

# What It Means to Belong to Church

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[ 0 : 00 ] But as always when we gather here, the heart of what we do is opening the Word of God and hearing from it. So we're going to read together now from our Bibles. If you haven't got a Bible, if you need one, there are some at the back, some at the front here, the sides, various places.

Have a wander about and somebody will put one in your hands if you need one. And then you'll be able to follow what we're reading. We're going to be reading in the New Testament in one of the letters of Christ's apostles to one of the New Testament churches, the church in Ephesus. And Edward Lobb has been preaching through this, leading us through this letter to understand its message and to take it to heart today. We're going to read this evening from the second half of Ephesians chapter 2.

Ephesians 2 then beginning at verse 11. And Paul says, Amen. And may God bless us His Word.

[ 3 : 04 ] Well, good evening, friends. Very good to see you. Let's turn to Ephesians chapter 2 and verses 11 to 22, which is our passage for tonight.

Ephesians 2, 11 to 22. And my title for this evening is What It Means to Belong to the Church. The Church of Jesus Christ is an international phenomenon.

It's to be found all over the world. It is, of course, stronger in some places than in others. In some nations it's relatively honored. In others it's despised and persecuted.

But it's the only human society that lasts. Others come and go, even the most apparently powerful. So, for example, the Roman Empire seemed to be invincible but only lasted for 500 years.

The British Empire petered out after 200. Adolf Hitler boasted that his regime would last for 1,000 years and it barely survived for 10.

[ 4 : 14 ] But the church, which you can date from the days of Abraham, has been running now for almost 4,000 years and it will continue. Because Jesus said, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

In other words, it is indestructible. So, to become a true member of the Lord's Church is to join an eternal society. Now, as you know, we're admitting a number of people later in this service to baptism and to membership of this church, the Tron Church.

But our new members are already members of the Lord's Church and have been ever since they consciously turned to him in repentance and faith. So, tonight we are celebrating the Lord's Church and we're welcoming new people with joy and gladness.

And it's a happy fact that our passage for study this evening is a passage in which Paul the Apostle deals with what it means to belong to the church. So, let's look at our text, the second half of chapter 2 in Ephesians.

And I want to start by pointing out how the shape of the passage is very similar to the shape of the first half of Ephesians 2, which we studied last week.

[ 5 : 29 ] And it's a shape that works like this. There's a before and an after. So, look back to verse 1. You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.

And then look at the end of verse 3. You were, by nature, children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. So, that was the situation for the Ephesians before they turned to Christ.

It was desperate. It was dire. Look at verse 4. But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

So, God has stepped in and has rescued the Ephesians from his wrath and has brought them to the wonderful position of being made alive with Christ. And being seated in the heavenly places because of their union with him.

So, it's a story of the defeat of death and condemnation and the triumph of life with God. And the turning point comes at the beginning of verse 4. But God.

[ 6 : 36 ] Now, it's just the same pattern with our passage for this evening. In verses 11 and 12, Paul asks his Ephesian Christian friends to remember their former situation.

Their before situation. So, verse 11. Remember that at one time before you came to Christ. And verse 12. Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ.

Alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise. Having no hope and without God in the world. Then verse 13.

But now, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. So, it's the same pattern. There was a before and an after.

Or, if you like, a before and a now. Paul is starkly contrasting the life of human beings before their conversion with their life after their conversion.

[ 7 : 35 ] Which is their life in Christ Jesus. Therefore, Paul is teaching us to think in the same kind of way. He is, if you like, training our thinking mechanisms.

He's saying to us, as he said to the Ephesian Christians. Learn to see the total contrast between life without Christ and life with Christ. Before you came to Christ, you were dead towards God.

You were enslaved. You were children of wrath. You were separated from Christ. Alienated from God's true people. Having no hope and without God in the world.

But now, your position in relation to God is a position of glorious blessing. Because you are in Christ Jesus. You are saved by grace. To use Paul's phrase in verse 8.

To be a member of the true church of Christ is to be blessed eternally. In short, it is to be saved.

Now, in verses 11 to 22, there is another point to be noticed.

[ 8 : 37 ] Which will help us to follow Paul's train of thought a bit more clearly. Because this paragraph, 11 to 22, really falls into three sections. Not two. The first section is just verses 11 and 12.

