

We are the House of God

DAVE BAST

Maybe you have had this experience at some time or other: You are visiting with friends, playing cards or some other game, and one of your hosts makes a move that surprises you. “Wait; how can you do that,” you demand. “House rules,” comes the reply. “That’s how we play around here.” So, what are the special house rules in God’s household? We will talk about that today on *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and Scott, we are now in program number four of a five-part series...a pretty interesting series, if we do say so ourselves...but it is a series about images for the Church in the New Testament.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and as we said in the opening program of this series, the more multifaceted something is, the more images we use, because no one image could capture it; and that is certainly true of the Church. As we have seen so far, it is the body of Christ, it is the bride of Christ, it is the family of God. Today we are going to look at that it is God’s house or God’s household; and our final program in this series will be on the Church as the temple of God.

DAVE BAST

So, you think immediately of the house of God as a church building maybe. That is natural enough. So, you tell your kids: Hey, stop ramming around; be reverent; this is God’s house, at least we used to. We heard that when we were kids. I don’t know if that still happens anymore, but...the fact is, there were no church buildings in the New Testament, and not for several hundred years later. The earliest evidence of purpose-built churches comes from about the 4th Century.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; well, the Church was kind of underground. It was illegal in the Roman Empire up until the time of Constantine in the early 4th Century. Constantine became a Christian around the year 313. So, the Church was literally underground, and they met in actual houses—they met in people’s homes; that was, the church in Corinth didn’t have a building at Main Street and 2nd Street. They met in people’s homes.

DAVE BAST

And there is interesting evidence of that in the New Testament. Toward the end of a number of Paul’s letters, he gives greetings—personal greetings. Here is an example from Romans 16; Paul writes: ³Greet Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. ⁵Greet also the church in their house...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

So, there it is.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And also in Corinthians, at the end of 1 Corinthians: ¹⁹The churches of Asia send you greetings: Aquila and Prisca (Priscilla), together with the church in their house, they send you hearty greetings in the Lord. Then in Colossians 4, at the end of Colossians: ¹⁵Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha, and the church in her house.

DAVE BAST

So, wherever the Gospel took root, there had to be someone who was willing to take the risk of opening their home for these meetings.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And so, they must have been tiny, by and large, the congregations.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; nobody had very large homes; but it is the same today, actually. The house churches in China, house churches in Iran, places again where the church...it is not totally illegal in China, but it is pretty highly regulated; so, if you don't want to be kind of a state run church, then you meet in someone's home, as did the earliest believers.

DAVE BAST

So, you know, for starters, if we think of the Church as God's house, there were literal houses, and these were small fellowships; and I think that actually gives quite a bit of insight into so much of the New Testament teaching that is addressed to these congregations, because these were all people who knew each other; they knew each other's flaws and faults. When you are with a small group...when you are meeting under the same roof...it is easy to rub each other the wrong way. So, it wasn't like a mega-church, where people just show up and sit in a seat for an hour and consume a worship experience and then go their separate ways.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; you couldn't be anonymous in these churches. In fact, this ties back a little bit, Dave, to our previous program, that the Church is a family—the family of God is another biblical image for the Church, which we looked at in the previous program—and families live in houses; and indeed, you know, the Apostle Paul...Ephesians 2 is a passage that has cropped up numerous times in this series so far, but Paul writes in Ephesians 2:

¹³But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two, so making peace; ¹⁶and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

DAVE BAST

And Paul goes on: ¹⁷He came (he, that is, Christ) and preached peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him, we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of

God...(there it is)...²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Now, in our next program on the temple—the church as the temple—we will deal with Christ as the cornerstone; so we will leave that to one side for now, but notice something important here, Dave...and we see this happening already in the earliest chapters of the book of Acts, that this house...this new household of faith that is the Church was built on a foundation, and what was the foundation? Of course, we all know all buildings need a good foundation. I have been watching a construction project near a nearby mall; they spent weeks pouring the footings and the concrete, because if the footings are wrong, the whole building is going to go; and so, what is the foundation for the house of God? The teaching of the apostles, which is so interesting.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; so, Christ Jesus is the cornerstone; and as you said, Scott, we are going to look ahead and talk more about that in our final program. We have already looked at this Ephesians 2 passage, as we have noted, and noted the idea of reconciliation of people being brought together. They are brought under the same roof—they are brought into the same family—they are brought into the same household—but this foundation idea...we want to draw attention to that just a little bit more. You are right; in a construction project, Scott, if you want to build a skyscraper, way, way high, you start by going way, way low...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

