

God Builds his Church Ephesians 2:13-22

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace. He made the two groups one by destroying the wall of hostility that divided them ¹⁵ when he abolished the law of commandments and regulations in his flesh. He did this to create in himself one new person out of the two, in this way making peace. ¹⁶ And he did this to reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by putting the hostility to death on it. ¹⁷ He also came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. ¹⁹ So then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household. ²⁰ You have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the Cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you too are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

A new building project can be a daunting task. Much planning is required. The building won't go up overnight. Many people will be needed to put in their opinion so the building will serve everyone best. Of course, proper materials will be needed in the building so the structure lasts. And one more thing is needed. The Psalmist reminds us, *"If the Lord does not build the house, it is useless for the builders to work hard over it"* (Psalm 127:1).

When it came to building his Church, God planned to involve many more people than some may have first thought. And so his Church would remain permanent, God would have to remain involved in its building. The apostle Paul shows us how in the second chapter of his letter to Ephesian Christians.

God's New Testament church would be much different from his Old Testament church. His Old Testament church was made up exclusively of members of his chosen people Israel. They were the ones through whom God would carry out our world's salvation. But once the Savior came and made everything right between sinful mankind and our holy God, things would be different. Now Gentiles were welcome just as much as Jewish believers. Paul tells what God did to bridge the gulf that separated Gentiles from the Jews. Paul writes: *But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace. He made the two groups one by destroying the wall of hostility that divided them when he abolished the law of commandments and regulations in his flesh.* God would take Gentiles who were far off and make them near, on par with Jewish believers. What brought this about was the blood of Christ.

The need to keep Israel a separate nation ended with Christ was born. Civil and Ceremonial laws that kept Jews and Gentiles separated had fulfilled their purpose. When Jesus declared from the cross, "It is finished," he was speaking of the completion of our salvation. His words marked the end of Old Testament rules and regulations. *In his flesh* Christ on the cross abolished the law with its commands and regulations. Jesus tore down the wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles by nullifying the law. Keeping the law meant not only remembering all that was required but also doing it. Try as they might, the Jews could not keep the law perfectly. As our substitute, Jesus kept the law perfectly. Now we can claim his perfect obedience as our own. Paul told the Romans, *"Through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous"* (5:19). Jesus' body was nailed to a cross, his blood was shed, his soul tore in anguish. The full weight of the curse which the law pronounced brought to bear upon him. So Christ has nullified the law. The law has no more demands to make. Jesus satisfied its every demand perfectly. It has not curse to pronounce. *"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by become a curse for us"* (Galatians 3:13). The result of Jesus' work? He took the two

antagonists (Jews and Gentiles) and by a creative act has turned them into a single man. Since Jewish and Gentile believers have become one man, the hostility is gone and there is peace.

The primary purpose of Christ's death on the cross was to reconcile us to God. Paul tells the Ephesians, *"And he did this to reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by putting the hostility to death on it. He also came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. While it was true that we were by nature children of wrath. It is also true that God did what he did for our salvation because of the great love with which he loved us. The law was nullified. It's curse was removed from us sinners. Jesus did this for Jews and Gentiles in one body. This new entity is the result of what Jesus did on the cross. His body was given over for both Jews and Gentiles. And that marked the end of the hostility. What happened to Christ on the cross brought about a reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles, as well as sinners to God.*

After Jesus finished his work on the cross, his resurrection showed his work was complete and accepted by his Father. That's when he proclaimed the good news of peace. Think of his greeting to his disciples on Easter evening: *"Peace be with you"* (Luke 24:36). Paul says that Jesus proclaimed peace to you who were far away. Jesus did preach after his resurrection, but only to his Jewish followers. How can Paul tell Gentile Christians in Ephesus that Jesus proclaimed peace to them? Paul was his ambassador. Paul told the Corinthians, *"God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. And he has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, inasmuch as God is making an appeal through us. We urge you, on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God"* (2 Corinthians 5:19,20). Not only was Paul Christ's ambassador. We all are. Peter reminds us: *"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, the people who are God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light"* (1 Peter 2:9). What a humbling and yet inspiring revelation! When we tell people about the peace which Jesus established, Jesus is proclaiming peace through you and me. I pray that all of you can set aside a few hours on Saturday, September 21 for the workshop Everyone Outreach. I'm sure it will well be worth it for all.

