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In One Body Ephesians 2:19-22

Intro: By way of review, in **ch1**, Paul presents the plan of salvation from God's perspective. He began with God's electing grace in Christ (**4**) and concluded with the exaltation of Jesus Christ as head over all things to the church, which is His body (**22b-23a**). **Ch2** presents the plan from the believer's perspective, showing how we are brought from a state of being spiritually dead to a state of being spiritually alive. But the chapter also ends with the church; for it will show, not just how we have been made alive in Christ, but how we have been brought into the fellowship of God's redeemed and regenerated people.

Paul hinted at this conclusion in last week's text. After reminding his Gentile readers of their past situation, Paul urges them to fully embrace their current circumstance – that Jesus Christ is their peace. They were without Christ, aliens, strangers, hopeless and Godless. But now, by the blood of Christ, they have been brought near into a close relationship with God, which naturally results in a close relationship with all of God's people. Notice how Paul's repeated use of the word one emphasizes the unifying work of Christ: made both one (**14**); one new man (**15**); one body (**16**); one Spirit (**18**). All spiritual distance and division have been overcome by Christ. But believing Gentiles weren't unified with believing Jews in only a spiritual, ethereal sense. They both were now one body; meaning they were a particular people in a particular place brought together for a particular purpose. This is the point to which our text today brings us.

19-22 – Most all of us can probably remember, when we were kids, seeing pictures in which various objects were cleverly concealed. The picture might be of an idyllic meadow with trees, grass, and fluffy clouds. Underneath were the words: "Can you find the animals hidden in this picture?" When you looked at the picture carefully, you would find a rabbit hidden in the fluff of the clouds, a horse tucked into the foliage of a tree, a dog in the grass, and so on. In a sense, this is what we have in our text. Paul's not using the word church, but hidden away in these lines are 3 great biblical images for what the church is and how it functions.

Can you find these images? The first is of the church as a nation or kingdom. Paul refers to it by saying, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints (19a). The second picture is of a family. Paul slips that in by continuing, and members of the household of God (19b). The third picture is the most carefully developed, a building which turns out to be a temple that's built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (20). Then Paul goes on to add, "In whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (21). Later in this letter, Paul further develops the image of the church as Christ's body (ch4-5), and as a well-equipped army (ch6). Let's look at the hidden pictures in our text and see how they apply to church life today.

God's Kingdom (19a) - What a rich field of imagery this first picture unfolds! In the OT, Israel was God's chosen nation but they rejected their Redeemer (Jesus) and suffered the consequences. The kingdom was taken from them and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it (Mt 21:43b). This new nation is the church, a chosen generation...a holy nation, His own special people (1 Pt 2:9). In the OT, the nations were reckoned by their descent from Shem, Ham and Japeth. In the Book of Acts, we see these 3 families united in Christ. In Acts 8, a descendent of Ham is saved – the Ethiopian eunuch. In Acts 9, a descendent of Shem is saved, Saul of Tarsus. In Acts 10, some descendents of Japeth were saved, the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius. Sin has divided mankind but Christ unites by His Spirit.

Still, when you hear the Kingdom of God, what does it bring to mind? Some may immediately think of the OT theocracy, where God was the literal head of the earthly Israelite nation. Or they might think of John the Baptist's preaching: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 3:2), or of Jesus declaring, the kingdom of God is within you (Lk 17:21). We pray for the coming of that kingdom each time we recite the Lord's Prayer: Your kingdom come, Your will be done... (Mt 6:10). Over the years there has been much scholarly debate over whether the kingdom of God is past, present, or future. In some cases the kingdom seems to have a past aspect, as in God's rule over Israel. In others it has a present aspect, as in the preaching of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the early Christians. In still other cases the kingdom of God is future; else how could we pray, Your kingdom come?

The answer is that the kingdom of God actually transcends these chronological concepts and is best dealt with in entirely different terms. Basically the kingdom of God is where God rules. Since God rules over all life and over all worldly kingdoms, there's a sense in which the whole world is God's kingdom and His kingdom prevails. As a result, those who confess God's kingship are comforted in the midst of this world's chaos, conflicts and corruptions. This is why, although there are always wars and rumors of wars, we're not to be troubled (alarmed) by them ([Mt 24:6](#)). The kingdom is also where God rules in individual minds and hearts. Paul described the internal aspects of this kingdom as righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit ([Rom 14:17](#)). Today, the kingdom comes whenever the righteousness, peace, and joy of Jesus enter an individual life, transform it, and bring spiritual blessing.

Paul doesn't develop this picture any further in this letter. He doesn't even use the word kingdom. But he introduces the thought in such a way that it is clear what he has in mind—the incorporation of gentile believers into the kingdom. He gets into this image by the things he said earlier. He'd been talking about the hostility that had existed between Jew and Gentile symbolized by the wall around the Jewish portions of the temple. Paul declares that this wall has been broken down by Christ so that now both Jew and Gentile (and all other elements of human society) are brought near to God on an equal basis and become elements of one great spiritual kingdom, the church. All believers, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, gender or social class, belong to that holy nation with citizenship in heaven. There are no second-class citizens in God's kingdom.

