

EPHESIANS 2:20-22

THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCH 7-29-12

(Ephesians 2) Last week I was asked by an incredulous visitor to our church what could possibly have provoked me to leave the tropical paradise of Florida, which is also my home state, which is also the location of much of my family, in order to move up here. This message is my answer to that question as we consider together the subject of the church. This is what I have invested my life in, and I hope that in a half hour you will understand why. We are in Ephesians two and as you work your way thru Ephesians 2 you go from being dead in trespasses and sins on into our being received as citizens of God's kingdom, children in His family and bricks in His temple. Ephesians 2:**19-22** *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, ²⁰having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, ²¹in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, ²²in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.* Considering the metaphor of the church as a building, the first portion of this passage teaches that the foundation of the church is laid in the teaching of the apostles and the prophets. That is extremely important and we covered it last Sunday, so this morning I want us to look at what the second half of the passage says about the church. The emphasis in the last two verses is on the growth of the church. The key words are the verbs "growing" and "being built." There is this expectation given here that the church of Jesus Christ, described here as a temple is a growing temple, an expanding temple. We are not a static entity but a dynamic one. Two chapters later Paul makes the same point under a different metaphor. In Ephesians 4 you see Paul describing church growth under the image of a maturing body. The church is not only an expanding building but a growing body. In both images you get the expectation of growth don't you? **15-16** *but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.* Church growth. The last half century has seen the development of something called the "Church Growth" movement. Simply put, some have come to analyze church growth in a rather scientific way and have made their conclusions the basis of much teaching. Some see this as a positive thing. Others see it as a

disastrous thing. Either way you see it, recognize that a concern for church growth is not a modern thing. It is a Jesus thing, a Biblical thing. There is, in the New Testament, an expectation given that the kingdom of Jesus Christ is going to grow. We have seen two passages about that already. Let me show you two more. In Matthew 13 Jesus says in **31-33** " *The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; ³²and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.*" ³³*He spoke another parable to them, "the kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened."* What is Jesus getting at there? He is telling us in both pictures that the kingdom of God is something that may start off very small, but eventually becomes pervasive and large and influential. He says that His kingdom is going to be a growing one. This is why I expect the church to grow. My expectation has nothing to do with my evaluations of my own gifts and abilities. As a rule, I expect any church true to the gospel and teaching of Christ to grow because Jesus said that was going to happen. And in the early days of the church we see church growth occurring just like the Lord said it would. Acts 2 in verse 47 says of the infant church that they were **47** *praising God and having favor with all the people And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. 5:14 all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number. 6:7 The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.* The book of Acts describes some radically serious church growth.

Is this a good thing? Are we in favor of church growth? It's bizarre to me that we have to ask that question, but a problem has arisen among us over this church growth business. Some it seems have emphasized church growth as a mechanistic, numbers game that cares only about getting people into a building or onto some church roles. They have also been guilty of distorting the gospel message and neglecting the instruction of the saints in order to appeal to the unchurched. And some of us have stood up against that and said, "No, numbers are not what we are all about. We are about faithfulness in our mission, faithfulness to the word, growth or no growth." We have become suspicious of church growth methodology and have insisted that real, biblical growth will be seen in more than increasing numbers. Someone said the old Pentecostals used to think, "We are God's real church, that's why we are so small and pure." Now that their numbers have swelled they

think, “we must be God’s real church, look at how he’s blessed us.” And, of course, both perspectives are incomplete at best. Jesus taught that he would grow his church. Does that mean that He grows the temple by adding more bricks or making the bricks already in bigger and better? Does he grow the church qualitatively or quantitatively? Any reading of the New Testament yields the obvious answer that our Lord builds His church in both ways. Both ways. Each stone in this building is a growing stone. I Peter 2:5a *you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house*. Each individual stone grows and matures, but at the same time the Lord is cutting out new stones and adding them to His temple. Growth in quality, growth in quantity? It’s not to be an either/or but a both/and.

