

BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY NINE

God's Household

Ephesians 2:17–22

The church's foundation is perfect; the cornerstone is perfect; the plan is perfect. But Christ is putting together in His church imperfect people who must get along. That's why reconciliation transcends theology and moves into the realm of relationships. Reconciliation is a wonderful thing!

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

As the psalmist wrote, “How wonderful and pleasant it is when brothers live together in harmony!” (Psalm 133:1). And how sad it is when disharmony splits people apart.

Thankfully, Jesus is the master bridge-builder who unites even enemies. He “broke down the wall of hostility” that separated Gentiles from Jews and joined the two contentious factions “into one people” (Ephesians 2:14). And, remarkably, He built this bridge of peace with *His own body*. Through His death and resurrection, He reconciled Jews with Gentiles, and along with them, us with each other—and all of us with God.

Reconciliation is central to Christ's mission. As Eugene Peterson observes in the introduction to his paraphrase of Ephesians:

Jesus, the Messiah, is eternally and tirelessly bringing everything and everyone together. . . .
The energy of reconciliation is the dynamo at the heart of the universe.¹

Christ is a reconciler! He wants us to do more than just cross His bridge; He intends us to dwell together in harmony and become a living temple for the glory of God. Let's learn from Paul this marvelous truth about our peace and unity in Christ, which, when experienced, is a wonderful and pleasant way to live.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Jesus' message of peace paints a hopeful vision of unity in our divided, combative world. As you begin this study, invite Christ's peace to settle on your soul and then your relationships at home, work, church, and in your community. Ask Him to help you follow in His steps as an ambassador of peace and a minister of reconciliation.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As you recall, Paul opened Ephesians 2 with a bleak portrait of humanity. We were dead in our transgressions and sins, but then God raised us with Christ and gave us new life. With new life came a new community, for, as we discovered, unity with Christ includes unity with His people.

According to Ephesians 2:14–15, people who formerly had nothing in common—Jews and Gentiles—now had Christ in common. Christ created in Himself “one new people from the two groups.” Now read [Ephesians 2:17–22](#). As you read, notice how Paul's bleak portrait of humanity in the opening lines of Ephesians 2 turns into a beautiful vision of community, the new society of our dreams.



Observation: What We Have in Common

Paul illustrates with word pictures the mutual benefits of our union with Christ, specifically, four things all Christians have in common.



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Searching the Scriptures Study Tool

Similes, metaphors, and analogies are figurative comparisons that form pictures in our minds and help bring to life the author's concepts.² Paul packed his writing with figures of speech, and, in this passage, we can identify Paul's main points by observing his rich assortment of metaphors—such as “citizens,” “family,” “house,” “foundation,” “cornerstone,” “temple,” and “dwelling.”

A Common Access to God—Ephesians 2:17–18

According to Ephesians 2:17, to whom did Christ preach the “Good News of peace”? And how did Paul describe these two groups?

At the temple, Jews could enter the courts around the sanctuary, but only the high priest could access God's presence behind the veil. An imposing wall, guarded by a sign that threatened death to trespassers, kept Gentiles far away, and they had no high priest to access God on their behalf.

Jesus, however, changed all that when His death tore the temple curtain in two (Matthew 27:50–51) and broke down the “wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:14). Now, according to 2:18, what could the “near” Jews and the “far away” Gentiles have in common?



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The Greek word translated “can come” or “have our access” in the New American Standard Bible, is *prosagō*. According to Greek scholar, Kenneth Wuest, the word bears a profound analogy:

It was used of those who secure for one the privilege an interview with a sovereign. The French word *entree* exactly translates it. . . . God the Son provides the way into the Father's presence through the Blood of His Cross, God the Spirit conducts the saint in and presents him, and God the Father is the One into whose presence the believer is brought.³

All three members of the Trinity work in sync to secure our access. Amazing! Based on this truth, how should we come to God, according to *Ephesians 3:12*? What issue would you like to bring before God right now?

I come before God confident that He has forgiven me, He cares, He hears me, and He will respond with what is best. —Chuck Swindoll

A Common Citizenship—Ephesians 2:19a

How did Paul characterize the Gentiles before and after Christ in the following verse?

So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. (Ephesians 2:19a)



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To whom do you think “God’s holy people” referred? Hint: the original Hebrew was Abraham, and according to *Galatians 3:6–9*, Paul connected us spiritually to him.

