

“No Longer Strangers, but Citizens”
(Ephesians 2:19-22)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation. Last week, we saw one of the greatest blessings you can have as a Christian: knowing you will arrive in heaven.

1. You can know you will arrive there because:

a. Jesus said you would.

(i) He gives you eternal life.

(ii) You will never perish.

(iii) No one can snatch you out of His hand.

(iv) Nor can anyone take you away from the Father who has promised you to His Son (John 10:27-29).

b. What Jesus said is based on the whole plan of God.

(i) The One who foreloved you, predestined, called, and justified you, will certainly also glorify you.

(ii) This is His eternal purpose, so it can't fail to happen.

2. Because the Lord has chosen to preserve you, He will also make sure that you persevere in holiness to the end.

a. You will hear His voice and follow Him.

b. In other words, the fact you are walking with Him in holiness from the heart is the evidence that the Lord is preserving you and will continue to do so to the end.

B. Preview.

1. This evening, let's consider another spiritual blessing that is yours through faith in Jesus Christ: the communion of the saints.

a. In our passage, Paul began by reminding you of what your situation was prior to coming to Christ.

(i) You were excluded from citizenship in the kingdom (v. 12).

(ii) You were strangers to the covenants of promise (v. 12).

(iii) And you were without hope, because you were without God (v. 12).

b. But now, through the blood of Jesus' cross – through His death – you have been brought near, so that,

(i) You are no longer strangers to God's redemptive covenant in Christ.

(ii) You are no longer without God and without hope.

(iii) Now you are citizens of the kingdom.

(iv) And as citizens, you have a particular privilege and a special heritage.

2. This is what we're going to consider tonight.

II. Sermon.

A. First, you have a particular privilege: you have communion with the saints.

1. Union with the head of the church – Jesus Christ – through faith, by His Spirit, brings certain privileges.
 - a. You participate in what He has done for you.
 - (i) His vicarious life – His obedience to the Father – is yours.
 - (ii) His substitutionary death on the cross was your death.
 - (iii) His burial was your burial; His resurrection your resurrection to newness of life.
 - (iv) His ascension was yours, as was His exaltation – in a certain sense you are now ruling and reigning with Him in heaven because your Head is there.
 - b. Because you are united with Jesus, you also participate in what He has purchased for you.
 - (i) You have His Spirit, with the particular gifts He gives to equip you for service.
 - (ii) You also have certain resources entrusted to you to use for His glory.
2. But union with the head also means you are united with His body – the church. Because of this union, you also participate in what He has given to them, and they with you.
 - a. You have an interest in their love – the love the Spirit has created in their hearts.
 - (i) This is the love He gives that is to bind the church together.
 - (ii) That’s why Paul tells you to be “diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).
 - (iii) Every time you come together, you should do your best to nurture and strengthen that bond through your fellowship.
 - b. Because of this union, you also have a share in each other’s gifts.
 - (i) The Lord has given each of you a particular gift – we looked at those not too long ago in the Discipleship Class.
 - (ii) This gift is not just for you, but for the whole fellowship of which you’re a part – even for the whole body in some sense. Paul writes, “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7).
 - (iii) You are to use your gift to build up each other. Again, Paul writes, “But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Eph. 4:15-16).
 - (iv) Paul himself desired and needed this communion. He wanted to go to Rome that he might enjoy fellowship in their gifts. He writes, “For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be

established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine" (Rom. 1:11-12).

- (v) This is one of the main reasons the Lord gives us the command to rest the same day and to worship together. The author to the Hebrews writes, "And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (Heb.10:24-25).
- c. And, you know, under certain circumstances, this union with the body of Christ calls you also to share your material goods with each other.
- (i) The Lord calls you to help anyone that may be in need – as He tells you in the parable of the Good Samaritan – but He particularly calls you to help the saints. Paul writes, "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith" (Gal. 6:10).
 - (ii) This is in fact what the early church did.
 - (a) The thousands that were converted on the Day of Pentecost had to be disciplined before they returned home.
 - (b) To make this possible, many of the saints contributed their properties and goods.
 - (c) Luke writes, "And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart" (Acts 2:44-46).
 - (d) Not only did they do this for these saints that were near to them, but also for those who were far off. Luke writes, "And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means [*i.e.*, those in Antioch], each of them determined to send *a contribution* for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders" (Acts 11:29-30).
 - (e) This is what you do in the diaconal offering.
 - (iii) This sharing of our resources is one of the many evidences that we have the saving work of God's Spirit in our hearts: "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him" (1 John 3:16-19).

- d. And so union with the Head of the Church calls you into communion with His body, with which you are to share your love, your gifts and your goods.
 - (i) This by itself is a great blessing, as Jesus says, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).
 - (ii) But don’t forget, these same privileges extend to you as members of that same body.
 - (a) You have a very large family that loves you, that will minister their gifts to you, and to provide for you when you are in need.
 - (b) This is something the whole body of Christ is to share in.
- B. Second, and briefly, you also have a special heritage: you have communion with all the saints that have gone before you.
1. You stand in the company of a great host of saints in the great work the Lord has given us to do. You have the privilege of being part of that mighty army the Lord has raised for His glory.
 - a. You are in the same army as Noah – who believed God and built an ark for the salvation of his family and the condemnation of the world.
 - b. As Abraham – who believed the promise of God, became an heir of the world, and the family through which the Savior would come.
 - c. As David – who fought and vanquished that great enemy of God’s people – Goliath – and with whom the Lord made His covenant to bring Jesus into the world.
 - d. As Paul – who by God’s grace took the Gospel to the whole Roman Empire.
 - e. As Luther and Calvin – who proclaimed the Gospel in the face of a hostile church and certain death if they fell into the hands of their enemies.
 - f. As Whitefield, Wesley, Edwards and Spurgeon – all of whom were not afraid to own Jesus and preach His Gospel to a hostile world and because of which saw Him do great things.
 2. Because you are in union with Christ’s body, you also have communion with these saints and a host of others in the good fight the Lord has called us all to engage.
 - a. Your head calls you to the same work.
 - b. Your fight is the same as theirs, only you’re fighting at different times and in different circumstances.
 - c. Have you ever read about the great things the Lord did through His saints in history and wish you could have taken part in it? You can and you are.
 - (i) This is the same work, the same war, the same plan of God.
 - (ii) It just happens to be your turn now at bat.
 - (iii) Let this remind you *for whom* you’re fighting and *with whom*.
 - (iv) Let it stir your heart to enter into the work, attempting great things for God, knowing that you are in excellent company. Amen.