Well, that is our introduction to this matter of the growing temple. Let’s proceed now through our outline to see that the temple grows in and by the Cornerstone, that the temple grows with every part together, and that the temple grows into a dwelling of the Lord. First then, we turn to this great teaching that Christ is our Cornerstone. 20 *having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone*. More so in Paul’s day than ours, when buildings were constructed out of individual rocks, instead of uniform blocks, the cornerstone was of immense importance. The cornerstone would be a part of the foundation, in one corner of that foundation, and would serve to hold the entire building steady. The builders would use the cornerstone as the standard by which they kept everything else in line. Sounds like what Christ does for us. He has to keep His church in line. The cornerstone was regulative for all the angles of the building. Once it was set everything had to line up with it, not vice versa. Do you see that? And do you see the implications for the church? We don’t go around reinventing Jesus to fit what we want the church to be. We must conform the church to Him, His person, His character, His will and word.

In the New Testament, it was Jesus who first applied the cornerstone metaphor to himself. Matthew 21:42 *Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'the stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone*. What was he talking about there? Peter tells us in Acts 4:11 *He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone*. So distorted was the sight and vision of the Jewish elite that they saw in Jesus a perfect stone and then cast it aside. What Jesus said first and Peter picked up on in Acts 4 is that this stone which was rejected by the Jewish builders, God has made the cornerstone of His eternal

house. Peter elaborates on this in his first epistle. I Peter 2:**4-5ab** *coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, ⁵you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house.* He refers to Jesus as the precious living stone. But we too, who are built on him are called living stones as well. **6** *For this is contained in Scripture: "behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed."*

So then, the church is built up in and on that cornerstone. But in the case of Jesus the cornerstone serves an additional function. For not only is the church built up in him, it is also built by Him. In verse 22 when it says "in whom you are being built" it could just as easily be translated, "by whom you also are being built." Jesus is the builder of His church. He is the one who told Peter, "upon this rock I will build my church." We pastors have to often remind ourselves of this. This isn't Hendley's church and I'm not the builder. It is Christ's church and if it's going to be built He has to do it. The neat thing is that He promised to do exactly that. Has he been doing it? Listen, He has been up to this work for almost 2000 years. How is he doing? Oh, it could be a little farther along than it is, but the progress is evident and it is picking up steam. Let me share some really, really exciting statistics with you that come from the U.S. Center for World Missions. Bible-believing Christians, in the year 1500 there were 5 million on the earth, best estimates. In the year 1900 there were 40 million. In the year 1950 there were 80 million. Now, listen, in 2012 there are 650 million Bible-believing evangelical Christians on this planet, best estimates. In this century the ratio of non-Christians to Christians has gone from 27-1 to better than 7-1. Christ is building His church. What is neater is that He lets us help a little too. I Corinthians 3:9 gives us the right perspective. **9** *we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.* It's all there isn't it? We are God's building. We are Christians under construction. That is exactly how we should see ourselves. We are God's fixer-upper project. He is the builder, we are the building, but does that mean we are totally passive? No. We are His fellow workers in the project. Christ is the One who sees that His church gets built, but He does his work with us, not without us. People are God's plan A. We are the instruments he uses. What a privilege and what a responsibility! Listen, if Christ is about the project of building His church, tell me what you ought to be doing. Huh? If you want to be doing what Christ is doing, if you want to work alongside the Master you had better get committed to the church project because this is what Jesus is up to. He is the architect, the

cornerstone, and the general contractor on this project. What job do you have? Think about that and we'll come back to that question.

