

# The Church IS a Building

*Ephesians 2:19-22*

In the early days of COVID19 forcing an end to in-person church gatherings, there was a rush to declare, "The church is not a building."

Encouraged by that exhortation, many churches settled-in to some form of web-based 'services' in order to connect with members.

We thought it would all be over May 31st.

June... July... Now August. As various mandates are issued regarding social distancing, and masks, and singing in church, most churches are struggling to comply.

Christians are divided about COVID19:

- 👤 Some strongly believe that this is a time for us to be a witness by obeying the governing authorities.
- 👤 Others just as strongly believe that this is a time to disobey the governing authorities and obey God rather than man.

Do you remember the SNL routine, "I'm not a doctor, but I play one on TV?" Over the last few months, it could be said of a great many believers, "They're not medical experts, but they play one in church."

Of others we could say, "They're not constitutional lawyers, but they play one in church."

Any discussion of COVID19 and the church ought to begin with an understanding of what the church is. The other issues are peripheral.

Don't get me wrong. I'm OK with our constitutional protections. But the courts seem stacked against us.

I'm not against science. But experts are in strong disagreement on how to handle COVID19.

## **The church IS a building.**

Not a stick-and-plaster one. *A supernatural one:*

Eph 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

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

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

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

- 🧠 The church on earth is a "household... built on [a] foundation... Jesus Christ Himself being its Chief Cornerstone."
- 🧠 The church on earth is a "building" that is "a holy temple in the Lord."
- 🧠 The church on earth is "being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

Before we move on, and look at these buildings, we need to ask: "Was Paul talking about the church in general, at large? Or was he talking about the gathering of a local church?"

Why argue? I'd be willing to concede he was talking about both. The truth thus remains: When we gather together on the earth, we are a very spiritual building.

Eph 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

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

The preceding verses speak of Gentiles who are saved having the full privileges of being God's children. Jews and Gentiles alike comprise a household built on the saving work of Jesus, as declared by the first century "apostles and prophets."

A "household" suggests a building in which there are servants.

Paul will go on to say, "And [Jesus] Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ..." (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Reading the New Testament you see that the "apostles and prophets" established local gatherings of believers under the oversight of gifted men.

One way to approach this is to point out that believers have a gift or gifts of God the Holy Spirit. While for sure we can serve the Lord when we are not gathered, the presumption here is a gathering.

When we gather in-person we are able to exercise our gifts in ways that can't present themselves otherwise. As we do, our gracious, Spirit-led interactions testify to nonbelievers of Jesus being in our midst.

Remember the Corinthian church? One of the problems Paul corrected them about was their serious misuse of spiritual gifts. After discussing the gifts, he wrote,

1Co 14:26 How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

1Co 14:27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let there be* two or at the most three, *each* in turn, and let one interpret.

1Co 14:28 But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.

1Co 14:29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.

1Co 14:30 But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent.

1Co 14:31 For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.

1Co 14:32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

Clearly Paul was talking about the use of gifts **as we gather**.

When we do not gather regularly, under an established spiritual authority, our gifts can languish. And we are not being refreshed by the gifts of others.

Unless we meet, we cannot fully be God's household of servants on the earth.

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

The picture here is a stone mason building a temple using uneven stones. He has to carefully fit them together so that there aren't huge gaps.

Jacob pointed out to me recently that a first century carpenter was not only a carpenter. One resource explained it this way:

After Jesus teaches in his hometown synagogue, the crowd asks, "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary?" The Greek word *tehton*, translated here as carpenter, is more accurately rendered as craftsman or builder. At face value, without taking the Jewish cultural background into consideration, a carpenter *could* fit that description. However, a quick survey of northern Israel's landscape reveals that the job of carpenter may not be the best fit for that Greek word.

More likely, or at least in addition to being a carpenter, Jesus was a stonemason. Thus the picture Paul was painting in our verse has even more depth.

Notice, too, the stones are said to "grow." Another way of understanding what is meant is given to us by the apostle Peter when he says, "You also, as living

stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (First Peter 2:5). It may sound silly, but how can we be "fitted together" if we are not together? Yes, I know I am part of the universal church through the ages. But I am called, supernaturally, to be a pastor of this local church. I'm not a 'general' pastor to the church universal.

Here is something the Lord showed me. Each time we gather, there are different living stones for Jesus to work with. Some are not in the pile, so to speak, while others may be new.

Our gatherings are never quite the same. Thus it is somewhat important we gather, so that Jesus can place us for growth.

Another way of putting it: I'm a living stone, but by myself, or sheltered at home, I can't be fitted, and therefore the overall growth is limited.

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

Hmm. If you are a believer in Jesus, God the Holy Spirit already indwells you. You can't be a Christian without the Holy Spirit being in you.

One thing Pentecostals understand well is that Jesus does manifest Himself in special ways when believers gather. Like the Corinthians of old, they can tend to act carnally, and out of order. But it remains true Jesus wants to manifest Himself.

After telling us in the Book of the Revelation that the "lamp stand" represents actual gathered believers on the earth, the Lord tells us that He, "walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands" (2:1). He is there; He is here; when we gather, in a way that is more than simply being omnipresent.

Who remembers the song, *He is Here?*

*He is here, He is here,*

*He is moving among us.  
He is here, He is here,  
As we gather in His Name.  
He is here, He is here,  
And He wants to work a wonder.  
He is here as we gather in His Name.*

Should the church gather, against the mandates of the governing authorities? It remains a local decision. There is no one answer for every fellowship. I'd like to suggest. That we frame the question biblically. Instead of asking, "Is it essential that Christians meet together to sing and hear the Word?" let's ask it this way: "Is it essential that God's household servants gather together in order to exercise supernatural gifts and be growing as a temple on earth?"

Yeah, it is essential. The gathering of the local church on the earth is unlike any commercial or religious or social gathering. If we really believe the Scriptures - and we do - it is obvious the church must be excluded when issuing mandates. Or in strictly following them.

Yes, I know we individually are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and that Jesus is omnipresent.

But He is here in ways He is not when you are anywhere else. He said it - not me.

Let me tack on a footnote. I've been reading a lot of comments about the effects of COVID19 on mental wellness.

Not the effects of the disease, but the effects of the efforts to "flatten the curve." Domestic violence is spiking; so is suicide.

Secular psychologists are predicting that depression and suicide will get increasingly worse over the next few years as people deal with loss of job, career, finances, family... And I say basic human dignity.

If only the governing authorities could be more far-sighted.

They're gonna need the church, like it or not. Jesus is the only real hope anyone has.