

LECTURES ON EPHESIANS

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE BODY—ITS PRESENT PURPOSE Ephesians 2:19-22

WE SHALL now consider the remaining verses of chapter 2 which present the third great division of the book—The Church—Its Present Purpose.

The present purpose of the church, the Body, is that it might be a holy temple in the Lord, the habitation of God through the Spirit. I want you to note as we continue with the exposition the marvelous connection which one part of the letter has with another—the progress of the revelation, “**The Mystery**,” which the chapters unfold.

In chapter 2 we have first, individual believers described; secondly, believers collectively formed into the temple of God through the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

This is the great process of the unfolding of our standing in Christ. The natural character of individual believers is first given in order that the matchless grace of God in saving such and making them, not only members of the Body of His Son, but also “**heirs**” of God and “**joint-heirs with Christ**,” might shine forth.

You will never see the wonders of the grace of God unless you first look closely into the quarry of nature and the pit of sin from which you have been lifted, and from which you have been dug. It is for this reason that the Spirit of God refers again and again to what we were by nature. What a contrast!

Mr. F. C. Grant tells the story about a friend of Dr. J. H. Jowett.

Dr. Jowett’s friend dreamed a dream in which he saw on the horizon afar off a range of sunlit mountains, the lower hills veiled in a thick white mist. In an ecstasy of longing, he besought the Lord that he might dwell upon them. But a voice responded, “Thou must first descend into the valley.”

Down into the gloomy valley he went, finding the ground alive with fierce, ugly, loathsome things. He quickly became aware that these specters were the incarnations of his sins. Imagine his horror! Presently, he heard approaching footsteps, and instinctively he realized that they were his Lord’s. He covered his face in shame with his cloak, and bowing his head, waited.

Soon the Lord and the sinner confronted one another, each standing in silence for some time. How long they thus stood no one knew. Minutes sometimes seem like hours and hours seem to lengthen into days. What thoughts filled the sinner's heart no one has told us. Perhaps our own experience of sin may whisper them. Finally, however, he ventured to withdraw from his face the edge of his cloak to look and lo! All of the loathsome creatures covered the Lord. God had laid upon Christ all his sins. The dreamer went through the valley before ascending the mountains.

We, on the other hand, who have only been dwelling on the sunlit mountains, of chapter 1, must descend into the valley of what we are by nature, "Lest We Forget"; lest, like the Apostle Paul, when called into the third heaven, we should become unduly exalted by the lofty heights on which we have dwelt, and lest, like Lucifer, the Son of the morning, who was enamored with his own beauty, we should become proudly intoxicated with the marvels of our blessings.

The valley then into which we must first descend in order to know the marvels of the grace of God is what is portrayed in the opening verses of chapter 2. What a sight we behold! We see ourselves "**dead in trespasses and sins**"; that is, dead to God and dead to eternal blessings. We see ourselves under the control of the prince of the power of the air and find ourselves designated, not only as "**children of disobedience**," but also as "**children of wrath**."

Then follows the marvelous statement: "**But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us**" (v. 4). The God who is rich in mercy devises a way by which He may remain just and at the same time become the Justifier of all of those who believe in His Son. We can understand how W. R. Newell, after contemplating this should write a hymn, entitled "At Calvary:"

Mercy there was great and grace was free,
Pardon there was multiplied to me,
There my burdened soul found liberty
At Calvary.

Only a God "**rich in mercy**" and having "**exceeding riches of grace**" could help those with a nature so described, and there was only one way of deliverance, that known to an all-wise God; hence, Christ crucified, is called the "**wisdom of God**."

Through Christ, His death and resurrection, we are not only "**quickened**," "**raised**" and "**seated**," but also gathered into a living temple whose present purpose is to be the habitation of God through the Spirit, a memorial in eternity of God's grace in time. We shall now consider the verses which deal with believers collectively as a temple, verses 19-22:

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Before noting what is said in these verses concerning the believers being “**fitly framed together**” into an holy temple, let us note the significance of the two words, “**no more**,” in verse 19.

The things stated about us in the opening verses of this chapter are forever past— the Spirit of God writes concerning them, “**NO MORE.**” We have seen in previous studies the significance of the coupling of other words such as “**But now**” (Ephesians 2:13), and “**But God**” (Ephesians 2:4).

After this fearful picture of what we are by nature, we have the blessed assurance, “**No more.**” The old life has been done away and instead of saying “**No more**,” we can now say “**Forever more.**”

- Christ is our position,
- Christ is our life,
- Christ is our power,
- Christ is our glory.

