

From Alienation to Family Incorporation by Adopting Grace (Ephesians 2:18-19)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on June 12, 2011

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‘A missionary who was officiating at a communion service in the church was deeply moved when he looked around him. He saw the chief of the Ngoni, along with many other members of that tribe. He also saw members of the Senga and Tumbuka tribes—singing, praying, and participating in the Lord’s Supper together. In former years each of these tribes loved to brag about how many men, women, and children of the other tribes they had killed, raped, or maimed. The old chief could remember the days when the young Ngoni warriors had gone out to attack their enemies. They had left behind a trail of burned and devastated villages and had come home with their spears bloodied with the death of Senga and Tumbuka people. But as they once were divided by the spilling of each other’s blood, they are now united by the blood of their common Savior, Jesus Christ.’¹ [as v. 13 says, *brought near by the blood of Christ*, as blood-bought brothers in a new family of faith]

The NY Times in 1913 reported missionary Don Fraser’s account of a convention of converts among these very people groups in Africa. The NY newspaper said ‘8,000 natives came – the church held only 2,000 – and sang their hymns to their own tribal music, to the very tunes, in fact, of what were once their war songs.’²

Ephesians 2:14 *For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one ...*
 v. 15b ... *that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,*
¹⁶ *and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross ...*
 ... ¹⁸ *for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.* ¹⁹ *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household,*

OUTLINE:

1. ONE WAY TO GOD (v. 18)
2. ONE PEOPLE OF GOD (v. 19a)
3. ONE FAMILY OF GOD (v. 19b)

1. One Way to God

v. 18 begins “*Through Him ...*” – that’s through Jesus (v. 13-17), the Prince of Peace, the One who brought peace and reconciliation. He also said “*no one gets to the Father but through Me*” (14:6). The same phrases “*to the Father*” and “*through Him*” are in v. 18. “*Through Him we both* [Jew and Gentile, v. 11-17] *have access...*”

ACCESS – In ancient times, this word was used for Oriental courts where someone was given audience before the King. You didn’t just waltz into the presence of a King (ex: story of Esther in Persia, and King Ahasuerus granted her access, raising his royal scepter). You had to be “*brought near*” (that’s the language of v. 13 also). There was typically a court official one had to come “*through*” to get to the King, who granted access and audience to the monarch on the throne. Jesus gives us that before the throne of God above.

None of us could ever stand before God without Him in front of us, going before us, making the way for us, introducing us as His own. The Prince of Peace brings former enemies of the King before the throne, which is a throne of grace for all the King's Son befriends. The golden scepter of grace is always extended to those He brings.

This word "access" is used in chapter 3, v. 12 of Jesus: "*in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.*" It's used one other time in the NT, in Romans 5, where Paul says: *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice ...*

The language of "access" takes us right up to the very throne room of heaven, before the very King of the Universe Himself, before the very council of the Trinity that planned this from all eternity. We are granted access and audience before the throne of God above, to be able to speak with the King of heaven anytime! The Holy Spirit ushers us into His presence, announces we are here and even helps us formulate our petitions where our words fail. The Son also is always before the throne of the Father interceding for us, as our Advocate, "*through Him we have access in one Spirit.*"

Heb. 4:16 has a similar thought with a similar word: *Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* There the idea of access to a throne includes High Priestly access. In fact, the original language word "access" is used in the OT for offerings brought by the priest that granted *acceptance* before God. We not only needed peace, we needed a Priest, and Jesus is both. In OT times, people didn't have direct access to God in the temple. There was only one nation on earth, and only one tribe within that one nation, and only one man within that one tribe, one day a year – the high priest who entered the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur.

But Jesus by His sacrifice fulfilled the ceremonial priestly system, as He died, the veil to the Holy of Holies was torn in 2 from top to bottom, forever giving the formerly far off direct access; Gentiles and Jews who have faith in Jesus can come right to the mercy seat!

Heb. 10 says: "*since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus...let us draw near*" (v. 19, 23). What a privilege!

The privilege that once only one person from only one tribe of only one nation had only one day a year, to enter the holy place behind the veil, to draw near to God's special manifest presence...now the veil is open for every person of every tribe and every tongue and every nation on every day of the year! "Let every kindred, every tribe on this terrestrial ball, to Him all majesty ascribe and crown Him Lord of all." Praise the King of heaven, praise your Priest in heaven, praise the Spirit who not only brings you to God's special presence, but who fills you with His special presence at all times! Praise the Father, praise the Son, praise the Spirit!

