

The Body of Christ

Lesson 4: The Family of God -- Ephesians 2:19-22

There is a particular ache that comes from being on the outside. Maybe you have felt it standing at the edge of a party where everyone already knew each other, or moving to a new town where you were nobody's neighbor, or sitting in a room full of strangers who shared a history you were not part of. You can be physically present and still feel like an outsider, a stranger, someone who does not quite belong. It is one of the loneliest feelings a person can carry.

The Christians Paul wrote to in Ephesus knew that ache deeply. Most of them were Gentiles, and for centuries the Gentiles had been the ultimate outsiders to the people of God. There was a literal wall in the temple in Jerusalem that kept them out, with a sign warning that any Gentile who passed it would have himself to blame for his own death. They were, as Paul says earlier in the chapter, "separated from Christ, alienated, strangers, having no hope and without God in the world." If anyone knew what it was to be on the outside, they did.

And then Paul writes four sentences that must have taken their breath away. "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." No longer outsiders. No longer strangers. Fellow citizens. Family. The wall that kept them out has been torn down by the cross, and the people who had no place have been given the best place of all: a place in God's own home.

This is one of the most tender truths in all of Scripture about the church. The church is not first of all an institution or a meeting. It is a household. It is the family of God, built together into a temple where God Himself lives by His Spirit. This lesson invites you to feel the wonder of it, that in Christ you are not a stranger or a guest, but a son or daughter at home in the Father's house, with brothers and sisters all around you.

Group Discussion: Think about the difference between being a guest in someone's home and being family there. A guest is careful and polite; family raids the refrigerator and helps with the dishes. In which of those ways do most people seem to relate to the church, and why do you think that is?

Personal Reflection: Be honest: do you experience the church as your family, or more as a place you visit? When have you felt most like you truly belonged among God's people, and when have you felt most like an outsider?

Read Ephesians 2:19-22

Study Questions

1. Paul says the Ephesians are “no longer strangers and aliens” (v. 19). In light of the first half of Ephesians 2, what were they before, and what does it tell us about the church that its members are people who were once outsiders to God brought near by the cross?
2. Paul names a former condition, strangers and aliens, that Christ has ended. Are there ways you still live as though you were an outsider to God, holding back, keeping your distance, not quite believing you belong? Where does that come from?
3. Paul calls the church “the household of God” (v. 19) and elsewhere “the family” into which we are adopted (Romans 8:15–17). What does it mean that the church is a family and not merely an organization, and how should that change the way members relate to one another?
4. In a healthy family, members carry responsibilities for one another that they would never carry for strangers. What responsibilities of family life in the church have you been treating as optional, and what would it look like to take them up?
5. Paul says the household is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (v. 20). Why is it significant that the church is built on the apostolic and prophetic word with Christ as the cornerstone, and what does this say about where the church’s authority and stability come from?

6. A cornerstone sets the line and level for the whole building; everything is measured by it. In what areas of your life are you measuring by something other than Christ, and what would it mean to let Him be the cornerstone that everything aligns to?
7. Paul says the whole structure is “joined together” and “grows into a holy temple in the Lord” (v. 21). What does it mean that the church is a growing temple rather than a finished building, and what part do individual members play in that joining and growing?
8. Paul pictures the church as a building where every stone is fitted to the others. Is there a relationship in the body where you are not “joined together” well, where there is distance, friction, or neglect? What step toward being fitted together is Christ asking of you?
9. Paul’s climax is that the church is being built “into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (v. 22). Why is it so significant that God’s dwelling is no longer a temple of stone in one city but the assembled people of God, and how should the truth that God dwells among His gathered people shape our view of the church and of our part in it?
10. Look back across Ephesians 2:19–22. Having seen that in Christ you are not a stranger but a member of God’s own household, a living stone in His temple, name one specific way Jesus is calling you to live as family rather than as a guest, and what is the first step?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Galatians 6:10, do good to everyone, especially the household of faith; 1 Timothy 3:15, the church as the household of God, the pillar and buttress of truth; 1 John 3:1, see what kind of love the Father has given, that we should be called children of God; Romans 8:15-17, the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry "Abba, Father"; 1 Peter 2:4-5, living stones built into a spiritual house.