

## **The Church, God's New Temple, & You**

**Ephesians 2:19-22**

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Well, as has already been mentioned and alluded to on several occasions, this is a historic day at Countryside Bible Church. Last year, we celebrated our 40th anniversary as a church and today, and this year, we send out our first official church Plant. It's been a long time coming. Twelve years ago, on October 17, 2008 at an elders meeting – actually, an elders planning retreat - we decided then, unanimously among elders, that if the Lord willed, it was our desire to plant a church sometime after 2016. By God's grace, those plans have come to fruition and today we officially send out 50 families who've been meeting together on our campus since September 8 and have been meeting here on our campus as Northlake Bible Church since November 3.

In just a few minutes, we will commemorate this momentous occasion with a brief ceremony formally sending them out to establish a church in their community. But for the next few minutes, I want all of us to step back and think about the unity that we all enjoy as the church of Jesus Christ - the unity among us who will belong to Countryside Bible Church in the days moving forward, the unity that will be a part of those of you who belong to Northlake Bible Church and the plant that launches today, and ultimately, the spiritual unity that we all enjoy as the people of God. We are inseparably connected to each other, even if we are divided by space and distance. I want us to look at that together.

If you still have your Bibles open, you turn back just a couple of chapters to Ephesians 2. Otherwise, I invite you to take your copy of the scriptures and turn there - Ephesians chapter 2.

In the first ten verses of this chapter, Paul lays out the spiritual biography of every true Christian. if you're in Christ, this is your story. He begins with the fact that we were dead in trespasses and sins - that we didn't know God, that we were enslaved to our sin - but God intervened, and He made us alive. He gave us spiritual life and spiritual hearts began to beat and we had a new love for God and a new power and desire to follow and obey His son Jesus Christ. We were created for good works to follow, verse 10 says. So that's our spiritual biography then. Beginning in verse 11 running down through Verse 18, Paul explains that collectively, Christ has done a work for us - that through His work, Jesus Christ has united us with all who believe in Him. Look at

verse 14. This is a key verse in this paragraph. He says, for Christ “Himself is our peace.” And notice, He made peace in two directions.

He made peace, first of all, horizontally with those around us, He made peace. He, “made both groups,” verse 14, that is Jews and Gentiles, “into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall.” Christ united believers of different backgrounds together - whether Jew, Gentile, rich or poor, whatever it might be. He brought us together.

But there's another way that He united us, verse 16. He has reconciled “them both,” that is both Jew and Gentile, “in one body,” the church. But notice He's reconciled us to God “through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity that existed between us and God.” So, Jesus Christ has made peace between us and He has made peace between us and God. That's Paul's point in this paragraph.

Now when you come to verse 19 through the end of the chapter, Paul goes on to explain the results of that spiritual union that Christ has accomplished. Let's read these last few verses together. It's where I want us to focus our attention this morning. Ephesians 2 beginning in verse 19. “So then,” as a as a result of what has been accomplished,

you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Now that is an amazing passage, but I want you to notice with me the connecting point. Notice, verse 19 begins with those two little words, “so then.” It means that what follows are the practical consequences, or the logical results, of the union that we now have with God through the work of Christ and with each other because of the work of Christ.

To help us understand the practical consequences of that union, Paul here uses three illustrations to show us what it practically looks like, what it means. Three images that, together, help us understand what has changed because of the union that Jesus Christ has produced. Let's look at these pictures, these images, together.

The first is this: we are citizens of God's kingdom. Notice verse 19, "So then" - as a result of what Christ has done, the union He's produced with God, and He's united you to other believers - "so then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints". Notice, again, the two directions in which Christ has accomplished this work. You're no longer strangers and aliens to God. God is now your King and you are, as a result, fellow citizens in His kingdom with the other believers.

The second picture that he describes here is this: we are members of God's family as a result of what Christ has done. We are members of God's family. Verse 19 goes on to say, "and (we) are of God's household." The Greek word for household implies all those who live under the roof, who are related to the family. The point is: as a result of what Christ did in producing peace between us and God, God is now the Father of every Christian and of all Christians. He has adopted us into His family. And as a result of that, we are also members of that family together. We are fellow members of the family of God. Is that how you think about the believers around you? That's the reality. God is our adopted Father. Our adoptive Father and we are, in turn, His adopted children. That is exactly the truth if you're a follower of Jesus Christ. God has adopted you as His son or His daughter. Let me just say, if you're here this morning and you're not a follower of Jesus Christ - if you have never repented of your sins and put your faith in Jesus Christ - that is not true of you. In fact, Jesus said in John 8 to those who had not become His followers, "you are of your father the devil." If you're here this morning and you're not a follower of Jesus Christ, then Satan himself is truly your father. The only way to change families, the only way to be adopted as described in John 1:12 where it says this, "as many as received," Jesus, that is, all of those "who believed in His name," "to them He gave the right to become sons of God." If you're willing to turn from your sin and put your faith in Jesus Christ, even this morning, God will adopt you. Christ Himself will give you the authority to become a son or a daughter of God. You will be a part of His family and fellow members of the family of God. So, we are members of God's family.