Applications of this first point:

- *Praise God!*
- *Proclaim this truth to others*

If there is one way to God, tell others (John 14:6). v. 17 says Jesus preached the gospel of peace to those who were far off and near, and He calls us to do the same. Eph. 6:15 says when we put on the gospel armor, our feet are to be fitted with *the readiness/preparation of the gospel of peace*.

- *Put into practice these truths with others*

v. 18 is not mainly about individual Christians given access to God, it says “*we both have access*” (both = Jew/Gentile). The word “both” is repeated from v. 16 where it says Christ “*reconciles both in one body to God through the cross ...*” In the end of v. 15 it says Christ “*created one new man from the two.*” The same verb “created” was used in v. 10, where Paul says “*you are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works...*”

God re-creates us not to be individual Christians, but to serve one another by good works, in the one body of Christ. God doesn't need our works, but people do, and God delights to do good for His children through other children of His in the body of Christ. He has good works v. 10 says are prepared beforehand for each of us to walk in, each having a part in the body life. God saves me not to be my own man, but a united *new man* with other believers who have all been reconciled by the cross that redeems all believers.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 5. How do we put these truths into practice? There is application of reconciliation to believer and unbeliever. The Corinthian church was a fleshly-oriented church w/ divisions, self-centered attitudes that Paul writes to correct, and he says in v. 15 Christ died for us so that we should no longer live for ourselves.

2 Corinthians 5:16 *Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh* [not Jew/Gentile, other fleshly distinctions, sub-divisions in the body, “I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos, I'm of Peter” – those are part of the “old things” salvation does away w/] ... ¹⁷ *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.* ¹⁸ *Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,* ¹⁹ *namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world [i.e., all classes of people] to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.* ²⁰ *Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.* ²¹ *He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

*If you're not yet reconciled to God, I beg you, beg God to reconcile you to Himself by grace ... v. 10 says judgment is coming so v. 11 says knowing this terror we persuade/plead with men, we beg (v.20) *be reconciled!* Our motive: Christ's love (v.14). We and are appointed to die one time, then judgment (Heb. 9:27). There is one God and there is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim 2:5). God sent His One and Only Son to die one time, so we don't have to pay for one of our sins in hell if we are one with Christ by repentance and faith. There is one name given under heaven by which men may be saved: Jesus (Acts 4:12). There is salvation in no other. If that sounds exclusive, it is! There is one way, one truth, one life. Jesus said the one way to the Father is through Jesus (Jn 14:6), turning from your sins, trusting Him alone as Lord and Savior. There is **one way to God** ...

2. One People of God

Ephesians 2:19 says in the NIV: “*Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people ...*” That Greek word *hagios*, “saints,” is a general word for “set apart” ones, one of the most common words for believers, God’s people of all ages and all times (not ethnic-specific like Israel / Gentiles).

In a passage parallel to Eph 2, Peter says “*you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers...*”(1 Pet 2:10)

Same terms, Peter urging believers to be strangers to the world, to avoid its lusts. But with fellow people of God, none are to be considered foreigners or strangers - we are to be friends and fellow citizens with them. We are not aliens or sojourners, we’re brethren in the same house; none segregated, all integrated as God’s people.

Ephesians 2:12 *remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel [or in other words, alienated from God’s people] and strangers [or foreigners / outsiders] to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*¹³ ***But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.***

The word *strangers/foreigners* is the Greek word *zenos* that we get the English word *zenophobia* from (fear of strangers). A *zenos* was not a member of a state or city and didn’t have rights like citizens. He was an outsider to the country, commonwealth, community. He was separated, segregated, alienated, and sometimes hated racially.