For now, let's move on to see that this church which is built in and by Christ the Cornerstone is a church that is built with every part together. Look at our text again. What is the word common to both verse 21 and 22? It is the word, *together*. We are fitted together, built together. The very same thing is emphasized in the fourth chapter of Ephesians where it speaks of we growing up, we reaching maturity. The only way God has planned to grow up believers is together. He does not operate upon you over here and you over here and you over here. He brings you together where you can help each other in the growth process. Ephesians 4:16 *from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.* Do you see what he is saying there? We grow through our mutual contributions into each other's lives. We don't grow as lone Christians. There are aspects of spiritual formation that happen best in solitude, but there are other aspects that can only occur in the context of a church body, being part of a temple wherein you are rubbing shoulders with lots of other living stones. I was so thrilled to meet a brother recently who came to Christ through a book he was given. His spiritual growth was obvious but most all of it has come thru the reading of Scripture and listening to good teaching, but his career made it very difficult for him to connect with other people in a meaningful way. That concerns me. There are elements of growth that happen only in relationship. This is why family is so important. This is why small groups in the church are so important. In the process of rubbing up against each other, we living stones get a lot of rough edges knocked off. I know that's happened with me. One pastor tells of entering a shop in a tourist area that sold polished stones, unusual and attractive rocks. As he looked at the shiny stones he asked the owner of the store how he gets them so shiny. The man took him to a back room that had a barrel full of rocks that were being turned over and around constantly by an electric motor. The man said, "I put the rocks together in here and let them bang up against each other, polishing each other all the time." That's what we do with each other, we swirl around polishing each other by our fellowship. The pastor asked, "When do you know that a rock has been in there long enough?" The owner said, "When I can see my reflection in it." That too is the goal of God. We are the Rock Church, called together by God for mutual polishing until

the Master can see His reflection in us. Christians, the bricks in God's house, grow together. Reason #243 to get involved in your church.

Our third major consideration is this: We grow in and by the Cornerstone; we grow with all the parts together; and thirdly, we grow into a temple or dwelling of God. These last two verses are enough to take your breath away when you think of it. We who were children of wrath have been so completely saved that God Himself has come and will come to make His home in us and among us. We read that we are a holy temple. The temple was known in the Old Testament as the house of God. It was that place in which God was to make His glory and presence known. What turns a building into a temple is simply the presence of God. And then in verse 22 it says we are being built together into a dwelling of God. No real difference from the notion of a temple, but in verse 22 Paul makes clear what he means. Lest anyone think of the temple of Diana which you could visit in Ephesus, a pagan temple that housed a material idol - Paul notes that this temple is indwelt by God spiritually. The verse means that the church is where God dwells by His spirit.

Now look closely at our text and answer me this. Does it teach that the church is now or someday will be the temple and dwelling of God? In contemporary language, has God gotten His certificate of occupancy yet? Have we been declared fit for him to move in? Well, the language of our text seems to point ahead, to some future date when God will dwell among us. Revelation 21:3 describes such a day **2-3** *I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.* There again we find the mixing together of wonderful metaphors. The church is the new city, and she is a bride made ready, but then in verse 3 she becomes again the dwelling place of God. The emphasis is "He shall be among them." There is this glorious hope of the visible presence of the Lord among His people. But is this just a future hope? Is God not among us now? Maybe you think of Matthew 18:**20** *where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.* By His Spirit God even now dwells among His people. We are, present tense, the temple of Jehovah God but the glory of the Lord is not displayed in full as yet, because we are not fully sanctified. What is very plain in our text is that there is a process underway. And it is a process of purification. We are growing into a holy temple. Think of it. We who were misshapen stones, marred and dead have been made into living stones

that are being perfected as the eternal sanctuary of the living God. This is what I Peter 2:5 *you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* Now wait a second! I need to challenge you in your thinking about this. If Christ is at work to grow Himself a holy spiritual house, then, let's see, if you really are part of that house, we would expect that you are personally doing what? Wouldn't you be growing spiritually? If you were really part of that house He is building into a holy temple. Ron Jensen tells the story about going shopping with one of his best friends when, all of a sudden, out of the blue his friend spits right in his face. Ron was rather disgusted by it, but didn't really know what to think so he just took out a handkerchief and wiped himself off. A few minutes later as they were leaving a store his friend did it again. Ptui! right in his face. Strange behavior don't you think? Weird! Until you learn that Ron's friend was his one year old son. Now, it doesn't seem so odd does it? We expect babies to do those kind of immature, infantile things, but if a grown-up did that to you he wouldn't be your friend for long would he? You expect of adults a higher standard of behavior, and let me tell you something - so does God. And he's saying to some of you here this morning that its time to grow up! Some of you are still spitting in your Father's face by the choices you make. Grow up! God intends for us to be a part of this holy edifice He is raising to the Father's glory.

