

<sup>19</sup> **Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household,** <sup>20</sup> **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.** <sup>21</sup> **In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.** <sup>22</sup> **And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.** <sup>15</sup> **Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.** <sup>16</sup> **From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.** (NIV 84)

Theme: Together we are One in Christ.

1. Who we are.
2. What we work for.

What many people want is a sense of belonging. We all want to belong to something—maybe it's a sports team, a group of friends, a company, a congregation, a country, or whatever. We want to feel like we belong. A big topic in politics right now is whether or not we should accept the Syrian refugees because of the risks involved by unknowingly allowing members of ISIS into our country. We aren't going to get into the politics of the matter and whether or not we should allow them into our country, but the situation reminds me of being foreigners and aliens. Right now, many of those refugees are without a home, separated from their loved ones, and even without a country to call their own—they don't really belong anywhere.

And that is what we all were like at one point—we were aliens and foreigners, born as enemies of God who were hostile to his Word and wanted nothing to do with him. We were completely dead in our transgressions and sins. We were unable to do anything spiritually—there is nothing in us that could contribute in any way to our salvation. And as far as I know, not anyone here is of Jewish ancestry. We aren't God's children by nature; and we aren't part of his chosen people. As

Gentiles, that is non-Jews, we are a people without citizenship, foreigners and aliens. As Paul says earlier in chapter two, we were **without hope and without God in the world.**

But that is not who we are now. As Paul says in verse 19, **you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people.** Because of the work of Christ we are no longer aliens and foreigners. Through the shedding of his blood on the cross we have been reconciled or brought back to God. Since his life, death, and resurrection, removed the guilt of all our sins we now enjoy a right relationship with God. He no longer looks at us as sinners, as his enemies who are hostile to him; because through faith he has made his own.

And so we are now citizens in the kingdom of God. Christ is the king who rules over his people. We know right now in heaven Christ rules over his entire creation as everything has been placed under his feat. We also know that at the end of the world all believers will live in Christ's kingdom of heaven. But he also rules over us—over all believers today. By the gospel that was shared with us, he rules in their hearts through faith. We do have a citizenship—our citizenship is Christ's kingdom.

We are all citizens of this great country. And while we love this country and feel some sort of connection with the other citizens of this country, it's not as if we are all united—we don't see eye-to-eye with everyone to say the least. That is because our worldview and our goals are different than many others'.

Together in Christ we are citizens of Christ's Kingdom; but not just that you are also a part of God's house. You are one brick that makes up the house of God. The foundation of this house of the Apostles and Prophets—Christ himself is the cornerstone, the very foundation of God's household without whom there would be no house. And the parts of this house, his believers are fitted together by a masterful architect. As Paul says, **In (Christ) the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.** The inner part of the temple, the Holy of Holies, was where the Lord dwelled among his people. The word used for temple here indicates the Holy of Holies. That is what we are—the Lord dwells in each and every one of us through faith in him.

And notice what is being done with this temple—it is still being built! There are more bricks to be laid—part of this temple to be built. It is an ongoing construction project. The Lord adds to his number day in and day out as he works through the gospel and dwells in the hearts of his believers across the world. And like you must do with old buildings, someone must do some upkeep so things don't fall into disrepair. Through the gospel the Lord keeps you in his temple as he strengthens and keeps you in the one true faith.

There is yet another picture Paul uses to describe our togetherness in Christ. He says that we are, **members of God's household**. We aren't just citizens of a country, but we are members of our household. Through the waters of baptism we were welcomed into his family as the Holy Spirit worked faith into our hearts. We are now God's own children, adopted into his family. We are now heirs of him who will inherit his gift of salvation. We part of a close-knit family, brought together by the blood of Christ.

2. Not all family members see eye-to-eye with the others. There will be fights and disagreements, no family relationship is perfect; but they are united as a family nonetheless. So it is with this family of God. Together all believers are his children—whether they are WELS Lutherans, other Lutherans, Baptists, Catholics, Methodists, and so on. There are disagreements and yet we are still part of God's family.

