

A Holy Temple
Ephesians 2:18-22
November 13, 2022

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.

We have talked about the people of God being the Body of Christ. Three weeks ago we learned God's people are the household of God. The emphasis of the second half of ch. 2, since verse 11, has been on unity, the unity of Jews and Gentiles secured through the blood of Christ, unity because Jesus reconciled all believing Jews and Gentiles to God the Father, through the working of the Holy Spirit. This basis for unity through the blood of Jesus as people are saved from their sin, is a unity for all people who trust in Christ; people of all

nations, tribes, tongues, cultures, no matter what their former religion, whether they worshipped at the feet of American culture, or Mohammed or Buddha or any other idol. We are now all part of the Body of Christ, the household of God. We belong to God and we belong to one another. And our church here at Brook is a local expression of that truth. And so the message of Ephesians is very important to us.

We looked in vs. 19 and how God's people are fellow citizens, citizens of heaven, and fellow members of the household of God. We all belong to the Kingdom of God and because Jesus has been raised up and seated at the Father's right hand in the heavenly places, we too have been made alive together and seated with Him in heaven, we have a different reality than we once had. The Apostle Paul says in Philippians 3:20 that "our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." We have spiritual life and our desires are now desires for things of heaven, which we read about in Colossians 3.

Then, all God's people are part of His family. He is, as Paul says in ch. 1, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and therefore, through Christ, He is our God and Father. We are His adopted children. And we are heirs of all His promised blessings for His sons and daughters; some of which we will experience in this life and some of which we will have when we arrive in heaven to be with God forever and ever.

Today we learn that the household of God, to which we belong, is

built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone

I pointed out what is fairly obvious, the household of God is not a literal house made of physical building materials. The term is a kind of imagery, a metaphor, meant to point us to a spiritual reality. Vs. 20 continues that imagery. A house has to have a foundation, otherwise it cannot stand, at least, not for long. John and Lynn are having an addition built on their house, which mainly will be a library. John posted on Facebook and number of pictures of the foundation being laid. Without the

foundation of concrete, their new addition would not last long. God's house has a foundation as well. It is the apostles and prophets. The term apostles here is not limited to the twelve chosen Apostles that Jesus appointed. Paul uses the term to describe other men with a special role in the Kingdom. The term itself means someone sent for a special job, to carry a message, and of course, that is the message of the gospel. In the New Testament. There were the twelve appointed by Jesus. Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus, had killed himself and later Matthias (Acts 1:23) was appointed in his place.

But there were also men such as, of course, Paul who was appointed as an Apostle by the risen Jesus to carry the gospel to the Gentiles. Also, there were others Paul probably had in mind like Barnabas, Apollos, Timothy, and Sylvanus. The NT tells us all of these men had a role in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles and helping to establish the early church.

According to commentator Frank Thielman ¹, that's why Paul calls them part of the foundation. And to help them were the

¹ Thielman, Frank. *Ephesians*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, p. 180.

early church prophets. When we see the word “prophets,” we most often think of the OT prophets, men like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Hosea, Micah and others who were sent by the Lord to declare to Israel and Judah their sins, to pronounce God’s coming judgment, and to call them back to true devotion to the Lord. This was not the role of early church prophets. We see the NT church prophets early on in the book of Acts in places like ch. 13:1-2,

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

So, the prophets named here were used by God to appoint Saul (Paul) and Barnabas to go out into other parts of the Roman empire and preach the gospel first in the Jewish synagogues and later to the Gentiles as the rest of Acts shows. Chapter 15:32 tells us that Judas (not Iscariot) and Silas, quote, “who

were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words” in the church in Antioch.

Back in the letter to Ephesians, Paul wrote, in ch. 3:

When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

There was a mystery to the OT prophets and they understood the answer in part, but not completely; that God’s salvation coming in the Messiah would unite believing Gentiles with believing Jew in one body, the Body of Christ. This seems like it is no mystery to us. This is what we have been learning in Ephesians. But the reason it is no mystery to us is that it was revealed, Paul says, to Christ’s “holy apostles and prophets,” the men anointed to carry the good news to the Gentiles that they might be saved and brought into the Body of Christ.

I have a sense, as I stated in a message recently, that we wonder what the significance of all this is. This was incredibly important to the Gentiles because this is why the message of the gospel came to them through the apostles and prophets. This is why churches were established among them. This was so important for the early believers to understand as part of the basis of their unity together—that the walls of hostility between them had been broken down in Jesus.

You might be thinking, “Gee, pastor. I’m still looking for the significance to this for me and for us here at Brook 2,000 years later.” And, as I have stressed, the significance for us is that Christ died for our unity, with all believing people in the Church, our church. Think of the hostility in our world today, in our nation today, in the Church at large. Our culture is brutal in the many ways it promotes disagreement and the way it stokes people’s anger in all kinds of situations, the way it promotes anti-Christian sentiment. Hostility exists between various races of people; black and white, black or white and Jews, black or white and Hispanics, black or white and Asian, the list goes on.

