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KIND OF LIKE EPCOT
Ephesians 2:19-22 and others

While Laurie and I were on vacation one evening we went to a restaurant that is memorable for us. We have history there. The restaurant is called Longhi's. It is right on Front Street in the little town of Lahaina on Maui. It was the place where we had our first argument as a married couple. We were trying to recall restaurants where we ate on our honeymoon and realized that there are only 2 on Maui that are still in business today. One of them is...wait for it...McDonald's. Yes, we ate dinner at McDonald's one evening on our honeymoon. It was because we were a poor ministry couple with no money. McDonald's was the cheapest place we could find to eat. But the other still functioning restaurant was Longhi's. This was our second time having a meal there since our honeymoon so long ago. I am sure you will be pleased to know there was not a return engagement of the argument, but the meal did prove to be somewhat interesting for a completely different reason.

As we were finishing our meal, settling our bill and chatting with our server, she surprised me by something she said to us. She complimented us on being such a happy couple, and then said that it makes it fun when she gets to serve happy people like us. She said she rarely encounters people as happy as us.

Her comments had an interesting effect on me. First, it reminded me that what she said is true. At our core Laurie and I are joyful because of Christ in us, but also because of the abundant love we have in our relationship with each other. Life, for me, is mostly fun because I get to be with Laurie all the time. Even mundane things are happy because we are together. The second effect our server's words had was it made me grateful. As I reflected on what Jesus has done for us and on the joy we have I was even more thankful. Third, it made me want to live up to her perception of me. Really, it motivated me to remember more that we have reason to be happy and to let that be even more apparent to others. I don't want to put on an act, but I do want to live in such a way that we can spread the joy we have to other people and bring some encouragement to them.

Today I want to do something for you that is a bit like what that waitress did for us. I want to remind you of some things that are true of you. I hope that in doing so I will encourage you, remind you of some great things and affirm you. And I hope to motivate you to live out these things even more in your life.

Today we are celebrating the anniversary of the beginning of our church. I want to remind you today of who you are as part of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are a number of images used of the church in the New Testament, and today I would like us to consider 5 of those images, several of which appear in Ephesians 2:19-22, but a couple that show up elsewhere.

THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

In Ephesians Paul was writing to a predominantly Gentile church. He reminded them in verse 1 that previously they were “dead in your transgressions and sins” and in verse 12 that they had been “foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world.” These things were also true of us. But because of what Jesus has done everything has changed. Verse 16 says that God reconciled us to him through the cross, and in verse 18 we see we have “access to the Father” through Jesus.

In verse 19 we see some of the consequences of that world changing work of grace. “You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household.” To be a member of God’s household is to be a member of his family. In other words, the church is, at its core, God’s family. That’s why it is common to see believers referred to in the New Testament as brothers and sisters. All those in the church have the same Father. By definition, those who have a Father in common are related. They are family.

This truth has caused me to have some uneasiness with the way the church operates in our country much of the time. It is not up to me to decide how churches ought to exist and operate. That’s God’s business. Nevertheless, in these past few years I’ve begun to have some questions. The modern American success story for churches is the megachurch. There is no question that many of these behemoth ministries that count as many as 20,000 people or more as part of their congregation, are truly impressive organizations. They often have highly effective programs that serve the needs of almost every person imaginable, they put on spectacular and appealing events and services and they are highly visible. My problem is, in what sense can 3000 or 5000 or 20000 people be a family? Such churches must focus on organization to be able to function and maintain all their moving parts. But a family is not fundamentally an organization. This presents them with a big challenge of trying to be a family. Small churches like ours have their own problems, but at least it is easier to function like a family.

About once a month for the past few months Laurie and I have had a sort of odd experience. We've been out and about doing errands in a store or eating at a restaurant when we have been approached by people who call us by name. They recognize us, but we do not know them. They inform us that they went to the church where I used to serve as a pastor. Typically they just want to say hello and thank us for our former service. In a way that bothers me. It makes me more uneasy with the fact that we once served at a church where we didn't even know many of the people who were a part of the "family."

