

## The Temple God Builds.

Text: Eph 2:19-21

Suggested Hymns:

124, 189, 191, 284, 131

- 1) The builder of the Temple
- 2) The foundation of the Temple
- 3) The cornerstone of the Temple
- 4) The material and the tools used to make the Temple
- 5) There is one Temple
- 6) The Temple is rising to completion

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Ephesians 2:19-22, *<sup>19</sup> Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, <sup>22</sup> in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Pentecost grows on the person who has eyes to see. It is more than a phenomenon which flashed upon the world for a few brief moments and then vanished. It is a miracle of grace which in its essential features will continue until it has completed its mission of building the one holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.

The nature and grandeur of this new creation transcends human language. Jesus calls it the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven. St. Paul compares it to a complex living organism, a body, whose Head is Christ.

In our text he provides illustrations to describe it. It is a city of God in which believers are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints. He raises it to a higher and more intimate level when he honours it with the term, the household, the family of God. Finally his poetic eye sees it as a temple which God builds. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### 1. The Builder Of The Temple

On the first Pentecost Sunday the unfriendly critics of the disciples sensed that another power than their own was at work. ***“Are not all these who speak Galileans?”***<sup>1</sup> they asked in amazement. The origin and educational background of these humble men could not account for the mystery of these Apostles speaking in the hearers own language, and the spiritual power which they exerted.

Our text gives the answer in the words ***“in the Spirit.”*** The Third Person of the Holy Trinity transformed the simple sermon of Peter into a message which burned deeply into the hearts of three thousand hearers. He welded these people of different languages and cultures into a closely knit fellowship of faith, love, and service.

The mind of the twentieth-first century has not discovered a substitute for the Holy Spirit. Beautiful churches and highly trained choirs whose songs sound heavenly may attract many people. Preachers who wield the power of eloquence and the skill of persuasion may lead many people into church membership.

But all of this at its best cannot transport a single soul from spiritual death to life, from the slavery of sin to the freedom of the children of God. It is still as true today as when first written that ***“no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.”***<sup>2</sup> This is because ***the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.***<sup>3</sup> This means that only God the Holy Spirit can build the temple.

## **2. The Foundation Of The Temple**

The divine Builder carefully selects the foundation. It must endure when heaven and earth shall pass away. It must, therefore, have the qualities and the strength for eternity.

St. Paul calls it the foundation of the apostles and prophets. It is the foundation of which they have testified and on which their own faith was built. The Holy Spirit describes it through the prophet Isaiah, ***“Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation.”***<sup>4</sup> St. Paul identifies it in his First Letter to the Corinthians as we read in 1 Corinthians 3:11, ***“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”***

Through His perfect obedience and His sacrificial suffering and death, Jesus became the Foundation upon which the Holy Spirit builds the temple.

Nothing less will satisfy the righteous demands of God, who has said in Leviticus 19:2, <sup>2</sup> ***“You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”*** We read of the consequences of not following this command in Deuteronomy 27:26, <sup>26</sup> ***‘Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law.’***

All human attempts to provide another foundation end in failure and tragedy. When the inspired apostle wrote this Letter, the temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the world, dominated the city of Ephesus. It was regarded by many as the answer to man’s needs for this life and that which is to come. Centuries later, however, archaeologists dug for many months in search of the site. They finally found a few foundation stones sunk in a swamp.

This typifies the experience of many people who rest their hopes on the foundation of their own righteousness. It collapses and falls apart when an awakened conscience haunts and taunts them. It will fail them completely on that day when all must appear before the judgment seat of God, who in His Word, has given us a preview of His verdict in such statements as ***“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”***<sup>35</sup> and ***“There is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin.”***<sup>36</sup>

In striking contrast note the song of the believer whose hope is built upon nothing less than the foundation which God Himself has laid,<sup>7</sup>

*Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness  
My beauty are, my glorious dress,  
Wherein before my God I’ll stand  
When I shall reach the heav’nly land.  
Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness*

Here is the foundation upon which we may rest firmly our whole spiritual life, our faith, our love, our peace, our service to God and man, and our hope of eternal life.

Here is the spiritual security which enables us to share the confidence of St. Paul, ***“I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.”***<sup>38</sup> This same thought is expressed in Romans 8:38-39, <sup>38</sup> ***For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor***

*principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,<sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

### **3. The Cornerstone Of The Temple**

In the temple which God builds there is a Cornerstone which determines the lines of the structure. This is Jesus. Who else could serve in this capacity? All other so-called founders of religions bear in their character and life the stigma of sin. Their examples point towards hell.

In Jesus, however, we see the image of God as it once radiated from man in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. In Him we see the spiritual and moral ideal toward which God would have the believer move.

Here is perfect love reaching out to God with all the heart, with all the soul, with all the strength, with all the mind. Here is perfect love toward man, and the Golden Rule in action.

### **4. The Materials And Tools Used To Make The Temple**

The divine Builder selects His materials for the structure from the quarry of nature. He finds them rough and unsuited for His purposes. But the Holy Spirit hews and shapes them.

