

INTRO - The Army has had an advertising and recruitment campaigns for years that all of you know. 'Be All You Can Be.' In other words people are called to be fulfill their potential and live their life to the fullest. That is a sentiment most of us embrace.

I. In order to fulfill our potential as God's people, we need to know who we really are. If we don't, that can be a problem. Do you remember the Hans Christian Anderson story of 'The Ugly Duckling?' The problem was the baby swan did not know who it was. It thought it was a duck.

A. Many in the church today don't necessarily know who they are. Christians often have the wrong idea about the church. That can cause problems in being all we can be for God.

1. Please look at the cover of your bulletin. What is pictured? Is that St. John? Sometimes people think the church is a building. But, while that is the St. John Church building, it is NOT St. John.

2. Sometimes people think the church is an organization, sort of like a business chain with multiple locations. But, the church is essentially not an organization.

3. Sometimes people think the church is the pastor. When I was pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in St. Louis, I once had a young boy walking by the church ask me if I was St. Paul. No, the church is the pastor.

B. But, today's lesson tells us what the church is.

1. Look at verse 19. **¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household,**

A. This says **You** are fellow citizens with God's people. You are **members of God's household.**

B. According to this verse You are the church, you are citizens or members of this group of people, part of the people who form the house of God.

2. Look at verses 21 and 22. **²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises 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.**

1. This is saying the church is a building, a temple made up of people built on the faith of Scriptures.

2. It also says, these people are the dwelling place for God to abide in this world.

3. My friends, these verses make quite obvious who you are as you seek to live a full life. You are the people of God. You are the church.

II. But this summer we have been looking at the Epistle lessons because they give practical direction to God's people. They give us guidance in what to do. In that Army commercial, supposedly the way that a person can reach fulfillment is by joining the Army. **How** can we reach our potential as the people God? You may not see it, but there is direction in this reading.

A. First, look at verses 19 and 20. **¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household,**²⁰

built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

1. How do we become the church, the household of God?
 2. It happens when we are built on the right foundation. As verse 20 says, **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.**
- B. We find the apostles and prophets in the Bible.
1. If we become the church as we are built on the teaching of the apostles and prophets, the practical guidance is to use God's Word - read the Bible.
 2. You know, we have a congregational schedule for this year that would help us in reading the Bible, and in being built and joined together, as we read it together.
 3. In fact, this week's Epistle was in the chapter assigned for reading on Wednesday.
- C. But, this verse doesn't just call on God's people to be built up as the church through Bible reading. The focus needs to be right.
1. Verse 20 says, **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, WITH CHRIST JESUS HIMSELF AS THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE.**
 2. The practical implication of this is, don't just read the Bible, but focus on what it says about Jesus.
 3. Look at the Old Testament and how the people looked ahead to the Messiah, and look at how Jesus fulfills those prophecies.
 4. Look at the Gospels and see how Jesus ministered to people, and taught, and suffered for the sins of the world, and how he rose.
 5. Look at the epistles and see the practical result of what Jesus life and death and resurrection means for God's people.
- D. The practical direction from today's lesson which says we are verse 20 says, **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone** is that we read the Bible and focus on Jesus.

III. But, there is one more bit of direction in this verse.

- A. When God's people are ²⁰ **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone** the Gospel of Jesus brings peace.
1. Ephesians 2 is talking about peace between the Jews and Gentiles. Verses 13 and 14 say, **13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,**
 2. This might be especially practical in a world where today there is such hostility between Jew and Gentile, Moslem and Christian in the Middle East. Seek, if possible, to live in peace and love.
The source of this peace according to verse 13 is the blood of Jesus. His forgiveness for us can help us to forgive and live in peace.
- B. But, this is also practical for every congregation. As vice president of the Northwest District I get to deal with troubles in churches. There is conflict in the church, and this often leads to a lack of peace.

1. There are disagreements in our congregation at times too. That is natural when sinful people join together. But, if there is any place that people should be able deal in love to bring peace, in patience, and kindness, and forgiveness it should be the church.
 2. It is not so much having disagreement, but how those disagreements are dealt with.
 3. Even if we have a disagreement, can we treat each other in patience, in kindness, in peace and love?
- C. So, the practical advice from today's Epistle is not only to be built up by Scripture, but be built up and strengthened to bring and live in peace and love Which we have in the blood of Jesus.

CONCLUSION - In today's book stores there is a brand of book that was not always there. Bookstores are full of 'self-help' books, books that help people be healthier, fix their homes, manage their money, just about anything.

You people are here today as the people of God. And, the Bible is the best self help book there is. If you want to grow, improve yourself, be strengthened as a Christian. Read the Bible, focus on Jesus, and use your faith for peace and love.