As close as you are with members of your family, you have a closer relationship with yourself. And so, in the second part of our text Paul uses the picture of a body to describe how together we are one in Christ, **we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.**

Each part of a body as a job. The eyes' job is to see, the ears' job is to hear, and so on; The brain, of course, is the epicenter of the body that controls everything. We are members of the body of Christ, with him as the head of everything. And as each part this body of Christ has a job to do. Each one of us has been given a different set of gifts and abilities, and we use them for the work of the Lord. Some of us may be good and talking to others about Jesus. Some are great working with kids, others are better with the elderly. Some are good at money; others are blessed with worldly wealth and are able to give generously;

some are knowable when it comes to God's Word and in sharing that knowledge, others are great at encouraging others in their faith and comforting them when down. We all have different gifts and abilities and we all have different jobs to do according to those abilities.

Remember how the temple of God is still being built up? As the gospel is being spread the Holy Spirit works faith into the hearts of many. That is how the house is being built—through the gospel. As we spread the gospel the Holy Spirit works through that gospel to bring people to faith and keep us in that one true faith.

That is why Paul mentions that we speak the truth in love. It is the job of all Christians to spread the gospel so that other people may hear the gospel and be brought to faith through that gospel. To everyone we have the opportunity to share the gospel with—that is what we do we tell them the truth of Jesus as the world's one and only Savior. And we do this out of love and concern for them and their soul.

But sadly, that is something we often fail to do. For whatever reason we keep our mouth shut—we are afraid of how someone may react; we don't want to put ourselves “out there.” Or we may claim that we simply don't have the time to sit down and tell other people about their Savior. And maybe you just aren't that comfortable telling others about Jesus—it's just not your thing. If this is the case, it is something you can work on and pray about that the Lord would give you such ability. And even if you may not be the best at it, the Holy Spirit will still work through you. And there are plenty of other jobs you can do as a member in the body of Christ to help spread the gospel.

And what happens when we don't use those gifts and abilities? When I was in my second year at the Seminary, I was playing basketball and was on a fast-break and I jumped up and suddenly felt something tear in my knee. It turns out I tore my medial meniscus in my left knee. I tried to tuff it out for a few weeks but the pinching in my knee made it hard to do much of anything; and I ended up having surgery to remove and repair the torn part of my meniscus. The point is, the meniscus is just a small little part of the human body. It is a crescent shaped piece of cartilage that serves like a shock absorber for the knee. But even though it is small, it does serve a purpose. And when it was torn the rest of the body suffered and didn't perform as well as it should have. The same thing goes with the body of Christ. Everyone has a job to do and when one part of this body doesn't do its job, no matter how small

or seemingly insignificant, the rest of the body suffers and it isn't able to function as smoothly as it could.

And so do strive to do the work of the Lord, so that the body of Christ may be built up as we do all we can to share the gospel with others that they may be brought to faith and add to Christ's house. As Paul tells the Romans, **in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.**

And we have a great opportunity to do just that as members of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Together with all Christians we are citizens of Christ's kingdom, part of his temple, and members of his body, but how much closer are we with the fellow members of our synod. That word, "Synod," means to walk together. That is what we are, we are those who walk together in the faith—we are perfectly united in doctrine and practice.

And through the synod we are able to do things that we can't do on our own or as a congregation. We can only share the gospel with those whom we come in contact with—in and around the Standish area. But as a synod we are able to start congregations throughout the country, to send missionaries overseas, to train future ministers of the gospel so that they may be able to do the work of the Lord on our behalf. Being part of the synod allows us to speak the truth and love throughout the world and to fulfill the Lord's will for his people in the Great Commission by making disciples of all nations.

Today we have a special opportunity to do our jobs as members of God's body and speak the truth in love throughout the world. A portion of your regular offerings already go to the synod to support the work of the gospel. Today you have an opportunity to give a special offering to the synod. This offering will help to pay off our synod's debt so that we can invest more into new congregations and missionaries throughout the world.

So let us give and let us give generously remembering who you were and what you are now. . For at one point you were a foreigner and an alien, without a spiritual home and outside of God's family. But

through Christ you are now a citizen of God's kingdom with Christ as the king. You are a part of God's temple as Christ rules in your heart through faith, you a member of God's family as he adopted you through baptism; and together we are part of the body of the Lord, with Christ as the head. You were once lost, but now you belong to Christ. Through the gospel you are his. And so you do your part to spread the gospel. Let us work together as we are one in Christ so that the body of Christ may be built up. Amen.