My desire here is not to criticize any ministries, but to ask, just exactly what is a church supposed to be? If we are not clear about that it is entirely possible that we could do a lot of impressive things, while missing the heart of what we're supposed to be. In so doing we could easily end up emphasizing all the wrong things. This is enormously important, because it seems reasonable to think that God has some significant purposes in his design for his church.

I've noticed that family shows up fairly regularly in the movies and shows that come out of Hollywood. Particularly, I've noted that quite often there is a message being sent that almost any group of people can be a family. We were watching a show that takes place in a hospital emergency department. Most of the characters had dysfunctional relationships with their family. But they were told by fellow workers "we are your family." I've seen another show where young people who are outcasts in some way are portrayed as a family.

Hollywood is the mouthpiece for our cultural elites. As sociologist Philip Rieff pointed out clearly, those elites have been waging a war on the nuclear family. They believe that the nuclear family, mother, father and children, represents a danger to their social dream and agenda, and it should be undercut at every opportunity. So their message is, "You don't need those people you have blood relations to. You can have a family with any group of people that you choose. In fact, it is better for you, because those blood relations often do damage to you. This other 'family' will care for you way more than that other family ever did."

Even as they attack the core family, these people are betraying the fact that they know how badly we need it. We come into this world with a powerful, unquenchable need to belong, to be a part of, yes, a family, that will never abandon us. Even as they seek to devalue the family, the elites are showing that they long for family and are trying to create some sort of substitute for it. The absence of

family is unbearable, so if we are going to deconstruct the family we have to come up with a replacement.

There is a danger that anyone with a big and rigid ideology faces. Their ideology can blind them to reality. Their ideologically formed world view becomes the grid through which they interpret everything, and as a result they can easily fail to see some truths that would be obvious to a more objective observer. This is a danger that we who are believers in Jesus must deal with. But it is apparent that many of our cultural elites fall prey to it. That can be seen in the issue of family.

Family is a bond that exists beyond preferences, self focus and convenience. Family can disappoint us, annoy us, even hurt us, but they are still family, and always will be. I have known many people about whom I have wondered why they even care at all about their family because said family is so messed up and causes them nothing but pain and difficulty. But almost always they don't give up on them, they long for better and don't run away. That's because they are family and always will be. They always belong to them at a deep level. That is not true of any other group, whether it be a team, a group of friends or co-workers.

This says something to us about the nature of the local church. It is a family, not an organization. It is to relate and to operate like a community of people who are committed and tied to each other, who may disappoint, hurt, or even annoy us, but who are nevertheless our family, a group to whom we belong in a deep and powerful way. We are tied together because we have the same Father, and we share the same Spirit, the same spiritual DNA.

One of the common complaints I hear from church leaders is that there is a pervasive consumer mentality among Christians in our nation today. That's in part because that is the character of our culture, but it is also in part because churches have been structured to appeal to that mentality. Give them what they want, appeal to them, make church about meeting whatever they think their needs are. No wonder people evaluate church from a consumer mindset. To avoid that we need to remember that the church is the household of God. This is a family. They don't replace our natural families, but they are a family we are deeply connected to, and that is eternal. We stick to these people and we relate to these people like they are our physical family, who will always be our family. I have seen how you all have loved each other as family. How you have cared for each other. I commend you and encourage you, excel still more, and give thanks for your spiritual family.

THE TEMPLE OF GOD

In verse 21 Paul shifts his image from a family to a building. He said we are being built together to be a building, but a particular kind of building. We are to be the temple of the Lord. So the church is a temple. That begs the question, what is a temple? What is its purpose? People don't typically build buildings for no purpose whatsoever. Our government does. When Michael was deployed to Afghanistan I read an article in the newspaper about a headquarters building that we built on a base in Helmand province. It cost \$34 million. The article claimed that there was no need for the building. The base was the one at which Michael was stationed, so I asked him about it. He said, "Oh, yes, it's there. The Marines neither needed nor wanted the building, but the government built it anyway. It's sitting there empty and it's going to stay that way. When we pull out we'll just leave it there empty." Your tax dollars at work. So our government builds buildings without any purpose, but no one else does. You build a house for people to live in, you build a factory for people to do manufacturing in, an office building for people to work in, a school for education. Why would God build a temple?

