

March 22, 2020
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Ephesians
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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BUILT INTO GOD'S DWELLING PLACE **Ephesians 2:18-22**

I enjoy looking at the work of architects, engineers, and craftsmen. Sometimes I marvel at the buildings that men imagine, design and construct. I especially like to look at nice homes like the Biltmore house, Buckingham Palace, Windsor Castle and such. Okay, those are somewhat ostentatious homes. Yes, but even nice homes in our area are attractive. Like the old plantation homes in the low country of our own state. Sometimes I have looked at a fine house and said, "That house is fit for a king." That is definitely a fair conclusion about Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle.

It is probably acceptable to read about the palace Solomon built for himself and wonder how ornate it really was or how it compared to the middle class homes of his day. It is also interesting to compare the statement at the end of 1 Kings 6, that it took Solomon seven years to complete the grand temple of the Lord, with the opening statement of 1 Kings 7, that it took him thirteen years to complete his palace. We can tell from the details given about the temple that it was stupendous. But, we also might wonder how the House of God compared to the king's house.

Then we might also wonder if God really needed a house? Throughout Israel's history, God often referenced His presence, His dwelling, His abiding with His people. On one hand, God is an omnipresent spirit who needs no house. On the other hand, He condescends to make His presence known in specific places such as the mercy seat over the ark of the covenant in the back of the portable tabernacle.

Solomon acknowledged that paradox when he prayed to dedicate the temple to the Lord. "*But will God indeed dwell on the*

earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built! Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O LORD my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you this day, that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you have said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. And listen to the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen in heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive" (1 Kings 8:27-30).

More amazing than the fact that God willingly had a presence in a tent and in a brick and mortar building is that God has condescended to virtually dwell within His people. This is such an unusual, unearthly idea, that even we whom God indwells have difficulty comprehending it. In this section of Paul's letter to Christians in Ephesus, we learn about the amazing miracle of God building His people into a holy temple in the Lord, into the dwelling place for God. Coming to grips with this reality will help us order our lives in a way that will be more to His honor.

Through Christ We Are Built (vv.18-20).

Most people will never catch the importance of Paul's opening statement in our text that we are having access to the Father. *For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father (v.18)*. Our access to God the Father is through Christ and in the Holy Spirit. The idea of access to the Father is a picture of a citizen having access to the king's presence. For a normal citizen to be able to enjoy access to his king would have been a very rare situation in ancient times. Much more remarkable is the possibility of gaining access to the Creator of the universe. Can we even imagine the privilege of gaining access to the Eternal Judge who alone determines the eternal destiny of all people? Do you think that is important?

Who should be so privileged? The answer is *we both have access*. That statement flows out of the previous text where Paul taught the plan of God to bring together Jew and Gentile through Christ. Through Christ the impenetrable barrier between Jews (God's chosen people) and Gentiles (everyone else) was broken down.

Through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, God created what Kent Hughes calls the "third race." Now because of Christ's work of salvation and through His sacrifice on the cross, there are three races in the world: Unsaved Jews, Unsaved Gentiles, and Christ's people.

Again, this was possible and this comes about only *through Him* which has to be a reference to Christ. That reference is connected with the previous arguments or statements that God has made us spiritually alive in Christ (2:5) and that God has seated us with Christ in spiritual places (2:6). Therefore, because of God's work through Christ in us, we have access to God the Father through Christ. We have access to God only through Christ who is the way, the truth, the life, the only way to the Father (John 14:6). He is the door, the gate to the sheepfold (John 10:9-10).

It is very important to notice that in this one short statement in verse eighteen, we discover that this entrance to God involves each member of the Trinity. We have access *through Him*, that is God the Son. We have access *in one Spirit*, that is God the Spirit. We have access *to the Father*, that is God the Father. In this one phrase we discover all the resources of the Holy Trinity are at our disposal so that we can come to our Creator.

Let's focus on the object of that access. We are having access to the Father. This is a remarkable privilege. The Bible clearly teaches that God the Father is perfectly sinless, perfectly holy. Therefore, God the Father is separated from sin. His separateness from sin and holiness was well illustrated when He turned His back on His beloved Son as He laid on Him all the sin of the world (Isaiah 53:6; 1 John 2:2).

God's holy nature makes this privilege of access to Him that is granted to us remarkable because by birth, by nature, and by necessity we are afar off. Our sinful nature and our specific sins separate us from God. Our sins make us God's enemy. Our sins render us dead and incapable of approaching God.

