

## Fellow Citizens of the Household of God

Ephesians 2:19-22, May 2, 2010

Cantate Sunday ("O Sing")

Beloved of the Lord...The apostle Paul visited and preached the Gospel to the Ephesians on his second and third missionary journeys, being there three years the second time. Religiously speaking, the Ephesians were a very diverse people. Being the seat of Greek learning and science, many followed the philosophies of men, but witchcraft was also practiced there and the people were very superstitious. On top of all that Ephesus was the home of the heathen cult of Diana. It was then a mark of great mercy that God sent Paul there to preach the Gospel "So that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the Word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" Acts 19:10. Though the members in the congregation were very diverse and different, the Gospel brought them together and kept them together. Our lesson than today is simply this, though the people of any congregation can be diverse and different, the Gospel not only pulls us out of the darkness of unbelief, but it is also the glue, the mortar that binds and holds different people together as fellowcitizens in this Household of God, so that we are "an habitation of God through the Spirit."

I. Fellowcitizens, not strangers. The Bible teaches God is not a respecter of persons. For their sins and unbelief, God will damn a king just as easily as He will damn a pauper. Both have coveted money, both have coveted power, both have coveted the flesh. Thus the past life of any sinner, no matter how great or notorious, is of no importance when one becomes a Christian, for "there is none righteous, no not one." The only righteousness we as Christians claim is the righteousness of Christ, the "Lord OUR Righteousness". Whatever our backgrounds and differences, we come from the same darkness of sin, into the same marvelous light so that we believe "chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed His blood for me." "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God." Through Christ perfect strangers, even enemies, become friends and brothers, fellowcitizens with the saints, living in peace. True unity of the Spirit is so important to Christ, the Head of this Household, that our Lord instructs us if we have given offense to a brother and not removed it we should not commune until we are reconciled. "First be reconciled to thy brother, then come and offer the gift."

It is then a great sin when brothers and sisters in a congregation do not get along, do not live in peace but create clicks or work to get people on their side like politicians before a vote. "A house divided against itself shall not stand." Voter's meetings, Ladies Guild meetings, congregational meetings, Pastoral Conferences, Conventions, etc., ought always be peaceful, filled with brotherly love. The Prince of Peace always wants His

children to live in peace. "Follow peace with all *men*, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble *you*, and thereby many be defiled." "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." Charity shall cover a multitude of sins.

While we dare not be quick to judge and condemn any brother, love for God and neighbor at times will compel us to admonish. The proper way to correct is found in 2 Timothy 2 where God instructs pastors, "the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all *men*, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." Yet when we correct, we should remember the Maker of the eye and ear is watching and listening to every word we say thus the spirit behind the rebuke is more important than the rebuke itself. Likewise if the shoe is on the other foot and we have sinned and are being corrected, let us not deny but humbly confess our sin, for "God is faithful and just to forgive our sin, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

II. The "foundation of the apostles". For ye "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone." The Holy Christian Church is not built upon human reason, philosophy, tradition, or what is most popular with the people, but "the foundation of the apostles and prophets", namely the Word of God as recorded in our Bibles. From beginning to end, God not only moved the prophets and apostles to write, but He inspired the very words which they wrote. Consider the Nicene Creed in The Lutheran Hymnal, page 16. We believe in the Holy Ghost, "Who spake by the Prophets. And I believe one holy Christian and Apostolic Church." The Christian Church is an Apostolic Church, because it is built upon the Word of God recorded through the APOSTLES and PROPHETS. Every Sunday in church these dead apostles and prophets who even now live in heaven still preach to us when the Bible is read. Being a true Apostolic Church we do not believe in "apostolic succession", as if one becomes a minister by the laying on of hands by another minister, NOR do we believe Peter was the first Pope, for the heart and soul of the Holy Christian Church is not the apostles, not Peter, not Pope, but Christ "the chief cornerstone." That is why God can call His Church the HOLY Christian Church, because that holy name of Christ was given us at our baptism when we were washed by the WORD. We received "the sign of the holy cross, both upon the forehead and upon the breast, in token that thou hast been redeemed by Christ the Crucified."

While we are indeed a little, lowly, and unholy flock by way of sin, through Christ God counts the unholy as holy. Thus our faith rests not upon mere pages in a book, nor black ink written on white paper, but our faith rests Christ the LIVING WORD, our Rock, the very Son of

God who purchased us "not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death"! This is the Rock of All Ages, our Rock. What are our dead works compared to Christ whose work is yet alive and living? It is only because Peter confessed Christ the Living Rock that Jesus answered, "Thou art Peter, and upon this ROCK I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." When you dear Christian in faith eat THIS body and drink THIS blood, your Rock not only gives you His sincere and full pardon of all sin, but He through such firmly implants your feet upon that Rock who can never perish nor be moved. Satan can rage and howl about your sins all he wants. He is but a wave which smashes itself to pieces upon the Gibraltar of our faith. If our sins stand like a mountain reaching into the heavens, they are but a spark easily extinguished in the ocean of God's mercy for "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son, cleanses us from all sin." Hence, "He that believeth on him shall not be confounded."

III. Fitly framed together we grow together. Oh what a beautiful structure this Temple is, this Holy Christian Church on earth which has been washed clean by the very blood of Jesus Christ. Each stone then, each member is indeed a living stone, a lively stone, for saving faith in Christ cannot but be active through Christ. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and do to His good pleasure." Speaking of these lively stones, the Gospel then is that mortar, that cement which binds and holds us close to one another though we by nature do not want to be close. In Christ "all the building is fitly framed together" growing together. Brick by brick God daily adds to His Church such as would be saved until the Temple is complete, the full number of the elect, "and then shall the end come" Judgment Day. While there are those who mumble and complain saying "Oh if God were so good, why does He allow all this evil in this world", we by faith know "It is of the Lord's mercy". His mercy alone holds back His divine wrath for the sake of that last unbeliever yet to be converted. "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." Until that Last Day dear child of God by faith in Christ Jesus, let us do all things to the glory of His name. Grow together as a family in God's house, grow in grace, and increase in that love which surpasses all understanding. For "ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Therefore "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? *It is* God that justifieth" and Christ is our cornerstone. Amen.