I don't know about you but I find this all tremendously exciting. I get thrilled to think of what the Lord is doing in His church. I consider myself blessed beyond belief to be able to participate like I do in the great construction project that Jesus has undertaken. There is nothing more wonderful to me than to see the Lord establish and build up a church that is growing in both holiness and expansiveness. North Park Church of Wexford is just one little franchise in the great worldwide plan. But this alone is enough to dedicate my whole life to. A church that is growing, but not just in numbers - a church that is committed to both intensive as well as extensive growth. I don't think it matters to God how many people we have sitting through a given Sunday service, but I do think it matters to God how many fully devoted followers of Jesus arise within our ranks. Some people talk about how we need to limit the size of the church and I don't really get it. Sure you can get a church that is a mile wide and an inch deep, but how many holy disciples is too many? How many does our Lord deserve? I can't count that high and I have no fear that we will ever pass it.

Can you relate at all to my enthusiasm about this? You have likely heard the old story about the man who approached three different bricklayers at a construction project. He asked each brick mason what he was doing. The first, very tired looking fellow said, "I am making \$9 an hour laying brick." The second one said, "I am expertly laying brick." The third one very exuberantly said, "I am building a great cathedral!" The perspective can make a world of difference in attitude. Think of how it affects your view of ministry in the church. When you are in the nursery do you see yourself as just cleaning wet bottoms or are you building a great cathedral? It may not look like a cathedral, or smell like one either, but that is what you are up to. Even in the mundane endeavors of church ministry you are co-workers with Christ who is building His church - every bit as much as I am when I stand to preach the word of God. There are lots of building jobs to go around. Make sure you have one. Don't miss out on the opportunity of a lifetime. When I was in seminary I assisted some work crews in the construction of a new building on campus. It was a very nice structure and I suppose one day I might show my grandkids the great building their grandpa helped put up. That building will likely outlast me. But it won't be forever. Someday, it will crumble, maybe before I do. But this I know, when I work on church-building I am involved in a building that will never go down. What a privilege! What an opportunity!

When I was in Atlanta at Promise Keepers way back in the 90s, I heard James Ryle tell a story about going over to London where he bought a tour of the famous St. Paul's cathedral there. James said that as he toured this magnificent and opulent cathedral he found himself quoting Scripture. Specifically he quoted the words of Judas Iscariot who said, "What is the point of this waste? This might have been sold and the money given to the poor." James said he had developed a really bad attitude about the place until, on the way out they noticed an engraving on the cornerstone of the cathedral which said this, "This great cathedral has been built to the glory of God, to the end that all might know that as is His majesty so too is His mercy." James said he immediately melted, and turned to his wife who knew what he was thinking and said, "Honey, let's go back to Colorado and build a great cathedral." He didn't mean a physical one. He meant a church, growing in holiness, growing in size, that becomes a holy temple in the Lord. Like St. Paul's we are a monument to the mercy of God! And this project is worth your life! I am not embarrassed to call you to be committed to Christ's church. This is what your Lord is committed to. This is what He shed His blood for! When you invite a friend to church, when you put a check in the plate, when you work in

a class, when you reprove a sister in love, when you sing a hymn with all the vigor you can muster then you take part in the greatest project of all time. You become a partner in the construction firm of Jesus and Friends. Somebody told me last week that her daughter works now at Toys R Us and really loves it there. But my job is better. I work for Temples R-Us. And we offer a warranty that is lifetime plus. Won't you join me and my friend Jesus? You can be both a brick and a worker in the greatest building ever built - the church, the temple of the eternal King.