You dig deep; and the foundation, Paul says here, is the apostles; not necessarily meaning the person of the apostles. You think of what Jesus said to Peter: You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, exactly.

DAVE BAST

Not meaning Peter as a person, so much, but Peter's confession.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; his faith. So, this is what the Church has defined as orthodoxy from the very beginning. It is what the apostles taught. How they interpreted the meaning of Jesus' life and ministry, his death, resurrection, ascension. What does the Church believe? It believes what the apostles taught, which is why the earliest creed of the Church is called the Apostles' Creed; not that any one of the apostles...or all of them actually wrote it, but it is a summary of the apostles' teaching. That is our foundation; that is what we are built on.

DAVE BAST

Right; in fact, you mentioned early creeds. There is another creed, the Nicene Creed, which is perhaps less familiar to some of our listeners, but in the article of the Nicene Creed about the Church...the Apostles' Creed says: I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, or the Holy Universal Church. The Nicene Creed says: We believe one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. There it is again; this idea that the apostles were chosen by Jesus as eyewitnesses to his resurrection, and as sort of authorized, if you think of an authorized dealer in some product. These are the people authorized to teach the truth of the meaning of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so, the foundation is important, and it is the apostles. It is important for the whole house of God, that is, the Church; but it is also important for us as individual believers; and Jesus told a famous story about that,

which we will turn to in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are talking about the Church as God's house—God's household—and we have just been, Scott, pointing out the importance of the foundation for any house, and the foundation for the house of God, or the household of God, is Jesus as the cornerstone, and the apostles' witness to him as the foundation on which the house is built; but that brings to mind a familiar story that Jesus told.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is from Matthew 7, and this is the last word of the Sermon on the Mount, as Matthew presented it in Matthew 5, 6, and 7. Starting at verse 24, Jesus said: Therefore, anyone who hears these words of mine...(now, that would be a summation of the whole Sermon on the Mount)...therefore, anyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶But, everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain came down, the streams rose, the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

You know, I have often noted, Dave, that at seminary we always encourage our students to end with grace...you want to end with hope. Well, here is the end of Jesus' most famous sermon, and the last word is *crash!*

DAVE BAST

Crash, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is sort of like, well, I guess Jesus isn't one of my students because this ends rather dire; but, what Jesus is doing here at the summation of the Sermon on the Mount as Matthew records it for us, is saying that everything that Jesus taught in the Beatitudes and everything in the Sermon on the Mount, is vital. It is the foundation for a good life, and if you don't heed it, you will crash; and it seems like a harsh way to end the most famous sermon Jesus ever preached, but there it is. That is how important this is.

DAVE BAST

Well, and I think we have a tendency, many of us...maybe most of us...to read the Bible selectively; and we love to pick out the comforting parts and the encouraging parts and the promises and all that, and we kind of skate past the harder, more warning-like sections; and Jesus really ends his sermon, not just with this parable, but with a whole string of words that emphasize the crucial nature of listening to him and doing what he says—of actually living it—putting it into practice. So, just before this parable, for example, he says: ^{21a}“Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” is going to enter the kingdom.” It is not your verbal profession. We talked in the first segment of this program about the importance of believing the Bible, of accepting the New Testament, of building the Church on the apostles' teaching; but it is not just doctrine that is important either; and that is the point Jesus wants to emphasize in this little parable about two houses and two builders, which are really two different lives, aren't they?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; probably in the ancient world, by all outward appearances you wouldn't be able to tell the difference between the wise man's house and the foolish man's house. They would probably look the same. Most houses in the ancient world followed the same blueprint, if you will; but it is what is underneath that is the key. It is also interesting to notice here, Dave, in terms of we were talking about individual believers, but we are also talking about the Church as a whole in this program, it is not that the wise man is spared the storms. The storms come equally to both, right? Both houses face the same conditions. So again, Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount he said: You are going to be persecuted. They are going to persecute me; they are

