

The Church, A Holy Temple

Where does God live?

But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases. (Psa 115:3 NKJV)

Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? (Isa 66:1 NKJV)

"God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. (Acts 17:24 NKJV)

We know that God inhabits all of heaven and earth. That no building made by man could contain the Lord God. Yet in the Old Testament . God came down to dwell with the people in the Tabernacle. That is what "tabernacle" means, the tent, or dwelling of God. It was a tent of meeting. There God would meet with His people. The Holy of Holies in the tabernacle pictured the throne of God where He would sit between the cherubim. Later God allowed Solomon to build a permanent temple. And the glory of God's presence filled the temple.

But Ezekiel records for us that the glory of God's presence departed from that temple before it was destroyed by the Babylonians about 580 years before Christ. The Jews rebuilt the temple after the exile in the days of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. And in the years prior to Jesus' coming, Herod reconstructed and expanded the temple. It became a magnificent structure. But the glory of the presence of God did not dwell there as He once did.

But God did come to dwell with people again, As John 1:14 tells us about Jesus, the Word who was with God and was God, **"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."**

God's dwelling with man on this earth, was the Lord Jesus Himself. Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," (John 2:19). And John comments, **"He was speaking of the temple of His body."** Jesus was put to death in that body, and raised on the third day. Forty days later, in that body Jesus ascended into heaven. Does that mean that now God dwells exclusively in heaven? No, Praise God! He still lives here on earth us. Now God is living with His people as His Holy Spirit indwells every believer in Jesus Christ. Paul says in 1 Cor. 6:19, **"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?"**

But God's Spirit not only dwells in every individual believer, but as Paul shows us in Ephesians 2:19-22, He dwells in us collectively as we are His church, the body of Christ. Listen to that passage as I read it:

19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone,

21 in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,

22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Last week in verse 19 we considered the first two pictures of this new man, the body of Christ, the church. We said that:

I. We are Citizens of God's Kingdom (v.19a).

II. We are Members of God's Family (v.19b).

In verses 20-22 Paul takes this idea of being the household of God and turns it to picture the church as God's temple.

III. We are God's Temple (vv.20-22).

Let's examine three elements that make up God's temple: the foundation, the Cornerstone, and the building stones.

A. The Foundation of the Temple: The Teaching of the Apostles and Prophets.

Notice the tense of the verb, "**having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.**" This is past tense, it is something that has been done. The "**apostles and prophets**" have already laid the "**foundation.**" You don't put up the walls until the foundation is laid. For almost 2,000 years now God has built His church on that "**foundation**" that was laid out in the 1st century.

What "**foundation**" did "**the apostles and prophets**" lay? The meaning is not that the apostles and prophets were themselves the foundation, but that it was their foundation because they laid the foundation.

Look with me to **1 Cor. 3:9-11**. Here Paul uses a similar picture to describe his missionary and church planting work.

9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.

10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.

11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Paul says the believers at Corinth, the church, were "**God's building.**" And the apostle Paul describes himself as "**a wise master builder,**" an architect who "**laid the foundation.**" But he makes it clear that Jesus is the "**foundation**" in verse 11 saying, "**For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.**"

Who were these apostles and prophets? Luke 6 tells us that one night Jesus had spent whole night in prayer and verse 13 says, "**And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles.**" The apostles were specifically chosen by Jesus and sent out with the message of the gospel. The original twelve were not the only apostles, some others were added later, like in Acts 1 Matthias was chosen to replace Judas to be a witness together with them of Jesus' resurrection. And Jesus chosen Paul himself to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Remember back to Ephesians 1:1, he wrote, "**Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.**"

The "**Prophets**" here are not the Old Testament prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, but they are New Testament prophets. Paul helps us to understand that these are not OT prophets later in this letter in 4:11 when he writes about Jesus that, "**He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.**" The book of Acts which is a history of the early church mentions some of these prophets, like Agabus in Acts 11:27-28, and Acts 13:1 says that in the church at Antioch "**there were certain prophets and teachers,**" of whom Paul was one of them. Acts 15 mentions that Judas and Silas were prophets.

How did they lay the foundation which is Jesus Christ? Through divine revelation and God-inspired teaching. In the next chapter in Eph. 3:5 Paul writes about the mystery of Christ, this new body of believing Jews and Gentiles, the church, "**which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.**" They are not the "**foundation**," but the divine revelation they received, the teaching they left behind—specifically the NT scriptures which tell about Jesus—this is the "**foundation**" upon which our church is built.

That is the foundation, now let's look at the Cornerstone.

B. The Cornerstone of the Temple: The Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul leaves no doubt, "**Jesus Christ Himself**" is "**the chief cornerstone.**"

The "**cornerstone**" was the major structural part of the buildings of ancient Palestine. It had to be laid out perfectly and it had to be strong enough to support the full weight of corners of the walls because everything else depended on it.

