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## Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace

*To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ... (Ephesians 3:8)*

### **From Outsiders to Insiders – Reconstruction**

#### ***Ephesians 2:19-22***

***19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.***

I am pleased and excited to announce to you something of wondrous news. Perhaps you were not aware of this, but we here at Hope CBC are part of a building project. By the grace of God, we have been privileged to participate in the most massive reconstruction project ever undertaken. In case you missed it; in case you have forgotten, God created something back in Genesis that served as the pinnacle of His efforts. What was that creation? It was humanity itself; humanity created uniquely in the image of God; in the moral, creative likeness of the Creator. This new humanity was *granted* the privilege and responsibility of taking dominion of the earth, shining the light and glory of the Creator God in everything.

But, a problem arose. Adam rebelled against God's command and plunged this new humanity into the state or condition of sin; the penalty of which God was clear, "for in the day that you eat of it, you will surely die" (Genesis 2:17). God's pinnacle of creation, humanity, was ruined by sin; separated from its Creator. As I have been preaching as of late; *sin always separates*. But it does not only separate, it also degrades, ruins and destroys whatever it touches. If left in this sinful state, humanity would be eternally lost; eternally separated from God; eternally left to suffer the consequences of its own actions; the eternal enduring of the wrath of God.

Coming to Ephesians 2 then, let me remind you that Paul has been emphasizing the *grace* of God in salvation. Contemplating the events and effects of Genesis 3, Paul reminds his readers of the devastatingly lost condition every man, woman and child finds themselves in verses 1-3. Then he turns back to God in verses 4-10 to speak of the amazing salvation He has provided to those who have faith in Jesus Christ.

Now let me have you look with me again at Ephesians 2:10 which says, "***For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.***" Did you catch that? We are His what? His "workmanship"! We are His masterpiece; His magnum opus; His greatest work? In our text, we are said in effect to be His building project. And we have two questions. First, who is the "We"? The answer to that question is simple; the "we" are all those who are "in Christ" – that is, those who believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is their only hope and only Savior from sin. The second question is this, what is this "workmanship"? I find it interesting that we often read verse 10 and delight in being called His workmanship, but then stop short of asking ourselves, "What is this work?" What is it that God is doing? What is it that God is making? What is it that God has made us a part of?

Paul answers that question, at least in part, in major part in our text of verses 11-22. He begins by calling believers to remember; to remember their past when they were without hope and without God; strangers to the things of God in verses 11-12. I would challenge you to consider remembering who you were before faith in Christ, that is a dead, deluded, disobedient, depraved and doomed sinner. Why? Because remembering this is one of those "good works" God has prepared for us. We are to remember how desperate our condition was so that we

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stand in ever increasing awe that God has graciously provided us salvation through the cross of His Son, Jesus Christ.

In addition to this good deed of remembering our past, we saw in verses 13-18 the doctrine of reconciliation; the full experience of the peace and presence of someone with whom we formally had hostility, animosity, and/or ill-feelings. But recall that our reconciliation is not simply experiencing the peace and presence of God, as verse 16 indicates; but it also the experience of the peace and presence of people, the people of God from every tongue, tribe and nation. This brings me back to what I said at the beginning. Remember that sin ruined and destroyed the new humanity as realized in and through Adam and Eve. The effects of that sin not only separated man from God; but men from men. As fallen humanity spread throughout the earth; it took sin and sin's effects everywhere. Sin is at the root of every act of violence, behind every form of deceit; the impetus for every act hostility and crime that man perpetrates against one another. Sin divided men into "races"; groups, clans, and gangs. Humanity would learn not to trust one another; to hate one another; largely on external attributes, like the color of one's skin; or because of cultural identifications. Humanity indeed grew. The edifice of humanity was being built as a ruin, but a ruin that spread everywhere

In time, God called out a nation, from the descendants of Abraham. This nation, Israel, was to be the recipients of God's grace and was to be a monument of that grace; a light unto the rest of the nations, showing the rest of humanity what God can do when people follow Him. One problem, Israel was stubborn and sinful. In her pride, she became introverted and separated herself from the rest of humanity thinking herself superior. The rest of the nations did not take kindly to Israel's pride and sought to subdue her or destroy her. Something we still see taking place today. And so, we have a ruined and divided humanity; ruined from antiquity.