But, there's a third illustration that Paul gives here that I really want to spend the rest of our time together this morning focusing on and it's the fact that we are stones in God's temple. That's the message of verses 20 - 22. Now, this picture of the church as a building was the very first picture that Jesus, our Lord Himself, used the very first time He referred to His church. You remember

in Matthew 16:18, He said, "I will build my church." He described the church as a building and Paul here takes up that image, that metaphor, and develops it a little more. And here, in the context of Ephesians 2, Paul is showing the Jewish and Gentile believers in Ephesus that they are now united - that the enmity between them is gone and they are united to God in ways that this image will develop and they are united to one another

Now, it might seem with this third picture that Paul is getting a little cold on us. I mean, we can all appreciate being citizens in a new nation and new kingdom. We can all appreciate being members of a family. That seems warm and inviting. But stones in a building? Well, think about it for a moment. There is actually a unity expressed by this third picture that is not expressed in the first two because you can be a member of a nation and not really united with the other members of that nation. We see that in our country today, sadly. You can also see the reality - depending on the family to which you belong -that you are by blood a member of that family, but you are not truly united with them in a loving, gracious way. But when it comes to this third picture, this picture of stones in a building, there is a profound, deeper unity that is portrayed. Between the stones of an ancient building, there was this essential unity. They didn't use mortar, typically, in the kinds of buildings Paul's talking about here - important buildings made of marble or granite. Instead, the stones were cut out of a quarry very carefully and then, they were shaped to fit against each other. They tightly fit together. And if there were any cracks, they were very small, and they were carefully filled. And if you broke the stones of the building apart, then the entire building collapsed. It was no longer a building. That's Paul's point here. As the church of Jesus Christ, we are so interconnected. We rely on each other to such an extent that if we stop, the entire church collapses. The building is no more. So, it's a powerful picture. I want to look at it a little more in-depth as Paul does here. As we think this through this morning,

Notice, first of all, Paul identifies the materials in this building. He starts with the foundation. And he says the foundation is the New Testament apostles and prophets. Notice verse 20, "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets." The church is built on one foundation and, according to 1 Corinthians 3, it's a foundation that's already been laid, Paul says I and the apostles and the New Testament revelation that came through the New Testament prophets, that is the foundation. The New Testament revelation about the person and work of Jesus Christ that came through His Apostles, through His New Testament prophets. That's the

foundation. Understand, the foundation is not the men themselves. Rather, it is their authoritative, and ultimately, inspired teaching.

Let me say to Countryside Bible Church and to Northlake Bible Church that our churches must be built on only one foundation - the inspired revelation of God in the Word of God. That must be the foundation of everything we do and every decision we make about the church. This Book, the Book you hold in your hand, it is the only foundation for every true church - for this church, for Northlake as well.

There's a second material that Paul identifies here, and that is the corner stone. The corner stone is Jesus Christ. Notice how he puts it in verse 20, "Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone." Now in an ancient building of importance, a building that was going to be built with marble or granite to enable it to endure the years, the corner stone was absolutely essential. In fact, it was the very first stone that was quarried out, carefully selected. And then it was carefully prepared, meticulously squared. And then, it was the very first stone that would have been put into place. The rest of the foundation stones were then squared and true to it. Then, every other stone in the building was true to those foundation stones. So, when we think of corner stone, we think of something that ceremonial, something that's just sort of stuck out there to mention, you know, why the building was built or when. That's not a corner stone. In the ancient building, the corner stone was the most important stone in the entire building. It was the ultimate determiner and measure of everything in the building. And Paul says, when it comes to the church, "Christ Jesus Himself is the corner stone." Who Jesus is, what Jesus accomplished, what He taught - all of those things about Jesus must shape everything in the life of the church. Christ must be the center of every authentic church. He must be the center of Countryside Bible Church, and He must be the center of Northlake Bible Church.