Our former position, “**dead in trespasses and sins**,” “**children of wrath**,” “**children of disobedience**,” is no more. Hallelujah! Before continuing with the exposition, may I suggest that you study with a concordance the “**no more’s**” of Scripture?

In Hebrews 10:18: “**There is NO MORE offering for sin.**”

Christ gave Himself an offering for sin, and there is “**no more**” offering for sin acknowledged by God. The man, therefore, who rejects the one offering which Christ offered, is shut up to the judgment of God for there is “**no more**” offering for sin.

The one who trusts in that one offering which Christ made at Calvary needs “**no more**” offering because Christ’s atonement makes him eternally safe and eternally secure.

In Hebrews 10:17: “**Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.**” What wonderful words! The offering made by Christ of Himself has so thoroughly dealt with sin that God in His righteousness has said, “**No more**” will I remember them. What rest of heart and mind this assurance gives to a repentant believing sinner!

Still another is found in Hebrews 10:2: “**The worshipper once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.**”

The blood of Christ gives not only a rest to the heart and to the mind but to the conscience as well. And so in Ephesians 2:19 we read,

“**Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.**”

To what does the word “**fellowcitizen**” refer?

Some teachers would have us believe that it refers to the fact that we have been brought into the commonwealth of Israel as the legalists in Paul's day taught and the Seventh Day Adventists today teach; consequently, the believer is to be placed under the Law of Moses, the Jewish seventh day, Sabbath, becoming an obligation.

My friends, to be brought under the old schoolmaster and into the bondage of and under the curse of the broken law would not be good news. That would not be something over which to rejoice. No, Paul does not speak of the commonwealth of Israel when he speaks of our being "**fellowcitizens**." He rather places before us the fact that saved Jews and Gentles of this age have been brought into a higher sphere than the nation of Israel has known or ever will know. We are in the company of the redeemed heavenly bodies and will so continue throughout all the ages of eternity. "**Fellowcitizens**" refer to our heavenly citizenship.

In Philippians 3:20, 21 Paul declares:

For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

Paul must have gloried in his Roman citizenship which enabled him to escape the scourging which the Roman officer was about to administer. But he gloried more, though Roman chains were upon his hands and feet, as he wrote about his heavenly citizenship, by which he had and would escape from greater evil than a Roman scourging. His earthly citizenship linked him with Tarsus which he calls "**no mean city**," but his heavenly citizenship linked him with the city "**which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God**."

But we are more than "**citizens**" of a heavenly city.

The text says that we are also made members of "**the household of God**." We are members of the family of God by the new birth. We do not have to go apologetically to the back door like a beggar, but we can go boldly to the front door and enter the living room. Being of "**the household of God**," we have access into the Father's presence.

What a wonderful thing it is for us who were once "**dead in trespasses and sins**" to be able to look into the face of the God of this universe and address Him as "**Father**." And, my friends, when we actually enter into the presence of God, we shall not be embarrassed, we shall not be afraid, nor shall we be ill at ease, for He has given us the spirit of sonship, making us forever perfectly at home even in the midst of all of the heavenly glory.

THE TEMPLE OF GOD

The verses that follow speak about the believers being collectively built into a temple for the habitation of God through the Spirit. Let us read again verses 20-22 where the whole Body of believers is declared to be the living temple of God:

And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through die Spirit.

During the age of grace, the present time, this living temple is the only house which God has.

The temple of God is not a cathedral; it is not that magnificent Presbyterian Church which cost thousands of dollars, nor is it any one of the Methodist Churches. There is now no material building which is God's house, and few people remember that fact. God, in the Old Testament times, had a material house in the tabernacle and the temple where He manifested His glory—these were shadows or types of the living temple which the Holy Spirit is now in process of building.

Since Jesus Christ came to earth, died, was raised, and has ascended, the shadows of the Old Testament have passed away and among them, the outward fabric which was the house of God, the temple, the only right place toward which prayer was to be made and in which sacrifices were to be offered. In the church epistles, nothing is called the house of God except the bodies of believers who are indwelt by the Holy Ghost. The following scriptures show this to be true:

Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's (I Corinthians 6:19, 20).

And Peter says:

To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ (I Peter 2:4,5).

There is no holiness in brick and mortar though it might be consecrated a dozen times by an Archbishop. Holiness is in the hearts of the ones who worship God, and if God, the Holy Ghost, is not dwelling in the members who attend the church, then there is no holiness there.

The temple in the Old Testament days had vessels. If the temple itself was a shadow of the bodies of believers, what then did those vessels foreshadow? The vessels of God in the living temple, my body, are my eyes, my ears, my hands, my feet, my heart, my brain.