But through Christ we have access to God the Father. At His throne we are secure from the penalty and power of sin. At His throne He requests us to cast our cares. At His throne we find mercy and help in the time of need. We who are redeemed through Christ's sacrifice are so privileged to come into the presence of the Creator and cry out to Him.

Not only do we have access, but now we also are accepted members. We are members of His kingdom and members of His family. *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (v.19)*. If we are citizens, we can no longer be aliens. That is what we were when God apprehended us by grace. By birth and nature we are on the outside looking in. We are "separated from Christ" (v.12a). We are "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel," which means that we are not included among God's chosen people (v.12b). We are "strangers to the covenants of promise" (v.12c). We rightly "have no hope and are without God in the world" (v.12d).

But that was before the work of Christ was applied to us by grace; before God dragged us through the "Door" Jesus Christ. Now we are included in the greatest covenant and promise of all, the New Covenant. God promised that He will do for Israel what He does for us at the point of salvation. *I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people (Jeremiah 31:33)*. People who are part of that covenant are no longer on the outside looking in.

Furthermore, through Christ we are now fellow citizens. We *are fellow citizens with the saints (v.19b)*. Because we are fellow citizens with the saints, part of Christ's kingdom, we are now aliens to the world. We do not belong to this world system because we are citizens of the heavenly kingdom. *But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20)*.

People who are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb belong to the kingdom of the saints. We are pilgrims traveling through this world to our heavenly kingdom. And as we travel, we are already part of the kingdom in which Christ rules supreme. That is why we are in agreement with, generally on the same page with fellow saints. And so as we meander through life, we rejoice to make contact with fellow citizens who want to talk about heavenly-kingdom stuff.

When I used to travel internationally, I would often meet fellow Americans on flights out of foreign countries. It was always refreshing to hear someone speak my language and to be able to talk about American stuff, and places, and events. Because I love America, when I visit other cultures and nations I compare them with

“home” and generally not favorably. Home is where I feel most comfortable. Home makes us feel secure. If you never hunger to be at home with God, it has to be because you are satisfied with the passing kingdom of your world. If you are satisfied with the passing kingdom of your world, it must mean that you have no hope for the heavenly kingdom. That we are citizens of the saints’ kingdom causes us to often feel like strangers in this world.

But even better than being citizens of the heavenly kingdom, through Christ we are now members of God’s family. We are *members of the household of God (v.19c)*. This too is a remarkable change. We who were by nature and practice sons of disobedience (2:2) are sons of God. We who were by nature and practice children of wrath (2:3) are children of God.

We are members of the immediate family of God. The Greek word for family can speak of immediate relatives, extended family, or even the entire estate including servants and guests. But in light of the fact that we have been brought into the family by Christ’s blood (2:13), we are blood relatives. We are brothers, sisters, joint heirs with Christ. *For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers (Hebrews 2:11)*. And because we are brothers, we share the inheritance with Christ. *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him (Romans 8:16-17)*.

We know that we are God’s children when our Heavenly Father disciplines us. *“For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons (Hebrews 12:6-8)*.

True also is that because we are part of God’s family as His children, we practice our position as children by saying, “Our Father who is in heaven.” And we are privileged to cry out “Abba Father” (Romans 8:15). What a privilege to call the Creator of all things, the Eternal Judge, the one and only Holy God, “Father.”

Being inspired by God to write, Paul is allowed to mix metaphors, which he does quite frequently, especially in this text. We who took English 101 understand that you shouldn’t do this. But, the mixed metaphor in this case is good news. It tells us believers that we are not only citizens of God’s kingdom, and members of God’s family, but we are also God’s building. We are *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone (v.20)*.

In fact, more exact to the Greek syntax, we are *having been built on the right foundation*. The text says that we are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, but that does not mean that we are built on the apostles and prophets themselves. The reference here is to messengers who received and delivered truth God gave to them directly. Probably Paul did refer directly to the Old Testament prophets since they are listed second after apostles (cf. 4:11). Rather these were the messengers who proclaimed God’s word in the New Testament, similar to preachers.

The apostles were the original eleven (twelve including Mathias) to whom Jesus taught the gospel and who He used to establish the Church. But the foundation is their teaching is the issue, not the men themselves. They laid the foundation (subjective genitive). Paul the apostle and preacher explained it like this: *According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:10-11)*. The foundation has already been laid (past tense verb). God is not giving us any new information.

