

# Body Building

Ephesians 2:19-22 June 14, 2023

The world's longest ongoing architectural project is a Catholic Church in Barcelona, Spain.<sup>1</sup> It's a basilica called the Sagrada Família, and it comes from the genius of a man named Antoni Gaudí. He was known as "God's architect."<sup>2</sup> Work began on the church in 1882 and continues still today. In their story on Gaudí, *60 Minutes* asked the question, "Why would a church take so long to build?"

It has been a long process. It took 128 years of work before the first mass was even held at the Sagrada Família. More than a century for it to start serving its purpose. I'm sure Gaudí wouldn't have liked that. His biographer said, "*Gaudí felt his duty as an architect...was that a building should reflect the glory of God, and that God was working through him.*"<sup>3</sup>

In Ephesians 2, the Apostle Paul reveals that the longest ongoing church building project is not the Sagrada Família, is us, right here. Christ has been building His Church for about 2,000 years now. It's not made out of sandstone, but out of *living* stones.<sup>4</sup> His Church is not meant to sit dormant for a hundred years. This Church is meant to be growing and growing *together*, as Christ's powerful salvation continues to revolutionize and recreate us according to His image.

**Ephesians 2:19 - <sup>19</sup>So, then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household,**

Wait, aren't we called "strangers and foreigners" in a different part of the Bible? We are, indeed. The Apostle Peter uses those words of us in his first letter. But we're not strangers to the Lord, we're strangers to the unbelieving world. We're *exiles*, on our way home. We are a new, special group of people moving through life separated from the path of this world. In fact, in antiquity, opponents of Christians would sometimes label them as "genus tertium," the *third* race.<sup>5</sup> Neither Jew, nor Gentile. Not Greek or Barbarian. Something else.

Paul uses three analogies to describe the Church. The first is that we are citizens. Of what? *Not* Israel.<sup>6</sup> The Church does not replace Israel. God has put His program for the ethnic nation of Israel on hold during the Church age, but they are still His people and He will still keep His promises to them. Our citizenship is in a *new* thing, the Church.

Nothing makes you appreciate American citizenship like being in a strange land overseas. I remember the small comfort of having the US Embassy's phone number and address tucked into my pocket while we were in Colombia or parts of Peru.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://medium.com/modulus/the-worlds-oldest-ongoing-construction-project-3c5b39f5d97a>

<sup>2</sup> 60 Minutes *God's Architect: Antoni Gaudí's Glorious Vision*

<sup>3</sup> <https://freakonomics.com/podcast/a-good-idea-is-not-good-enough/>

<sup>4</sup> 1 Peter 2:5

<sup>5</sup> Adolf Harnack *Mission And Expansion Of Christianity In The First Three Centuries*

<sup>6</sup> Klyne Snodgrass *Ephesians*

In the Roman Empire, there were different status levels. To be a foreigner meant you had *no* rights at all, to be a stranger meant you had *some* rights.<sup>7</sup> Then there was citizenship. There were different types.<sup>8</sup> It was complex and somewhat unfair. But Paul explains that, in the Church, there are no levels of citizenship.<sup>9</sup> We're all equal in that regard. We all receive the rights, the freedoms, the access, the privileges, and the responsibilities of being citizens of God's Kingdom. We are no longer strangers to the Lord or foreigners to His covenants and promises.

This spiritual citizenship makes us countrymen with all other Christians - comrades together. We live in an increasingly isolated, individualistic society. The Church is something we're called to *together*. Gathering and supporting and connecting.

This spiritual citizenship is incredible. It comes with privileges and allotments and authority. But it means we must give up world citizenship and some of its "benefits." I was looking on a .gov site yesterday all about how to renounce US citizenship. I'm probably on a list now. We understand that allegiance has to be given to one place. We are no longer citizens of this world, we are citizens of God's Kingdom, living as exiles in this world. We're not meant to behave with hostility, but with grace and mercy and truth. But we do turn our allegiance to the Lord and away from this world.

Next, Paul uses the analogy of a household. This is an image of greater intimacy than citizenship. There are hundreds of millions of American citizens walking around that we've never met and never will meet. But you *know* everyone in your house. This is an image of togetherness and sharing and caring and knowing.

Don't think of a big, *Downton Abbey* house, where we're just the servants downstairs and the Lord and His special saints are detached and doing their own thing upstairs. Jesus said, "I don't call you servants anymore, I've called you friends."<sup>10</sup> God also calls us His *children*. Life in Christ is one of joy and intimacy and nearness to our Lord.

But, as children, we are to be submissive and obedient to our Father. *Christ* is the Head of the Church. Christ is the King. It's God Who sets the rules and the schedule and the course. Children don't do that in a house. When they do, things don't go very well for the family. The family doesn't sit down and say, "Ok, little toddler Timmy, what are the things we are going to do today and what time are we going to do it and how should it be done?" That's a recipe for disaster.

