

The sermon

Intro

Some of you want me to tell everyone how to vote. Some of you don't. Some of you want to keep the focus on the gospel.

I'm cautious on politics because it's not my authority to tell you who you have to vote for. Just like I don't tell parents how they have to school their children. And I don't tell you which movies you're allowed to watch. And I don't tell you how much you're allowed to spend on a car or your vacation. These are areas of wisdom and discernment and conscience, not biblical command. You can vote without defying a biblical command. You can't lie without defying a biblical command. Do you see the difference?

I'm cautious on politics because I don't want to equate our church with a political party. I don't want to give the impression that our hope rests in a political candidate. I don't want to give the impression that the church's mission is enforcing morality on the world. I don't want to give the impression that political programming is more valuable than spiritual disciplines.

On the other hand, we should care what becomes of our nation, like the laws inflicted on our children and grandchildren. By the way, the purpose of government is to punish sin and reward good conduct (Rom 13:3-4). Not to normalize sin and punish God's people. And we're not just voting for a candidate. We're also voting for the people they'll put on the cabinet, put in the Supreme Court, etc. Voter guides are there on the tables as you walk out. Please pick one up.

One of the themes I uncovered in Colossians was no area of life untouched by God's word. So I have a few questions. Have you prayed about how you'll vote? Have you researched the policies of candidates? How is your Christian faith, how is your Bible, impacting your voting this year? Have you connected your faith with your voting?

It can be conceded that no party or candidate is perfect. And each party has policies that agree in some measure with the Bible. But one question we ought to ask is, which candidate, which party is promoting values that oppose God's word? In Ephesians 2, we hit on the world, the devil, the flesh. Which candidate wishes to normalize sin (the world)? Which candidate is following Satan the most?

Voting is a conscience matter. The point isn't to divide our church over politics. The point isn't to elevate politics over the mission of the church. The point is to connect our faith with our voting. Never given it any thought? Ask a brother or sister why they vote the way they do.

Christian, let your citizenship in God's household affect your citizenship in America.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Passage Focus

Christian, Paul is telling you who you are and where to find belonging.

Point 1: You have become citizens (2:19)

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

"So then" = Paul's getting to his conclusion.

"strangers" = someone excluded. An outsider.

“*aliens*” = a resident foreigner. Living in a place that isn’t your home. A government worker on a six month assignment in Japan.

We didn’t belong to the people of God.

But something has changed. Now we’re “*fellow citizens with the saints.*” We belong! We weren’t saints (= the church), but now we are. We’ve become part of the “*one new man,*” part of “*one body*” = the church.

“*fellow citizens*”

The emphasis of citizenship is rights. There were privileges that once didn’t belong to us, but now they do.

What exclusive rights come with American citizenship? To my surprise, basically three:

1. Right to vote in federal elections.

Federal meaning the US government. Citizens can vote for a presidential candidate.

2. Running for federal office.
3. Serving on a federal jury.

On the other hand, non-citizens can buy a home, buy a firearm, get a driver’s license, get free public education, get government benefits like food stamps, and even get a hunting permit in Maine. The Bill of Rights in the Constitution is used to protect the rights of non-citizens too.

So horrible illustration. There’s not many benefits in the US limited exclusively to US citizens.

Not so with the church. Outside of Christ, we’re excluded from every spiritual blessing that comes to sinners through Jesus Christ. Only in Christ is there:

1. Forgiveness of sins, declared not guilty, wrath removed.
2. Declared righteous, acceptable in God’s sight despite our sins.
3. Peace with God. Reconciled relationship with God. The end of hostility.
4. Access to the throne of grace in our time of need (Heb 4:16).
5. Made alive = born again.
6. Eternal life.

A future immortal body that can’t die or suffer.

7. Access to the new heavens and new earth (land) where we’ll experience God’s kindness forever and ever.

Application

Christian, you belong. You have privileges! When we understand what we have in Jesus, when we understand what Jesus has done for us, we’ll treasure him above everything else. Christian, do you know what you have in Jesus?

Point 2: You have become family (2:19)

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

Christian, you’re a family member of God’s household.

If citizenship emphasizes salvation benefits, household membership emphasizes relational benefits. The church is pictured as family.

Application

The relationship isn't just vertical: us and God. The relationship is also horizontal: us and God's children. We become one with all God's people throughout the earth (universal church).

