

THE CHURCH THAT CHRIST BUILDS

Ephesians 2:19-22 (No. 13)

Treasuring Christ Church – Pastor Boyd Johnson

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INTRODUCTION

The great theme of Ephesians is the church. The focus in these early chapters isn't so much on the church in Ephesus, but the church universal—all the people who trust in Christ worldwide for all time.

In Chapter 1, Paul showed us all that God has done for us. All the blessings he has given us—the church—in Christ.

In Chapter 2, Paul has been showing us what God has done in us. God is building his church by resurrecting us from the dead—since we were dead in our trespasses. And he is building his church across ethnic lines.

Now, whether you came to Christ as a Jew or a Gentile isn't important. What is important is that you came to Christ. God saved you. And he has shown us that the church exists because of Jesus. Jesus' death on the cross made a way for us to have peace with God and become his people.

As we come to the final verses of chapter 2, Paul gives us a marvelous description of the church in four parts. To reacquaint ourselves with the passage, I want to read 2:11-22.

Eph 2:11-22 ¹¹ Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have 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 members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

In verses 19-22, Paul gives us four descriptions of the church that Christ builds.

I. THE CHURCH THAT CHRIST BUILDS IS A ROYAL, HOLY FAMILY

v.19: So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

Paul reaches back to v. 12 where he described the status of Gentiles before the cross:

“remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”

The two words strangers and aliens occur in both verses. Before the cross, we were strangers and aliens to God.

Strangers: ξενος (we get xenophobia): Foreigner; a person allowed to be in the country but with limited rights. Like a tourist traveling in a foreign land.

Alien: πάροικος A foreigner who lives in the country. Like a person legally residing in a foreign country with a residence visa

In other words, in relation to God’s kingdom, we were outsiders. We didn’t belong.

But now, we are “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” So, now, you belong to God in a way you never did before. God changed two things about you when he saved you.

First, your birth certificate changed. You were born again into a new kingdom. And on that birth certificate it doesn’t read citizen of the world, but citizen of God’s kingdom. You’re now a “fellow citizen” with all the saints. Saints means holy ones, those set apart. Here, it means all the believers of every age. You are a citizen of God’s kingdom with Paul, Peter, Abraham, Moses, David—these are your fellow citizens. You were living on a passport in a foreign land. But now, your birth certificate changed to read citizen of God’s kingdom. You really do belong in God’s kingdom—it says so on your new-birth certificate.

The **second** thing God changed—and this one is greater than the first—is that your bloodline changed. You’re now a member of the household of God. That means, you’re part of God’s family. The love of God for us is so great, he didn’t just invite us into his kingdom and give us citizenship. He went further and brought us into his royal family. Now, you are a brother/sister of Jesus and all God’s people. So, now you have a home. You have a place to call home—as a citizen in God’s kingdom. You have a family to come home to—as a member of God’s family. The church that Christ builds is a royal family.

Second...

II. THE CHURCH THAT CHRIST BUILDS IS FOUNDED ON CHRIST AND THE SCRIPTURES

v. 20: built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone

Jumping off the word “household” in verse 19, Paul uses another metaphor for the church in v. 20—that of a building. The church has a foundation. And there are two parts to the foundation.

A. APOSTLES AND PROPHETS

The church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.”

We’ll have much more to say about the apostles and prophets when we get to 4:11, but briefly. . . “Apostle” means “one sent on a mission.” Usually, when we talk about apostles, we’re talking about the 12 disciples of Jesus, including Matthias [muh-THIGH-us], who replaced Judas, and of Paul. Those 13. An apostle was one who was chosen by Jesus and a witness of the resurrection. These 13 men had a broad ministry to the church at large and spoke divinely revealed truth to the church. They were God’s spokesmen. They were God’s gifts to the church universal.

“Prophet” means “one who speaks before.” That is, one who speaks before an audience. Here, Paul is writing about NT prophets not OT prophets. Notice the word order: he says “the apostles and prophets,” not the “prophets and apostles.” We’d expect the reverse if he was writing about OT prophets.

In 1 Co 12:28, Paul writes: "And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers..."

The context here is about the church—so he is writing about NT era prophets. Now, the apostles were a kind of a prophet. In fact, the Greek grammar here makes that plain. The apostles were a kind of prophet—a subset of the category of prophets. But whereas the apostles had a broad ministry to the church at a large, the prophets’ ministry was more narrowly focused on a local congregation. Sometimes prophets spoke a fresh word from God. Other times, they only expounded upon already revealed truth. Regardless, their teaching was always to be judged according to the apostles teaching. They were second to the apostles. When the church gathered, Acts 2:42 says, “they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching”

Now, notice that the primary role of an apostle and a prophet was teaching divinely revealed truth. So when Paul says the church is founded on the apostles and prophets, he doesn’t mean what they did, so much as he means what they taught. The foundation of the church is the teaching of the apostles and prophets. They spoke for Jesus. They spoke for God.