At one time, verse 11. At that time, verse 12. Those two verses are again about life before conversion. Then the second section runs from verse 13.

But now, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. And that runs right the way through to the end of verse 18.

And then we have a third and final section, which begins at verse 19. So then. And in verses 19 to 22, Paul draws out the thrust of his teaching in the form of a summary.

So then. In the light of all that I've said in verses 11 to 18, I want to show you the wonderful consequences of your leaving hopelessness behind and being united to Christ.

[ 9 : 40 ] So we'll take the passage in these three sections. Before, after, and so then. First then, verses 11 and 12. To which I'll give the heading, Remember the bleak past.

It's striking here that Paul asks the Ephesians to remember. And he asked them to do that not once, but twice. Verse 11, therefore remember. But again, verse 12.

Remember. Paul himself never forgot his own past. He says in 1 Timothy chapter 1, Formerly, I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent man.

But I received mercy. You may know the story of John Newton, who captained a slave trading ship in the 18th century, taking black slaves from West Africa to the Caribbean.

And he never forgot his past. Amazing grace, he wrote. How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. Paul is saying to all of us, Don't forget what you've been rescued from.

[ 10 : 48 ] So what is he asking the Ephesians to remember? Well, the first thing he does is to remind them of the great gulf between the Jews and the Gentiles.

So verse 11. Therefore, remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision, by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands, remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

That phrase, the uncircumcision, has inverted commas around it. And equally, I think we could put inverted commas around the phrase, the circumcision. Because Paul is using these terms because they were commonly used as nicknames, often to express contempt.

So a Jew might say, That man who's just moved in across the street, he's of the uncircumcision. In other words, don't trust him, don't have any more to do with him than you really have to.

So how did this great gulf between the Jews and the Gentiles open up? And I ask that because we know from the early chapters of Genesis that all human beings came from Adam and Eve.

[12:04] We have a common ancestry. Adam and Eve are the parents of all of us. But then there came the rebellion in Genesis chapter 3, which we often call the fall. Then there came the flood in Genesis chapter 6, after which the bloodlines of Noah's three sons became separated and distinguished.

And thus the Jews were set apart from the Gentiles. But when God called Abraham at the beginning of Genesis chapter 12 to be the father of the Jewish nation, he promised Abraham that through his offspring all the families of the earth, in other words, the Gentiles too, would be blessed. So right back then, in Genesis chapter 12, it is made clear that the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, will be able to receive God's salvation blessings.

And that theme is restated times without number throughout the Old Testament, especially in the Old Testament prophets. And yet the Jews, not least the Jews who were Paul's contemporaries, somehow read their scriptures in a way that blanked the Gentiles out of view.

And the Jews ended up by regarding the Gentiles as heathen and as dogs. They despised them. Let me quote a historian's view of all this. This was William Barclay writing about 60 years ago.

[13:26] It's quite a painful quotation. The Jew, he writes, had an immense contempt for the Gentile. The Gentiles, said the Jews, were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell.

God, they said, loves only Israel of all the nations that he made. It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in her hour of sorest need, in other words, in childbirth, for that would simply be to bring another Gentile into the world.

Our verses 11 and 12 here in Ephesians 2 reflect that kind of animosity. Paul is about to make the point that Christ has brought the hostility between Jew and Gentile to a complete end by his cross. But he's asking the Ephesians, who were Gentile Christians, to remember that bleak situation into which they were born, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, as verse 12 puts it.

Now, there was a great temple. You know about the great temple at Jerusalem. It was a magnificent building built by King Herod the Great, and it was the center of world Judaism, and it represented with painful accuracy this division between Jew and Gentile.

[14:44] At the temple, there were three courts where the people of Israel could meet. The court of the priests, the court of the men of Israel, and the court of the women of Israel.

And these three courts were all on the same level as the central part of the temple. But beyond these three courts, you could descend five steps to a walled platform and then descend another 14 steps to another wall, beyond which was a large court called the court of the Gentiles.

And Gentiles were allowed to enter that court, and from it, they could look up into the temple itself, but they were not allowed to enter any of the courts of Israel. In fact, signs were displayed at intervals around the wall which did not say trespassers will be prosecuted.

