

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND
THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL:
A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON TWENTY-EIGHT)

“JOINED TOGETHER IN CHRIST”

EPHESIANS 2:11-22 (NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh — who are called “uncircumcision” by the so-called “circumcision” that is performed on the body by human hands —

12 that you were at that time without the Messiah, alienated from the citizenship of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who used to be far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For he is our peace, the one who made both groups into one and who destroyed the middle wall of partition, the hostility,

15 when he nullified in his flesh the law of commandments in decrees. He did this to create in himself one new man out of two, thus making peace,

16 and to reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by which the hostility has been killed.

17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near,

18 so that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

19 So then you are no longer foreigners and noncitizens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household,

20 because 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, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,

22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

In the second half of **Ephesians 2 (Verses 11-22)**, the Apostle Paul focuses on the work of Christ for the Gentiles in particular, and on the reconciliation of the Gentiles and Jews in their union with Christ. According to New Testament scholar **Daniel Wallace**, the theme of this section of Paul's letter may be stated pragmatically in the following way: "Christians, get along with each other! Maintain the unity which Christ has effected positionally, by his death, in a practical manner."

Before they were saved by God's grace, The Jewish and Gentile members of the Ephesian church had been separated by what Paul referred to as "*the middle wall of partition.*" This "*middle wall of partition,*" may have been an allusion to a literal barricade which separated the court of the Gentiles from the temple itself in Jerusalem. But the allusion to that barricade was by way of illustration. What Paul was actually speaking of was the chronic, deep-seated hostility that existed between the two groups. The divine ordinances given by God to Israel stood as a wall between the Jews and the Gentiles, because it made a definite distinction between them.

Jesus Christ destroyed this "*middle wall of partition*" when He abolished the law by His death on the Cross. By fulfilling the demands of the Law in His righteous life, and by bearing the curse of the Law in His sacrificial death, Jesus removed the legal barrier that separated the Jews from the Gentiles.

Paul informs us that our Lord "*did this to create in himself one new man out of two, thus making peace.*" Christ not merely made one man where formerly there had been two, but He made one **new** man. He created something entirely new. The old distinctions between Jew and Gentile have been lost in a new man—the "***in Christ***" man.

In verse **16**, Paul continues and expands his explanation of the purpose of Christ's sacrifice, whereby He abolished in Himself the law of commandments in ordinances. He says, "*and to reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by which the hostility has been killed.*"

Paul is referring here not only to the reconciliation between the Jews and the Gentiles, but also to a reconciliation that is even more fundamental, namely, the reconciliation between lost humanity and God. In the context of the idea of the reconciliation of the Jews and the Gentiles, Paul introduces the larger idea of the reconciliation of both groups to God. While it is true that both groups had been in a state of enmity with each other, the larger and more basic truth is that both groups had been in a state of enmity with God! Indeed, it was because of their enmity with God why they were at enmity with each other!

It was God's purpose and plan to bring the Jews and the Gentiles into a right relationship with Himself and with each other by the Cross of Christ. On Calvary, He put to death the enmity between the Jews and the Gentiles by putting to death the enmity between both groups and Himself. In this way He reconciled both groups in one body to Himself and each other.

The idea of peace between God and man, and consequently also between man and man, as a result of the sacrifice of our Lord on the Cross, is continued in verses **17-18**: *“And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, so that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.”* The peace of which Paul speaks here is not a feeling, but an objective fact. Every genuinely saved person enjoys peace with God right now!

The fact that the Jews and the Gentiles have been brought to God through Christ, is a witness to the truth that Christ came and preached peace to both of them. And because both the Jews and the Gentiles have obtained this peace through Christ’s suffering on the cross, both groups now have *“access in one Spirit to the Father.”* It is through Jesus Christ, and Him alone that access to the Father was made possible and real. We may define *“access”* as it is used by Paul in his epistles, as *“the freedom to approach the Father, in the confidence that we have found never-ending favour with Him.”* *“Access”* has to do with the special status of those who can enter boldly, into the innermost dwelling place of the sovereign God. Both Jewish and Gentile believers can now, as a result of Christ’s work, walk together as one humanity into the very presence of God.

