

## Ephesians Bible Study

### Lesson 8 Notes/ Ephesians 2:20-22

#### Foundations of Unity

Ever since rebellion shattered man's relationship with God in Genesis 3, human beings have struggled to get along. Evidence for this reality is rampant as no family, church, community, or nation has escaped the devastating effects of the fall. Because of the inherent pride and self-centeredness of man, powerful feelings of suspicion and opposition often lead men, women, and children into conflicts of every kind. Truly no person is left untouched. Whether it be a simply misunderstanding between friends or an international conflict on the grandest scale, the cause is always the same: human beings by nature simply want their own way. The hopelessness of this reality has led many to pursue a worldly, superficial type of peace where tolerance is demanded and truth is denied. Even within the walls of the church, ungodly forms of unity are often embraced, leading many to compromise simply because they want the freedom to believe and act according to their own opinions.

So, what does God say about all of this? In last week's lesson we learned that the whole reason Christ came was to bring peace. In its entirety the Gospel is a message of peace, but as Jesus said in John 14: 27, ***"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you."*** For those who are in Christ Jesus, the peace they have been given is an objective reality grounded in the fact that by faith, those who were once God's enemies have been reconciled and redeemed through the cross. Believers no longer need fear God's wrath, for those who were once strangers to God, have now been lovingly adopted into His eternal family. They have become his beloved children and He has become their Father. Yet going further, the peace that God has given extends far beyond just one's personal relationship with God. As we learned last week, this objective peace God has provided through Christ extends into all our relationships within the body. The Bible makes clear that we are truly in union with Christ *and* one another. As Paul said in Eph. 2:13, ***"But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility."*** Truly as Paul said in Galatians 3:28, ***"There is neither Jew nor***

***Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.***” The positional unity that comes through the peace God has granted, cannot be altered one single iota: in God’s eyes we are all truly one body; one family. Before the beginning of time God master planned who would be in His household, and Christ will not return until every member has been redeemed.

The obvious question that remains though, is why then do we continue to find such discord even within the church if we already possess God’s peace? Clearly, we only need to walk into our own homes to find selfishness rearing its ugly head! Paul recognized this dichotomy and sought to address it head on when he wrote Ephesians. While the first 3 chapters of his letter seem to be entirely focused on doctrine, it is important to remember that the apostle had one great purpose for which he wrote: he wanted his readers to understand positionally who they were in Christ so that in practice they would know the essence of their new life and be compelled to live it out. Paul wisely knew that is impossible for people to live truth they do not know, and that is why he refrains from diving into application without first firmly establishing the Christian’s identity. He ultimately knew that by first grasping the true nature of salvation, men and women could then move forward in representing the Lord in the body, and in the world.

### **The Metaphor of a Building**

As we move into our verses for this week we notice Paul using the metaphor of a building to describe believers in Jesus Christ. Continuing his discussion on unity, Paul notes that the true church of God is ***“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”*** In various other places in the New Testament the metaphor of a building is used in a similar way to teach the same basic truth. Believers in the Lord are referred to as God’s building, God’s temple and individually as living stones in the edifice God is constructing. Christ is referred to as the one and only foundation which has been laid, the living stone, and ultimately the precious cornerstone who holds the building together. These overlapping images of Christ point to His preeminence. The prophets and apostles

are also referred to as the foundation, the ones whose teaching and testimonies formed the very Word of God and revealed that Christ indeed was the Messiah. Finally, God is referred to as the builder, and the Holy Spirit is the one who is filling the temple with God's presence. These similar yet overlapping images of the building all are meant to reveal to us rich truth for our life as the church. God is the master architect and designer, and from the beginning of time planned each person who would be a part of his building project. He will not stop construction until each stone has been added, and all the finish work has been completed.