They said, in effect, trespassers will be executed. What a ferocious thing to write on your wall. Just look for a moment at verse 14, where Paul writes of Christ breaking down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.

Now back to verse 12 and back to what Paul is asking the Ephesians to remember. Just look at these searing words of estrangement that Paul uses. Separated, alienated, strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.

[16:11] But there's a double alienation in verse 12. The Gentile Ephesians were alienated from Israel but also from God. And those two alienations belong together because the true and only God is the God of Israel.

And the only way to be reconciled to the only true God is through the saving work of the King of Israel who is Jesus Christ. Now when Gentiles, like you and I, become Christians, we don't become Jews but we become the inheritors of everything that is promised to the people of Israel who recognize and receive Jesus as their Messiah.

When we repent and turn to Christ, we become incorporated into the true people of God. And we discover with joy and perhaps surprise that we become organically descended from Abraham.

Not as a matter of bloodline but united to him by faith because he is the father of all those who exercise faith. the father of all who put their trust in God by putting their trust in Jesus.

So whether we come from Jewish stock or Gentile stock, if we have put our trust in Christ, that wall of hostility is broken down and we are deeply united.

[17:29] The animosity between Jew and Gentile is destroyed and we belong together. I remember meeting a young couple at the church door years ago when we were still in our old building in Buchanan Street.

This young couple were on holiday together in Glasgow and just passing through but they decided to join us for Sunday morning church as they were Christians. Well we introduced ourselves to each other.

He was a tall, fine looking young Scotsman about six foot three, wearing a tweed jacket and a bristling red beard and he had a very Scottish name which I can't actually remember but it was a real Scottish name.

His wife was about a foot shorter than her husband and she introduced herself to me with a gentle smile. She said, I'm Rebecca of the tribe of Levi.

Now it took me about three seconds to compute what she was saying but the penny finally dropped and I said, you're Jewish and you've become a Christian. Yes, she said, that's it exactly.

[18:31] It was a lovely moment. Jewish people do become Christians. It's often very costly for them because their families can be hostile to them, can even disinherit them if they're young adults but it does happen.

Well, it happened to Paul. He was a Jew. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews as he described himself but he became a Christian. The apostles were Jews and they became Christians.

The majority of Jews do not turn to Christ but many have and many still do. If you have Jewish Christian friends, do treasure them and do marvel at the grace of God.

Now let's look back to verse 12 and to the things that Paul is very keen for the Ephesian Christians to remember. Verse 12 shows them five precious things which they once lacked.

First, they lacked Christ. They were, says Paul, separated from Christ. Now Paul has been telling them right the way through chapters one and two of the wonderful things that are now theirs now that they're Christians.

[19:36] Chosen before the foundation of the world, predestined for adoption, redeemed by the blood of Christ, their sins forgiven, their inheritance in heaven secured. He's been telling them about the power of God, how it's at work in them now that they're in Christ, the power that raises believers from the dead and seats them in the heavenly places.

All these blessings come to them through Christ because their identity is now in Christ. But back then they were separated from Christ.

Second, in verse 12, they were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel. Now Israel was a theocracy, a kingdom ruled by God's gracious law. It was a realm of grace and truth and love, but they were alienated from it.

Third, they were strangers to the covenants of promise. The covenants of the Old Testament were the solemn pledges and promises by which God bound the people of Israel to himself.

They gave the Israelites great security, but the Gentiles knew nothing of the God who makes and keeps his promises. Fourth, says Paul, they had no hope, no sure and certain expectation of eternal life in the company of God and all God's people.

[20:56] In the Gentile world back then, the gateway to death was crowned with this motto, abandon hope all ye that enter here.

They had no hope. And fifth, they were without God. Now it's not as though God had not made a real revelation of himself to the Gentile world.

Paul explains in Romans chapter 1 that God had plainly revealed himself both in the beauties of creation and in human conscience. But the Gentiles, says Paul, had suppressed the truth about him.

Hush, they said to each other, hush, don't talk about that. So this is what it means to be a Gentile who is not a Christian. Separated from Christ, alienated from Israel, the true people of God, strangers to God's promises, without hope and without God.

As one Bible commentator has put it, Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, godless. Paul is saying to every person who has become a Christian, remember what you once were.