### **Ephesians 2:20 - <sup>20</sup>built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.**

Paul moves to a third analogy - we're a *building*. And, this building is carefully planned. When you see pictures of the Sagrada Família, the complexity is stunning. Gaudí had meticulous plans and

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<sup>7</sup> CSB Study Bible Notes

<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman\\_citizenship](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_citizenship)

<sup>9</sup> Darrell Bock *Ephesians: An Introduction And Commentary*

<sup>10</sup> John 15:15

models so that the building would be accomplished properly. Sadly, during the Spanish Civil War, anarchists broke into the Sagrada Família and destroyed all the original plans and models.<sup>11</sup> So later engineers have had to work using their best efforts and guesses as to Gaudí's original plans.

Not so with the Church. It was masterfully designed, carefully planned. The foundation has been laid. That foundation, Paul says, was the apostles and prophets.

But, wait, isn't *Christ* the foundation? Yes - He's called the foundation in 1 Corinthians 3 and here He is called the cornerstone. But Paul is explaining that Christ used these New Testament Apostles and prophets to establish the Church, reveal the Word of God, and explain the doctrines necessary for this Church to be built. The ongoing work of the Church flows from this foundation.

This is why we reject Joseph Smith, or Charles Taze Russell, or anyone else who comes along and says, "I have new revelation, I have a new way for the 'church' to work, I have an adjustment to the New Testament." Paul was very clear in Galatians 1:

**Galatians 1:8 - <sup>8</sup>But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, a curse be on him!**

It's not that *anything* the Apostles said was revelation from God. The Apostles were fallible people. Peter was corrected publicly for some of his choices. But through this foundation, God delivered the 27 books of the New Testament. There are 27 - no more, no less.

There are no more Apostles today, because no one fits the Biblical criteria. And there are not prophets today in the sense that Paul is using, here. The gift of prophecy still exists and can be exercised, but there is no *new* revelation which will need to be added to the New Testament. The foundation is laid, it's done.

In this building Christ is the cornerstone. Linguists argue over whether Paul means the foundational cornerstone, the first that would be laid, or the *capstone*, the last that is put in place. Both have a Biblical basis. When Peter talks about Jesus being the cornerstone, he purposefully uses two different terms in the same breath. And that's because Jesus is both! He is the First and the Last. He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is the foundation, the center, and the most highly exalted. He is the basis *and* the culmination. It's all of Jesus. It's all *in* Christ, by Christ, for Christ.

In our context, Paul seems to be speaking of the lower, foundational stone. The first one laid - one that provides stability for the building.<sup>12</sup> This was a load-bearing stone on which the rest of the structure would rest.<sup>13</sup> This stone would provide the lines and measures for all the other parts of the building so that it could stand and be square.<sup>14</sup> One source says, "*In ancient structures, [the*

<sup>11</sup> <https://medium.com/modulus/the-worlds-oldest-ongoing-construction-project-3c5b39f5d97a>

<sup>12</sup> *Bible Knowledge Commentary*

<sup>13</sup> Snodgrass

<sup>14</sup> Ray Stedman *The Third Race: Ephesians 2:19-22*

cornerstone] was placed at a right angle joining two walls, with the royal name inscribed on it to signify the ruler who took credit for the building's erection."<sup>15</sup>

We cannot overestimate the importance of the cornerstone and the foundation. R. Kent Hughes writes, "If we tamper with the foundation, the [building] will crumble."<sup>16</sup>

So, as we live out our Christianity, we must adhere to Christ's design which was revealed through the foundation of the Apostle's doctrine and the revelation shared by the prophets. Being the Church is not just about responding to what we feel is important, not just reacting to whatever the current social issue is. Rather, church life flows from the foundation described here. That's why we study the Bible here at Calvary, because it provides the guidance and design necessary to build up the Church. It *matters* what the Apostles said and what it means and that we align with it.

### **Ephesians 2:21 - <sup>21</sup>In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.**

So, it's not just a building, it's a *temple*, which is a very specific kind of building. It has a specific set of purposes. It is the home to specific activities. A special place unlike other places.

Paul says, "In Him." This is a favorite phrase throughout these opening chapters. In Christ. In Him. Christ Jesus is the focus, He is the goal, He is the *measuring line* for the Church.

He says the *whole* building is being put together. That's all of us. We are each a living stone, drawn by God to be placed in a special way alongside other stones as He builds the Church.

If you've ever had the experience of being taken off a malfunctioning ride at *Disneyland*, you know that 'backstage' is not as magical as what we normally see. Very plain. Nothing wonderful. Much more attention is paid to the part people are looking at. Not so in the Church. God puts us all together with care and precision and with all the attention He has.

One source defines this phrase, "being put together" this way: "*fit by means of all the elaborate preparatory processes necessary.*"<sup>17</sup> There's a lot of elaborate work God does to bring us together.