going to persecute you who follow me. So, it is not as though if you are a faithful church or a faithful believer, you will be spared the storms of life. No; but you will survive the storms of life that come if you are built on the foundation of faith in Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and notice, too, the different adjectives he uses to describe these two individuals. So, one is wise; the other is a fool, Jesus says. Literally, he calls him a moron...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Moranos (sic) [moro] in Greek, yes.

DAVE BAST

Yes, a common Greek word for fool; but that doesn't imply anything about his intelligence or his IQ, because in New Testament terms, a fool is not a particularly stupid person, or someone who cannot reason out a problem. A fool may be very highly educated...very intelligent...in fact, this is the whole point of the Bible's wisdom tradition, isn't it, going back to the Old Testament.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

The thing about a fool is, he just doesn't think. He doesn't pay much attention. He sort of puts his life down and lives it out without ever considering something as critical and basic as your fundamental...there is the word *foundation*...fundamental choices.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have talked about wisdom literature here on *Groundwork* in the past, and when we did we noted the old adage that fools are often in error but never in doubt. They may be very, very mistaken, but you cannot teach a fool anything. That is one of the vain hallmarks of folly biblically. You just cannot teach a fool anything. Even if they have the same thing happen to them three times in a row; you say, you know, if you don't do that one thing, you won't suffer that second thing, but they do it again anyway because they are unteachable. Well obviously, to accept Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, many of which were new teachings...new appropriations of the Old Testament law...you have to be a teachable person, which makes you wise, in order to be, you know, the person who builds on a foundation that isn't going to go kerflooy when the storms of life blow against it.

DAVE BAST

So you think back...okay, are you familiar at all with the Sermon on the Mount? What are these teachings of Jesus? Be salt and light in the world...in your community; love your enemies; when someone insults you, you accept it without retaliation; you practice your faith—your religion—sincerely and in secret, you don't do it for show before other people...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

You forgive those who sin against you, as you expect God to forgive you; you don't judge lest you be judged; all these wonderful things that Jesus so memorably expresses in this sermon, and then, just so that we don't miss the point, he tells this little story of the two builders, and explains what the meaning actually is. So, Jesus says: The wise person is the one who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice. The fool is the one who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; it is how we live. It is the shape of our discipleship. So, we said in the first segment the Church as the house of God is built on the foundation of the apostles and on their teachings, and that is true; but, faith is never an intellectual exercise; it is not just assent to a series of propositions or signing off on a catechism: Yes, yes, yes; I believe all that. If you believe all that and don't live it, it doesn't count. Jesus would call that hypocrisy. It is a shallow person...it is a foundationless person. So, putting it into practice is pretty important.

DAVE BAST

It absolutely is. We have mentioned the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus' practical instructions—practical teachings; but there are also passages later in the New Testament, in the epistles, that are known as house rules or household rules. These are the rules for behavior in the household of God, and we really want to pay attention to one or two of those before we wrap up this program.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast. This program is focusing on the Church as God's house, or now we want to think of the idea of household...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

The people living inside the house.

SCOTT HOEZEE

By the way, Dave, we just said it now. It is one of our standard taglines: At *Groundwork*, we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives; and that is what this program has largely been about—the foundation that upholds the house of God...the wise man who built...

DAVE BAST

It's the scripture, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; you build your house on the rock, and so forth; but, inside those houses, Dave, it is important to follow the house rules; and we get some of those in the New Testament, particularly later in the New Testament, in the pastoral epistles as the Church gets more established, the last things Paul wrote often had some instructions.