The overall mission and ministry of the church must be Christocentric. Every specific ministry in the church must be centered on Christ. Our worship must be centered on Jesus Christ. It comes down to this: if people can attend Countryside or Northlake, if they can hear the preaching, sing its music, go to its classes and Bible studies, attend its events, and not know that we are the church of Jesus Christ, then we have failed. No generic talk about God. We are followers of Jesus Christ. And this is His church. He is its head. If someone who claims to worship God but does not accept or acknowledge God's Eternal Son can attend the activities in our churches and

feel comfortable and agree with everything that happens, then we have miserably failed. Christ must be at the center of everything. If you are a teacher here at Countryside or will be there at Northlake, if you have a role of leadership in one or the others of these churches, make sure what you teach, make sure the decisions you make as leaders, is centered on Jesus Christ. Our unity, Paul says, comes from the fact that we share the same corner stone, Jesus Christ and His gospel, and the same foundation - the inspired, authoritative teaching of the same Book. May God keep Countryside and Northlake from ever abandoning either the foundation or the corner stone.

Now, that brings us to the third material that Paul mentions and, really, where I want us to focus, and that is the stones, or members. I, when I preached through this text when we were working our way through Ephesians, it took me several weeks to deal with this passage. So, I'm just kind of flying across the top here, but I want you to realize that the third material is us. The stones are us as members of the church. Verse 21, "in whom the whole building being fitted together." You see, the reference to the individual stones there, "being fitted together, is growing." "The whole building," here, refers to the entire church. It could be applied to the church universal, that is, all true followers of Jesus Christ everywhere, in every age. And that would be true. But that's not Paul's emphasis here. Here, he's talking to the entire church in Ephesus and, by application, to the entire church at Countryside and the entire church that is Northlake.

He says, "the whole building," and then he says, "is being fitted together." That is one, unusual Greek word that's translated there, "being fitted together." It's just one Greek word. This is the first time it ever appears in Greek anywhere. It's because Paul himself coined it. What Paul did is he took three separate building words and he combined them together. Words that describe construction with huge blocks of marble and granite. In fact, this unusual Greek word with its three separate words put together incorporates the entire ancient construction process of building with stones in secular Greek. If you follow these three words that he brings together here into one, you will find that these words refer to the cutting of a stone from the quarry, the shaping and fashioning and preparing that stone so that it's perfectly square and smooth, testing that stone, even preparing dowels and dowel holes in each stone, and then the sealing of those dowels into the holes with molten lead. Paul's point is this is what God has done for each of us as individual believers. This is what God does. He has cut us out of the quarry as individual Christians. He has shaped us. He has fashioned us. He has tested us. He has prepared us to ensure that we all fit

together well with the other stones. Now, just stop and think about that for a moment because this metaphor and this idea that that you have been cut out of the quarry - you have been saved, if you will, out of your sins - not solely for yourself but in order to fit into this building God is building, it completely demolishes so many of the ideas that are rampant in today's church. For example, this this metaphor is anti-narcissistic. Paul doesn't speak of individuals, he speaks of the whole building. Think about that on your own faith for a moment. When God thinks about the church, He doesn't think solely, He does think of individuals, but He doesn't think solely of individuals. He thinks about the entire structure.

Imagine one stone in one of those ancient temples. Some of you've had the chance to travel and you've seen some of those magnificent buildings or the ruins of them with those huge stones carefully fitted together. Imagine one of the stones in one of those buildings thinking something like this, "you know, this whole thing really is about me." Immediately, this metaphor destroys that kind of thinking. Christian, understand this: when you think about your Christian faith, don't think about yourself as an island that simply exists with a relationship between you and God. No, that is not God's thinking. You are one of the stones in a larger work, intimately connected to and dependent on your fellow stones. Christianity is not narcissistic. It's not self-focused. The whole building is being fitted together.

This metaphor is also anti-consumeristic. You know, today the church is all into the consumer. You know, fashion the church, do what you do up front to appeal to the individual consumer. They've got to like what you do, and they've got to want to come back. And so, you've got to gear everything to the consumer like you were a department store. But the whole image of a building here reminds us that the building isn't constructed, listen carefully to this, the building isn't constructed to fit individual stones. Instead, each stone is selected, cut, and shaped so that it fits into the building.