[22:09] Remember the reality of your life without Christ, how utterly bleak your past was. Now a person who's not a Christian, this might apply to somebody here tonight, but a person who's not a Christian might want to say, but my life doesn't feel bleak, I enjoy life, I eat well, I sleep well, I work hard, I play hard.

Well, I don't dispute that that's your perception of your life, but Paul is going beyond perception to reality, and he is saying the truth about your life is that you are without Christ, without God, and without hope.

And the New Testament seeks to persuade you to find hope by turning to Christ. Jesus said about himself, the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.

It's a wonderful thing to leave hopelessness behind and to find salvation in Jesus Christ. So there's the first thing, remember the bleak past, and we who are Christians, we need to remember it often, because it will help us to be thankful for the mercy and the transforming grace that we now enjoy. Well now secondly, we're moving into Paul's next section, beginning with the words, verse 13, but now in Christ Jesus. So this is the section that runs from verse 13 to verse 18, and we could give it this heading, it's a bit long, but here we go.

[ 23 : 36 ] Rejoice that Christ has secured peace between Jew and Gentile and reconciliation to God. Do you remember how Jesus said in his famous Beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5, blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Jesus is himself the supreme peacemaker, and Paul tells us here about his peacemaking achievements. Now these few verses, 13 to 18, are packed as tight as sardines in a sardine tin. We shan't be able to look at every detail, but I'll try and bring out the main lines of what Paul is saying. The first thing to notice is that the far off, so-called, have been brought near.

So verse 13, but now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. The far off are the Gentiles.

They were separated, they were alienated, they were strangers, as we've seen in verse 12. But their position has been totally transformed. They're no longer in some far off wilderness beyond the reach of God's mercy.

[ 24 : 48 ] They've been brought near, which means brought right into the sphere of God's salvation. And verse 13 explains that this has happened for two reasons.

First, because they are in Christ Jesus, he is now their dwelling place, their identity, and secondly, because of his blood shed on the cross, brought near by the blood of Christ.

And what has this bringing near of the Gentiles led to? Well, verse 14 tells us it has led to the real uniting of Gentile Christians with Jewish Christians.

Paul says, Christ himself is our peace, not simply that he has brought us peace, but that he himself is our peace. His very own person unites Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians.

And that uniting has been achieved by his death on the cross. Just look at that lovely phrase in verse 14. He has made us both one.

[ 25 : 49 ] That's the Jews and Gentiles. The two become one. And, says Paul, he has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility. And almost certainly he's referring there to that great thick wall at the temple in Jerusalem.

The wall that seemed to be an insuperable barrier between Jew and Gentile. A dividing wall bristling with hostility. Stay out, you're not wanted. That's what the wall said.

It was a fierce wall. It was an excluding wall. But Christ has broken it down. And he has done this in his flesh, which means on his cross where his flesh was broken.

Now, if we ask, but how exactly has the death of Christ brought unity between Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians, Paul explains that in verse 15.

The death of Christ, he says, has abolished the law of commandments and ordinances. Now, these commandments and ordinances are the regulations of the Old Testament law which divided Jews from Gentiles.

[ 26 : 53 ] They defined what it meant to be Jewish and the Gentiles were firmly outside their reach. So, Paul is thinking here about circumcision, about the kosher food laws, the regulations about burnt offerings and peace offerings, the rules about the priesthood, about ritual cleanness and uncleanness, regulations about festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths.

That whole apparatus of Old Testament law was entirely foreign to the lifestyle of the Gentiles. It was a system of rules and regulations that Gentiles could neither participate in nor even understand.

and Jesus by his death on the cross has abolished them. How? By fulfilling them. The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was the once-for-all sacrifice that ended the need for any further sacrifices.

And no more priests are now needed because Jesus fulfills the role of mediating priest forever. So those ritual and ceremonial regulations are no longer required.

Jesus has done them and completed them and superseded them. Now look again at verse 15 if you will because there's something wonderful here. Jesus has abolished one thing so that he might create another thing.

[ 28 : 18 ] Do you see it in verse 15? There is an abolition and a new creation. He has abolished the Old Testament regulations which divided humanity so as to create in himself one new man which means one new united humanity.

One new humanity says Paul in place of the two that was the Jews and Gentiles. So making peace between Jew and Gentile. But it's not only peace that Jew and Gentile not only peace between Jew and Gentile that his death has achieved.