In 1 Kings 9:3 after Solomon had built the temple and prayed the Lord said, "I have heard the prayer and the plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there." 2 Chronicles 7:16 says the glory of the Lord filled the temple. In his book, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, J. Daniel Hays wrote that the temple, "is a place where God's presence dwells in a special kind of way so that his people can be with him and worship him." He says it is the place "where God meets his people."

This has some big implications for us, since these verses, along with others, claim that the church is now the temple of the Lord. It is the place where God will be with people in a special way, where we experience him. That means the church is a place where there should be a sense that God is very real and very much present. How might we see that in the church? When we are what God wants us to be it will be seen in our desire to praise him. As we worship him together we will experience his presence and power in a special way. It will be seen in the priority of prayer. We will believe that God is here, that he is active, and we expect him to answer prayer and to work, so that prayer takes priority.

It will be seen in the way we relate to each other, giving grace as God gives grace to us. Perhaps more than anything else, in the church there will be love, for God is love. If God is here, then love will be here and people will experience that. It will

be seen in our peace and contentment, as we believe God provides what we need so we trust in him. It can be seen in how we respond to hardship, loss and tragedy. We continue to trust in him, no matter what happens.

Because we are the temple where people can encounter God, that means that his reality and his truth should shine out from this place like a beacon of hope. There will be a sense among us that we want to bring the presence, hope and blessing of our Lord to the dying world around us. We don't just sit together and be happy about what God has given us, we want to share it with the world so they can meet him too. The ancient prophets said that some day people would come from all over the world to meet God in his temple. That is what should happen in the church, in this church, for it is now the temple of the Lord.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

In Ephesians 1:22-23 referring to Jesus Paul wrote, "God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be the head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." That passage says that the church is the body of Jesus Christ! 1 Corinthians 12:27 says, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

The Bible maintains that Jesus is physically still alive today. Though his body is different, it is immortal, and it still exists today. He is not living off on some planet in some far off corner of the universe. It is more like he is living in another dimension, one we do not experience, so we cannot see him. But he is nevertheless very much there, very much alive, and very much real and physical.

So in what sense can the church be his body? He is not physically in this world right now. But he still wants to be physically present. However, how can one physical body be physically present all over the world? It can't. So Jesus fills us with his Spirit. Then he can use our bodies as though they were his. If a person needs some affirmation and encouragement in, say, Hong Kong, today, while another person in St. Louis needs help because they have to move to a new apartment and can't do it all alone, and yet another person in San Diego needs someone to tell them about the grace of God in Jesus Christ, how does Jesus help all those people? He sends members of his church in Hong Kong, St. Louis, San Diego, people in whom his Spirit lives, to go give the encouragement, to help with the move, to tell the person about Jesus. We become his physical body working on the earth in this age.

I recently had to have surgery to repair a couple of inguinal hernias. The surgeon told me he would do the operation robotically. This meant his hands would not actually physically touch my body, nor would tools he was holding in his hands. In fact, he could theoretically do the surgery while in a completely different city. In my case he was actually in the operating room, but he was sitting in the corner of the room nowhere near my body. He was looking at a video screen that gave him a 230 degree view of what the camera that went inside my body was seeing. They put 3 small holes in my body. The camera went in through one, the other two were what Toby told me were docks. The surgeon would maneuver the camera using foot pedals. Using his hands he would direct the robot to put various instruments through the docks into my body and use them to do the necessary work. They choose to do this because the instruments the robot uses are much smaller, thus less invasive, than ones a surgeon would hold.

