



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

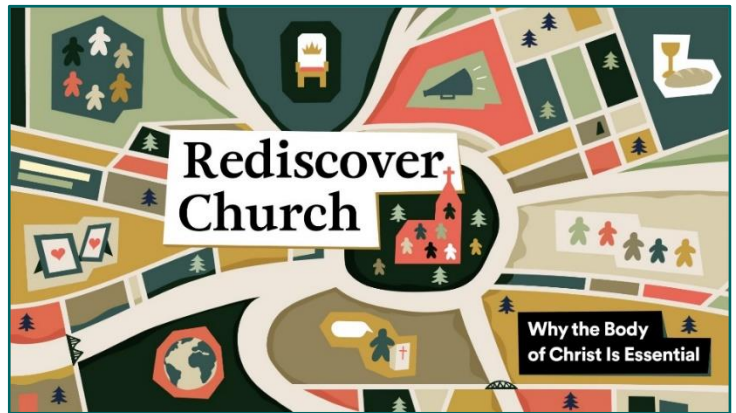
REDISCOVER CHURCH

Adopted Into God's Family

Ephesians 2:1-10

Phil Chapman | September 10, 2023

Good morning! In case you're not familiar with me, I am a VBC Campus Pastor and the Connections Pastor here at Sugar Grove. I'd like to welcome all of you and welcome to those who are joining us online as well. We're continuing our sermon series "Rediscover Church." Two weeks ago Pastor Tim took us on a journey through the essence and purpose of the church; today we're moving from what is a church to who belongs to the church.



We're not talking about who can walk through those doors, or who can join us online. We welcome everybody. We're not talking about membership—who can join Village Bible Church. That will be discussed on October 8. We are talking about who can belong to the body of Christ—the invisible church.

In 2010, my wife Shari and I started a process that transformed our family. It was a process called adoption. We weren't exactly sure where we wanted to adopt from. We didn't know if we should adopt from here in the United States or internationally. Through much prayer and research, we decided Ethiopia was going to be the country we would adopt from. On November 28, 2010, we received this picture of a young boy named Abine. We affectionately call him Reggie and we fell in love with him right away. Man, we loved him so much. We had never met him, yet we loved him so much. After filling out all the paperwork, we flew to Ethiopia and met him for the first time. We were adopting two boys at the same time but had to leave both Reggie and Jacob in Ethiopia, waiting for the paperwork to be processed.

On Reggie's third birthday—May 3, 2011—we went to the United States Embassy in Ethiopia and that's when we were told the boys could officially come to the United States. We flew home as one big happy family. But Reggie was hurting. He was sick. Much like many kids adopted from different countries—including Ethiopia—he was very malnourished. After going through multiple tests, we found out that Reggie was infested with parasites; he was being eaten from the inside out. He couldn't keep any food down, when he was willing to eat. They sent all the tests to Indianapolis for a specialist to review. Then they concocted special pills this three-year-old needed to take—horse pills that a three-year-old boy was supposed to take multiple times a day. Well, that wasn't going to work. We were out of options.



So the doctor decided to insert a tube inside his nose, down through his throat, into his stomach so he could get the medicine through he needed. We did that multiple times a day for ten days. It was difficult. We knew Reggie needed it as his path to healing. At the end of ten days, I slowly peeled that thing out of his nose. That was gross. But Reggie began to thrive. He became almost like a new person. He was smiling and laughing and jumping around, already loving Spiderman. We had Reggie.

Why do I share this story? I share it because it serves as a powerful metaphor for what we're diving into today. It's the transformative healing power of belonging to God's family. Just as Reggie couldn't heal himself, we can't save ourselves. We were chosen for adoption by God, much like Shari and I intentionally chose Reggie for adoption. The decision to bring Reggie into our home wasn't random; it was intentional and there was a lot of love behind it.

In the same vein, the Bible tells us that God chose us even before the foundation of the world. Ephesians 1:4 says, *"...before the foundation of the world..."* He chose Philip Chapman to become a follower of His. That's amazing for me to think about. That is awesome.

We're engaged in a spiritual battle, just in regular life. We're just like Reggie. We need someone to intervene on our behalf. We need a loving heavenly Father Who not only chooses us but offers us a new abundant life so we can thrive. To help us understand this process, we're going to work through the first ten verses of Ephesians 2.

