ly/2Dqlykd>

Wednesday, January 30th

Read Ephesians 3:7-9

⁷ I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

In verse seven, Paul begins with answers to the question, "Who am I?" He identifies himself as a servant of the Gospel, not just a recipient of it. Paul goes on to say in layman's terms, "I shouldn't be. It's only by the kindness of God that I'm a servant...I was less than the least of all of the Lord's people." This is not false humility. Paul is speaking of the times when he was hunting down the servants of the Lord. He hunted down Christians and had them executed. And now he is a servant of the same Jesus that he himself persecuted. Paul recognizes God's lovingkindness and grace, but he is also embracing his new identity. He is a servant. And it's not just true of Paul, it's true of every one of us.

If you have been saved by grace, you are called to be a servant of grace, not just a recipient of it. This is not just for pastors, missionaries or people who spend a lot of time in church. As we embrace our role and our identity as servants of the Gospel, we begin to be strengthened. "I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given to me through the working of His power." Paul is saying, when we embrace our identity as servants of the Gospel, we are empowered by God.

"To make plain to everyone", in verse nine means it is our job to make it plain to everyone that God is in our midst and that what is happening cannot be explained by human means, but that God is present in power among us. Around the world, we have brothers and sisters who share the Gospel with people knowing full well they could die for sharing their faith. Yet, they live with more power than what can be explained by merely human means. They live with God's power that is present within them. With God's power, we are able to go out of our comfort zone to be a servant of grace and embrace our identity as a servant of the Gospel.

Smith, Craig. "Identity Theft." *Embraced and Empowered*, 13 Nov. 2016, <https://bit.ly/2Dqlykd>

Thursday, January 31st

Verses 3:10-13

¹⁰ His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. ¹³ I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

Previously, we talked about the Ephesians as being a superstitious people. So, when Paul mentions, "the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms," that is the language used to talk about Satan and demonic forces. Paul is saying the church is God's victory

announcement to Satan and his demons. The church is not just making it plain to everyone, meaning, every other human being, the church is making it plain even to the spiritual powers that God has broken the barriers, that the devil used to try to separate us.

Manifold wisdom means the ability to accomplish what you desire to do. God's wisdom is demonstrated in the crucifixion. Try to imagine what the crucifixion looked like from Satan's perspective. Don't you think it looked like a victory? Satan would think, we killed the Messiah. We stirred up trouble to the point that they actually crucified the Son of God. Satan was thinking he won. Except three days later, the news didn't look so good for Satan. Three days later, Jesus is risen from the dead, and not only had they not killed the Messiah, but His death took away the sins of mankind. His death eliminated the consequences for our sin so there was no longer a barrier between us and God. So, what Satan and his evil devotees' thought was a victory, actually allowed human beings to come into the presence of God, the Father Himself, and have eternal life.

What God wanted to do is bring us all together so that He could show up through us in power. He accomplished it through what looked like a defeat. That is how wise God is. Even the things that looked like opposition to God's will become the very truths that He used to accomplish His will. Paul is saying the Church is God's announcement of victory, not just to the world, but even to spiritual forces in the heavenly realms. This means there are cosmic implications for how we conduct ourselves as His Church. This call to unity is not an option. It's the way the people of God have to define themselves at their core.

The impulse of the world is towards fragmentation. Sometimes our personal habits or inclinations don't lead us to welcome others that are different from us, so we remain separate. So how do we come together? In verse 12, Paul says "In Him". In Jesus and through faith in Jesus, we may approach God with freedom and confidence. That language was an ancient phrase to talk about coming before a king to ask for something. The language suggests, "In Jesus, we can go before God and we can request what we need." And Paul says you can do it without fear. You can do it with freedom and confidence. We are supposed to be asking for the strength to set aside differences, put others before us and do whatever we need to do to come together as the people of God. This will make it plain to all the world, those seen and unseen, that God is in our midst in power. In other words, faith in Jesus gives us the power to surrender to self and put others first.

Smith, Craig. "Identity Theft." *Embraced and Empowered*, 13 Nov. 2016, <https://bit.ly/2Dqlykd>

Friday, February 1st

Verses 3:14-17

A Prayer for the Ephesians

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

“I kneel before the Father,” is Paul’s way of saying I pray. He bends his knee in prayer so we can come together instead of dividing ourselves. Here Paul is establishing his model for personal prayers as well as prayers for others; remember, request and rejoice.

He remembers who God is and what God is like. This gives him confidence that his prayer is in line with God’s will. And because he knows the prayer is in line with God, he can move on to rejoicing knowing that God will answer his prayer. His prayer may be answered by different means or timing than what he expected, but he knows he can rejoice because his prayer is tied to the character of God. And his prayer aims to bring God’s purpose and promises into reality.

In verses 14 and 15, Paul used the expression of family to emphasize to the Ephesians that they were no longer Jew or Gentile, but that they all belonged to God’s new family. God is the ultimate and most important source of our identity. There would be no families without God. Paul is reminding us that we are sons and daughters of God.

Then Paul goes on to his request because he knows it is in line with God. He is asking God to strengthen the church, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul wants us to be strengthened from the inside out so we can bear the full presences of Jesus. He wants us to be strengthened so Jesus will feel at home in our hearts.

He is not talking about a dramatic, one-time experience, but rather an ongoing experience of God’s power to change our hearts, as we walk in the Spirit every day. We invite Christ to take up residence in us in a deeper, more conscious way than we experienced at conversion.

What does it take for Christ to feel at home in our hearts? Jesus has to feel welcomed. That is why we start our chapel time with praise and worship. We are saying, “Please come we welcome you.” Jesus also needs to be known, so we continually grow in the knowledge of who Jesus is by spending time in the Word. We also want to make Jesus welcomed by being a people of unity. He does not want His church to be divided.

Christ being at home in our hearts means to have close fellowship with Him. To have an active reliance on God and His promises, often in the face of impossible circumstances. Biblical faith is always linked with obedience. If we trust God, we obey God. To obey God, we must trust that His Word is true.

We should be able to welcome Christ into every aspect of our lives, so that there is no known area of our lives that we would be uncomfortable having Christ share it with us. Are we acting as a good host to Jesus Christ in our lives? Are we making our hearts a comfortable place for the holy Son of God to dwell? To do it, we must welcome Him, we must pray and grow in the knowledge of Him, so that we can obey Christ by faith. This allows Him to exercise His lordship over every nook and cranny of our hearts. As we strengthen our faith, we allow Jesus’ presence to grow within us, both individually and collectively as His Church.

Cole, Steven J. “Ephesians.” *Bible.org*, 2007, bible.org/series/ephesians-0.

Smith, Craig. “Identity Theft.” *A Prayer for Renovation*, 20 Nov. 2016, <https://www.missionhills.org/identity-theft/>