So picture Jesus being like the surgeon. He is in another place, but our minds, our bodies, our voices, our hands, become his instruments for carrying out his vital work in this world. The only problem with this system is that we aren't actually robots. The robot always does what the surgeon tells it to do. If it doesn't there is a huge problem and something is badly wrong. Unfortunately, we don't always do what the Great Physician tells us to do. We are robots gone rogue, off pursuing our own agenda. They make sci-fi movies about rogue robots and the terrible things they do. Those movies are about us!

For us to truly be the body of Christ means that each of us sees the reason for our existence being to do whatever the Lord Jesus tells us to do. We are to see the one purpose of our lives to be his tools, serving his will and his purpose at all times. It has large implications for how we function as a church. We are a body. Each member must play his or her part. A body with parts that aren't functioning is going to be sick. That's true of us as well. God has not put any of us in the body to merely be consumers. There is no spiritual gift of receiving.

THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

Revelation 19:6-8 says, "Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.' Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people."

There the church is depicted as Christ's bride. It is a symbol of the one loved above all else, the one chosen. Think for a moment about what that means. Brides spend a lot of money on wedding dresses. The Vera Wang wedding collection starts at \$2900. The Luxe Collection starts at \$6000. Those crazy women on Say Yes To The Dress sometimes spend as much as \$10000. Fortunately most women aren't that outrageous. According to The [knot.Com](http://knot.com) the average price of a wedding dress is now \$1564, not including accessories.

That boggles my mind. They pay \$1500 for one dress. And how much use are they going to get out of it? They are going to wear it once in their whole lives! I can't think of anything else that compares to spending that much money on a dress a woman will wear for part of one day, then never again. Doesn't that tell us something about that dress? Yes, it tells us it is a terrible financial decision. Yeah, it would be, except it is not primarily a financial decision at all. It is a statement about what is important. It is saying, the most important thing I will ever do is be a bride. This is the biggest thing about my identity, that I am the bride of this man. I am the most precious thing in all the world to this man. I am beloved in a way no one else is.

Being the bride of Christ makes that same statement about us. It says we are beloved by Christ in a way that nothing else compares to. It says the most important thing about our identity is that we are the bride of Christ, we belong to him. It is far and away, the most significant truth of our lives. We try to establish our identity and our worth so often in our abilities, our intellect, our accomplishments, our success, our prowess in different endeavors, but it is never enough. What matters most is that we are beloved by Christ.

There is a similar message in what happens at a wedding. Prior to a wedding guests begin entering the venue, once upon a time a church, and find their seats. Usually there is a time when the background music and the parents of the groom and the bride enter. There is a point when the pastor and the groom, and sometimes the groomsmen will sort of appear at the front. Then the bridesmaids will march down the aisle one by one. Now the music changes, everyone present stands and turns to watch as the bride is ushered down the aisle. They don't do that for anyone but the bride. Why is that? The bride is the most important person there, that's why. I always instruct wedding parties during the wedding rehearsal that it is easy to know which way to stand during the ceremony. You always face the bride, because she is the star of the show.

Do you get what this is saying about us? We are the bride of Christ! We are the star of the show. We are the most important people in the room. It doesn't look like it, does it? The world doesn't think I'm even a little bit important. People's heads don't turn to look at me when I enter a restaurant. They're not whispering to each other and saying, "Can you believe it? Look there. It's Rick Myatt. I wonder if he'd mind if I asked for his autograph." The only person who wants my autograph is the server at the end of the meal because I'm paying with a credit card and they need me to sign the bill.

It often feels like we don't matter. No one runs news stories about what we are doing. Our church isn't on the nightly news. But the truth is, we are the most important people here because we are the beloved of the Lord of the Universe. We don't need the notice of the world, we have the notice of the one who loves us.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Back in Ephesians 2:19 remember that Paul wrote that we are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people. Uh, citizens of what? The term citizen requires a context. Years ago there was a Snickers commercial on TV that was hilarious. It centered on a quarterback in a football game who got hit hard and briefly knocked out. He insists he's fine. They ask him if he knows where he is. He says he's on the football field. His coach says, "Do you know who I am?" He says, "You're coach." Then the coach asks, "Do you know who you are?" He says, "I'm Batman." In the final scene he's sitting on the bench next to a teammate and says, "Hello, Citizen, I'm Batman. Would you like to be my assistant?"