Grim reality (verses 1–3)

Our first point today is that there is a grim reality. We've got bad news, friends! You came to church to hear some bad news. Listen to the first three verses of Ephesians 2:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Who is Paul talking to? Who is his audience? It's always important when you're studying God's Word to understand who the audience is. It's Christians. He's talking to Christians. And he's talking to you and me, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ. He's saying, "You know what? I want you to remember who you used to be. This was you before."

These verses serve a dual purpose. For believers, it's, "Hey, remember who you were." For people who don't follow Jesus—people who are non-believers, people who haven't committed their life to Jesus Christ—it's saying, "Hey, this is super bad news, but there's going to be some hope shortly. There is hope for redemption."

We need to understand that with this grim reality, with this bad news, there is good news. This is really a tough pill to swallow—just like Reggie had parasites living inside him and without medical intervention he probably would not have survived. In the same manner, recognizing our spiritual condition is absolutely vital for us to understand. We need to acknowledge that we need God. It's vital for us to understand our condition, so we can understand what that glorious future with God is all about. Digging into these verses, we see Paul speaking directly and candidly about our spiritual condition. He says we were dead in our sins. Not physically dead, but spiritually dead. We were dead men walking.

Romans 6:23 says, *"For the wages of sin..."* That means what you get paid. This is what you earn when you sin. If you sinned one time, if you were a jerk to that kid at school, this is what you get. If you looked at that video with intentionality, this is what you get. If you were not righteously angry, this is what you get. What do you get? Death. *"For the wages of sin is death..."* Adam and Eve ate fruit one time, then death. You sinned, now you deserve death. I told you this is bad news. This is a grim reality. You no longer get to enjoy all that God has for you, all that you were designed for.

Those of us who know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior need to remember where we were, what we were doing in our lives. Maybe some of you here know Jesus Christ and call Him your Savior, but you're not living like it. You forgot that the old is dead and that God has created you new. The apostle John makes it clear when he says, *"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him"* (1 John 2:15). Some of us really dig into things in this world that we love, so much that these become everything in our lives. We see that a lot with sports. We see that a lot with family. I know a lot of moms and dads who are struggling in their marriages because it's all about the kids. Some of you may do it with alcohol, TV, all kinds of things that make you say, "Oh, I love this world so much."

What does John say? God's love is not in you if you're embracing this world. We've got to remember, "Only one life, soon will pass, only what's done for Christ will last." Everything else is gone. If you haven't accepted Jesus Christ, understand that what I'm explaining right now in these verses is explaining your present-day experience. You do not have hope. You have no hope. You're dead. I'm not saying this; this is what the Bible says. You're spiritually dead! But there is hope. We'll talk about that in a minute.

There's another layer described in Ephesians. We're not just making poor decisions, we're being driven by the prince of the power of the air, Satan himself. This aligns perfectly with what Jesus said to the Pharisees in John 8:44: *"You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires."* He's warning the Pharisees, "Hey, you think you're doing all this good stuff." We've talked about Saul (later Paul), who thought he was doing all these great things for God but really was just serving the devil.

Think of all the things you do, the things you're giving to others. You even come to church but you're coming just to check it off the list. "Went to church. Check. Now, let's get to the Bears game. Aw, do I have to go to Sunday night church too? What? I'm supposed to give to the church? I'm supposed to read the Bible?" All this stuff starts to make you feel a little uncomfortable.

In Ephesians 2:3, Paul tells us that we *"were by nature children of wrath."* Do you know what that phrase means, "children of wrath"? It means you're pointed to a path that leads to divine judgment and separation. It means if you stay on that path, there is separation. There is no hope for connection. You have no hope.

Obviously, this sounds discouraging, but don't lose hope. There is hope. That's why the church exists. That's why Jesus ignited the church age. That's why God has you here today to hear this message. It's about this incredible power of God's redemptive love, and it's available for you right now. Right this very second. That's why belonging to the church matters so much. That's why we're spending so much energy on this. It's not just a community; it's a fellowship underpinned by God's transformative love and His amazing grace. That's what being part of the body of Christ is all about. And this understanding naturally guides us to our next point, which is redeeming love.

Redeeming love (verses 4–5)

Now, if the beginning of Ephesians 2 paints a bleak picture, these next words start to be that sunrise we sang about a little earlier, the sunrise breaking the darkness. It says, *"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ."*

"But God..." Two simple words, yet we have to understand that they change everything. We were lost, but God found us. We were without hope, but God gave us an entire future. But God! It has nothing to do with us. But God. And we're not just given this life; we're made alive together in Christ.