Think of all the ways disunity has been on display in our nation through this past election—and quite obviously, the spirit of disunity is still raging. But in Jesus Christ, all different kinds of people who come to Jesus and put their trust in His saving death on the cross, all those people are united together no matter who they are, rich or poor, healthy or disabled, educated or un-educated, powerful or weak, Republican or Democrat. If they truly trust in Jesus, they are united in Him and they are called to love one another, to sacrifice themselves for one another for the glory of God. **** The Apostles and the prophets were the foundation of all of this in the sense that they carried the message and built the Church among the Gentiles by the power of God and for His glory.

But there was and is an even more important part of the building and it is the cornerstone. Christ Jesus is the cornerstone of the household of God, according to verse 20. The Greek word for “cornerstone” is extremely rare. It doesn’t occur anywhere else in the NT. For this reason, scholars debate whether it refers to the capstone of the building or a stone that

is part of the foundation, which, Thielman says, sits “on top of the foundation and carefully placed to provide guidance and stability for the building’s continuing construction”² If Christ is the capstone or keystone of His household, it would point to “the superiority of the ascended Christ over the whole.”³ If Christ Jesus is the cornerstone of the foundation, it would point to the truth that He “provides strength and guidance”⁴ to the entire household of God which He is building. Scholars are equally divided in their arguments over the two possibilities. Both make good sense to me. I think Paul would say that from beginning to end, Jesus Christ must be central. He is the foundational cornerstone because, as Paul showed earlier in ch. 2, He shed His blood for the salvation of His people who are the household of God. He is the capstone of the house of God because He is supreme over the church and it is all for Him. We are here this morning at Brook because

² Frank Thielman, [*Ephesians*](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 182.

³ Frank Thielman, [*Ephesians*](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 181.

⁴ Frank Thielman, [*Ephesians*](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 182.

Jesus died for us and we submit to His Lordship and do all things for His glory.

Now, let's pick up the train of thought again in these verses this morning. Beginning at vs. 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 . . .

This is what we have seen so far in the past two sermons. And then Paul says,

²¹ in whom the whole structure . . .

What structure? The household of God.

being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

The Greek word for “being joined together” is long. I’ve never been confident of my pronunciation of long Greek words (it’s 16 letters long! I used to squirm in my Greek classed being afraid I’d be called on to read a word like this!), but here goes. It is συναρμολογουμένη (*synarmologoumenē*). The word is

really rare. It only occurs here in all ancient Greek literature and in Eph. 4:16 which is really important because it connects the two passages, as we will see. The basic root word was a little more common and it meant “fitted together.” So when you put together the parts of Paul’s long word, it probably meant something like “being fit together” or “being fit together with.” In the context of Ephesians 2, it once again points to the concept of unity. The believers in Ephesus were being built *together or fitted together* with other true believers regardless of race or ethnicity or culture. The boundary lines had come down in and through Jesus.

Look at the map of Europe, Asia, and Africa. The nations marked by navy blue, like I told you last week, are countries that restrict Christianity and the work of the gospel. The nations marked in yellow are those who have outlawed the Church and forbid the work of the gospel and punish those who disobey with severe consequences, sometimes even death. We are being built together with them into a holy temple. We are one with them. The Bible verse on the map is very appropriate

with what we are talking about. You can't see it, but it is Hebrews 13:3. Listen carefully.

Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.

Not only are we one with them in the body of Christ, we are one with all the believers in Russia and Europe and North and South America. God is fitting us together into His temple. And He is fitting us together right here at Brook with one another. In fact, the work of the building process begins with the cornerstone and foundation and then, like in Ephesus takes place in the local church. We at Brook are one, little, tiny building block in the household of God. And there are countless thousands like our little church across the globe.

How does the building process work? What is the building process. Paul doesn't leave us in the dark in Ephesians. He answers the question beginning in ch. 4. We will come to this after Christmas and New Year's. But let me just read what some of ch. 4 says to give you a foretaste. This is how unity is

achieved, first on the local level, in individual churches, by God's people who have been saved through the sacrificial death of Christ by which all the former barriers have come down. This is how the household of God and the Temple of the Lord are built.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ But grace was given to each one of us [that is, gifts were given to each believer] according to the measure of Christ's gift. . . .

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of

doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ **from whom the whole body, joined and held together** [there's that big word again, συναρμολογουμένη *synarmologoumenē*, “joined together”] **by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.**

So, we quite clearly hear the language of building, of being joined together, of unity. Prophets, evangelists, and pastor teachers have been given by Christ to the Church for the building up of the Body, the goal being unity. The prophets, evangelists, and pastor teachers prepare God's people for the work of the ministry, specifically, the building up of the Body, through, as Paul says elsewhere, the use of various spiritual gifts.

Finally, Paul says in ch. 2

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.

This verse brings us to the end of chapter 2. My plan, God willing, and if He sustains my health through the holidays, is to

pick up again with Ephesians ch. 3 after New Year's. But let's think about this final verse for a few moments.