It seems from Matthew 27:7 that Jews didn’t even allow non-Jews to be buried in the same fields – foreigners were separated even in death by the Jews in NT, even dead Gentiles weren’t brought near! *But now*, Paul says, *in Christ you were far off are brought near ...*All Christians are part of the one people of God and are not to be segregated but to be fully integrated in the church

¹⁹ *So then you are **no longer strangers and aliens**, but you are fellow citizens with the saints...*(it doesn’t say Israel or Rome, it’s a general term for people of God, *saints*, i.e., believers)

Paul had citizenship in both Rome and Israel. In Acts 22, we read:

²⁵ *But when they had stretched him out for the whips [i.e., to beat him], Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a **Roman citizen** and uncondemned?”*²⁶ *When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, “What are you about to do? For **this man is a Roman citizen.**”*²⁷ *So the tribune came and said to him, “Tell me, are you **a Roman citizen?**” And he said, “Yes.”*²⁸ *The tribune answered, “I bought [my] citizenship for a large sum.” Paul said, “But I am **a citizen by birth.**”*²⁹ *So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately, and **the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen ...*** (ESV)

That interchange illustrates how differently citizens were treated from strangers / foreigners, not only in NT times, but in history. The temporary traveling outsiders or the resident aliens, illegal or legal (both are included in v. 19) were often marginalized, made to feel excluded, and were even mistreated, with few if any rights. It was quite different to be a citizen, and citizenship could be bought or earned. If you were *born* a citizen you're a "first class" citizen.

But when it comes to the people of God, there are no second class citizens, we all become a part of this kingdom by being born *again*.

No 2nd stringers or 2nd class citizens, you're not just getting in by the hair of your chinny chin chin. You're not an outsider sneaking in the back door. You're an insider if you're in Christ by faith, and you receive a royal welcome on the same red carpet stained by the red blood of Christ. You belong because you belong to King Jesus!

In human society, strangers, foreigners, newcomers don't always feel welcome, but it's not to be that way in the church of Jesus. I'm sensitive to this because I spent most of my growing up years as a *stranger or alien* in the Philippines where I was an MK grades 2-12. I didn't exactly blend in as a tall white guy among millions not so tall or light-skinned (Filipinos would stare, smile, point, laugh, and it wasn't considered rude to do that in their culture, and it was usually friendly or in fun, but it still took a little getting used to :) But in the Filipino church, we were not foreigners, we were family. The warmest most hospitable people I know are Filipino Christians ... I loved potlucks. I can still hear their passionate praise singing:

Fraise God por the body, Fraise God por the Son
Fraise God por the life That binds our hearts in one
Joy is the food we share, Lobe is our home,
Brothers, Fraise God por the body, Shalom, Shalom

As we think of peace/shalom in our text, praise God for the body! None of us naturally had *shalom* with God or were naturally part of His people, though some Jews wrongly trusted in Jewish-ness rather than Jesus, and they thought strangers/aliens were excluded.

The NT tells us all of us (Jew/Gentile) were *strangers* to grace (v. 3), but God in justification, gives sinners who trust Christ an *alien* righteousness, a *foreign* righteousness: the perfect life of Jesus and death of Jesus is given, imputed to our account, while our sinful life is put on the account of Jesus on the cross, so God the judge can declare us righteous, not because *we are*, but because *Christ is!* So every believer is as much a citizen of God's kingdom as Jesus!

Sinclair Ferguson, originally from the UK, speaks from experience as a resident alien / stranger in the US for many years, what it's like to have a green card, you get taxation without representation, but as a Christian, you get representation in heaven, and you don't have to pay anything, your representative Jesus pays it all for you.

Martyn-Lloyd Jones of England said the image of v. 19 is not that we have a passport, or an alien registration card, or other proof of ID to get in; we have a birth certificate proving our citizenship! Signed in the king's blood and Spirit's seal (1:7, 14), guaranteeing inheritance. We're not naturalized citizens, we're super-naturalized citizens!

If you turn forward to Phil. 3, Paul uses this word “citizen” one other time. In Phil 3:5 Paul says he was physically “*of the people of Israel ... a Hebrew of Hebrews*” – that was his natural, national ethnicity, but he says he puts no confidence in the flesh anymore. His Roman citizenship and its rights and privileges faded in Christ to a new citizenship: v. 20 “*For our citizenship is in heaven...*”

That’s the citizenship he’s talking about in Ephesians 2:19 as well. Turn to one more, Heb. 11. It also talks about fellow citizenship and fellowship of faith we have with the people of God of all time. Hebrews 11 is not just a list of Hebrews. The first 7 verses are non-Jews. Gentiles like Rahab make the list (v. 31). Israel doesn’t come into play till v. 21, Israel, also named Jacob. Even the father of the later Israelis, Abraham, was originally an Iraqi, who v. 9 says “*lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents.*”¹³ *All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ...*¹⁶ *But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one ...*

12:22 *you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,²⁴ to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant ...*

APPLICATIONS:

1. Live like where your citizenship is

There may be no loftier language for our position than in v. 22-24.