God's Family - Paul's 2nd picture of the church is a family ([19b](#)). We are not just full citizens, we are full and equal members of God's household. The Greek word which Paul uses (*oikeios*) can refer to an entire family household, including friends who live with the family, servants, and hired workers. But in view of Paul's earlier discussion of our being made alive in Christ, it's most likely that he's thinking of our being born into the "natural" family of God where the ties are of blood and not mere household associations. No doubt this is why he introduced this picture. As wonderful as the relationship of a citizen to a strong, healthy nation may be, it's still a distant, or formal relationship. Family ties are more intimate, the bonds are much tighter.

To become a member of a family you must be born into it or be adopted into it. Interestingly, the Bible uses both terms to describe what it means to be a Christian. Mainly it speaks of rebirth. This was Jesus' teaching to the aging Nicodemus: You must be born again ([Jn 3:7](#)). Peter wrote about this in his first letter: having been born again, not of corruptible [perishable] seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever ([1 Pt 1:23](#)).

This idea highlights the similarity or continuity of natures. The life of the child is not the same life as the life of the father or mother, but it comes from them and is like theirs. Modern science would talk of a genetic relationship where the characteristics of parents are passed to children. This is why there must be holiness in the church. God is holy. So the children of God must be growing in holiness also. If they're not, they reveal that they're not truly His children.

Being a member of God's household brings inestimable privileges with it. It brings us into the supportive network of our spiritual brothers and sisters. It gives us a share in the oversight, fellowship, and prayers of the church. It gives us a right to the ordinances and a place in God's plan. More important, it gives us access to God as Father, which means that we can come to Him in prayer at any time of the day with any need or request and have the assurance that He will receive us, He will hear us and He will answer our requests out of His own mercy and according to His own pleasing and perfect will.

God's Temple - The most extensive picture of the church in these verses is that of a temple ([20-22](#)). In the early chapters of the Book of Genesis, God walked with His people ([Gen 5&6](#)), but in [Exodus](#), He decides to dwell with His people ([25:8](#)). God dwelt in the tabernacle until Israel's sins caused *the glory to depart* ([1 Sam 4](#)). Later, God dwelt in the temple of Solomon, but eventually, Israel's rebellious sin would cause the glory to depart again ([Ez 10:18-19](#)). God's next physical dwelling place on earth was in the body of Jesus, which men took and nailed to a cross. Today, through His Spirit, God dwells in the church, the temple of God. God doesn't dwell in man-made temples (or church buildings). He dwells in the hearts of those who have trusted Christ individually and in the church collectively. As Paul develops this image of the church as a temple, he reveals several important aspects.

1. The foundation. The strength and durability of any building rests upon its foundation, and that is just as true of the church as well. This is so important that Paul begins his discussion by reference to this foundation. What is it? He says it's the apostles and prophets. He makes this point differently in [1 Cor 3:11](#) saying, For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. But the point is really the same. Jesus is the foundation. He said to Peter, on this rock [Himself] I will build My church" ([Mt 16:18](#)). But it's also right to say that the apostles and prophets are the foundation too, in the sense that for us they are their teaching, which is focused on Jesus Christ.

The apostles were the appointed and inspired witnesses to Christ in the first generation of the church. Jesus said that He would provide the truth of the NT through them, and He did. In this context, prophets probably refers to that special class of individuals who received and proclaimed direct messages from God and worked along with the apostles in the early days. Paul refers to them again in [3:5](#), speaking of truths revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets and in [4:11](#), saying that God blessed the church by giving some to be apostles [and] some prophets. In this sense of laying a foundation of authoritative revelation for all of God's people, there are no more apostles or prophets today; at least not in this sense. The foundation is already set.

The point is that the basis of the church's unity is truth or sound doctrine. In our day churchmen are often very concerned about unity, and many have been pouring great energy into an ecumenical movement, an effort to get the many diverse branches of the church together. By some great stretch of the imagination, it could be a good thing. True Christians should be united, and it's unfortunate that we're as divided as we are. But when anyone speaks about unity we must be careful to determine what kind of unity they're talking about. Is it the unity of the lowest common denominator? If that's the case, Christianity quickly loses its uniqueness altogether. Is it the unity of an imposed ecclesiastical structure? The church had that to perfection in the Middle Ages, but those were the worst days for Christ's body in all of church history. No, the only unity that's worth having—the only true unity—is the unity built on the revealed truth of God centering in the person and work of Jesus. Where that is present, God blesses the church and enables it to grow into a holy temple...built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit ([22](#)).

2. The cornerstone. In [1 Cor 3](#) Paul called Jesus the foundation. Here he calls Him the cornerstone. A cornerstone was important for 2 reasons. It was part of the foundation, and it also fixed the angle of the building and became the standard from which the architect traced the walls and arches throughout. The word literally means: at the tip of the angle. It refers to the capstone or binding stone that holds the whole structure together. It was such a crucial part of the building that often times, the royal name was inscribed on it. In the East, it was considered to be even more important than the foundation. One scholar describes it as: the stone placed at the extreme corner, so as to bind the other stones...together – the most important stone in the structure, the one on which its stability depended.