He has also verse 16 reconciled us both Jews and Gentiles to God in one body through the cross thereby killing the hostility.

And what hostility is that? Well not only the hostility between Jew and Gentile but also the hostility between God and mankind. You see if reconciliation to God is needed there must have been hostility between God and mankind and that has been a mutual two-way hostility because men and women since the Garden of Eden have been rebels against God but God also has been angry with rebellious humanity.

Just look back to verse 4 again. We were by nature children of wrath, God's wrath, like the rest of mankind. So the cross of Jesus has united Jew and Gentile who come to Christ and the cross of Jesus has brought reconciliation between God and the people who were once his enemies.

[ 29 : 55 ] that cross, just think about it for a moment, that scene of degradation and brutality and shame where that flawless wonderful human being was spat at and mocked and crowned with thorns and nailed to a hideous gibbet, that unspeakably vile episode is actually the means of reconciliation between heaven and earth, between God and his people and between Jew and Gentile.

God's love so we are right to call that day Good Friday. It was horrible but it was good beyond measure. And verse 17 tells us more about the love that Jesus expressed towards us.

He not only died on the cross so as to make peace but he also says Paul came and preached peace. He announced it both in his preaching before his death, which was largely preaching to Jewish people in the land of Israel but also in his subsequent preaching.

Paul must mean preaching through the apostles and evangelists, his preaching to Gentiles, peace to you who are far off and peace to those who are near. And this means that to this very day wherever the gospel of reconciliation between God and man is preached, it is Christ who is preaching it through the mouths of those who open up the scriptures.

As we study Paul's letters together, Paul is preaching peace to us and through the voice of Paul we hear the voice of the Lord Jesus because Paul is his mouthpiece, his ambassador.

[ 31 : 29 ] Jesus is continually preaching to the world and his message is continually come to me and be reconciled to God. And verse 18 shows us another wonderful thing.

Through him we both, Jews and Gentiles, have access in one spirit to the father, access to God, we're no longer barred from the father's presence.

The cross that has reconciled us to him grants us continual access to him, which means that we can pray to him at any time. It's as though he says to us, my door is always open to you, I don't have restricted visiting hours.

We once were enemies but we're now friends. We once were estranged but we're now reconciled. we were once persona non grata but now we are always welcome.

And if that greatest of barriers, the barrier between Jew and Gentile has been overcome by the death of Christ, his death has surely broken every barrier that separates human beings from each other.

[ 32 : 36 ] The barriers created by ethnicity and skin color, by social class, by economic background, and any other barrier that you can think of. In Christ, we really are one and we can live out that unity together with joy.

Well, let's turn now to Paul's final section, verses 19 to 22, because there he shows us the consequences of everything he's been saying in the previous verses.

Just remember the shape of this passage. At one time, alienated, but now in Christ, reconciled. so then, verse 19, absorb and understand the wonderful consequences of what God has done for us in Christ.

In these final few verses, Paul uses three pictures to help us to understand our position once we have come to put our trust in Christ. They're the pictures of a nation state, then a family, and then a building, which Paul describes as God's temple.

So first of all, the nation states, look with me at verse 19, so then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints.

[ 33 : 54 ] To be outside the people of Christ is to be like a person who has no passport and no recognized nationality. Paul has spoken about this already in verse 12, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise.

Aliens strangers. If you're in that position, you're in a very precarious position. But Paul says no longer strangers, no longer aliens. You are now recognized, not by any human government, but by heaven itself.

You belong to the kingdom which outlasts all earthly kingdoms. You have a birth certificate. You are now registered. Secondly, Paul speaks of God's family at the end of verse 19.

He says, members of the household of God. And this metaphor adds a further dimension to the metaphor of the nation-state. In the nation-state metaphor, we are fellow citizens, and God therefore is our ruler.

But in the family, we are brothers and sisters, and God is our father. And if we are brothers and sisters, it means we have a very close relationship to each other.

[ 35 : 05 ] It means we care for each other, we support each other, especially in times of hardship. We belong together. We are siblings. And then third, Paul speaks of the church, the united church of believing Jews and Gentiles, as a temple.