### **Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets**

So, when Paul says that the church is ***"built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets"*** what does he mean? Simply put, Paul is declaring that God laid his foundation, namely the Word of God, through the apostles and prophets, and that the true church of God is the one who is grounded on this reality. It is important to understand which apostles and prophets he is referring to when he writes these words. The term apostle is a New Testament term which means "one who is sent out." Furthermore, there are two primary ways in which the term is used. The first, and most frequent usage of the word refers to the twelve men who were commissioned by Christ to fulfill the office of apostle. They had to have seen the risen Lord, been personally appointed by Christ to fulfill the role, and able to authenticate their assignment with miraculous signs. (Acts 1:22, I Cor. 9:1, Mark 3:14, Acts 1:24, Matt. 10:1-2, Acts 2:43) These men were given immense responsibility, in that they were the ones God used to deliver the message of the New Testament and confirm the testimony of the risen Lord, among many other things. As Wayne Grudem says, *"The Church rests on the total unique event of which Christ is the center, but in which the apostles and prophets filled and guided by the Spirit and doing their work in unique closeness to Christ, had an indispensable and untransmissible part."* The immense significance of the apostles' role is further confirmed in Revelation 21 when John mentions that in the future New Jerusalem, ***"the wall of the city had 12 foundations and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."*** Clearly, the apostles' role in laying the one foundation of the church should not be missed, for it is through the content of their teaching that the true Christ is proclaimed and men and women are saved! (Matt. 16:16-18) It is also important to note that the foundation they labored so intensely to position, was a one-time thing. Two

thousand years later we are not still working on the foundation by adding to it or changing it. It is absolutely complete through the written and settled Word of God! This is important because as we will see, throughout the centuries, men and women have tried repeatedly to restore the office of authoritative apostle and through this many destructive heresies have seeped into the church.

As for the second use of the term apostle in the New Testament, there are a few instances where the word is used generically to refer to certain individuals who were sent out in a role that is similar to our modern missionaries. (Acts. 13:2, Rom. 16:7, 2 Cor. 8:23) They were not given the authority or official position of the twelve, but did have a calling on their life to fulfill a certain mission. Not much else is known about the extent of their role in the early church, but it is clear they were not the ones Paul is referring to as the foundation layers of the church.

Moving on from the apostles, Paul mentions the prophets as also part of the foundation. In this context it seems he is referring to the role of a New Testament prophet as opposed to an Old Testament prophet, although their roles were very similar. Grudem summarizing this idea says, *“It is harder for us to see the prophet’s particular ministry, but they stand out clearly from the New Testament as people of inspired utterance, whose ministry of the word was of the utmost importance for the young church. On occasion they might foretell the future as in Acts 11:28 and 21:9,11, but like the Old Testament prophets their great work was to “forth-tell” the Word of God. This might be in bringing to light with convicting power people’s sins (1 Cor. 14:24-25), or in bringing new strength to the church by the words of exhortation.”* This official role of prophet also ceased with the completion of the canon and the death of the apostles, and gave way to the roles of evangelists, shepherds, and teachers (Eph. 4:11) as the written word came to be widely circulated among the churches, and local church leadership became more firmly established.

## **Growth through the Cornerstone**

Moving on from the foundation to the cornerstone, Paul makes clear that the Lord Jesus Christ is the one who secures the building which is the church, when he says, ***“Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the***

***whole structure, being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.”***

The reference to Christ as the cornerstone is a common image throughout Scripture. Going all the way back to Isaiah God declared, ***“Behold I am laying in Zion, a stone, a costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed.” (Is. 28:16)*** Christ Himself declared in Matt. 21:42, Mark 4:10, and Luke 20:17 that He indeed was the fulfillment of the prophecy proclaimed in Psalm 118:22 which stated, ***“The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.”*** But going further, as we learned last year in I Peter, Jesus proved that He was also the *living* cornerstone, the overcomer of death and the only source of life to all who come to him. (I Peter 2:4-10)

It is important to understand the significance of a foundational cornerstone in the buildings of biblical times. As Macarthur says, *“The cornerstone was the major structural part of ancient buildings. It had to be strong enough to support what was built on it, and it had to be precisely laid, because every other part of the structure was oriented to it. The cornerstone was the support, the orienter, and the unifier of the entire building.”* This is the exact role that Christ plays in the church. *“All believers find their true place and function in relation to Christ as they are built into Him.”* as Grudem says. It is only through Jesus that the whole structure remains solidly unified through each stone that is joined together in Him.

As we learned last week, in one sense the unity that believers share through Christ is a sure and certain reality. In God’s eyes positionally, the structure that is the church is perfect, solidly joined together in Him, and sure to never crumble. The Greek word that Paul uses here to communicate the idea of how we are joined together is *sunarmologeō*. It is a beautiful term which reflects the idea that believers have been fitly framed together-closely linked to each other and to the Lord, in a very personal way. *“Nothing is out of place, misshapen, or inappropriate...Every part is precisely cut to fit snugly, strongly, and beautifully with every other part.”* (Macarthur) What a thought! Of course, in a practical sense the structure that is the church, is still ***“growing”*** as more believers are added to the family all the time, and the believers that are currently in the church are being sanctified. This is the idea that is communicated when Paul concludes by saying, ***“In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for***

**God.”** This reinforces the truth that the building of believers that God is constructing is indeed a holy temple, the place on earth where God’s Spirit has taken up residence.

