

Ephesians

2:11-22

Introduction

God loves to build places where He can come and dwell with you. He first built a universe, with a planet, upon which He could put a garden – all so He could dwell in fellowship with our parents in the cool of the afternoon. Adam and Eve’s sin separated the human race from fellowship with God, so He established altars upon which sacrifice could be made that would restore access and allow Him to dwell with us. As time went on God localized these altars to a moveable Tabernacle in the wilderness and then a permanent Temple in Jerusalem.

The Temple was destroyed by Titus and the Roman Legions in 70AD. From that time until today, there has been no Temple at Jerusalem – but God *has* been building and dwelling in a “temple” on the earth! He has been dwelling in the hearts of those who have trusted Jesus Christ for salvation; all believers both *individually* and *corporately* are God’s temple on the earth.

Our text describes this temple, especially in verses nineteen through twenty-two where you see the words “built,” “foundation,” “cornerstone,” “building,” and “temple.” Believers are God’s temple on the earth, the “dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

Our text also says that this spiritual temple God is building includes Jews and Gentiles. This would have raised a serious concern in the minds of Paul’s readers. In the physical Temple at Jerusalem, there was a wall of partition that prohibited Gentiles from entering into certain areas unless they first converted to becoming Jews. If God was building a new, spiritual temple that included Gentiles... What did He do about this barrier?

He broke it down! Having broken it down, He could then build up His new building.

We want to take a look at God breaking down the barrier, then building up the building. We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 God Broke Down The Barrier So You Can Have Access To Him, and #2 God Builds Up The Building So He Can Abide In You.

#1 God Broke Down The Barrier
So You Can Have Access To Him
(v11-18)

A wall of partition prohibited Gentiles from going to certain areas of the Temple. Archaeologists have discovered an inscription from the ancient wall that reads,

"No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death."

The wall was a physical reminder of the spiritual separation between Jews and Gentiles. It reminded you that, in order to dwell with God, Gentiles must first convert and become Jews.

Ephesians 2:11 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh - who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands -

God had commanded Abraham to practice "circumcision" "in the flesh" as the outward, visible sign of His covenant with the new nation He was forming from the loins of Abraham. Over the ensuing centuries, physical circumcision became a source of pride among the Jews. They called the Gentiles the "Uncircumcision" as a defamatory, derogatory slur, and Gentiles did the same to them by using the word "Circumcision."

God established a new nation in Abraham only so He could bless **all** nations. The Jews sinned by refusing to share the knowledge of God with the Gentiles. God never intended there to be prejudice between Jews and Gentiles.

Gentiles did have significant disadvantages. They are listed in verse twelve:

Ephesians 2:12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

“Without Christ” means Gentiles were not living in expectation of the coming of the Messiah.

“Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel” means that Gentiles were not citizens of the chosen nation.

“Strangers from the covenants of promise” means that Gentiles did not share in the many marvelous promises God had made to bless His chosen nation both on earth and in eternity.

“Having no hope” follows from the things just listed. If the Messiah is not coming... And you are not citizens of God’s chosen nation... And you have no promises of blessing... You have no hope at all, either on earth or in eternity.

“Without God in the world” brings all Paul has just said to bear on each individual Gentile. As they lived day-to-day, they had no spiritual help, and no expectation of spiritual help.

God’s plan was that His chosen nation, the Jews, would go out among these lost and disadvantaged Gentiles and share with them about His grace. The Jews were content instead to hate the Gentiles and call them the “Uncircumcision.”

God was not without a plan for the Gentiles:

Ephesians 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

The “blood of Christ” signifies His death on the Cross. Because Jesus died, Gentiles no longer need to convert first to becoming Jews in order to be “brought near” to God.

This was a mind-boggling concept in the first century – *even among the first Christians!* The first Christian were all Jews. In the beginning, they only shared Christ with other Jews. When the Gospel message spread to Gentiles, heated debate sprang up in the Church as to whether or not Gentiles must first become Jews in order to be saved. The answer was “**No!**” Gentiles did *not* have to convert in order to be saved.

But how was that possible? How could the death of Jesus on the Cross abolish centuries of having to first convert to becoming a Jew? Paul starts with the conclusion:

Ephesians 2:14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,

Jesus “Himself” has brought “peace” between Jews and Gentiles, making us “one” in God’s sight. In other words, from God’s perspective there is no longer a spiritual distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Paul then mentions the “wall of separation” in the Temple and says that it has been “broken down.” It was still literally standing; but it had been broken down in God’s mind and heart when Jesus died on the Cross.

After giving you the conclusion, he tells you how the wall was broken down:

Ephesians 2:15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace,

“In His flesh” means by His human life. As a man, Jesus perfectly kept “the law of commandments contained in ordinances.” Jesus alone in all the history of the human race perfectly upheld and kept God’s holy law – both in its *letter* and, more importantly, in its *spirit*. It’s important to remember that the law was *never* given to make you right with God. It was given to show you how wrong with God you were! The law accuses you; the law condemns you. It condemns you to death.

Jesus perfectly kept God’s law, and then He went to the Cross to die in your place, as your substitute. In doing so He “abolished.. the enmity” of the law against you. “Abolished” means *rendered inoperative* or *nullified*. “Enmity” means *opposition*. Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross, as your substitute, nullifies the opposition of the law that condemns you. What you could never *achieve* in your own righteousness, you can now *receive* as Christ’s righteousness.

The law of God is not just nullified for Gentiles; *it is nullified for Jews as well!* Neither Jew nor Gentile is under obligation to keep God's law as a means of righteousness.

