

# LIVING IN THE KINGDOM

**Ephesians 2:19-22**

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I was going to entitle this morning's sermon "Stability, Direction, and Growth." Then I thought about "Firm, Forward, and Fattened." What I want to try and do is look at our passage in light of where we have come over the past several months.

We have been looking at Matthew and his emphasis on the kingdom. We held a mission's conference and heard how our humanness, being image bearers of the most High God should be reflected in our being missionaries, warriors and ambassadors. Yet, as I ponder all of these things, I keep coming back to one nagging questions: "What is wrong with the church?" We don't seem to reflect these things at all. I think that our passage this morning answers that question: "What is wrong with the church?"

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household..."

Do you remember the last time you were introduced to a new group of people? Maybe it was a new job, a new school, or a new church. You felt like a stranger - a foreigner in a strange land. That's what the Gentiles were - that's what we were. Paul tells us in verse 12..."remember that we were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the

promise, without hope and without God in the world.”

But now we are no longer strangers, because Christ has brought peace between Jew and Gentile. We have become “fellow citizens.” The promises of the covenant had been to the Jew alone. But now we have been naturalized - with all the benefits that come with that. Think about the cost some people are willing to pay to become U.S. citizens. They desire to have the privilege and freedom that belong to Americans. We have been made partakers of the covenant - we are now part of the kingdom of God. The church is no longer divided into first-class members and second-class members. The terms of admission are the same for all: faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, a faith working through love.

And not only citizens – it is one thing to gain citizenship in a country - but members of God’s household. We don’t just refer to one another as comrade, but brother or sister. Wendy and I have friends, Ann and Dave, who were unable to have children of their own. After a number of years, they began the process of adopting a little girl from China. When they adopted Amy, she became more than a U.S. citizen; she became a member of the Hudson household.

When God established the new covenant in Christ Jesus, he didn’t just allow the Gentiles into the church. They came in as one new man. God no longer makes a distinction between Jew and Gentile, male or female, slave or free. All are one together in Christ. So we are citizens and relatives.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by 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, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father in one Spirit. Ephesians 2:11-18

The word for household can also mean house, and so Paul now transitions from his metaphor of family-life to architecture. So he continues: "...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone."

When we were looking for houses in West Virginia, one of the concerns that continued to come up about housing there was the status of foundations. One house had a significant crack in the wall because the foundation had shifted. Before we bought our house, we had a structural inspection to make sure that the foundation of our house was solid - that it wasn't going to shift and cause major damage to the house.

Paul here is reminding his readers what the foundation of their faith is. At first glance it might seem a bit strange. The foundation here is the apostles and prophets. In 1 Cor. 3:11, Paul teaches that the primary foundation is, and can be none other than, Jesus Christ. "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." It may seem that Paul has messed up here, maybe forgotten what he had said earlier.

However, this is no contradiction at all. In fact, by calling Christ "the cornerstone," that is, that part of this foundation in which the latter achieves its super-excellence, luster is added to the metaphor. The joyful testimony made by the apostles and prophets in confirmation of the very fact that the basic or primary foundation is Christ makes it possible that, in a secondary sense, they, too, can be called the church's foundation. This foundation consists of the apostles and prophets. So what does Paul mean when he says that this house, God's house, is built on the foundation of the

apostles and prophets? It seems clear by the word order here that Paul is referring primarily to the New Testament teachers. This does not mean that we discard the Old Testament.

There are churches that call themselves “New Testament churches.” By that, they mean that the OT has no bearing or application for us today. I think that this seriously misses the mark. First of all, the only Bible the apostles and prophets had in the first-century church was the Hebrew Scriptures. Christ is found on every page and at every turn. The NT only allows us to understand the fullness of the Scriptures as they are found in Christ. So we affirm both the Old and the New as authoritative and useful. Yet, we view the Old through the New so that we can rightly understand it.

Now, let’s look more closely at this foundation. This is what provides firmness for the church - a solid bedding that will keep the Church from wandering from the way. John Calvin said this about our passage. “Foundation unquestionably here refers to doctrine; for he does not mention patriarchs or godly kings, but only those who held the teaching office, and whom God had appointed to build His Church. Paul teaches that the faith of the Church ought to be founded upon this doctrine.”

That statement alone is enough to scare many a good evangelical away. We hear things all the time like, “Oh, I’m not much for doctrine. I just want to love Jesus.” Or, more pointedly, “Doctrine only serves to divide us. Can’t we just agree on the basics and have true unity?” Maybe there are some here today that are thinking the same things. You don’t have much time for doctrine, thinking it for the professionals, or just a divisive tool of Satan.