We have a collection of that teaching in New Testament. So the foundation of the church is the divinely revealed truth of the Scriptures—especially the NT, since the NT speaks directly to the church. The church stands or falls based on its adherence to the Scriptures. If you alter the foundation documents, the church crumbles.

There is a second part of the foundation and it’s even more important. . .

B. CHRIST AS THE CORNERSTONE

v. 20: “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone”

Today, when we think of a cornerstone, we often think of the cornerstone as a memorial stone put in place at the dedication of a building—after its construction is already complete. However, that wasn’t the function of the cornerstone in ancient times. That’s not the imagery being used

here. Christ is not mere decoration for the church. In those days (and, in fact, depending on your project, even today), the cornerstone was the first stone laid. The integrity of the building depended upon the integrity of the cornerstone. The builder was careful to position the cornerstone correctly—because the rest of the foundation and all the walls would be set according to the angle of the cornerstone. It also might provide the strongest support for the building.

In the early 1990s, archeologists discovered enormous stones that helped form the foundation of the Jerusalem temple. The largest measures 55' long x 11' high x 14' wide and weighs over 570 tons. Not only does the cornerstone provide the anchor of support for the building, but it also keeps the rest of the building in line. The cornerstone is the stone by which every other stone in the foundation is measured. Everything in the building must be in conformity to the cornerstone.

The Greek in this verse is emphatic that Christ Jesus HIMSELF is the cornerstone of the church. The first stone laid in the building of Christ's church is Christ himself. All the stones in the church—that is, all of God's people—are measured according to Christ. We all must be in conformity to him. He is the anchor of support for the entire church.

Very likely, Paul had in mind Isaiah 28:16 where the Lord God says: "Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, [a stone of testing], a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'Whoever believes in it will not be disturbed.'" [B trans] Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah and the cornerstone of the church. He is our founder. He is the one we look to be in conformity to.

Rom 8:29: For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son

So, the church that Christ builds is founded on Christ and the Scriptures.

Third. . .

III. THE CHURCH THAT CHRIST BUILDS GROWS AND IS HELD TOGETHER BY HIM

v. 21: in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

"In whom" points back to "Christ Jesus." In Jesus the whole structure—the whole church—grows into a holy temple in the Lord. The church grows in breadth and depth because of Christ. It expands numerically and matures spiritually because of Christ.

1 Co 3:6: I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

A true church grows in proportion to its conformity to Christ. Christ, as the cornerstone, is indispensable to the church's growth. And the construction project is ongoing. "Grows" is in the present tense. God is still adding to the church. He continues to do so until the full number of saints has believed.

1 Pet 2:5: you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Stone by stone—the church grows. Jesus not only grows the church—he is the one who holds it all together.

v. 21: “in whom the whole structure, being joined together”

This word Paul uses is a rare word. In those days, mortar wasn't used to fit the stones in a building together. Instead, in an elaborate process, each stone was cut and smoothed so that they fit exactly next to each other. So Christ himself, carefully fits us together. Because he is doing the fitting—he is providing the basis for our unity.

And finally. . .

IV. THE CHURCH THAT CHRIST BUILDS IS A DWELLING PLACE FOR GOD

v. 22: In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

The building Christ is constructing is identified as a holy temple in v. 21. Obviously, this isn't a physical building—it's God's spiritual building—the church. The temple had been the focal point of Israel's identity for 1000 years as the people of God. They came there to worship. They came there to offer sacrifices and make atonement for their sins. The temple was the dwelling place of God—where his glory was manifest. It was the structure that united Israel.

But now, God is doing something different. Now, the unifying object of Christianity isn't a temple in a geographic location. The temple God is building now is the church. And the church is now God's dwelling place. This is the place his glory is manifest. The church—not as a building, but a body of people—is what unites us and displays God's presence to the rest of the world. The church is God's home. He is present among us in a special way. And the way God dwells within the church is not in a blazing glory but by the Spirit.

CONCLUSION

- The church that Christ builds is a royal family
- The church that Christ builds is founded on Christ and the Scriptures
- The church that Christ builds grows and is held together by him.
- The church that Christ builds is a dwelling place for God.

So, what a marvelous thing it is to be part of God's church.