

# “YOU ARE INCLUDED”

## Ephesians 2:11-22

*This is a copy of the sermon preached by Dr. Paul Mims, Pastor, Cornerstone Baptist Church, October 30, 2011*

Back in Chapter 1:13, Paul tells the Gentile believers, “And you were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit...” Now, in the latter part of chapter 2, he is going to spell it out in detail. Christianity began in the cradle of Judaism. At long last, the prophesied Messiah came to the Jewish people first. He was then offered to the Gentiles. Paul reminds the new believers of seven concepts that form the whole picture of how blessed they are to be included in the salvation of the Jewish Messiah.

**YOU WERE ON THE OUTSIDE (verses 11-12).** *“Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men) – remember that at that time you 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.”*

This is a description of a heathen condition. They had no part in the Old Testament Covenant that God had with Israel when he made them his special people. One of the signs of the covenant was circumcision and the Gentiles did not know that emblem. They were called by the Jews, “the uncircumcised.” This meant that they were on the outside and were looked upon as strangers and aliens to those who viewed themselves as “the chosen.”

This was the condition of us all. Before we came to Christ we without hope and without God and were all alone in this great cosmos. It is a painful thing to be on the outside of a circle of friends, or alienated from a family, or estranged from a spouse, or to be kicked out of an organization. Do you remember when you were on the outside of the church without God in the world? It is difficult to be considered a stranger and not one of the “in” group of any organization.

Almost every age has had its social outcasts, people barred from normal society whether through physical illness or national origin. One person who stepped across these barriers in India was pioneer missionary Mary Reed. Already working in India, Mary visited a leper colony and was deeply moved by the people's plight. Later Mary contracted leprosy herself and went to work with the lepers, eager to tell them that she knew firsthand their pain and trauma. She became head of the leper colony she had visited, and in the years following, many were saved and a church built. Mary retired at the age of eighty-four after many years of faithful service to these social outcasts. (Today In The Word)

**YOU ARE NOW ON THE INSIDE (verses 13-15).** *“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”*

We have studied in the first chapter about the glorious truth of how God chose all believers in Christ before he chose the Jews to be his theocracy on earth. Through the cross where Christ paid the debt for our sin we are now included as part of “the chosen.” Things look a lot different on the inside. He has broken down the wall that separated Jew from Gentile and all believers are brothers and sisters in the family of God. We are now included in the covenant. There is a blessed peace between Jewish believers in Christ and Christians.

In our Ocean View Baptist Church in Myrtle Beach, we had a Messianic Congregation that met in our building on Friday nights. These were Jews of the community who had come to know Christ. We opened our hearts to them and gave them encouragement in their work. I enjoyed attending their services and seeing how they were so excited to be on the inside with us.

**YOU HAVE ACCESS TO THE FATHER (verses 16-18).** *“For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”*

This is a blessed truth. We both have access to the Father through the same Spirit. It is in Christ that we become one and have the way to the Father opened through the Holy Spirit.

You can now reach the Father through your prayers. You remember that Jesus taught us to pray, “Our Father, who is in heaven.” “Father,” this is such a rich word. It encompasses life and love, acceptance and joy, profoundness and

simplicity. The concept of the Deity as “Father” provides us with an understanding of the riches that are ours in our faith. Jesus, the Son always points to the Father. The Holy Spirit, whose main mission is to glorify Jesus, always points to the Father. So, we have access to him. We pray to the Father in the name of the Son with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

While Josh McDowell was attending seminary in California, his father went Home to be with the Lord. His mother had died years earlier, but Josh was not sure of her salvation. He became depressed, thinking that she might be lost. Was she a Christian or not? The thought obsessed him. "Lord," he prayed, "somehow give me the answer so I can get back to normal. I've just got to know." It seemed like an impossible request.

Two days later, Josh drove out to the ocean. He walked to the end of a pier to be alone. There sat an old woman in a lawn chair, fishing. "Where's your home originally?" she asked.

"Michigan -- Union City," Josh replied. "Nobody's heard of it. I tell people it's a suburb of --" "Battle Creek," interrupted the woman. "I had a cousin from there. Did you know the McDowell family?"

Stunned, Josh responded, "Yes, I'm Josh McDowell!"

"I can't believe it," said the woman. "I'm a cousin to your mother."

"Do you remember anything at all about my mother's spiritual life?" asked Josh. "Why sure -- your mom and I were just girls -- teenagers -- when a tent revival came to town. It was the fourth night -- we both went forward to accept Christ."

"Praise God!" shouted Josh, startling the surrounding fishermen. (Our Daily Bread)

**YOU ARE IN THE FAMILY (verse 19).** *“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household...”*

Such marvelous privileges we now have as members of the Father’s family. We, who were once Christ-less, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and Godless are now in the family. The church is a family and it is blessed indeed when they live in harmony with no hidden agendas. One of the great attractions to the unbelieving world is the acceptance that the church offers. It is to “whosoever” that our arms are open. You don’t have to look like us to be a part of us. If you claim Christ as your Lord, you are welcome here. Even if you don’t yet know him, you are most welcome. Our arms are open to all who are seeking to know the meaning of life. I wish we had at least fifty per cent of our congregation on Sunday morning made up of people who are seeking to know God. If all of us would find someone who is not yet a believer and bring them to worship, we would have a lot more people that we could welcome into the family when they come to know our Lord.