Historians tell us that the "**cornerstone**" of the Jerusalem temple was 29 feet long and the size of a railroad boxcar.

We don't have time this morning to dig into all the scriptures related to the cornerstone. This picture of Christ as a Stone or Rock is intimately woven by the Spirit throughout both the Old and New Testaments and makes for a fascinating and encouraging study. Hundreds of years before Christ, Isaiah proclaimed, "**Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily [be disappointed]"** (Is.28:16). A key verse from Psalm 118:22 is quoted or alluded to at least six times in the New Testament, "**The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.**" Jesus quoted that verse in Mt.21:42, saying "**..This was the Lord's doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes**"

There appears to be two functions of the cornerstone of the ancient times. First of all, for support as the whole building would rest upon it. Secondly, and even more importantly, it was for structure. The whole building depended upon the cornerstone for measurement and for unity.

So here is the picture of Christ being the cornerstone of the holy temple. The doctrine of Christ is our foundation in this passage, but Christ Himself is the cornerstone. We are not only built upon Him, but we totally depend upon Him. We are measured by Him. Every dimension we have as a believer has to resort back to Christ. We are being conformed into the image of Christ Jesus. He is the standard. He is the first stone that was laid. He is the one who gives us this

brand new identity. Everything about the Temple of God is governed by the cornerstone, Christ Jesus Himself. All the growth, all the unity, everything depends upon the cornerstone.

Ps.18:46 cries out, "**The LORD lives! Blessed be my Rock! Let the God of my salvation be exalted.**"

C. The Building Stones of the Temple: Believers Everywhere.

Paul uses the same analogy found in 1 Pet. 2:5 which says, "**you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house.**" If Jesus is the "**cornerstone**" and the divine teaching of the apostles and prophets is the "**foundation**," then we, believers are the "**living stones**" of the building.

The phrase "**joined together**" comes from a Greek term that suggests that every stone is set in place perfectly. This means nothing is misplaced, misshapen, or imperfect.

Stones don't naturally come shaped to form parts of a building. They require fitting. They require shaping. In Solomon's temple, they did this shaping at the quarry:

(1 Ki 6:7 NKJV) **And the temple, when it was being built, was built with stone finished at the quarry, so that no hammer or chisel or any iron tool was heard in the temple while it was being built.**

In a way this is a picture of the process that God is doing with us as His living stones. He is knocking off the rough edges, shaping us up, getting us ready. And if he has put you with some people you don't like, it is because they may be the chisel He is using to knock off some rough edges. God uses the chisels of our circumstances and our relationships with other people to shape us.

Some people in your life may be a pain in the neck, and God will use them to teach you patience, forgiveness and unconditional love. Others will be quite needy, and God will be using them to teach you compassion, grace, and mercy. Others will be there to help you, filling in the holes and cracks in your life.

This fitting process is not always easy. Our temptation is to just stay away from people. You can save yourself a lot of grief if you just stay away from people. But you will never grow if you do. You will not learn the patience and compassion that God so desires to build into your life. You will not have others there to encourage you and help you. That's why God puts us together in His family, we need each other to grow. Paul uses that same word, "joined together" in Eph. 4:16 in his picture of the church as a body, "**from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.**" That's God's chisel.

And He pounds that chisel with the hammer of His word, the Holy Scriptures. That's why Eph. 4:11-12 says that Jesus gave us apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers, "**for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.**" How do the apostles, prophets, and pastor-teachers equip the body? By teaching and preaching God's word and living it out as our example. Paul says in 1 Tim 3:16-17:

16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So God takes the chisel of our relationships and circumstances, and uses the hammer of His scriptures to shape us perfectly to fit into His holy temple. This is no joke; it is exactly what God is doing. He is building a temple, a holy temple -- a beautiful, magnificent building.

Together, as a "**holy temple**" we are a "**dwelling place of God**." Though we may call a building a church or even "God's house," it is just brick, mortar and wood. The real "**temple**" is the people. We are the church; we are God's house, His "**holy temple**" wherever we meet!

So, what is this temple for? What is the purpose of God making us into this temple? That God might indwell us, that God might live within us, that God might fellowship with us. God desires to live within us, and He wants us to be the vessel on this earth that He indwells. He wants to meet with us. He is the architect. He wants to give us His design. He wants to empower us for His ministry and His work.

What an amazing truth: God is building us together into His dwelling place in the Spirit! In the Old Testament, the temple was the special place where God met with His people and revealed Himself. But now, not in a physical building, but in the hearts of His people gathered in one locale, knit together in love (Col. 2:2), God dwells.

The building of God's temple is not yet complete. God is still adding stones. It will not be complete until everyone who will believe has believed.

You've seen those headless frames painted to represent a muscle man, a clown, or even a bathing beauty? Some of us have had our pictures taken this way, and the photos are humorous because the head doesn't fit the body. As we picture Christ as the head of this local body of believers, would the world laugh at the misfit or would they stand in awe?