But God was not finished yet. And we read in Ephesians 2:13-18, one of the things God did was to do something new. Not only are we new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), but we are said in verse 15 to be "**one new man.**" Do you see that? "**...one new man...**" Beloved, when Christ, by means of the cross, revealed all people to be sinners and thus all in need of a Savior, He made for Himself "**one new man**" out of all who believe; Jew, Gentile, Black, White, Asian, Arab. Beloved, Christ is making a "**new humanity**" one in which color of skin, the dialect of the tongue, or the geography of the person is not the issue. The "**new humanity**" is one united group by virtue of their communion with Christ. And thus, part of the "good works" for which we have been created is to be reconciled with all believers "in Christ."

This brings us to verses 19-22. And it is here that Paul describes to believers this massive reconstruction work of God whereby He is making this chosen race, this holy nation, this new humanity; not in the image of Adam, but in the image of Christ. In verses 19-22, we find Paul describing for us this new humanity and what God is doing for this new humanity in three ways; there is a fellowship, a family and a foundation.

### **I. Because we have been reconciled to God by Christ, we are part of a new fellowship (19a)**

***So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints...***

Paul begins with the words, "**So then...**" This means "*in light of this*" or "*because of this.*" "In light of what?" Our attention is taken all the way back to the beginning of the chapter and reminds us what we were before faith in Jesus Christ. What were we? We were dead (v.1);

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disobedient (v.2); and depraved, or sinful through and through (v. 3). According to verse 12, we were on the outside of all things Godly, outside His covenant and promises, and outside of His people. This was the condition in which we found ourselves; lost in sin, separated from God; doomed for hell.

If we can get that idea in our head. If we can understand what it is we deserve, which is the wrath of God, then the next words of Paul here in verse 19 are utterly amazing. [pause] He says, ***"you are no longer strangers and aliens..."*** The word ***"strangers"*** refers to those who ***"are not of one's family."*** When we say something is not familiar, we are saying that is not something of the family; it is strange, outside the understanding or comfort of the family. The word ***"aliens"*** speaks of those who ***"are sojourners in a country that is not their home; foreigners."*** Those two words accurately describe who we were before we were saved by the grace of God.

As ***"strangers"*** we were always on the outside looking in. Have you ever been a ***"stranger?"*** Have you ever been in a place where you did not know anyone and no one really knew you? It could be a new school, a new job, or having moved into a new town. I can relate to this feeling. In first grade I went to one school; then we moved. I attended a different school for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades and then we moved again when I started 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Then there was a move to another town and another school for 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades, followed by one more move as I started 9<sup>th</sup> grade. That is five new schools. Each time I started, everything was strange and I was strange (I know, hard to believe) to the others kids, most of whom had grown up together in the schools. Because I was a stranger, I did not know my way around. I did not know where things were located or how to find them. In other words, I was in a position of ignorance. I was ignorant about the place and the people.

Now then, we are not generally accustomed to having fellowship with strangers, are we? In fact, what is one of the first things we teach our children when they are old enough to go out in the front yard or to go to the park? We tell them, ***"Don't talk strangers."*** We are not in the practice of inviting strangers into our homes. Our inclination is to keep strangers at a distance, to be wary of them. Most of us know when we are being treated like a stranger, don't we? Here Paul says that there was a time when we were strangers from God. I became a Christian at the age of 17, so it has been a while; but I remember walking into a few churches just before I was saved; and while the people were nice, I knew I did not fit in. Beloved, there was a time, before Christ, when we were estranged from God and His people.

As ***"aliens"*** we are in a place to which we do not belong. We understand the word ***"foreigners"*** as speaking of a person who is dwelling, either temporarily or permanently in a country not his own. The alien is separated from the natives by culture, by language and by nationality. If you have ever travelled to another country then you know what it is like to be a foreigner. A foreigner does not have the same rights as those who are citizens. The citizens enjoy the rights and privileges of citizenship, but a foreigner does not have such rights. A foreigner is supposed to travel with a passport. He is allowed to remain in that country only by the permission of the government and technically can be deported any time the government chooses. A ***"foreigner"*** may know more about his host country than a ***"stranger,"*** but he is still limited in what he can do.

