

Dear Friends in Christ,

So there you are at a neighborhood get-together. A couple of the neighbors just moved in and are getting to know people. Eventually, the topic gets around to church and if / where people attend and suddenly, you're in the spotlight: "Tell me about *your* church."

Now there are a number of ways that you can go with this. Most of us would tend to scroll through the programs our church offers, or the community impact we have, or the friendly people that attend here. And all of that would be fine, all blessings from our gracious God.

But our text for today identifies and encourages a different response. As we look at Paul's letter to Ephesians, chapter 2, we are encouraged to point to the rock-solid foundation on which we stand in order to best explain who we are and what we believe.

You see, we at New Life are confessional, conservative Bible-believing Lutherans, but those who don't know that simply lump us in the same general category as every other church which calls itself Christian. So for those on the outside as well many of those on the inside, political decisions like the definition of marriage present a conflicting and confusing portrayal of the Christian Church. And in the midst of these monumental moral shifts undoubtedly the thinking of many can be summarized with a single question: What *does* the church stand for? In other words, what is the basis for its decisions, its proclamations and its mission?

Here's the answer: What the church stands *for* depends upon what the church stands *on*. And what the church stands *on* is the subject of our text for today. Using imagery we are very familiar with, Paul talks about the construction of true Christianity, ***Built on the Foundation***. But first, please...

As we begin, let me give you a little background on the people to whom Paul originally addressed these words...

The Christian congregation in the ancient city of Ephesus was made up of two distinct groups of people, Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). By the Holy Spirit working through the preaching of Paul, Jewish people who had the Old Testament – but had been steeped in the faulty religious idea of working their way to heaven through their own good deeds – came to understand Jesus Christ as the only way to eternal salvation. And Gentile people came to the light of knowing Jesus from the darkness of their heathen and pagan past.

Now the very fact that these two groups of people formed one Christian congregation was, humanly speaking, amazing, because normally they didn't get along with each other. In fact it is not too strong a term to say that in their pre-Christian days they despised each other.

But here they were – together in Christ and moving forward in Christ. The Holy Spirit had led them to understand that what they shared in Jesus and the Gospel message was far greater than their individual differences and backgrounds. And as a united Christian congregation they exhibited their love for their Savior by loving each other and reaching out to others.

After speaking of the oneness that Jesus creates between Jews and Gentiles, he writes: ***"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household..."***

There are some interesting designations here. The idea of being a ***foreigner*** and an ***alien*** means not being a part of a particular people or culture. Spiritually speaking, that's what the Gentile Ephesian Christians at one time were – outside the household of God. But now Paul says they are ***of*** it.

That's a big change, one that can only happen by the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel. Paul's preaching of the gospel brought them to faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior from sin. And

through the Gospel in Word and the waters of baptism the Holy Spirit has brought us to that very same faith – a faith that Paul describes as being “***built on the foundation of the Apostles and the prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.***”

And that’s it right there. That’s the construction of true Christianity, built on the foundation. The foundation is the Word of God (referred to here by the designation of “***Apostles and prophets***”), and the central message or “***chief cornerstone***” of that foundational Word is ***Christ Jesus***.

But the hearts, minds and headlines of our society are the sad reminder that many – even those that call themselves Christian – have abandoned this foundational, Scriptural teaching. Yes, they may give reverence to the Bible as the Word of God, but with the next breath they will say that its teachings were historically conditioned by the times, or that ancient man back then doesn’t know what modern man does today, or that much of what is in the Bible simply doesn’t apply anymore. They’ll talk about the Bible being inspiring, but not inspired. And so man becomes God, altering decisions and changing truths that God has already made – all in the name of “progressive” Christianity. And, truth be told, in our stickier moments, we’re tempted to do the same ourselves.

But here, the truth is self-evident. You see, we already know through our own powers of observation, that *we* are sinful. God laid down His laws in the Ten Commandments and tells us not to break them, but we do...all of them...on a regular basis. We don’t give Him the glory He deserves. We often misuse His name. We don’t take His Word as seriously as we should. We argue, fight, and generally try to order the world around our own personal, selfish desires.

And whereas the world talks about these things in terms of being character flaws or personal weaknesses, God has a name for all it. He calls it sin. And He says ***the wages of sin is death*** – eternal death in a real hell.

And that’s why Jesus Christ became the ***chief cornerstone*** for the construction of true, *saving* Christianity. Brick by brick, he has built up our salvation, becoming one of us, keeping all those commandments perfectly as our substitute, suffering the punishment we deserve, three days later rising from the dead as a testimony that everything He said and did was the acceptable payment on our behalf. And everything Christ did – His perfect life, his faultless righteousness, His sacrificial atonement on the cross to take away the sins of the world – all of it is built up brick by brick, from foundation to cornerstone to its very heights, ***joined together and ris[ing] to become a holy temple in the Lord.*** ²² ***And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.***

A man was answering questions for a national poll. When asked for his church preference, he responded, "Red brick." Now maybe, in reality, he gave more thought to his personal confession and his church affiliation, but it is interesting that his first thought was of the external building and the not the spiritual foundation on which he and his church stood.

My friends, don’t lose your focus on God’s Word as the foundation of truth on which you build your family and home. For if you lose the Word, you will ultimately lose Jesus Christ and the Gospel message. When the Bible is rejected as the foundational Word of God, marginalized as antiquated, dismissed as demeaning, the foundation crumbles. And when the foundation crumbles, the cornerstone quickly follows.

No, keep Jesus Christ – the crucified but risen Savior; the substitute sacrifice for all of our sins; the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world – keep this Jesus Christ as the cornerstone of both the Scriptures as well as your heart. For by grace, THE WORD OF GOD IS THE FOUNDATION; CHRIST IS THE CORNERSTONE, on which we stand. **Amen.**