But there's also a local expression of the church. In the local church Ephesian Jews and Gentiles who once hated one another have become one. Enemies became family in the local church. The local church is the place where we experience a family relationship with other believers.

Family

What does family look like? Maybe not the best question, because there's a lot of sin in families. The church is like my family at the holidays? I don't want the church! Maybe better, what should family look like? Committed relationships: enduring commitment, bearing with one another, sharing the inner recesses of our hearts, encouraging one another, correcting one another, receiving correction. Affection: concern for one another's well-being, a wanting to spend time with each other, praying for one another. Action: kindness, service, meeting practical needs.

That's how we're supposed to do community together.

Local church

In the local church, formal commitment is church membership. Just like marriage is a formal commitment. Think of church membership as a formal relationship with the people of this church. In church membership you're committing yourself to a group of people and a group of elders. You're placing yourselves under the care of a group of elders and a group of Christians. At the same time, you're committing yourself to hold this leadership accountable and these Christians accountable. Mutual commitment is the heartbeat of church membership. Yes, mutual commitment is a good thing!

Please don't view church membership as a right to vote on the color of the carpet. Or opportunity for ungodly, unqualified leaders to abuse you. Church membership is making formal our family relationship.

In the New Testament the people knew who their leaders were. And the leaders knew who their people were. The people knew who was an insider and who was an outsider. The people knew who to hold accountable (members) and who not to judge (the world). What I'm saying is church membership was practiced in the New Testament. See 2 Corinthians 2:6 where there was a majority vote. They must have known who had voting rights.

How did people become church members in the New Testament? When a new believer was baptized, they were added to the church (Acts 2:41). Baptism and membership weren't separated. If there were insiders and outsiders, and the people knew who the insiders and outsiders were, what mechanism distinguished these groups other than baptism?

Christian, we experience the family relationship in the local church. And the family relationship is formalized in church membership. If you've been attending for a while and you've settled on our church, the first step is church membership.

Point 3: Christ is our foundation (2:20)

built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

"the household of God" is built on multiple foundations: Jesus, the apostles, and prophets. But one of the foundations is more foundational than the others: Jesus is the ultimate foundation on which the apostles and prophets rest.

Cornerstone

The cornerstone was:

1. The first stone laid down.
2. As the first stone, it bore the weight of the entire structure.
3. As the first stone, all other stones were oriented in relation to the cornerstone.
4. As a stone located in the corner of the structure, it tied the walls together.

The cornerstone was the most important stone. The cornerstone gave stability and shape to the whole structure. So it is with Christ. Jesus is the stone that gives stability and shape to the church.

God the Son, Jesus Christ, took on human flesh to die as a man in the place of men (Heb 2:17). Jesus lived a sinless life, perfectly keeping the commands of God where Adam and Israel failed. Living a sinless life, Jesus was an unblemished, acceptable sacrifice worthy to satisfy the Father's wrath against our sins. Not only that, Jesus rose from the dead, ensuring that all who are in Christ will rise in like manner at his return. Furthermore, Jesus' teaching recorded in the four gospels is foundational to our personal obedience and our communal obedience.

Without the person and work of Jesus Christ, there would be no church. No forgiveness of sins. No mercy. No adoption. No being made alive and set free from the rule of the world, the devil, and the flesh. No dwelling with God in the kingdom to come. The church is built on Jesus Christ and nothing else!

Apostles and prophets

The apostles at the very least were the 12 minus Judas plus Judas' replacement Matthias (Acts 1:21-26) and Paul and James the brother of Jesus (Gal 1:19) and Barnabus (1 Cor 9:5-6). Those who were witnesses to the risen Christ (Acts 1:21-22; 1 Cor 15:7-9). Those who preserved and passed on the events of Jesus' life and Jesus' teachings. Our faith is founded on the apostles' doctrine. There is one *"faith that was once for all delivered to the saints"* (Jude 3).

New Testament prophets, not Old Testament prophets, are in view here. New Testament prophets didn't establish new doctrines, but they did receive spontaneous revelation (1 Cor 14:26, 29-33), tell the future (Acts 11:27-28; 21:10-11), encourage the church (1 Cor 14:3, 31), and help people learn God's ways (1 Cor 14:31).

More on apostles and prophets later in our study of Ephesians.