Jesus has "creat[ed] in Himself one new man from the two." The one new man means that when you receive Christ and His righteousness, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within your heart. By the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit you are enabled to walk worthy of God as He fulfills the righteousness of God's law *in* and *through* you.

There is now *one* new man – the Christian – where there was once *two* men – Jew and Gentile.

Ephesians 2:16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

God Himself had established a separation of Jew and Gentile in the human race when He formed a new nation through Abraham. At the Cross, God "reconciled" Jew and Gentile back to Himself in a spiritual unity that existed *before* He made the distinction.

"Thereby putting to death the enmity" is repeated for emphasis. Even though the Jew enjoyed all the advantages, he too was separated from God. The Gentile may have been separated by the "wall," but the Jew was separated by the veil in the Temple's Holy of Holies. Only the high priest, only once each year, only after much sacrifice and preparation, could have access to God. When Jesus died on the Cross, the Scripture says that this veil – about six inches thick – was literally torn from top to bottom, signifying that direct access to God had now been granted to all those who would receive Jesus by grace through faith. It was no longer a question of the Gentile first becoming a Jew in order to be saved; it was a question of the Jew also admitting he was a sinner in need of the same salvation.

Ephesians 2:17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.

Ephesians 2:18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

The same Gospel was being "preached" by the followers of Jesus to Gentiles who previously "were far off," and to Jews who previously "were near." Whether far off or near, whether because of a wall or a

veil, *both* were separated from full access to God. As believers in Jesus Christ, the new man – the Christian – has full “access.”

Spiritually speaking, there is no longer a distinction between Jew and Gentile. All men are invited to come into full, open, fellowship with God as Christians. All barriers between God and man, and between man and his fellow men, have been broken down at the Cross.

The final verses of the chapter are the application.

#2 God Builds Up The Building
So He Can Abide In You
(v19-22)

Since you are united as one new man, you are to live together as citizens of a single nation and as members of a single household in an amazing spiritual building that God Himself inhabits.

Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints...

“Saints” refers to the Jews. Saints, remember, means *set apart*. Previously the Jews had been set apart by God as His chosen nation. Now Gentiles are “fellow citizens” together with Jews in a new nation.

If you are a Christian your citizenship is in heaven with all the saints of the Church Age. You have an earthly ethnicity, and that’s OK... You have an earthly nationality, and that’s OK... But you are first and foremost a citizen of heaven with all other New Testament saints; and your new citizenship supercedes **all** ethnic and national distinctions.

You are closer than fellow citizens; you are members in a single, unified “household.”

Ephesians 2:19 ...and members of the household of God,

The picture here is of a family. Christians are to live with one another as one extended family. That person next to you, if both of you are believers, is your brother or sister.

As fellow citizens, and as family, we live together with God as His “temple” on the earth. The temple is spiritual; but Paul likens its construction to that of a physical building.

Ephesians 2:20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*,

The “apostles and prophets” is a reference to the men in the first century who were specially called and commissioned to reveal the truth about God and Jesus Christ. Their instruction, and especially the New Testament Scriptures, is the “foundation” upon which the temple is built.

Jesus Christ is the “chief cornerstone.” There are three senses in which Jesus can be understood as the cornerstone:

1. We generally think of the cornerstone as one that lies at a lower front corner of a building. The rest of the structure seems to rest upon and depend upon its placement. Also, since it joins two walls together, there may be some suggestion of the union of Jews and Gentiles in Jesus that we have been discussing.
2. Some Bible scholars believe the cornerstone is the keystone of an arch. The keystone occupies the highest place in the arch and provides the support for all the other stones. Thus is Jesus preeminent in the building.
3. A third possibility is the capstone of a pyramid. It occupies the highest place and is of a unique size and shape from all the other stones.

Ephesians 2:21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,

This temple “grows.” It grows because it consists of **living stones!** The apostle Peter wrote, “you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house...” (First Peter 2:5).

When you get saved, the Holy Spirit takes up residence within you. You individually are a temple within which God Himself resides. But you are also a single, living stone that is part of a vast temple God is building that includes *every* believer in the Church Age.

“Being fitted together” goes with what Paul says next,

Ephesians 2:22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Paul says “you also,” and that is important. In verse twenty-one he mentioned “the whole building,” God’s Church from the Day of Pentecost forward, including all the believers of this age from everywhere, whether on earth or in heaven. “You also” is a smaller group – his immediate audience, and each immediate audience through the centuries. He’s talking about a local fellowship of believers – like Calvary Chapel of Hanford.

The local fellowship is being “fitted together” and is being “built together.” “Fitted together” is a compound word meaning *picked-out and close-jointed*. “Built together” means *to construct out of varied materials*. God picks-out and joins closely together living stones from a variety of backgrounds in order to provide Himself a “dwelling place” on the earth in each unique local fellowship.

We can put this all together. Our fellowship is to be founded upon the teaching and instruction of the first century apostles and prophets, especially the New Testament Scriptures. Jesus is to be the cornerstone, the keystone, and the capstone of our spiritual fellowship with one another. We should eliminate *any* and *all* ethnic and national distinctions and function as fellow citizens governed by heaven. We should be loyal to one another as spiritual brothers and sisters sharing the resources of a single household. All of this occurs in each unique, local fellowship of believers that God raises-up.

Conclusion

We are “a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” One of the chief features of heaven is described in Revelation 21:22,

Revelation 21:22 But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

God desires to dwell with you; He always has. He dwells with you, and He dwells in you, by His Spirit. Soon Jesus will come for you... And you will dwell with Him in heaven.