Also, this picture of the church as a building is anti-spectator - and we live in a spectator culture. We gather in crowds like this and we watch, we sit, and we watch with other people. And that's how we think about church. But as a believer, Paul says, listen, you're not a spectator. You are one of the stones in God's temple and, like it or not, you must be an active part of the church itself. Whether you are part of Countryside and going to continue to be here in the days ahead or whether you have become part of Northlake Bible Church, you can't think of your faith like a

theater where you go and sit next to strangers, enjoy what you came to enjoy, and then leave with no sense of obligation to others. It's been said there are two kinds of pillars in the church: there are the pillars that support the church by their prayers, and their service, and their work, and then, there are the caterpillars who crawl in and out. Listen, if you're a follower of Jesus Christ, He hasn't given you the option of being a caterpillar that just crawls in and out every Sunday. Romans 12, as we're learning in our study of the book of Romans, Ephesians 4 that we just read a moment ago, 1 Corinthians 12, they all teach that every part of the body of Jesus Christ has been gifted by Christ with the intention that that gift be used for the benefit of the body.

We get this physically, right? I mean, maybe I'm the only one that's ever had this experience but, has your alarm ever gone off in the morning and you wake up and discover that your arm, the arm you typically use to turn off the alarm clock is completely asleep? The alarm is sounding. It's loud. You're afraid it's going to wake up your spouse. You desperately want to turn it off but when you try to move your arm, it just flops across the bed like a dead fish. Have you ever thought about what if members of our body just randomly decided to do that during the day? I mean, what if a member of your body said, "you know, I'm just tired of serving. I'm going to take a break. I'm just going to be here, but I'm not really going to serve the body today." Christian, you don't have that option when it comes to the body of Christ. If you're here at Countryside if you're going with Northlake, or if you're here visiting with us and you belong to a church, you are responsible to be an active part of that church. Don't misunderstand me now, I'm not saying that it's never appropriate to step away for a short time because of unusual circumstances. I'm not saying that you should never cut back on service if you have, if you're one of those few people who tends to over commit. But do get this point: Christ is not pleased when you attend church week after week, month after month, year after year, and you never get involved in serving in that church, when you refuse to become interdependent with the other stones in the building.

Now, look back at Ephesians 2 because what Paul says next is, at first glance, a little odd. Notice, he says, "the building is growing." Now, here's where the idea of the church as a building breaks down because the church is living, it's organic. And so, Paul has to add this idea of organic growth. It's like Peter's "living stones" in 1 Peter 2. Christ is still building His church and that means two things: it means, first of all, that more stones are still being added as others believe, and it means that the stones that are already in place are spiritually growing individually



as a part of this building. So, there are the materials: the foundation (the New Testament Apostles and Prophets), the corner stone is Jesus Christ, the stones are the members.

Now, next Paul explains for us the function of this building. What exactly is this building? How is it used? Notice, first of all, it is a new temple for worship, verse 21, "it is growing into a holy temple in the Lord." Now, that is an absolutely remarkable statement. It's remarkable because of the Greek word that Paul uses here. There are actually two different Greek words for temple. One of them is "hieron" and "hieron" refers to the various parts of the temple grounds or sometimes it's used for the entire temple compound, or temple complex. That's not the word used here. The other Greek word is "naos." Paul chooses this word "naos" because of how it's used. In the Old Testament, it's used in the Septuagint to refer to the temple proper, especially the Holy of Holies, the place where God manifested His presence. And, of course, when Christ came, He was where God manifested His presence. "The fullness of the Deity," Paul says, "dwelt in Him in bodily form."

But now, Paul says the church is where God manifests His presence. Now that's amazing, but it's even more amazing if you remember the context Paul has been dealing in this passage with - the temple in Jerusalem. And the Jews, he said, were considered near to God because the temple was in their midst. God was in their midst and they could go closer to God, even in the temple complex. The Gentiles were considered far off because many of them never darkened the grounds of the temple and even if they came to the Jewish temple, they can only go so far. They were far off. They were removed from the presence of God. And don't forget that famous dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles that Paul mentions earlier in this chapter. But God has built a new temple, a new place where He specifically manifests His presence. It's not made by human hands. It's not made up of marble and granite. Rather, it's made up of people that God handpicks to fit together into this building that He's creating. The Jews, you remember, couldn't enter the temple unless they were priests and the Gentiles couldn't even get close to the temple proper. But now, Paul says, believing Jews and Gentiles are the temple. You know, sometimes people refer to this room as the sanctuary. It's maybe a part of your past and I understand why people refer to it that way - it's because it's a place we worship. But this isn't the sanctuary. We are the people of Countryside, the people of Northlake. We are the Holy of Holies. Let me just say, if you're part of the church plant, you don't have a building, but you are a building. You are

a building that God Himself is creating, has created. And that's true of every true church of Jesus Christ. We are a temple where God dwells. The church is God's new temple. It's His new Holy of Holies. And, by the way, this really emphasizes the priority of worship. The temple had one primary function and that was approaching God in worship. And this metaphor of the church as a temple teaches us that when we come together as God's people, we are entering the presence of God to worship just as surely as if we were an Old Testament worshiper approaching the temple to worship. Not because God dwells in the place where we meet as the New Testament church, but because His abiding presence dwells among His people.