But the word also touches upon a rich mine of biblical imagery. We remember that Isaiah, the greatest of the OT prophets, spoke of the coming of Jesus Christ in these terms: 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 (or will never be dismayed) ([Isa 28:16](#)). The psalmist wrote of a stone which was rejected by the builders of the great temple of Solomon but which was later found and used: The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone ([Ps 118:22](#)). Jesus applied this Scripture to Himself, quoting this passage in [Matt 21:42](#); and Peter tied this text into one beautiful image in [1 Peter 2:6-8](#) – the dividing aspect of Christ!

Although the leaders of His day rejected the Lord Jesus Christ by crucifying Him, God made Him the cornerstone of the temple which is the church. This was the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes ([Ps 118:23](#)). The sobering truth behind all this is that you must either be joined to Christ in gracious salvation or be broken by Him in judgment.

3. Living stones. Paul doesn't specifically mention stones here, but that's what he's thinking of in [v22](#). Believers are mortared together with Christ, as God the architect through His workmen, the preachers of the gospel, builds His church. Peter makes the point explicitly in his first Epistle ([1 Pt 2:4-5](#)).

The applications of this part of the picture are as instructive as they are glorious for those who are the living stones. 1st, the stones placed into this great structure are chosen and shaped for their position by God. It's His temple; He is the architect; it's not for us to determine where we will fit in or

how. 2nd, the stones are placed into position in relationship to Jesus Christ. They are, by necessity, attached to Him; if they're not, then they're not part of this building. 3rd, the stones are of different shapes and sizes, maybe even of different material, and they're employed for different functions. Some serve in one way, some another.

Paul illustrates this clearly in [II Tim 2:20](#). There are many “vessels” in a house but not all of them can be the beautiful porcelain vase holding the flowers on the mantle. There's another porcelain vessel hidden from view in another small room that no one likes to talk about but everyone is glad it's there. It might not be as beautiful as the vase but it is a whole lot more necessary! Your service doesn't have to be popular to be necessary. The majority of the time, the most important service is done behind closed doors. The stones of God's temple are put into service as determined by the architect. The stones don't pick and choose how, where or even when they will serve.

4th, the stones are linked to one another. From where they are placed they can't always see this; they can't always even see the other stones. But they're all part of one interlocking whole regardless of what they can perceive. We may not know many people in the church down the road but if they are honoring God and following Jesus, we're all headed in the same direction, working toward the same goal and fulfilling the same purpose. This is true of fellow believers locally as well as those around the world. We're linked to ministries to the Jews in NYC, to Muslims in Pakistan, to the lost in the Philippines, to Venezuelan refugees and Peruvian nationals in Peru, to secularized “Christians” in Norway. We're linked to these believers and all other believers in churches and congregations we've never heard of. We're all stones in this ever growing temple of God.

5th, the stones of the temple are chosen, shaped, and placed, not to draw attention to themselves, but to contribute to a great building in which God alone dwells. I'm always astounded by the number of “ministries” that are named after the person heading it up. I realize the need to distinguish one ministry from another; God forbid that 1 ministry should profit from the hard work of another ([I Cor 3:7-8](#))! 6th, the placing of each stone is only part of a long work begun thousands of years in the past that will continue until the end of the age when the Lord returns. If the Lord tarries His coming, this temple will go on growing long after we are gone.

What a great process this is! And how mysterious! We are told in **1 Kings 6:7** that when the great temple of Solomon was constructed “only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer, chisel or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built.” To my knowledge, no building in history was ever built in this way. Its construction was almost silent, so holy was the work. Silently, silently the stones were moved and added, and the building rose.

It is the same way with the church. God prepares us first and then He adds us to His building. We don't hear what is going on inside human minds and hearts as the Holy Spirit creates new life and adds those individuals to the temple He is building. But God is working. In the days of the apostles God was adding Gentiles to a temple composed at that time largely of Jewish believers. He was adding Luke, Lydia, Phoebe, Philemon, Onesimus—and the believers at Ephesus, and other Greek and Roman cities. Later he added those we call the early church fathers, then the later church fathers and those to whom they ministered. At the time of the Reformation he added Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Knox and many others. He's still adding to His temple today.

This text teaches us that the church is a building, perfectly designed by the great Architect. It's not a haphazard pile of stones, randomly dumped in a field or on a lot. God arranges the church for His own glory and purposes.

It also teaches us that the church is a dwelling place, a place where God lives – not in the building but in the hearts of His people-individually and collectively. The church is never to be an empty house that is virtually a museum, with no one living inside. The church is to be both the living place of God and His people.

Finally, it teaches us that the church is a temple, holy and set apart by God, for God. We serve in that temple as priests, offering the spiritual sacrifice of our lips in praise, of our hearts in surrender and of our lives by walking in obedience.

The plight of the Gentiles has been gloriously resolved! Those who were Christless, homeless, friendless, hopeless and godless are now citizens, members and a dwelling place for God. Jesus Christ has unified His people

by destroying the dividing wall, abolishing the law, bringing peace and granting a new status to His people. do you enjoy that status? Have you been added to His temple? Are you serving Him in that temple? 😊