His tools are the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments. As the Holy Spirit uses them, a mysterious process takes place. Jesus says in John 3:8, <sup>8</sup> *“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*

Deep sorrow for sin sets in. It gives way to a joyous faith in Jesus, the Saviour. A refining process begins and continues throughout this life. St. Paul expresses it in the words, <sup>12</sup> *Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.*

<sup>13</sup> *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Thus from the quarry of nature the Holy Spirit has shaped and placed into the temple such heroes of faith as Job, Abraham, Joseph, Daniel, Isaiah, Mary, Paul,

Peter, John, Lydia, Eunice, Lois, Stephen, and many others whose names are recorded in the Book of Life. Into this illustrious company He has placed you and me. What an undeserved honour! What a comfort in a world in which it does not yet appear - what we are and what we shall be!

### 5. There is One Temple

By faith in Christ, the gentile Christians in Ephesus and gentile believers in general have the same access to God as God's covenant people enjoyed all along. The resulting conclusion is given in our text which text begins with the introductory words ***“Now, therefore.”*** The concluding statement is that since the Ephesians have the same direct access to God as the covenant people always had, it follows that ***you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.***

Recall that previously the Ephesian Gentiles were ***“were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise.”***<sup>9</sup> But now by faith in Christ all that has changed. Now they no longer lack a place in the kingdom of God. Now they are fellow citizens with God's people.

They are not only citizens of the same kingdom, but they are even closer than that. They are members of the same family. God is, after all, their Father, and they have access to Him just as the Jewish believers do.

The close relationship in the church between gentile Christians and Jewish believers is pictured by directing their attention to such concepts as citizenship in a kingdom or membership in the same family.

The same thought of one faith, one Lord, one church is given in the picture of a building and has them think of the unity and coherence among the various structural members of ***a holy temple***: the foundation, the cornerstone, the walls rising to form the superstructure. The Ephesians are ***“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.”***

The firm foundation of the Ephesian congregation, is the doctrine Christ gave to them through His Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles. Throughout the ages there has been only one plan of salvation.

Old Testament believers looked forward to the Messiah, or Saviour, who was to come. New Testament believers look back to the Saviour who has come.

Hence the apostles and prophets, bearers of God's Word about the Saviour, can fairly be called the "**foundation**" of the Ephesian congregation, and the Christ they preached, its "**cornerstone**."

But what is occurring in Ephesus is but one small example of what is going on all over the world wherever the Gospel is preached. "**In [Christ]**" the apostle declares, "**the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.**"

The "temple" to which Paul is referring is the holy Christian church. It is the total sum of all believers, those who in past ages waited in faith for the Messiah to come and those who in the present trust in the merits of the Saviour who has come. As the Gospel progresses through the world, new believers are added daily to this Church.

The materials selected and shaped by the Holy Spirit to build this **holy temple** are not aimlessly thrown upon a heap. Nor are they used to construct several buildings. They are fitly framed together in Jesus and intimately connected with one another to form one **holy temple** of God.

This truth brings joy to the hearts of all who are deeply concerned about the many divisions which separate those who call themselves Christians.

The hymnist writes,<sup>10</sup>

*Though with a scornful wonder  
Men see her sore oppressed,  
By schisms rent asunder,  
By heresies distressed,  
Yet saints their watch are keeping,  
Their cry goes up, 'How long?'*

But behind this tragic disunity there is a unity which centres in Jesus, the God-Man, the only Saviour of the world. Therefore Christians can also sing gratefully:

*Elect from every nation,  
Yet one o'er all the earth,  
Her charter of salvation  
One Lord, one faith, one birth;  
One holy name she blesses,*

*Partakes one holy food,  
And to one hope she presses  
With every grace endued.*

## **6. The Temple Is Rising To Completion**

As carpenters and craftsmen add more and more component parts to a building as it proceeds toward completion, so too Christ is building His Church — one believer at a time.

Each believer is carefully fitted into his or her niche. All are known by name. All are important to the builder. All fulfil a purpose. Recall the **“good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”**<sup>1</sup> Hence, the Holy Spirit gives His readers this assurance, In Christ ***you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.***

This means that the temple of God continues to rise, even though principalities and powers plot its destruction and direct all their fiendish resources against it. Amid the uncertainties of human history one thing is certain: the ***holy temple*** will one day be completed. The gates of hell, the chosen forces of the devil, cannot prevent it.

How reassuring for our faith at a time when materialism and ungodliness has largely determined the pattern of our national life to know that God is in control.

The day is certain to come when we shall see the temple, the Holy Christian Church, which God built in all the grandeur which His love and wisdom and power made possible.

In view of this, Pentecost ranks in importance with Christmas and Easter. We thank God for the Holy Spirit, who has enabled us to say, ***“I believe in the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.”*** Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 2:7

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:3

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:14

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 28:16

<sup>5</sup> Romans 3:23

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<sup>6</sup> Ecclesiastes 7:20

<sup>7</sup> Hymn 327

<sup>8</sup> 2 Timothy 1:12

<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 2:12

<sup>10</sup> Hymn 191

<sup>11</sup> Ephesians 2:10