As the Lord accomplishes this work, He will have to shape us so we can be close-jointed with the stones around us. It's a *snug* fit, as one commentator says.<sup>18</sup> And being fit together means we are going to be carefully aligned with the Lord, our cornerstone.<sup>19</sup>

The goal of this fitting together, according to Paul is *growth*. Growth in what? Most commonly the term "church growth" means the number of people who attend services. But is that what Paul

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<sup>15</sup> CSB Study Bible Notes

<sup>16</sup> R. Kent Hughes *Ephesians: The Mystery Of The Body Of Christ*

<sup>17</sup> *A Pocket Lexicon To The Greek New Testament*

<sup>18</sup> Bock

<sup>19</sup> *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 11: Ephesians Through Philemon*

means? Certainly, it is God's desire to add numerically to the Church, but *He* is the One Who does that as He sees fit.<sup>20</sup>

Paul will explain what he means by church growth in chapter 4, where we read:

**Ephesians 4:12b-13, 15 - to build up the body of Christ,<sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness...<sup>15</sup> But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ.**

So the growth Paul is talking about is spiritual maturity which is measured by Christ's fullness. We see Christ's mercy, how does our mercy measure up? We see Christ's prayer life, how does our church prayer life measure up? His joy, His kindness, His obedience. God is conforming us into His image, so as we grow, we will be maturing in all sorts of ways and more and more measuring up to the stature of Christ's fullness.

When we think about church growth we should be less concerned about bodies in seats and more concerned with whether we are aligned with our cornerstone so that we can grow properly.

Paul doesn't say this so we'll be discouraged. He's not saying, "By the way, you don't measure up, so you should be ashamed of yourselves." He says, "This is the process that's happening. The building is *ongoing*. The Lord is going to complete this work."

**Ephesians 2:22 - <sup>22</sup>In him you are also being built together for God's dwelling in the Spirit.**

God is doing an individual work in your heart and He is doing a corporate work in His Church, specifically through local churches where Christian stones come together to be knit with one another, fit snug, and built up. Isolation and Christianity do not square.

One source writes, "*belonging to the visible church is not optional for followers of Christ.*"<sup>21</sup> I saw that some professor recently broke a record by living by himself underwater for 100 days. A lot of Christians are doing that, spiritually, especially since COVID, and it's not spiritually healthy. It's not the design plan.

The plan is togetherness, snug and fit, with our stones growing and *glowing* together. We're luminous stones.<sup>22</sup> That's for all you *Tears Of The Kingdom* fans out there. But there are *real* stones that glow in the dark.<sup>23</sup> Of course, we're called to be light in the dark. Glowing stones, together shining brightly as the glory of God works in and through our lives.

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<sup>20</sup> Acts 2:47

<sup>21</sup> *ESV Study Bible Notes*

<sup>22</sup> *Hughes*

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.sciencealert.com/scientists-have-figured-out-how-this-natural-stone-glow-in-the-dark>

This building that God does is not random or haphazard, it's skillful and purposeful. The Lord has a specific church He wants you to attend. He has people He wants to connect you with. Because He shapes each of us in special ways for this work He's accomplishing. And we're reminded here that the Holy Spirit, Who is a downpayment to us and Who seals us, and Who comforts us, now takes up residence in our hearts and among us in a special way when we're together.

Officials say Antoni Gaudí's masterpiece will finally be finished in 2026. When will we be done? That day is coming. It's coming for us individually but there's a Day coming when the Lord will complete the universal Church as well and we will be presented as a Bride to the Bridegroom.

It's interesting - all this work, all this calling, all this opportunity, and yet, as Klyne Snodgrass points out, this is a text that does not specifically ask anything of us. "You're the Church, so go do this." That's not what Paul says. Paul's whole point is that this is what *is* true. This is *who you are* if you're a Christian. This is what salvation does. This is the work that God started and is continuing and will accomplish. If you're a Christian here tonight, *you are* a part of this.

Now, we have a part to play. Remember, we're *living* stones, not inanimate ones. We have roles and opportunities and tasks and assignments. Paul will explain some of those in the coming chapters. Our obedience is important. But *this* text is not about a list of things you need to do. It's an explanation of what God has done. In hearing these things, we're invited to remember, to realize, and to recognize. To remember who we were apart from Christ and remember what He did to save us. To realize the truths of what the Church really is. It's not a place that exists to meet my felt needs, it's a living spiritual Body that I am a *vital part* of, where God is glorified, I become more like Him, and the barriers between people and each other and people and God are broken down. And finally we're invited to recognize more and more how we fit together in the Church God has brought us to be a part of as He smooths off our edges and compresses us so that we can help bear the weight of the stones around us. Of course, Jesus Christ bears the most, He is our cornerstone, He is our capstone. But these are the realities of our Christian life in Christ and in the Church. Wonderful realities. Let's walk in them, be empowered by them, and cooperate with what God has already designed, already desired, and already began in us.