Paul uses these two words in a spiritual sense, saying that before faith in Christ, we are ***"strangers and aliens."*** Before Christ, we were ***"strangers"*** when it came to God. We were ignorant of Him, His ways and of all He could do for us. We were on the outside looking in at the blessings

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of God, not understanding that those very things could be ours. And we were also **"aliens."** Yes, we may have been around the people and things of God, but we did not understand them. We might read a gospel tract, own a Bible or go to a church; we could even sing hymns; but we had no saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and so we were **"strangers and aliens"** without spiritual rights or standing.

But now, through Jesus Christ, God has reached out to us and has taken us in making us, in the words of our text, **"fellow citizens with the saints."** That means we have changed our citizenship. We are members of a new humanity. We are part of a new fellowship; no longer are we **"strangers and aliens,"** we are in fellowship with the saints; the holy ones and now we are at home with such holy ones.

Because we are citizens of the United States of Americas we have certain privileges, rights and responsibilities that do not belong to non-citizens. As citizens we are under the protection of our government. As citizens we are under the authority of our government. As citizens we get to vote for our leaders and we must pay our taxes. Since we have been saved by grace, we have been brought into a new fellowship. This fellowship is the kingdom of God. As Paul reminded the Philippians, **"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ"** (3:20). We march with the fellowship of the redeemed under a new banner: the bloodstained banner of Calvary! Because we are citizens of God's kingdom, we are brought under His protection and His authority. Because we are citizens, we are no longer ignorant of God, of His blessings, or of what He can do for us. Being in Christ, when I hear someone preaching about Jesus, testifying about what God has done; or sing about Him in song, I know what they are talking about!

If we are citizens, then we are no longer without rights and without standing. We cannot be deported and we are no longer separated from God. In fact, remember verse 18 from last week? As citizens we even access to God as Father because of Jesus Christ. The testimony of Hebrews 4:14-16 fits here, **"14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."** Because we have been reconciled to God, we belong to a fellowship, a church, a body of believers that are citizens of heaven. We belong. As Dr. D. Martin Lloyd-Jones said, **"We no longer live on a passport; we have a birth certificate. We really do belong."** This is our fellowship. But even as Lloyd-Jones alluded, there is something more than simply fellowship. This leads to our second point...

### **II. Because we have been reconciled to God by Christ, we are part of a new family (19b)**

**...and are of God's household**

Not only are we **"fellow citizens,"** but we are also **"of God's household."** Paul takes us from being citizens of God's kingdom in fellowship with the saints; but then makes it more personal and even more intimate declaring us to be members of God's family. When we came to Christ by faith, so many things took place. We were given new life (Romans 6:4); made new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17); and, in the words of Jesus in John 3:3, 7, by the grace of God we were **"born**

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*again...* We were first born into Adam's fallen race; but now, in Christ, we have been adopted out of Adam and into Christ and this new humanity. Paul captures this idea in Romans 5:17 saying, **"For if by the transgression of the one [Adam], death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ."**

Paul has already pointed out this privileged position. Look back at Ephesians 1:3-5 where we read, **"3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will..."**

God's intention was to make us more than citizens of His kingdom, but to also bestow upon us something far more incredible and intimate relationship – we are children of the King. What does this mean? What is the significance of sonship over citizenship? As a citizen I can know about the King, and I might be able to meet the King if fortunate enough. But as a son, I know the King; I have access to the King.

There is a story about a king who was holding court in his throne room. His counselors, advisors, noblemen, and the ministers of state were all there. Suddenly, there was a loud banging at the door. Hearing the clatter, all heads turned in that direction. Immediately, the door burst open and into the room ran a little boy. One of the king's guards tried to stop the boy saying, **"Here now boy! Don't you know you are interrupting the council of your king?"** The little boy kept running toward the king, and he replied, **"He's your king, but he's my daddy!"** And with that he leaped into the open arms of his father! As the sons and daughters of God, we outrank all others in the kingdom! We have access to our Father at all times. Listen to the words of John who was in absolute awe over this very thing. In 1 John 3:1 we read, **"See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are."** This is our privileged position as believers in Christ.