The foundation of any building is important because it gives stability and determines the size and shape of the building! But the cornerstone of ancient buildings was more important! And Christ is the cornerstone of us who make up the building of God. *Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone (v.20b)*. John MacArthur explained the importance of this stone. “The cornerstone was the major structural part of the ancient buildings. It had to be strong enough to support what was built on it, and it had to be precisely laid, because every other part of the structure was oriented to it. The cornerstone was the support, the orienter, the unifier of the entire building. That is what

Jesus Christ is to God's kingdom, God's family, God's building." (John MacArthur, MNTC, p.82,83)

God promised way back in the Old Testament that, in eternity, He placed Jesus Christ as the chief stone in the Church. *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'Whoever believes will not be in haste'" (Isaiah 28:16).* It is possible that the word "tested stone" means the stone that tests. That was actually the purpose of the cornerstone in ancient construction. Therefore, everything in the Church is measured and tested according to Christ Himself. He determines His building's character. And we, the building, know Christ's character only through the Bible. If we are not being built according to His standard, it is likely we are not really His building.

In Christ We Are Being Built (vv.21-22).

In Christ the structure is growing. *In whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord (v.21).* More information about this amazing work called the building of God, the Church of Christ, tells us that we are being joined in Christ. The building process of the Church is being applied to us continually. The phrase *being joined together* is a present, passive, participle which means that it is an ongoing action upon us.

To be joined together means to be fitted together like exact and precise blocks that fit a particular way. It reminds us of the huge but exact blocks of Solomon's temple being cut and chiseled precisely. *All these were made of costly stones, cut according to measure, sawed with saws, back and front, even from the foundation to the coping, and from the outside to the great court (1 Kings 7:9).* This applies to the whole structure, and each block in the structure, not just certain blocks in the building. We Gentiles were once separated from the "house of God" by a wall of partition, but now we are living stones placed in the wall of the House of God.

We are growing into a temple. God's work *grows into a holy temple in the Lord (v.21b).* Again the lesson is that we, the Church, are continually growing into a holy temple. It is an ongoing process. The temple will not be complete until each "block" that Christ has

already determined will be in the building has been redeemed and placed in the temple. At the same time, each of us blocks continue to grow up into Christ, becoming more like Christ, who is the head of the Church (4:15).

The whole process takes place in Christ. In Christ we are being built together. *In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (v.22).* The important truth here is that we are being built together. The building process is happening TO us. We are not building ourselves up. The supernatural work of God in our lives does not stop at the moment of salvation. Rather throughout the rest of our earthly lives we are continually being conformed to the image of Christ. Christ is continually teaching us from His Word how to serve Him based on who and what He is.

Peter described the process like this: *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 (1 Peter 2:5).*

Even more astonishing is that we ourselves are to be God's dwelling place. It is a picture of God condescending to have a presence in the tabernacle. Then again it is like God being pleased to have a presence in the temple. Both of those structures shared the common trait of containing the ark of the covenant with the mercy seat. But now, the omnipresent God is pleased to live in the hearts of His people in the person of the Holy Spirit. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:13; 4:30). The Holy Spirit is in us (Romans 5:5). He is in the process of building us more and more into God's dwelling place.

Thus, Paul's argument is for us to live according to the reality that we are the temple of God. As individuals we are God's dwelling place. *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own (1 Corinthians 6:19).* At the same time, because individual believers are God's temple, when we meet corporately as the Church we are God's temple. *Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you (1 Corinthians 3:16)?*

When God filled His houses in the past, His glory was obvious. For example, when God came to dwell in the tabernacle, *The cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34).* As soon as Solomon finished his prayer

dedicating the temple, *Fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD filled the LORD's house (2 Chronicles 7:1-2).*

How do we know the Holy Spirit of God is living in us? The fruit of the Spirit ought to be so obvious in our lives that people can just tell that God is living in us. That is the lesson of this text. We should be astonished that God is willing to dwell in us. Does it show?

I wonder how many modern evangelical pastors have ever read this letter that explains God's plan for the Body of Christ? If they have read it, why don't they spend time explaining it to their people? This explains the number of people at the last judgment who are shocked to find out they really are not part of Christ's kingdom, family, building, and temple (Matthew 7:21-23). When those people argue that they did religious stuff, will Jesus answer (Hypothetical conversation): "You were part of a lot of different organizations and meetings, but you were not part of ME! If you would have read and studied the truth I gave you in MY Word, you would have known these things." And they reply, "Yeah, but my pastor never spent any time talking in detail about the Bible because he said it would not be attractive to outsiders." "Yes, of which you are one!"

Real Christians are in God's kingdom, in God's family, are God's building, are God's temple, and, therefore, indwelt by God. It shows.