²⁸ *Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; ²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire*

We should serve with gratitude, reverence, and awe, as citizens of the kingdom of God, who could and should consume us for our sins, but who has called us into the kingdom of His beloved Son! If you really believe that and think that, it should affect how you live. Set your mind / affections on things above, not on earth, Col. 3 says.

2. Love others, especially strangers (like you were)

Hebrews 13:2 *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers ...* [The Greek word is *philoxenos* – *phila* = love, ex: Philadelphia = brotherly love; *zenos* = stranger – literally “love to strangers”]

Lev. 19:34 **The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.**

Dt 10:19 says again “*Love the stranger, for you were strangers ...*”

Jesus used the Good Samaritan story to illustrate love to strangers. In Matt. 25, He says how we treat strangers is how we treat Him. Paul used this Greek word *zenos* to speak of his host Gaius, who opened his home to guests, which is one aspect of hospitality. But keep in mind, *hospitality* means literally “love of strangers,” and it is expressed esp. in how you relate to strangers or people you don’t know at church, whether newcomers or people outside your circle of friends. How is your *philoxenos*, love to strangers here at GCBC?

The little letter of 3rd John is addressed “*to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth ...*”⁵ *Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers;*⁶ *and they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God ...*¹⁵ *Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.*

What a beautiful picture of the early church. Shalom to you. I love you, beloved. The whole church testifies of your love. Greet the friends, befriend the foreigners/strangers, and treat them as friends, treat them in a manner worthy of the Lord, as if doing it for/to Him

There is One Way to God (Eph 2:18), One People of God (v.19) ... Now lastly, there is One Family of God

Eph 2:19b *‘fellow citizens with the saints, and of God’s household’*

We’ll begin this point but it really continues into our next message as this image of God’s house extends and grows in v. 20-22. This word at the end of v. 19 speaks of the members of a house/family. It would be amazing enough if God didn’t give us the wrath we all deserve in Eph 2:3. But God doesn’t stop there! It would amaze us for all eternity to have our sins forgiven (Eph 1:7), to have the wall broken down that separated us from God (2:14). To be able to have access to God (2:18) is an undeserved bonus. To be changed from strangers to citizens w/ His kingdom people is unexplainable grace.

But it gets even more amazing than that! Not only does He make us citizens, He makes us sons and daughters of God! No longer foreigners we are now full-fledged family members! We went from alienation to family incorporation by adopting grace! Former haters of God and each other are now in the same household! Eph. 2:18 *“through Him we both have access to the Father.”* Access to God not merely as subjects of the King, but as sons of the King! Our Father always has an open-door policy for us, access anytime!

Jesus has brought us into the family as a child of the King. We’re no longer outsiders from Israel excluded from God’s people and presence and promises (Eph 2:12), we’re even closer than Israel of old, we’re brought so near (v. 13) that God is our “Father” (v. 18) even “Abba” (papa). No OT Israelite ever addressed God that way! We approach the throne of grace ... to a loving Father’s embrace!

Look back a couple pages to Gal. 4. The closeness of God the Father and Son is shared with adopted sons and daughters by the Spirit of adoption enabling us to call out to Him as our *Abba*.

Galatians 4:4 *But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth **His Son**, born of a woman, **born under the Law**, [i.e., legal requirements met] ⁵ so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. ⁶ Because you are sons, **God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”** ⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.*

He does not treat us as slaves, even though we are (the same Paul who writes this letter, begins many of his letters “slave of Christ”). God is our Master, but He relates to us as *Father* and treats us as *children*, not chattel, not like human masters who abused slaves. Our Lord loves us. Our Master is merciful. Our King is kind. He is no harsh slave-master Pharaoh; God is our Father, who Jesus said “*loves to give good gifts to His children*” (more than earthly dads). He brings trials not as a whip to beat us, but from a fatherly hand of discipline and discipleship, even using those things for our good.