Paul adds, notice, that we are a, "holy temple." He stresses the church's character as set apart to God because of the nature of the church, because of what happens when we come together, the church - God's Temple - must be kept holy. We each have to pay attention to the sin in our lives. We have to come having confessed our sins to worship God together. And that's why, by the way, we practice church discipline. The church has to be kept holy because a thrice holy God dwells among us. Notice how Paul puts it in verse 22. The church is a new temple for worship, and it is the, "dwelling of God." Verse 22, "In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." Think about that. Regardless of our background - whether we're Jew or Gentile, whether in New Testament era, they were slave or free, whether today we are rich or poor, whether we're male or female - we are all being built together by the work of the Spirit into a dwelling of God. 2 Corinthians 6:16, Paul says to the Corinthian church, "we are the temple of the Living God just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." God dwells among His church.

By the way, look at that word, "dwelling," in verse 22. It's not the Greek word for dwelling in the sense of you go somewhere to stay as a guest. Instead, it means to make a place home. God has made the church - churches like Countryside Bible Church, churches like Northlake Bible Church - His home on Earth. Christian, you are a living stone in the temple that God Himself is building and where He lives.

These pictures of unity that we enjoy, by the way, are not just theory. This isn't just pie in the sky. Paul applies this concept very practically in the second half of Ephesians. Look at Ephesians 4. I read it this morning but notice. In light of this unity that we have, verse 3, we are to be, "diligent to preserve the unity," that the Spirit has created. How do we do that? Verse 2, with the

right attitudes: with humility, with gentleness, with patience, “showing tolerance for one another in love.” Verses 4-6, We are to not only treat each other graciously and humbly, but we are to focus on what unites us, focus on what we share in common. There is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. Preserve the unity by focusing on those things that we share in common, not those unimportant things that divide us.

He goes on, beginning in verse 7 down through verse 12, to say we must respect and appreciate the place that each stone fills in the body of Christ. It says everybody's been gifted and plays a part. Here, he switches to the metaphor, not of a building but, of a body. You're a member of Christ's body. You've been assigned a role. You've been given a capacity to serve. Do it and respect the others who have differing gifts as well. And then beginning in verse 13 down through verse 16, he says you have to take your place in the church very seriously. Actually, it starts in verse 12 because he says the pastors, the elders, the leaders of the church are there to equip you saints to do the work of ministry. We don't believe in a church where there are professionals who do the ministry of the church. No, the job of myself and the elders of this church, of Dusty and those who will be leadership of Northlake in the future, their job is to equip you, the saints, so that you can do the work of ministry. As you use the gifts God has given you. And when that happens, notice what happens, verse 16, as every joint supplies what it's supposed to supply and every part works properly, it, “causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” That's Christ plan for the church and it grows out of the unity that we enjoy.

Brothers and sisters of Countryside Bible Church and of Northlake Bible Church, as we part ways today to become two separate churches, don't ever forget our organic unity. Remember that unity when you think of the members of your own church. Remember that unity when you think of the members of the other Church. And remember that unity that we all, as living stones, enjoy together as God's people.

Each of us has been carefully placed into God's temple and permanently connected to each other. We have become the new Holy of Holies, the place where God manifests His presence. We are God's home and don't ever forget it. Not the place, but the people. May God make us faithful to be His home in the communities where He's placed us. Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You for these great truths. We thank You for what our Lord Jesus Christ has done in uniting us to You, in reconciling us to You through His life and death and resurrection.

Thank you that You brought many of us in this room to repentance and faith in Him and You've adopted us as Your children. We are citizens of Your kingdom. We are members of Your family. And we are specially selected stones that fit together to form the place where You manifest Your presence. Lord, help us to think like this. Forgive us for our individualistic thinking. Forgive us for our narcissism, for our spectator mentality. Lord, help us to think like Christians and not like pagans around us. And Lord, I pray that as we now part ways as churches that each of us individually - each church Countryside and Northlake - would take these realities and see them reflected powerfully in the communities where You placed us for the advancement of the kingdom of Your dear Son and the glory of His name. We pray, in His name, amen.