I'm sure it was difficult concept for Jewish believers to welcome Gentiles with open arms, especially since come had commanded them to remain separate. But now that Christ has come and won salvation for all, all believers, Jews and Gentiles are welcome members of God's church. And so God's Church may remain a permanent structure, God himself must remain an important part of it building.

Paul reminds his readings of what both Jews and Gentiles enjoy. *For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. So then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household.* People from both backgrounds now have access to God. Both Jewish believers and Gentile believers were now approaching the Father. They were on common ground. What Christ did for fellow Jews, he did for Gentiles as well. They were no longer two divisive groups. They were prompted by the same Spirit. They were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. The Spirit prompted all believers to pray because of their adoption. They daily came to the Father's throne in the name of Jesus. The Spirit encourages them to do this not divided into Jews and Gentiles. It is one body, one church.

Paul closes this portion of his letter by describing this new unity. Still speaking to Gentile Christians, Paul reminds them that they are no longer the aliens they once were. They are no longer strangers living in a country without citizenship rights. They are fellow citizens with the

saints. Being citizens implies obligation. But our King does not force his law with tyranny. When we consider the price Jesus paid to redeem us—his precious blood—we cannot help loving him. Citizenship in Christ's kingdom involves not only responsibility but also privilege. Our King delights to make his citizens happy and prosperous. Paul had just written about peace and access to the Father. Paul uses the picture of family life to describe the unity that Jesus established between Jewish and Gentile believers. Both received adoption to which they were predestined. As God's children they are his heirs. They can boldly approach the Father in prayer. God's family transcends all ethnic, racial, economic, and social boundaries. We look forward to the time when all human weakness and sinfulness will have been put off forever. God's family will be perfectly and permanently united before his throne. Meanwhile, we treasure the family members of God with whom we have been brought together, with whom we worship and work in the Lord's service.

Paul now comes with his third picture of unity that Gentile and Jewish believers share. *You have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the Cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you too are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.* Apostles are mentioned first because in the case of the Gentile believers it was apostolic proclamation that brought them to faith. The Church rests on the foundation of Scripture. The apostles and prophets are the foundation stone. Christ Jesus is the cornerstone of the foundation. Every living stone in the building must line up with him. Two walls of a building are united upon a cornerstone so that the building becomes an integrated whole, a single building. So Jewish believers and Gentile believers become part of a single unit as they rest upon Christ.

In this building every stone, every joint is laid together with each of its neighbors, so that the entire building is held together as a unit. It is not yet complete. It is growing. Other living stones are still being built into it. When the last of the elect will have been added, then the building is complete. Then the end of the world will come. If we echo the closing prayer of the Bible, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus," if we earnestly long for our Lord's return, we need to do what we can to get the gospel out to all people. We usually wait until a new church is finished before we dedicate it. The building Paul is describing has long since become and now is a holy temple in the Lord. Because believers are joined to the Lord by faith, collectively they are the temple in which he dwells. So they have the comfort that the Lord is dwelling in their midst to bless and protect them. *"God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day"* (Psalm 46:5).

The same Lord who dwells among all believers as his temple is the One in whom they are being made part of the building. When they became believers, they were brought to rest upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets of which Jesus Christ is the cornerstone. Now Paul speaks of remaining believers. We've all seen old buildings in which one stone came loose and eventually dropped out. Left to themselves, believers too could fall away. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall"* (1 Corinthians 10:12). Be assured the Lord wants you firmly in his temple. He wants you firmly joined to all other believers. Our Lord is carrying on a continuing process of tuckpointing. The Spirit does this through the means of grace. Jesus prays for our preservation in his high priestly prayer: *"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth"* (John 17:17). The goal is that we might continue to be what we by grace already are—the dwelling of God, where God has his home.

God in amazing grace has made Gentiles part of the temple in which he is dwelling. We can only marvel at his grace when you consider that this same grace has been shown to us. Our admiration for his grace will know no bounds. What blessing, what security, what hope is ours!