But nothing could be further from the truth. Yes, Christ is the only foundation, since He alone supports the whole Church. He alone is the rule and standard of faith. But in Christ the Church is founded by the preaching of doctrine. Some would say, “I just want to worship Jesus.” And I would

say, "But how do we do that?" Others would say that love is the true mark of a Christian Church.

And I would say, "What does that love look like?" I could go on and on and on. We are to worship in Spirit and in truth. We must have both the Spirit of God and the truth of God to worship Him correctly.

Maybe I haven't convinced you yet. You may say, "Amen. We must have the whole Scriptures to guide us." But you may go on, "However, I believe in no creed but Christ." Creeds are man-made inventions - and that's what doctrine is - man-made invention. By the way, creed comes from the Latin word "credo," which means "I believe." A creed is a statement of one's beliefs. So I would say to those who hold this idea of creeds and Christ, "No, no, no!" Those that say "No creed but Christ" often have a much more elaborate credal system than I do. We must know and understand what we believe if we are to live in this Kingdom of God!

Paul said that he wanted to know nothing except Christ and him crucified. However, his understanding of that crucifixion takes up volumes in the Scriptures. There is substance to our faith that we must uphold. I believe a significant problem with the Church today is that many in it do not want to be bothered with serious study and a deeper knowledge. This is true for the most part because we are mostly selfish, or because we have embraced the message of the world. We do not live as citizens of heaven.

George Barna recently published a survey of Americans that found most adults reject the notions of original sin, the existence of Satan, and salvation by God's grace alone. They tend to think that the core documents of the world's major religions are "different expressions of the same spiritual truths."

You just have to look at any given Saturday's "Religion" section to see that.

Those statistics bear themselves out in the church as well. Most people believe that truth is relative. It may be true for you, but it doesn't have to be true for me. Our message for the church and the world is, "It doesn't matter whether you think it is true or not. There is Truth, and it is that Truth which we must pursue.

Now, the firmness of that foundation must come from Christ. That is why we hold the gospel to be so dear. If anyone preaches a false gospel, Paul said, let him be accursed; let him go to hell. That gospel is rooted and built upon Christ Jesus. He is the chief cornerstone. In building a structure, the cornerstone serves two functions. First, it ties together two walls - in this case, the two walls of Jew and Gentile. The walls will not stand without them.

The other is direction. The cornerstone was a perfectly shaped stone that laid out the direction of the adjoining walls. So I would ask, "Which direction?" And the answer is, "Forward." And more specifically, up. See that in verse 21. "In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord." We are joined together in Christ, and we are being built into a holy temple, a dwelling place of God. We are "living stones," as Peter tells us.

The work on the house is progressing, and we must understand that Christ's church will prevail. God isn't going to let his church disappear. The real question is, "Are you one of those living stones?" Are you being fitted and shaped to be a part of God's temple - His church?

As we consider where we are going, we must remember that we have a mandate to go forward

with the Gospel, and not to retreat. When the Bible says that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church, it is the church that is battering down the doors of hell - and not vice versa. Do not forget it. We follow the commander of the armies of heaven, and the battle belongs to the Lord. Just fight.

Paul uses the language of the old covenant to convey in building terms the place of the Lord Jesus. He is the chief cornerstone. Here is another way of looking at this structure from a heavenly perspective.

In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD. Isaiah 2:2-5

And finally, this cornerstone gives growth. See in verse 22: "And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." God's desire for his church is not to be some anemic, waif-like thing that always seems to be on her deathbed. This is the picture God paints for his bride in Ezekiel 16. This is what God desires his church to be. And it is his work, and he will do it.

On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out in to the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised.

Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, "Live!" I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew up and developed and became the most beautiful of jewels. Your breasts were formed and your hair grew, you were naked and bare.

Later I passed by, and when I look at you, and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine.

I bathed you with water and washed the blood from you and put ointments on you. I clothed you with an embroidered dress and put leather sandals on you. I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with costly garments. I adorned you with jewelry: I put bracelets on your arms and a necklace around

your neck, and I put a ring on your nose, earrings on your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. So you were adorned with gold and silver; your clothes were of fine line and costly fabric and embroidered cloth. Your food was fine flour, honey and olive oil. You became very beautiful and rose to be a queen.

Does your faith rest on a firm foundation? Are you moving forward, seeing the church of Jesus Christ advancing in the world? Do you see yourself and the church fattened, full of vitality and vigor, growing in your personal walk and in our life together? That is who we are, who we are becoming, and who we need to be.

I want to ask you to do something. In a moment we are going to worship by the giving of our tithes and offerings. During that time, would you read the words of our closing hymn – 355. Truly, we are God's people, dwellers in the kingdom of the King of kings and Lord of lords.