Galatians 2:20 says, *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live..."* There's that "I live." It's because of Jesus. We get to live with Christ. It's not just about being saved from something—being converted, being adopted, being born again. It's not just about being saved from something; it's being saved for something. God wants us to live a life full of purpose and love.

That's a conversation my wife and I have all the time. What are we actually doing? What's our purpose? How are we serving God this way? It's all being funneled through our view of what the Bible is teaching us. My friend Aaron Wagner is here; we're going to be teaching a class on apologetics. The whole point is how are we sifting everything through God's Word and what Jesus wants us to do. How is that just what we do in our regular lives?

In the Bible there is a clear message that God took the first step toward us. It wasn't us. The apostle John tells us God showed His love by sending His Son Jesus to offer His life, to offer us forgiveness. It's not about how much we love God. Let me say that one more time in case you weren't listening. It's not about how much we love God.

Think about it as a parent. Many of you are parents. Many times your kids probably don't love you too much. But it's amazing how parents love their kids, no matter what. Infinitely more than that, this is about how much God loves us. It's not about how much we love God; it's about how much God loves us. Some people think, "You don't know what I've done. You don't know what I've seen. You don't know what's in my closet. You don't know what I've been struggling with for years and years." You know what the Bible says? *"But God... But God..."* That's where you get the divine interruption in your life. "I'm going this direction and everything's going great. I'm doing whatever I want to do. But God...!"

Look at Paul. He's loving life. "I'm going to Damascus. I'm going to get those people following the Way!" But God...

I hope I'm not just preaching to people who don't follow Jesus. I'm preaching to people who have loved Jesus for a long time, because we need to wake up as well. "But God" has to be the theme in our hearts. We're running in a different direction. "Okay, God, You want me there? Okay, I'll do that. That doesn't make sense."

There's another phrase that puts us in awe. At the end it says, *"By grace you have been saved..."* What does that mean? Grace is God's unmerited favor. You don't deserve it. You don't deserve anything. Romans 5:8 affirms it: *"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* That's phenomenal. Titus 3:5 says, *"He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy."* What? That doesn't make sense. But that's God.

So remember this. God's love is greater than our failing. God's love is greater than our doubt. God's love is greater than any force that seeks to hold us down. I go right back to those sins that you're going crazy with right now in your life. I don't know what they are; you know what they are, though. You and God do. Your spouse might not even know. Something may be holding you down. You need to get rid of it, but you can't get rid of it. But God can. So whether you've known God for years or you're hearing about this for the first time, understand that there is a redeeming love, there is a power that God offers through His grace and it's available to every single person here.

An ascended position (verses 6–7)

This incredible grace doesn't just rescue us. It doesn't just make us alive. It puts us in an ascended position. It elevates us. That's amazing to think about. Verses six and seven state, *"...and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."* Let that sink in. Raised us up with Jesus Christ? What?

We recently put the four girls to bed. Usually Shari or I will go up there and get them to sleep, in a sense. Four girls in two sets of bunk beds.

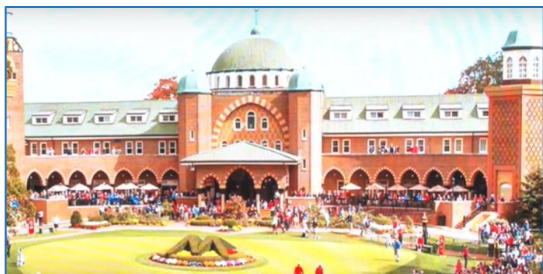
Gigi, our recently adopted eight-year-old asks me, out of the blue, "Hey, Dad. Are you rich?" I smiled and said, "Yes. Compared to the world, honey, I am rich. But so are you." Gigi, the wise one she is, shouts up to Gemima, "Hey, Gemima! I'm rich." Now, many of you probably don't know Gemima. She's the one who has a little bit of sass in her. She shouts down to Gigi, "You don't have a dime to your name, Gigi!"

That's when I said, "Gemima, you and Gigi are both rich, because you're my daughters; all that I have is yours. It's all yours."