Zig Ziglar says, “The evidence is convincing that the better our relationships are at home, the more effective we are in our careers. If we're having difficulty with a loved one, that difficulty will be translated into reduced performance on the job. In studying the millionaires in America (U.S. News and World Report), a picture of the "typical" millionaire is an individual who has worked eight to ten hours a day for thirty years and is still married to his or her high school or college sweetheart. A New York executive search firm, in a study of 1365 corporate vice presidents, discovered that 87% were still married to their one and only spouse and that 92% were raised in two-parent families. The evidence is overwhelming that the family is the strength and foundation of society. Strengthen your family ties and you'll enhance your opportunity to succeed.”

**YOU ARE ON A STRONG FOUNDATION (verse 20).** *“...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”*

Every life needs a firm foundation. You remember that Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount that some people build on the sand and when the storms of life come, their house falls. But when those build the foundation of their house (life) on the rock (Christ) it can withstand the fiercest blow. Christ is the chief cornerstone and if he were to be removed, the entire building of faith would collapse. The cornerstone of a building supports the superstructure by being placed at the corner of two primary walls. All of the other stones in a building must adjust themselves to this cornerstone. The Apostle Peter says that we are “living stones” and must regulate our lives in accordance with the chief cornerstone (I Peter 2:5). This gives us stability, which as we live in our present day of pressures and uncertainties is greatly needed.

Each stone must contribute to the strength and beauty of the building. This is what makes a church like Cornerstone such a tower of strength for all who gather for worship.

The great architect Frank Lloyd Wright was given the challenge of building the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, one of the most earthquake-prone cities in the world. Wright's investigation showed that a solid foundation could be "floated" on a sixty-foot layer of soft mud underlying the hotel, which would provide a shock-absorbing but solid support for the immense building. Shortly after the hotel was completed it withstood the worst earthquake in fifty-two years, while lesser buildings fell in ruins around it. (Today in the Word)

**YOU ARE A HOLY TEMPLE (verse 21).** *"In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord."*

As a living stone you are part of a holy temple. God does not dwell in a building. He dwells in the hearts and lives of his people. I learned this lesson as a young minister forty one years ago. I was pastor of First Baptist Church in Norfolk, Virginia. The building was one of the most beautiful I had ever seen. It was constructed of gray granite in a gothic design. There was a high bell tower. The sanctuary was a semi-circle with a slanting floor with a balcony that wrapped from one side to the other. The organ was huge with 4,000 pipes. The choir was behind and up above the altar. The pulpit was in the form of a semi-circle and I had to step up into it. On both sides and in the center were the most beautiful stained glass windows you could imagine. I still have dreams in my sleep of preaching in that holy place. But one night it burned, and those stones fell to the ground. On that October Friday afternoon, a television reporter said to me, "Pastor, what will you do now that you have lost your church?" I replied to him, "The church is not lost, only a building, as beautiful as it was is lost." In the succeeding years, I learned just how strong and beautiful the "living stones" were. Although I admired the building, I loved the people who were the true holy temple.

**YOU ARE A HABITATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (verse 22).** *"And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."*

When you first became a Christian, God gave you a salvation love gift which is the indwelling of his Holy Spirit. He put his Spirit in you. This is how you will grow and become strong and be an example of the believer to others. God has chosen to live in his people and not in a building. When we scatter after being together for worship we take God to every corner of the county as we live as a witness of our faith. We are building a sanctuary over on Cherry Log Street, but God is building his own sanctuary in us.

Charles Finney wrote how God gave him mighty infillings of the Holy Spirit "that went through me, as it seemed, body and soul. I immediately found myself endued with such power from on high that a few words dropped here and there to individuals were the means of their immediate conversion. My words seemed to fasten like barbed arrows in the souls of men. They cut like a sword. They broke the heart like a hammer. Multitudes can attest to this...Sometimes I would find myself in a great measure empty of this power. I would go and visit, and find that I made no saving impression. I would exhort and pray with the same results. I would that they set apart a day for private fasting and prayer...after humbling myself and crying out for help, the power would return upon me with all its freshness. This has been the experience of my life."

There are times when we go through the dry spells and it seems that we just can't get our spiritual strength again. Being reminded today of how God has included us in his family, and made us his habitation, let us bow before him and ask for a fresh anointing of his Spirit upon us as individuals and collectively as a church.

"Our Father, we bow in your presence and ask for a fresh anointing of your Holy Spirit upon us as your servants. We are building your house for worship, but we know that you desire to live in us and not in a building. Come to our hearts afresh and touch every one of us that as we reach our hands up we may place them in yours. Our prayer is in the precious name of Jesus. Amen"