This position of being born again, made part of a new family; adopted into God's household, belonging to God is a theme that overwhelmed Paul. In Romans 8:15 he reminded believers, **"For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'"**

How should we behave since we are part of God's household? Whose rules should we follow? Oh, let me remind you of something. If we are God's children, then we can know that He has our very best interests at heart. As His children, we must heed the words of 1 Peter 5:6-7, **"6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, 7 casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you."** Did you catch those last words, **"because He cares for you!"** [pause] The God of the universe cares for you. Oh blessed thought? He cares for, watches over you. Because of Christ, He cares for you enough to make you His child. What does this mean for you? Be obedient! Rejoice in doing God's will. As 1 Peter 1:14-16 reminds us, in light of our salvation, Peter says, **"14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, 'YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.'"** Let us live as those who are part of God's household. But there is one more thing...

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### III. **Because we have been reconciled to God by Christ, we are part of a new foundation (20-22)**

**20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.**

Beginning in verse 20 and running through verse 22, Paul uses a metaphor to describe this reconstruction of a new humanity. Let me remind you that a "metaphor" is a figure of speech in which a term or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable in order to suggest a resemblance. Jesus loved using metaphors. For example, in Matthew 5:13, Jesus said, "**You are the salt of the earth...**" Jesus did not mean that His followers were literally grains of salt, but that their lives were to flavor and preserve the lives of others even as salt flavor and preserves food. In John 10:9, Jesus said, "**I am the door....**" Again, we are not to assume Jesus is a literal door on hinges, but rather that He provides an entrance into the blessings of eternal life.

The metaphor in our text describes this new humanity in terms of a temple. This reveals something of our relationship to the Lord. We are part of a new foundation. For not only are we involved in a new fellowship and part of a new family, but we are also part of the foundation of His building project. This picture of the temple is simply another way of describing the body of Christ, of which all the redeemed are a part.

As citizens, we are part of common community. As children, we are part of common family. And now, as part of the building, we are part of an indivisible unity both to God and to one another. Why is the picture of a building important? Beloved, the citizens in a kingdom may be divided. We see this in our country today, people divided by a whole host of reasons. But this is not so in a building. If a building is to stand, it is, by definition, absolute unity.

Likewise, a family may be ripped apart by war, acts of nature, even stubborn pride, but the parts of a building are inseparably linked. In a building there is no separation between the stones. They are brought together by the will of the builder who puts them in their place to stand. One stone laid upon another; one stone laid beside another; and once in place, they become inseparably brought together as part of the same building. One stone may have come from one quarry and the stone next to it from another, but once in place, they become part same building. They either stay together or the whole building falls.

So, Paul tells us that we are no longer strangers and aliens; that we are citizens of the same kingdom. Furthermore, we are members of the same family. And even more than that, we are all individual part making up one and the same building. We are put together in Christ with a closeness that is permanent, powerful and precious.

Some parts of this building are Jewish, some are Gentile. Some are men, some are women. Some have light skin, some have dark skin; but we are now all one in Christ. Yes, we all have different pasts, upbringings, abilities, interests and ways of thinking. Yet, in spite of our differences, we have been brought together in Jesus Christ and given a unity in Him that is stronger than blood. We have been given a unity that will outlast time itself. Kingdoms will fall. Families will die out. But the building God is building with stones like us will stand forever as a testimony to His glory, His grace, His power and His honor!

I have more to say on these verses, but that will have to wait for another time. Let me close by reminding you that to be "in Christ" means all of these things we have been looking at. It

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means to remember what we were before faith in Christ. It means being reconciled to God and to one another by the cross of Christ. And it means that we are part of God's building project; His reconstruction plan by which He removes us from the dead and hell-bound humanity in Adam and transfers us to the kingdom of His beloved Son; into a living hope and heaven bound eternity in Christ.

By way of application, let me allow the Word of God to speak. Paul in Titus 2:11-14, gives us application. We read, **"11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, 14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds."**

*Father, thank you for the grace that have brought us salvation. May we be instructed by that grace to deny the ungodliness that surrounds us and the worldly desires that daily tempt us. May your grace empower us to live sensibly, righteously and godly in this hour, this week, in this life. And because of Your grace, may we look for the appearing of Jesus Christ, our God and Savior, being a people zealous for good deeds. For we were create for such thing that we might be known as your reconstruction project. May the world see and wonder at that grace that has performed such things. Amen.*

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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Ephesians 2:11-22  
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