Through their faith in Christ, Gentiles were inducted into God’s kingdom and granted the same rights of citizenship as the most devout Jews. But there’s more!

A Common Family—Ephesians 2:19b–20

What other connection do Jews and Gentiles share, according to *Ephesians 2:19*? What does the repeated title for God in *1:2*; *3:14*; and *4:6* communicate to you about your bond with God and other believers?

How does God join us to His family, according to *1:5*?

When we come to the bridge of the cross and see written the word, peace, we meet the Father, who comes to us with His arms outstretched. We have a Father. —Chuck Swindoll



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A Common Temple—Ephesians 2:21–22

What else do Jews and Gentiles have in common, according to *Ephesians 2:21–22*? Keep in mind that when Paul wrote these verses, an actual dividing wall in Jerusalem still blocked Gentiles from the temple by threat of death. Reflect on the revolutionary nature of Paul's declaration and how it challenged all the accepted religious norms of his day.

These pictures of our commonality in Christ offer four perspectives of the church, an institution that Paul doesn't specifically name but is at the heart of his analogies.



Interpretation: The Church's Foundation and Cornerstone

In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we seek the meaning of the figures of speech. As analogies, they tell us what the church (the worldwide community of believers) is like. It is like a kingdom in which God is King, a family in which God is Father, and a temple in which God's holy presence dwells. And, like any great building, the church has a solid foundation fixed to a secure cornerstone.

What does Paul mean when he writes that the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 2:20)? Feel free to consult your Bible study resources for an answer.

In his message, Chuck found an answer in John Stott's commentary, *God's New Society*:

Since apostles and prophets were both groups with a teaching role, it seems clear that what constitutes the church's foundation is neither their person nor their office but their instruction. Moreover, we are to think of them as inspired teachers, organs of divine revelation, bearers of divine authority. . . . In practical terms this means that the church is built on the New Testament Scriptures. They are the church's foundation documents.⁴



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If so, then what does the “foundation” analogy imply about the nature of the Scriptures and the role they play in the church?

As individual stones, we are fitted together and attached to the foundation stones, which are aligned with the “cornerstone,” who is “Christ Jesus himself” (Ephesians 2:20). What does the cornerstone analogy imply about the essential connection to Christ of every individual in the church, including the church fathers?

As a worldwide community of believers, we are being “joined together in Him” (2:21). This image of “joining together” brings us full circle to Christ’s core ministry of peace through reconciliation, His process of carefully joining us to one another as a “dwelling where God lives by his Spirit” (2:22).



Correlation: Ministry of Reconciliation

Correlation helps us confirm and augment our interpretation by consulting a similar passage. What did Paul teach about Christ’s ministry of reconciliation in *2 Corinthians 5:18–20*? And what is our role?



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Ambassadors often travel to other nations on peace missions. If all goes well, treaties are signed and wars cease, but rarely does peace last. Our task as ambassadors is much more effective. Let's look at our role as ministers of reconciliation as we wrap up and apply our study.

Application: Christ Is the Message

Our mission as ambassadors is not to win peace between people but to win people to the Man of Peace. Commentator William Barclay explains how allegiance to Christ inspires peace within us and then with others:

He is our peace. It is in a common love of him that people come to love each other. That peace is won at the price of his blood, for the great awakener of love is the Cross. The sight of that Cross awakens in the hearts of men of all nations love for Christ, and only when they all love Christ will they love each other. It is not treaties and leagues to produce peace. There can be peace only in Jesus Christ.⁵

Christ is our only hope of peace! What privileges we share through our common bond with Him: access to God, citizenship in His kingdom, membership in His family, and being living stones in His temple! With these privileges comes the responsibility of peacemaking. With whom can you join hands today in a spirit of reconciliation?

Go with boldness and confidence in prayer to the Father right now. Open your heart to allow His peace to pour in and then pour out to others. With Christ, the joy of living together in harmony is not just a dream, it's possible!



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for sending Your Son as a bridge-builder. Thank You for not abandoning sinful humans to our constant quarrels and hostilities. Erase the ugly racial barriers that keep people apart. Take away the prejudices that eat at societies and even churches like cancer. Fit me together with others in Your family as stones in a gleaming temple where Your Spirit dwells. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The New Testament in Contemporary English* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1993), 401.
2. To learn more about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
3. Kenneth S. Wuest, *Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament for the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 78.
4. John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 106–107.
5. William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 114.