God's people, His household, His Church is growing "into a holy temple in the Lord." The first thing that comes to my mind is that the Temple of the OT was the dwelling place of God among His people. John Stott tells how that at the time Paul was writing to the Ephesians, there was an incredibly beautiful temple to the goddess Diana standing in the city of Ephesus. It was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. And in it was a statue of Diana. In the meantime, in Jerusalem was the magnificent Temple of Herod where God's presence was said to dwell. What was the problem with these temples? Diana was a lifeless goddess and the glory of God was ignored in Herod's temple since the priests did not recognize Jesus as the very Son of God whom they were supposed to worship. Two beautiful temples and yet, they were both dead. A dead temple in Ephesus and a dead temple in Jerusalem.

Now, Paul told the Ephesians, God is building a new temple—the temple of the Body of Christ, the household of

God, the Church. The pieces were coming together, Jews and Gentiles alike. The causes for animosity had been subdued through the death of Christ, through His shed blood on the cross. F.F. Bruce says,

The new community, God's fellowship of reconciliation, transcends all distinctions of race, status, and sex. Properly oriented to the one cornerstone [Christ Jesus], based on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Gentile Christians, along with their fellow-believers of Jewish birth, belonged equally to God's holy house.⁵

And so we are reconciled with all kinds of people who are believers. Paul said in Galatians 3:28,

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

We are a microcosm here at Brook of what is true of God's universal church; men and women, people of different educational backgrounds, people of different income levels, people of different ages. And yes, at one time, we were even

⁵ F. F. Bruce, [*The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 307.

more diverse in the sense that we had more people of different races. That has changed due to illness, death and people moving. But for many years we have been a church that is unified in Christ, the household of God, the temple. And we are the dwelling place for God by the Spirit. And after the holidays, when we reach chapter 4, we will consider all this and how it is to be achieved within our church.

Now, let me conclude with a word of caution. I can imagine some of these things have been running through John's mind and maybe some of yours as we have moved through chapter 2 and talked about unity. And the stress of chapter 2 has been on unity and how in Christ walls of division and animosity are broken down and believers are made one with each other. And yet, there is much division in God's Church today around the world. And some of it is very bad. There is division between races and division between people of different social and economic background, and so on. And it is bad and wrong and dishonors the name of the One who died to end it.

But something else must be said, and then I'm done. The unity Jesus died for is established in and through Him and only through Him. And that means we can only be united based on the truth of the gospel and on the truth of God's Word and what He declares to be right. And there are essential truths that cannot be compromised. Sally Michael, former children's minister at Bethlehem Baptist and co-founder and director of Truth78, lists ten essential gospel truths:

1. God is the sovereign Creator of all things.

Scripture: Psalm 19:1, Psalm 22:28; Psalm 24:1; Isaiah 44:24

Implication: God made you. You belong to God. God is your ruler.

2. God created people for His glory.

Scripture: Psalm 29:1-2; Isaiah 43:6-7; 1 Corinthians 10:31

Implication: God created you to know, trust, and love Him most of all.

3. God is holy and righteous.

Scripture: Leviticus 19:2, 37; Deuteronomy 32:4; Romans 7:12

Implication: God is holy and righteous. God's commands are holy and righteous. You must obey God's commands all the time.

4. Man is sinful.

Scripture: Romans 3:10-18, 20, 23

Implication: You have disobeyed God's commands. You are a sinner.

5. God is just and is right to punish sin.

Scripture: Isaiah 59:2; Romans 1:18; Romans 6:23a

Implication: You deserve God's punishment of death and hell. You are helpless to save yourself.

6. God is merciful. He is kind to undeserving sinners.

Scripture: Psalm 145:8; Ephesians 2:8-9

Implication: You must depend on God's mercy in order to be saved.

7. Jesus is God's holy and righteous Son.

Scripture: John 1:1; 1 Timothy 1:15

Implication: Jesus came into the world to save you.

8. God put the punishment of sinners on Jesus, so that His righteousness might be put on them.

Scripture: Isaiah 53:5; Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24

Implication: Jesus died on the cross to be punished in your place.

9. God offers the free gift of salvation to those who repent and believe in Jesus.

Scripture: Mark 1:15; John 3:16-17; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:8-9

Implication: God tells you to believe in Jesus and repent of your sins and you will be saved.

10. Those who trust in Jesus will live to please Him and will receive the promise of eternal life— enjoying God forever in heaven.

Scripture: Luke 9:23; John 11:25; 1 John 2:15; Psalm 16:11

Implication: If you are trusting in Jesus for your salvation, you must follow Him. Jesus has promised that when you die He will bring you to heaven to live with and enjoy God forever.⁶

These truths cannot be compromised in any way. Not only that, we must stand on what God declares in His Word to be right about man and woman and how that applies to all the gender issues facing us, about marriage being for one man and one woman, about sexuality and there are others.

Ephesians 4 and 5 will give us the opportunity to think about some of the truths we must stand on and cannot compromise. But for now, as a final thought on unity and what

⁶ Michael, Sally. “Ten Essential Gospel Truths to Teach Children.” *Truth78*, Truth78, 14 Feb. 2019, <https://www.truth78.org/blog/post/ten-essential-gospel-truths-to-teach-children>.

joins us together, remember Paul's words in ch. 2:15-16, that Jesus died 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.

Let's pray