

WELCOME TO JESUS' CHURCH_ God's building

In this, the third lesson in our series, I want for us to look closely at the second word picture Paul uses for Christ's church. It is that of a building. Read along with me from **Ephesians 2:19-22**.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ² And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.

So, though the Lord's church is not to be confused with any physical structure_ the metaphor of a building is what the Spirit moved Paul to use here to describe her. Let's see what lessons we can learn from this.

First let's look at **the foundation**. The apostles and the prophets serve as the base_ but note that they are all aligned with one another because of their common alignment to **the chief cornerstone, Jesus**. Bottom line, any church that is built on any other foundation than this will not be His church. I don't usually name names_ but the Unitarian church is not Christ's church. Why? It doesn't care what your foundation is_ and Jesus is just one cornerstone among many, like Buddha, Confucius, and Mohammed. What about the Mormon Church? The apostles and prophets it is founded on aren't the ones Paul had in mind. How do I know? They didn't even exist when Paul made this statement. Get the idea? The prophets pointed to the Messiah, the Prince of Peace who would come and gather God's people together. And after He died and rose again and ascended back to the Father, the apostles all pointed to Jesus as the One they prophesied about. The prophets lined up historically before the Christ_ the Apostles stretching out into the future thereafter...

Yet, note that there are no sectarian groups, either. There wasn't Isaiah's church nor Ezekiel's church nor St. Peter's church nor St. Mary's church nor St. Paul's church, for that matter. Paul warned about such divisiveness in **1st Corinthians 1:10-13**. Neither were there Baptist churches, Methodist churches, Lutheran churches, or Presbyterian churches. There weren't any "*Christian churches*" either. By that I mean, there were no denominations, so there was no need for a church to identify itself as non-denominational.

Now, consider that **this is a holy temple**. Jesus' church is not a building, but the assembly of His followers is compared to the Temple of God. In the OT God's presence filled the temple. Divine revelation was given in the temple. Atonement for sin was made in the temple. In **1st Corinthians 3:16**, Paul says the church is the temple of the Holy Spirit. In **1st Corinthians 6:19**, he says each member of the church is also a holy temple of that same Spirit. So, guess what? God's presence is to fill Christ's church and every member of it. God's word is to go out from His church_ as we gather and as we go out one by one into the world. And, yes, atonement is to be made available through His church. We all need to be interceding in prayer for sinners and pointing them to the only One whose blood can cleanse them.

The whole building was joined together. Those who truly put their faith in Jesus become part of something much bigger than themselves. We understand that Jesus died not merely to bring us close to Him, but to live in harmony with one another. You see, there are no single standing stones here. Neither is there anyone **"taking a stand" on Jesus** while looking down on everybody else. I think we have emphasized the personal relationship with Jesus so much that we've left the impression that a relationship with the rest of the church is of little or no importance. Remember that those who were united to Christ become part of His living body. In this illustration, they became the bricks that comprised His church_ bound together with the magnificent mortar of unconditional love. **1st Peter 2:4-7** comes to mind.

⁴ "As you come to Him, the living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him--⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame." ⁷ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious..."

So Jesus' church is a spiritual house made up of people whom are called "*living stones*"_ aligning themselves with the chief cornerstone of Jesus, their Savior and Lord. I'm afraid that image is lost on most of us. What exactly is a cornerstone, anyway?

Though these days, a cornerstone may be merely an ornamental brick inscribed with some information about the building, in Paul's time, a cornerstone determined the placement of every other stone. Every brick or block or stone was aligned to it_ whether going North, South, East, or West_ or one atop another. Structures that are considered to be of great importance or beautiful and impressive architecture are referred to as "*edifices*." Interestingly enough, the same root word is used to form the word "*edification*." Both have to do with building something. No wonder Paul insists in **1st Corinthians 14** that all things in the church are to be for edification. As he also says to us in **Ephesians 4:29**, building each other up in love_ speaking only those things that will benefit those who listen.

So, **church, what is our foundation**? Is it Christ? Is everything we do aligning with His teaching? And what is our focus? Shouldn't it be supporting one another in love? **And how about each one of us individually**? As living stones, are we placing the full weight of our faith and trust on Jesus alone? Is He precious to us? Are we leaning on our brothers and sisters when we need help? Are we doing what we can to hold them up when they do? If not_ we need to be.

If you have not yet put your trust on Christ_ if you've not yet become cohesively connected to His church_ I encourage you to do so this morning.