Application

The apostles' doctrine isn't subject to revision. In the 18th, 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, local churches and denominations redefined Christ (he wasn't God; no resurrection) and other doctrines (the Bible isn't God breathed and isn't inerrant) and ceased to be the church.

The sentiment prevails today. If we want to reach out culture, if we don't want to church to die out, we need to revise the doctrines, we need to take off the rough edges (only one way to God, calling sin sin, day of judgment, repentance).

The idea of foundations requires that we stay the same in every age. If the church discards its foundation, it ceases to be the church! The church can't scrap the foundation to be relevant to the culture. Our gospel is what makes us relevant to the culture! We're relevant because Jesus was the Son of God, because Jesus did rise from the dead, because the Bible is inerrant, because the human problem is sin, because there is a day of judgment.

Point 4: The church is under construction (2:21)

in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

“the whole structure” is *“the household of God”* = the church.

It’s in Christ that *“the whole structure,”* the church, is joined together. Our familial relationship is rooted in Christ. It’s Jesus that joins us together. It’s Jesus that joins enemies (Jew and Gentiles) and makes them family.

Note the structure isn’t complete. It’s still growing. New members are being added to the family. We’re becoming *“a holy temple in the Lord”* = in Christ.

Application

Here I just want to emphasize the idea that the church is under construction. What sort of construction? Numbers or spiritual depth? In reality the answer is both, but, in context, the answer is numbers. New members are being joined together = added to the household. As new members are added to the household, the structure expands, and the temple continues to be erected.

The temple isn’t complete, so the mission continues on.

Evangelism

What part do we play in new members being joined to Christ? We evangelize. We speak the gospel to those who don’t believe. Praying for the conversion of sinners and living out the gospel with a godly life doesn’t hurt.

How might we do this?

1. Pray daily for God to raise up gospel conversations for you.
2. Be on the lookout for opportunities.

When someone asks you questions like why did you become a Christian? What do Christians believe? What does the Bible say about this issue? I hate what Christians stand for... God has answered your prayer. He’s started a conversation where we can explain what it is that we believe.

3. Ask someone about their religious background.
4. If they’re a religious person who believes some part of the Bible, ask them why one person goes to heaven and another goes to hell.
5. Ask them if anyone’s ever explained the gospel to them.
6. Ask them what the gospel is.
7. Ask them if they would be okay if you explained the gospel to them.
8. Or just share the gospel as a natural transition if all seems well.
9. Share about God, man, Christ, response.

GOSPEL HERE

God → man → Christ → response

People are joined to the church and become members of God’s household through our gospel proclamation. The more of us that are regularly speaking the gospel, the more we’ll see people added to the structure.

The structure is still being built. You have a reason to wake up today.

Point 5: The church is God’s dwelling place (2:22)

In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Here the you who “*are being built together*” are those already in Christ.

I glossed over the fact that we’re growing “*into a holy temple*” (2:21). In the old covenant, God dwelt in the tabernacle and the Jerusalem temple. Not so in the new covenant. In the new covenant, God indwells his people.

When Christ came, God dwelled in Jerusalem. Things were about to change. Jesus said to the woman at the well in John 4:21, “*Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.*” The temple system went away with the old covenant and now we are God’s temple. God indwells his people, individually and communally.

Application

The fact that we’re indwelled by the Holy Spirit (made alive) gives us confidence that we can make progress in keeping God’s commands. We can be new people! We can withstand the exterior assaults of the world and Satan. We can withstand the interior assaults of the flesh. God’s residing within us to drive out sin. God indwelling us brings hope in the battle against sin.

On the other hand, we’ve become holy ground because God indwells us. 1 Corinthians 6:19 says our “*body is a temple of the Holy Spirit,*” so there’s no place for sexual immorality in our lives (1 Cor 6:18). Our body is holy ground because we’re God’s temple. Our church is a holy community because we’re God’s temple (2 Cor 6:16-18). That’s why Paul tells the Corinthian church, “*Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.*”

Conclusion

God has worked in the past. He’s founded his church and grown the temple and he’s fitted us together into one household.

God continues to work. New members are being joined to the structure. We’re increasingly being formed into a fitting dwelling place for God.

If God is doing these things, shouldn’t we expect his work in our midst? Shouldn’t we be moved to pray, to go into the world, to live godly lives that model devotion, to speak the gospel?