My friends, are these vessels consecrated to the service of God? In the Old Testament days the vessels of the temple were used only in the Lord's service. What are you doing with the vessels of the living temple, indwelt by the Holy Ghost? In the light of the great revelation of the temple of God in the Epistle to the Ephesians surely our song should be that composed by Fannie J. Crosby: Take my life, and let it be Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.

I fear that many professed Christians are following in the way of Belshazzar who desecrated the vessels of the temple of God and put them to unholy use.

In unveiling the church as the temple of God, the apostle first speaks of the foundation of it. In verse 20 we read, **“And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.”** Note the order of the words, **“apostles and prophets.”** Paul does not say, “Built upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles.” He says, **“Apostles and prophets.”**

It is very important that we note this order, because there are people today who teach that there is no distinction between the church and the kingdom, and that the Old Testament saints, from Adam to the thief on the cross, as well as believers in the dispensation of grace, are members of the church. They base that teaching on verse 20, making **“prophets”** refer to the Old Testament prophets. They emphasize the word **“Prophet.”**

When a pastor in Texas, I preached on the present dispensation, in which I showed the distinction between the kingdom and the church, pointing out that the church began on the day of Pentecost and will be completed at the rapture. The kingdom, foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures, will not be established until Christ returns to the earth in glory.

I pointed out that the Old Testament saints or believers are not in the Body, the church, though they are saved.

In the congregation there were people present whose pastor did not believe in this distinction between church and kingdom. When they reported to him the content of my sermon, he answered by announcing that he would preach on the subject of the kingdom and the church showing that both were synonymous and began with Adam.

To prove his position that Old Testament saints are numbered in the church and that the church and kingdom are identical, he quoted Ephesians 2:20, making the word **“prophets”** refer to the Old Testament prophets. That man failed to see the exact reading of this verse. Had Paul had in mind Old Testament prophets, he would have placed the word before apostles. Had he done so, there would have been some weight to the minister’s argument, but the apostle did not say that. He said that foundation is built upon **“apostles and prophets.”** The first reference to the Church is in Matthew 16:18, where Christ says, **“And upon this rock I will build my church.”** In that reference; the building of it was still future. He did not say “I have built,” or “I am building”; He said, **“Will build.”** That declaration points to Pentecost.

What does Paul mean by saying, **“And built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets”**?

We already understand that apostle is a name given to one who witnessed the resurrection, one who had seen the Lord in His resurrection body (cf. Acts 1:22). The term prophets used in this reference applies to New Testament prophets.

The term means to “tell-forth” the Word of God, the truth of God, to the people.

The ability to predict future events is not a necessary element in the conception of a prophet. Its simple meaning is to **“tell forth God’s will.”**

Because God's message has so much to do with future events the word has unfortunately been associated with one who does predict future events. Were these apostles and New Testament prophets in themselves the foundation of the church? Not at all. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, said that he had laid the foundation; he did not say, "I am the foundation." **"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Christ Jesus"** (I Corinthians 3:11).

Paul meant that he and the other apostles were the preaching and writing foundation in what they taught and wrote concerning Christ and the doctrines of Christ. Jesus Christ and the doctrines concerning Him are the foundation of the church. Peter, James, John, Paul, and others, therefore, are not in themselves the foundation.

The foundation is Christ plus what these inspired men wrote concerning Him. The church built upon such a foundation is unshakable. It is no wonder that Christ declared concerning His church that the **"Gates of hell shall not prevail against it."**

"Fitly framed together," is the next expression descriptive of this living temple. Because God is placing together believers in His own marvelous way through the operation of the Holy Ghost, the temple is said to be **"fitly framed together."** Believers are living stones because they possess the life of Christ. **"Fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple."**

The building has been growing since Pentecost. At Calvary the foundation was laid; on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended to build upon that one foundation. On that day through Peter's message the Holy Spirit built 3,000 living stones into the living temple, and shortly afterward 5,000 more living stones were added, besides women and children. Through the centuries, in spite of dungeon, fire, and sword, the Holy Spirit has been adding living stones, continuing to do so to this hour.

The many signs about us of the closing hours of this dispensation lead us to believe that very soon the last living stone will be added which will complete the temple. Then the rapture, the taking away of it, will take place. Like the building of Solomon's temple, but the shadow of this building, stones are being added silently and surely, and there is reason to believe that soon the building will be complete.

No thought should stir the hearts of believers so much or set their lives so on fire for Christ as the thought that every time a tract is given out, every time a Sunday-school class is taught, every occasion a witness is given to the saving grace of God, things are being done which may add the last stone to the living temple of God.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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