It is by means of the ministry of the Holy Spirit that the saints have access into the presence of God. The in-dwelling Spirit opens the door into God’s immediate presence.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ reconciled both the Jews and the Gentiles to God, through His suffering on the cross, and both groups have access in one Spirit to the Father. Since this is the case, all inequality between the two groups, as far as their **position** or their **standing** in the sight of God is concerned, has come to an end. Paul gives expression to this truth in verse **19**: *“So then you are no longer foreigners and noncitizens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household.”*

In verse **12**, Paul had told the Gentile members of the Ephesian church, that prior to their conversion, they had been *“alienated from the citizenship of Israel”* and were *“strangers to the covenants of promise.”* But now, no longer were they to be considered mere foreigners who happened to be visiting the people of another land. Nor were they to be regarded as aliens or sojourners, dwelling in the midst of Israel without having obtained the full rights of citizens. On the contrary, they were now *“fellow-citizens”* with the saints.

The church is not to be divided into first-class members and second-class members. Every member of the body of Christ is saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. They have all been separated from the world and consecrated to God as His own peculiar possession. Their position or standing is also the same. They were all chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world; They were all predestined to the adoption as God’s legal heirs through Jesus Christ; They have all been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ. And all of this was and is according to the pleasure of God’s will and to the praise of the glory of His grace.

In the latter part of the verse, Paul expresses the truth of the change that had occurred in the circumstances and standing of the Gentiles in an intimate manner. He declares that they are now *“members of God’s household.”* They are now a part of God’s family! The household is a more intimate unit than the state. A family member shares a more intimate relationship than a citizen does. “Brother and sister” are more endearing terms than *“fellow citizens,”* “or country men.” We are all brothers and sisters in the one family, no matter what racial, national, societal, economical, or physical distinctions we may possess.

In verse **20**, The apostle changes his metaphor from family-life to architecture. He tells the Gentile believers in Ephesus that they *“have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.”*

In this verse, Paul refers to the *“apostles and prophets”* as the foundation upon which the believers, both Jewish and Gentiles, have been built. This appears to contradict **1 Corinthians 3:11**: *“For no one can lay any foundation other than what is being laid, which is Jesus Christ.”* But it is precisely because these men gave such a faithful and Spirit-empowered testimony about Jesus Christ that they could be called the foundation of the church, in a secondary sense. Paul does not refer to them, in and of themselves, as the *“foundation.”* Nor does he do so because they were entitled to this distinction as a result of any intrinsic merit. He does so, because they were divinely appointed witnesses and ambassadors who were constantly pointing **away from themselves, to Jesus Christ.** In **Revelation 21:14**, the Apostle John uses the same symbolism in describing the New Jerusalem: *“The wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”*

The term *“prophets”* here, does not refer to those who exercised that office in Old Testament, such as Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc. Rather, it is a reference to the prophets of the New Testament era.

In referring to our Lord as the *“cornerstone”* Paul clearly gives Him the pre-eminence over the apostles and prophets. Historically, the cornerstone was the most important part of any building. It was the first stone laid for a structure, with all other stones laid in reference to it. All the other stones were made to adjust to the cornerstone. Therefore, the cornerstone determined the position of the entire structure. The cornerstone was also the key to keeping the walls straight. The builders would take sightings along the edges of this part of the building. If the cornerstone was set properly, the stonemasons could be assured that all the other corners of the building would be at the appropriate angles as well. The total weight of an edifice rested on this particular stone, which, if removed, would cause the whole structure to collapse.

Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the spiritual house that God is building. In addition to resting upon Him, the **character** of the spiritual house is determined by Him and its **strength** and **security** is dependent on Him. It is He who settles the question as to what this house is to be **in the sight of God**, and as to what is its **function** in the world. It is Christ who gives the house its **direction**. In **1 Peter 2:5**, the Apostle Peter refers to believers as *“living stones.”* The *“living stones”* must regulate their lives in accordance with the will of the cornerstone, Jesus Christ.