Hello, Citizen. Yeah, citizen of what? Verse 12 says they used to be excluded from citizenship in Israel, in God's chosen people. That is no longer true. In Christ we have citizenship in the nation of God's chosen people. Another way to say that is we have citizenship in the kingdom of God. Colossians 1:13 says of God, "he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves." So we are now part of the Kingdom of Christ. What does this mean?

I like the picture we see in Philippians 3:20. Paul had written of enemies of Christ whose minds are set totally on things of this earth in verse 19. Then he said, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ." Heaven is the spiritual realm where the kingdom of God exists and rules totally right now. We are citizens of that place. We have friends who spent years as missionaries living in Papua New Guinea. They still go back there quite a bit. But they were never citizens there. Their citizenship was always here in the

United States of America. We are like them. We are here in this world living, and being missionaries, but our true citizenship is in the kingdom of God.

The picture in Philippians is especially meaningful to me because of the historical context. Philippi was the site of a significant battle. You might remember that Brutus and Cassius were two conspirators that took the lead in the assassination of Julius Caesar. That resulted in considerable chaos. Eventually forces led by them were defeated by forces led by Marc Antony and Octavian. Octavian went on to become Caesar and was called Caesar Augustus. That battle occurred at Philippi. To commemorate the victory Philippi was declared to be a colony of Rome. As such it was viewed as a part of Rome itself and its residents were given Roman citizenship. In his commentary on Philippians Gerald Hawthorne wrote of the people of Philippi, "They were a people proud of their city, proud of their ties with Rome, proud to observe Roman customs and obey Roman laws, proud to be Roman citizens. Philippi was a reproduction of Rome."

Paul told them as citizens of the kingdom of God they had an even greater privilege. They should observe the customs of that kingdom and obey its laws. They should become a reproduction of that kingdom! That is true of us as well. We are a colony of heaven, a reproduction of the kingdom of God, the place where his will is what determines what happens in every matter large or small.

A few years ago before our kids were married Laurie and I got to go to Disney World in Orlando with them. Our first day there we went to Epcot. It had a couple of good rides, but a lot of exhibits. We ate lunch at the Italian pavilion in Epcot. There was a replica of the campanile at Piazza San Marco, or St. Mark's Square, in Venice. They reproduced the tower down to minute detail. There is also a replica of the Doge's palace, a fountain in the piazza and gondola's in the water next to it, evocative of the canals of Venice. We had lunch, Italian food, of course, at Tutto Italia Restaurant. The experience was intended to give visitors a taste of what it would be like to be in Italy. The church is to be the Kingdom of God Pavilion, where people get a taste of what it is like to be in that kingdom. There are some things we should remember about that Epcot plaza. The beautifully reproduced tower is 83 feet tall. The real one in Venice is 323 feet tall. The food we ate there was Italian, but Carissa and Michael, who have been to Italy will tell you it was light years short of what the food they ate there was like. I had thoroughly forgettable pizza. My point here is, Epcot is not as amazing as the real thing, and neither will the church be. But we can and should give a glimpse of the real thing.

The kingdom of God is an amazing place. It is ruled by love. Love decides every matter. It is marked by joy and peace, rejoicing in the freedom and grace of God. It is a place where every person is treasured. It is a place where people live to glorify God and they revel in his presence among them. It is a place where Jesus Christ is Lord, loved, honored and obeyed in everything.

For our church to be the kingdom of God will require that each of us live with Jesus Christ as our Lord. We must live with the desire to glorify him in everything we are and do and with the choice to do his will no matter what it may take. But if we do that, this will become an outpost of heaven, a place where people can get a small taste of the incredible blessing of the kingdom of God.