On the one hand, the Bible teaches that each believer is an individual temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6:19-20, 2:12-16, 2 Cor. 5:10) and will personally be held accountable for the way in which he or she lives. Each person is responsible for their own daily walk of holiness, and is called to lay his life down daily for the glory of God. (I Cor. 10:31) Yet, in this context, Paul is referring more to the corporate nature of the temple of believers. God has called us to jointly ***“proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness.”*** (I Peter 2:9b) He has called us to live out our oneness through the power of the Holy Spirit, and ***“to be diligent to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*** ( Eph. 4:1) There are an endless array of ways that we as the body of Christ are called to live out our unity, but at its core our calling boils down to this: we are to ***“put on the Lord Jesus Christ,”*** ( Rom. 13:14) particularly ***“having this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant.”*** (Phil. 2:5-6) This is only possible when we as a body of Christ have an exalted view of Jesus Christ as Lord and Master over all, our great High Priest who laid down his life as a ransom so that we could be saved.

## **Closing Remarks**

### **Using the Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets to Discern Doctrinal Error**

While there are many possible take-aways from our passage for today related to unity, it is profitable to consider how our verses can help us discern false doctrines that tragically tend to seep into the church under the guise of true Christianity. First and foremost, understanding that the foundation (the Word of God) is complete, and the office of apostle no longer exists is paramount. Many false doctrines have entered the church through people who claim apostleship- particularly those who claim God has given them new revelation and authority to speak on His behalf. This belief has long been associated with Roman Catholic doctrine which has historically embraced apostolic succession. This

heresy entered through the belief that Christ gave Peter greater authority than the other apostles, which led to him becoming the first pope and bishop of Rome. This then led to even greater heresy in that the Catholic church has long operated on the premise that every pope that has come after Peter has been divinely appointed by Christ to be his representative on earth, the one possessing divine authority equal, if not superior, to that of God in Scripture. Of course, if we examine Catholic doctrine even closer we see that because their foundation is not solely based in the Scriptures, the bulk of their teaching is extremely off. This is most tragically seen in the way they view Christ's atoning work, and the Gospel itself. All of this reveals the reasons why the true church of Christ cannot be in union with those who embrace the Roman Catholic faith. Of course, this in no way negates our responsibility to love and proclaim the true Gospel of grace to those we love who may be a part of this belief system.

Another more current false doctrine that has been influencing the church is the New Apostolic Reformation. Over the last several years, this belief system has been wreaking havoc on the church at large, and has become the fastest growing segment of Christianity internationally. (MacArthur) Many charismatically minded churches have come to embrace the New Apostolic belief that God has restored the official role of the apostles and prophets in the last thirty years or so, and through this the church is said to be going through a reformation of sorts. According to NAR doctrine these apostles and prophets are being empowered by God to receive new revelations from the Spirit that will aid the church in establishing dominion on the earth. They believe that through the cross, Christ not only took care of sin for the believer, but also empowered him to exercise dominion and control over the earth. Through these false beliefs, many people have been deceived into believing a more prosperity minded Gospel, where the Word of God is placed on the backburner in favor of these new revelations. Sadly, the trajectory for this of type belief system is always doomed, because the foundation is not the Word of God. In this situation, it may be more tempting to dismiss the doctrinal error because in many cases the Gospel still seems to be a part of the message being proclaimed. But the reality is that the church must lovingly, and firmly stand for the Word, for while the truth about Christ may still be hanging on by a thread, it is only a matter of time before the Gospel message is totally compromised in these circles.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, there are many challenges that we as believers face when it comes to living out unity in the body of Christ. Whether it be laying down our selfish desires to serve one another, wanting to compromise the truth for the sake of “peace,” or being unsure of how to even move forward in a difficult relationship, the challenges we face each day seem to be endless and constant. Yet going back to the basics of the truth we have been given in the Word, it is our union with Christ himself that will provide us with the adequacy we need to face each challenge. To the degree that we are all looking to Jesus to be all that we need, we will find the capacity to walk in our unity.

*“One hundred pianos tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other. They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So, one hundred worshippers met together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be were they to become “unity” conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.” A.W. Tozer*

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