Paul began the book of Romans referring to Himself as “slave of Jesus Christ,” but in chapter 8 he contrasts that with human slavery: ¹⁵ *For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a **spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!”*** ¹⁶ *The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that **we are children of God** ...*

Jaime and I shared in our Christmas letter to you we’re pursuing adoption from the Congo through Pastor Didier’s orphanage, and in the providence of our heavenly Father, right as I’m studying this passage and theme, God brought a newborn boy to that orphanage that we’re in the process of seeking to adopt him and Lord-willing bring him home as our son August/September? It’s very special for me to study spiritual adoption while in midst of a physical one :)

John Piper writes in comparison to human adoption: ‘God’s cost to adopt us was infinitely greater than any cost we endure in adopting and raising children ... [in earthly adoption there is legal red tape involved, but our heavenly adoption involved red blood, life for life, legally required by God’s law] Jesus satisfied all the legal demands precisely by shedding his blood ... The distance between what we are, and what God is, is infinitely greater than any distance between us and a child we might adopt. God crossed the greatest cultural barrier to redeem and adopt us...God does not leave us as [foreigners] when he adopts us. He does not leave us without feelings of acceptance and love. Rather, he pours his Spirit into our hearts to give us the experience of being embraced in the family ... In adopting us, God gives us the very Spirit of his Son and grants us to feel the affections of belonging to the very family of God ... Like the other children in the family, they all cry, “Daddy.” Praise God that he gives us *both* legal standing as his children *and* the very Spirit of his Son so that we find ourselves saying from a heart of deep conviction, “Abba, Father.”’³

Look again at Eph. 2:18, and ponder again those words “*access to the Father ...*” or in v. 18 “*we are members of His household.*”

Bryan Chapell, writing of his earthly father and household: ‘In my life, a lot of ugliness has revolved around the issues of race. In the South, where I was raised, issues of race and religion often divided people with prejudice, name-calling, and hostilities between black and white, Jew and African-American ... It was not uncommon to experience outbreaks of true hostility ...

[we were kept] in public schools when the Memphis schools were integrated; and I remember when they took my sister from public school when hostilities became so great that she was attacked merely for being white ... Something deep in my father's culture and upbringing ... made it difficult for him to touch a black man without a sense of repulsion [he felt uncomfortable even shaking the hand of a black man he had fought side-by-side with in WWII]. My father was not defending his feeling, but simply identifying its reality in him. Knowing that reality about my father, as did my siblings, we all wondered how he would react when my sister – the one who had experienced such racial hostility in school – adopted a child who is black. [The gospel had moved in the heart of Bryan's white sister, attacked by blacks as a kid, she not only accepted them but adopted one of them into her family].

In our home we have a picture that I count precious. It is of my father asleep with my African-American nephew also asleep in my father's arms. The arms of my father that once held me also held a child of a different [color his former culture rejected, now as his own]. Ancient enmities had been overcome, and I experienced a taste of heaven because one very different from me had as much access as I to my father ... [in the gospel picture of Eph. 2] we see ourselves as a child in the [arms] of our heavenly Father and also see other children – red and yellow, black and white, precious in his sight – held with us in his arms. And we also know that when we count these other children precious, too, because our heavenly Father gives them equal access to himself through the blood of his Son, then we will have understood more of the heart of our Father and thus will know even more of his love for us.⁴

Notice how Ephesians begins: **1:2** “Grace to you and peace from God **our Father** and the Lord Jesus Christ.³ Blessed be the God and **Father** of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,⁴ just as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. **In love**⁵ **He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself** ...

2:13 *But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near ...¹⁸ for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.*

In a greater way than any human father going to a far off land to bring near a son to himself in adoption, God the Father came to us who were far off and has brought us near in His Spirit, through His Son, to make us sons forever with full access, acceptance, affection and attention always before the Almighty King who is our *Abba*.

¹ John MacArthur, *Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), 67.

² “African Hunts: Experiences of a Sportsman and a Missionary,” *NY Times*, December 7, 1913.

<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F70F1FFE345F13738DDDAE0894DA415B838DF1D3>

³ John Piper, “Adoption: The Heart of the Gospel,” in *Reclaiming Adoption* (Cruciform Press, 2011), p. 97-103.

⁴ Bryan Chapell, *Ephesians* (Reformed Expository Commentary, P&R Publishing, 2009), p. 118-19.