DAVE BAST

Right; so Paul writes: ¹ Timothy 3:14 Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions ¹⁵so that if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the Church of the Living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

So, all these ideas kind of come together in that verse, don't they? Pillar, foundation—what is holding it up; and also instructions. These are the house rules if you are part of the household of God; and the truth is, this is an idea of a mixture of people. We have seen that before, haven't we? It is a family. You don't choose your family; you don't choose your fellow church members. Sometimes we would like to think: Maybe I would like to belong to a church that is by invitation only, you know, where you can kind of sort folks out and just get the right kind, but that is not how the Church works; and in an ancient household, there would have been

a whole variety of people living under the same roof, not just the nuclear family, but the extended family, servants, slaves.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And again, in our previous program, the image in the third program of this five-part series was the family of God; and as people have noted, you know, in life you can choose your friends, but you cannot choose your family. Your family...you are born into it. Your brothers and sisters are who they are. Your parents and uncles and aunts are who they are. You cannot choose your family; you have to find a way to live with them; and so, Paul and the other apostles...and we will maybe have a passage from Peter in just a bit before we close the program...they had to give some rules. Some what the Germans call *Haustafeln*—house rules. This is how we live together. In Colossians 3 Paul has some of this. Some of this is a little bit sensitive. It has kind of got some cultural baggage from then, and it may clash with some of our cultural sensitivities now, but Paul did have some advice.

DAVE BAST

He wrote: ¹⁸Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly. ²⁰Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. ²¹Fathers, do not provoke your children or they may lose heart. ²²Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. ²³Whatever your task, put yourselves into it as done for the Lord, ²⁴since you know that it is from the Lord that you will receive the inheritance as your reward.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there it is. Practical nuts and bolts instructions; and again, we fall back a little bit here: Slaves...we believe slavery is wrong now. I think Paul believed it was wrong, too. We did a program on Philemon some while back, where Paul is undermining the whole idea of slavery, so it is kind of in there; but in that culture, there still were slaves, and there were husbands and wives and children and so forth. So, how do we live together? Back in the day of Paul, we may forget, this was a little radical. Nobody gave instructions to fathers and husbands...

DAVE BAST

Or masters.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; they could kind of do what they wanted, right? But here, Paul is saying: No, you cannot just do whatever you want if you are a husband. You cannot do whatever you want if you are a father. Men; behave. You behave, too. We are not going to just tell that to your children. Fathers, you behave.

DAVE BAST

Yes; so, what Paul is really doing in these house rules is removing a double standard...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

This becomes especially clear in the many New Testament passages that address sexual purity. We have talked about that in other programs. We will talk about it in the next program, too. But, there was a notorious double standard in the ancient world. As you just said, Scott, husbands could do pretty much what they wanted as long as it wasn't with another man's wife. Masters could put their slaves to death; they could put their children to death under Roman law, if things got bad enough; but Paul is addressing everyone as if they are a responsible agent, answerable to God. The idea under all of this is that we have a higher master. All of us have a higher master to whom we are accountable. He is the Lord of the household, and his rules apply equally to all.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and that is what is really interesting about all of Paul's advice to wives, husbands, children, masters, slaves—anybody in society. The reason to behave a certain way and to treat people well was always the same. You do these things as unto the Lord. It is grounded in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. If Jesus is Lord, that means he is your master—he is over you; and so, everything you do, you should do it just like you would do if you were doing it to Jesus himself. That grounds all of these house rules for the household of God pretty deeply in the Lordship of Jesus himself.

DAVE BAST

Maybe we could end with one last household passage from the New Testament. You alluded to it, Scott. It is from 1 Peter Chapter 4, where Peter writes: ⁷The end of all things is near; therefore, be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. ⁸Above all, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹Offer hospitality to one another; ¹⁰each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace. ¹⁵And if you suffer, it should not be as a criminal, or even as a meddler...¹⁶ but if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. ¹⁷For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the Gospel of God?

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there it is. In the Church, we are the household of God; and within that household, we are built on the foundation of the apostles, built on the rock that is Christ; and in that household, we are called to love all. We are the house of God. Thanks be to God.

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast, and we hope that you will join us again next time as we study the biblical image of the Church as the temple of God.

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you. Suggest topics you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs.

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