That's exactly the same thing we see in these two verses. You see, when we are elevated and seated in heavenly places with Christ, we inherit the immeasurable riches of God's grace. We are in essence spiritually rich. All that God has is ours because we're His children. This is captured very well in Romans 8:17: *"...and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ."*

Imagine the Creator of all things saying to you, "You belong here. You belong with Me." That's the message I'm telling you. You don't have to do anything with your identity. You don't have to wear a certain type of clothing. You don't have to woo God. You don't have to do anything. God is saying, "You belong with Me. That's what you were designed for."

We're made in the image of God and He wants you to come to Him. You may be wondering, "What in the world does being *seated in heavenly places*" mean?" It's not a metaphor. It's actually a spiritual reality. You see, when you're adopted by Jesus Christ, when you're born again in God's family, your position shifts. You go from spiritual poverty—having nothing—to spiritual richness. You go from separation—where there's zero hope—to absolute connection, to relationship.



I don't want to gloss over this too much because this concept can be challenging. In earthly terms, when we elevate ourselves in our world that usually is followed by pride, by a sense of entitlement. "Ah, welcome to the club." That's the opposite of what being a Christian is all about. In fact, when you give your life to Jesus Christ, your elevated position actually causes you greater humility and a sense of service. For those of you who don't know Jesus, this is an invitation that's wide open for you. It's not an exclusive club.

If you want to see an exclusive club, consider this place. This is Medinah Country Club. It's about 30-40 minutes from where we're seated right now. You know how you become a member there? You have to be invited; I don't even know by whom. Then it's rumored the initiation fee, the initial fee to get into the club is \$85,000. Plus if you're a senior member, \$1,000 a month. Now, people who belong to a club like this are in a pretty elite group, right? There aren't many people who get to be in that club. But it's only an elite club from an earthly vantage point. You see, the stunning difference is that the Kingdom of God is wide open for all people. There's no prohibitive fee, no exclusive invitation needed. God is giving you the invitation right now. You can allow the Holy Spirit to do that work; maybe He already has. Maybe even right now you've been adopted while you're in this service. God's riches are freely given to all who believe.

Have you ever seen an American Express card? It says "Unlimited." If I had one of these in my wallet, when I pull that out, it never runs out. That's what we have in Christ. It's always paid for. It's got everything we could give away, spiritual stuff, and it never runs out. We're given an unlimited supply of spiritual riches. While this is absolutely a wonderful truth, it could be very challenging because "*seated...in the heavenly places*" doesn't mean we sit back and relax. It actually should mean that we take on this challenge and move forward. There's spiritual warfare that actually happens when we give our lives to Jesus Christ. Jesus said in Matthew 16:24 that we are to take up our cross every single day and follow Him, knowing that it could cost us everything.

Your whole family can hate you. Your friends can hate you. I remember at one point in my life, I had to give up multiple friends because I was trying to learn how to walk with Jesus in an honoring way, but my friends took me to the wrong places in my heart and mind. That was the toughest thing I've ever had to do.

We're called to be ambassadors. Second Corinthians 5:20 tells us, "*Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ.*" We're in this world, serving God as His ambassadors. So don't let this incredible gift God has given you lull you into spiritual complacency. Embrace it, thinking, "All right, I've got to start doing life a little bit different. I've got to stop trying to only make money. I've got to have a different angle on life. Who cares what I want. Okay, God, what do You want?"

That's hard to do, friends, to humble yourself and say, "Okay. I'm done doing this. I'm done chasing this. I'm done going after this." We have to just stop and say, "What do You want?"

First Peter 2:9 says, "*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*" We've not only been chosen; we've been elevated in Christ. We're welcomed into a brand-new family, a holy nation. This is where we belong. We're seated in the heavenly places. Yet let's not forget that this elevation—this richness in Christ, this immeasurable gift—comes at a price...that you don't have to pay. It's a price we don't have to pay, but it's a price that was paid for us.

Costly gift (verses 8–9)

Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*"

There's no initiation fee, no monthly dues, no exclusive invitations. God is inviting everyone because Jesus paid it all—in advance. It's a gift that cost Him everything and it's freely given to you. In the economy of God, His grace is beyond anything we can imagine. You see, sometimes we don't think about the gift God has given us in Jesus Christ. It was a costly gift. Once you start understanding the actual cost of something, you start understanding the value of it, then your life changes in how you're treating it.