And he slides out of the metaphor of the family at the end of verse 19, and immediately into this new metaphor of the building. So what kind of a building is it? Well, verse 20, it is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

And what he means by that is that they are the people uniquely authorized to teach the church. Their writings teach us. Both testaments of the Bible are the word of God.

But God has brought his word to us through the prophets who wrote the Old Testament and the apostles who wrote and authorized the new. And their words, Paul is saying in verse 20, are the foundation of the church.

church. Now, if you tamper with the foundations of a building, that building is likely to collapse. But if you hold firmly to the foundations, there is stability and strength.

[ 36 : 13 ] And more than that, there is life and nourishment. And an individual congregation like ours, which is built on the teaching of the Old and New Testaments, that will provide life and nourishment and stimulus and impetus to its members.

The Bible teaching is the foundation and that's why we need to be continually taking it in. It's our nourishment. But even more important, verse 20, Christ Jesus is himself the cornerstone and that's the most important part of a building foundation, giving it stability and setting the line and direction for every part of the superstructure.

Now, apparently, when the old temple at Jerusalem was finally excavated, the ruins were excavated, a stone was discovered there which measured 38 feet and 9 inches in length.

That's the length of about seven medium-sized men lying head to toe in a line, a huge stone. And Paul may well have had that stone in mind when he wrote verse 20. But look at what he says about the function of Christ, the cornerstone in the final two verses here.

In him, verse 21, the whole structure is joined together and grows. Now, even back then in 63 AD when Paul was writing, he could see enormous growth in the worldwide church.

[ 37 : 35 ] Christian congregations were springing up all over the Mediterranean area and further afield. But look at the first two words in verse 21. In whom?

It is in Christ, it's because of Christ, that the church grows. it's Christ who fills the church with life and it grows and it keeps on growing. In fact, every person here who has become a Christian, every person who has repented and believed is a further evidence of the church growing by the power of Christ.

And it grows, says Paul, verse 21, into a holy temple in the Lord. And what Paul means by a temple is explained in the next verse, into a dwelling place for God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Now the temple in Jerusalem always represented the presence of God dwelling with his people. And that's what Paul is talking about here. We who belong to Christ are indwelt by God in the person of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit dwells in each individual Christian, but Paul's point here is that he dwells in the church, his own people, corporately. We who are Christians, we are the temple in which the Lord dwells.

[ 38 : 53 ] So we are both the household of God and the house of God. A church building like this one is not the house of God. It's we Christians who are the house of God.

This building is just a building. It doesn't have life in itself. If you were to come back here at midnight, I think you'd find that the only life here would be the spiders weaving their webs in the stained glass window.

This building is only here to keep the rain off our heads. The building that the Lord loves and nurtures and makes to grow and lives in is us, his people. And he is constantly at work to strengthen and enlarge his temple.

And we know that from verse 22 where he says you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God. It's an ongoing work. It's happening at this very moment.

well let me try and sum this up briefly. Paul is teaching us that once we come to Christ our alienation from God is over.

[ 39 : 56 ] We become fellow citizens with all of Christ's people. We become members of God's household, his family, and we are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Holy Spirit.

it means then that we belong. Every Christian belongs to the family. The little children belong. The newborn babies belong. The student members of the church belong. The hard pressed, hard working, middle aged men and women belong.

The elderly people who are struggling with all sorts of problems of old age belong. the child of a broken family belongs. The widow and the widower belong.

The divorcee belongs. The person who is struggling with mental health problems belongs. The person who is wrestling day after day with temptation belongs.

[ 41 : 00 ] Those who are shut up at home belong. Those who are dying belong. It is a wonderful thing to belong to the family of the Lord Jesus.

All these blessings come to us in him, through him. He is the center of the whole of God's gospel work. When we put our trust in Christ, we know that once we were dead, but we've been brought back to life.

Once we were children of God's wrath, but now we are subjects of his mercy and love. Once we were aliens and strangers, but now we are fellow citizens with the saints, members of the household, and we are being built into a temple which is the dwelling place of God himself.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Amen. Our dear heavenly Father, how we thank you for the mercy, the love, the grace, and the kindness that you have shown to the undeserving.

We thank you for the Lord Jesus who has brought real unity to all who belong to him and has opened up access for us to come to you. Please continue to build up your temple here in our own congregation so that our hearts may rejoice and your name be greatly honored.

[ 42 : 31 ] we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.