The importance of Jesus Christ as the cornerstone of God's spiritual building is stressed by Paul in verse **21-22**: *"In him the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."* The building that Paul refers to is of course, the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. He explains that, in addition to being the principle of the church's **stability** and **direction**, Jesus Christ is also the principle of its **growth**. Christ is central to the growth of the building. Christ is the one *"in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord."*

The words, *"being joined together"* are the translation of one Greek word which means, "to join closely together." **The members of the body of Christ are not only joined closely with Christ, they are also joined closely together with each other!** It is in union with Him and with each other that the entire building is growing. It is a living building consisting of living stones. Each living stone, whether he or she be Jew or Gentile, slave or free, rich or poor, black or white, makes his or her own contribution to the growth and beauty of the building. The church is God's Temple, where persons who were once enemies, are not only joined together, but are contributing to the growth of each other because of their union in Christ!

Paul underscores this point in chapter **4** and verses **15-16**, *"But practicing the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head. From him the whole body grows, fitted and held together through every supporting ligament. As each one does its part, the body builds itself up in love."*

The word *"Temple"* is the translation of a Greek word which has reference, not to the outer area of the temple with its porches and outbuildings, but to "the inner sanctuary." Paul is not speaking here of the visible Church that congregates on a Sunday. He is speaking of the true ecclesia, the called-out ones, the invisible Church. It is this group that he refers to in **2 Timothy 2:19**: *"However, God's solid foundation remains standing, bearing this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and 'Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from evil.'"*

Paul's reference to the temple would, most likely, have been meaningful to both the Jews and the Gentiles in the Ephesian church. The Jews would think of Herod's temple in Jerusalem, and the Gentiles would think of the great temple of Diana in Ephesus. Both of these temples were destined to be destroyed, but the temple that God is building will last forever. The Holy Spirit builds this temple by taking dead stones out of the quarry of sin, giving these dead stones life, and then setting them as it pleases Him into the temple of God.

This reminds us of what occurred when the temple of Solomon was being constructed. **In 1 Kings 6:7**, we read the following: *"As the temple was being built, only stones shaped at the quarry were used; the sound of hammers, pickaxes, or any other iron tool was not heard at the temple while it was being built."*

The *"living stones"* are being built up **together**, in the closest possible association with each other, through active fellowship.

The emphasis on the word “*together*” clearly indicates that the temple of God must not be understood in terms of individual believers, but in terms of “*the whole body,*” made up of Jews and Gentiles together in Christ. Paul’s emphasis is on the corporate dimension of the church, not on the individual believer.

Brothers and sisters, God has not only saved us individually, He has also made us a part of His church collectively. Jesus Christ died to make reconciliation possible. You and I must live to make the message of reconciliation personal.

The Apostle Peter puts all of this into perspective in **1 Peter 2:4-10**:

4 *So as you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but chosen and precious in God’s sight,*

5 *you yourselves, as living stones, are built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood and to offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

6 *For it says in scripture, “**Look, I lay in Zion a stone, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and whoever believes in him will never be put to shame.**”*

7 *So you who believe see his value, but for those who do not believe, **the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,***

8 *and **a stumbling-stone and a rock to trip over.** They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.*

9 *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may proclaim the virtues of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

10 *You once were **not a people,** but now you are God’s people. You were **shown no mercy,** but now you have received mercy.*

It is very important that we see in these references to “*God’s household,*” a “*building,*” a “*holy temple,*” and a “*dwelling place of God,*” our church, **The Grace Workshop Ministries,** made up of radically different people who are living out our lives amid the pressures, conflicts and enmities of everyday existence. We are the body of Christ, made up of real people who were accustomed to give vent to our prejudices and biases and enmities in specific social, cultural, and even religious ways. Now, by the grace of God, we are making an effort to intentionally, concretely and experientially break down the walls of division that exists among us, as we are being built-up together in Christ, “*into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*”

Can we do it? Yes, we can, and we will, by God’s grace.