Let me explain it in a different way. Think about the most expensive gift you've ever received in your life. Oh, I've never gotten a car with a big bow on it, but in 1984, I received an Apple 2C computer. Man, we had no idea what to do with this computer. My brothers and I just looked at it. Then we found out it cost \$1,295. In today's dollars, that's \$3,800. All of a sudden, this computer became a little treasure, and we started treating it differently. We weren't rough with it. We made sure it was on the shelf securely. My parents spent a lot of money on that. We started valuing it so much more and we lived differently because of it.

Now, there's a parallel here. Like this computer, the gospel is a gift that is profoundly more special, profoundly more expensive, than an Apple 2C computer. How are we treating this beautiful gift from God? First Peter 1:18 says, "*You were*

ransomed...” You were stuck with the devil and doing his bidding. God paid the ransom, not with silver or gold, *“but with the precious blood of Christ.”* Salvation is free to us, but it cost God everything when He didn’t spare His Son. This should ignite a sense of profound gratitude from each of us. It should call us to action.

Now, especially for those who are contemplating this right now, maybe the Holy Spirit is moving in your heart; maybe you don’t know Jesus yet. I’m going to keep coming back to you.

Let me bring Reggie’s story up again. You see, Reggie still had parasites in him when we adopted him. When his adoption was sealed, he still had a lot of bad things going on. We’re still nurturing Reggie today. He’s back there ushering for us today. He didn’t have to be perfect to come into our family.

In the same way, you don’t have to be perfect. You can’t be. Come to God’s family. Allow the Holy Spirit to work in your heart. Stop fighting. Stop suppressing the truth. Come to His family and allow that healing process to start working from the inside out. That’s what God will do with you. He’ll keep nurturing you, keep strengthening you. Accepting Jesus into your life doesn’t mean you have to be perfect. Allow Him to strengthen you. Allow His grace to overwhelm you. So the question is not whether the gift is available to you. It is. The question is: will you accept it? Will you live in a way that honors the high price paid for your freedom?

Empowered for service (verse 10)

This is why, as followers of Jesus Christ, we’re empowered for service. You see, the gospel isn’t just about what Jesus has done for us; it’s about what He wants to do through us. It’s how He wants to use us. Ephesians 2:10 says, *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”* You see, our elevated position—the gift we have been given—is not for our own benefit. We’ve been given a mandate to serve God, to worship Him daily. That’s why we’re to take up our cross every single day. That’s why we’re to welcome persecution. “Bring it on. Whatever You want, God, bring it on. I want to follow You.”

Perhaps you’ve heard the phrase, “Too heavenly minded to be any earthly good.” That’s not what the Christian spirit is. The Bible teaches us that Jesus came to serve, not to be served, and we should emulate that. We aren’t just saved from something; we’re saved for something. We’re saved to be God’s hands and feet right here in this world. The costly gift of God’s grace should empower each one of us. First Peter 4:10 says, *“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another.”*

As we come to the end of this message, I want to share a fictional story with you. I just made it up but I think it’s going to help us understand a little bit more about the amazing grace that God offers us. Imagine two individuals go to heaven and they’re at the pearly gates. The gatekeeper says, “All right, let me have you come up here. Why should I let you through these gates?” The first man says to him, “Well, I’ve revolutionized the world of technology. I donated \$35.8 billion to global health. I gave \$25.3 billion to U.S. education. I pushed \$10 billion into climate change initiatives. I saved millions of lives were going to die from malaria. I’ve done everything I could to make a huge impact on this world.” The gatekeeper looked at him and said, “I’m sorry, sir. That just wasn’t enough. Next, please.”

He calls up the next guy who is barely able to walk. He says, “Sir, why should you come through the gates of heaven?” “I don’t know. I shouldn’t. I’ve been a criminal my entire life. I had this whole plan. I had all these people involved. I was doing all this stuff because it got really big. But then I got caught stealing. I went to trial and was sentenced. At my sentencing, there were two other guys getting their penalty as well. I don’t know. I was really angry at both of these guys, but something happened in my heart. I just started feeling bad for that one guy. Then, I don’t even know why, but I said, ‘Will you remember me when you die?’ I don’t even know why I said that.” The gatekeeper goes, “Wait a minute. Who did you ask, ‘Will you remember me?’” He goes, “I don’t even know his name but he was the guy on the middle cross. He said to me, ‘Today you’ll be with me in paradise.’” The gatekeeper said, “Welcome. We’ve been expecting you.”