

The Church is the Temple of the Holy Spirit

Ephesians 2:19-22

Ephesians 2:19-22 - *“Now therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God; having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom the whole building being fitted together grows into a holy temple in the Lord: in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”*

Background Notes

The Ephesian believers, to whom the apostle Paul was writing, would certainly have known a lot about temples. Many of the Jewish believers would have seen the 1st century Temple (sometimes called Herod's Temple) when they traveled to Jerusalem for one of the annual Jewish feasts. That Temple was the same Temple that our Lord attended - the Temple from which he drove out the people who exchanged money and sold animals for sacrifice. And of course, both the Jewish and Gentile believers of Ephesus would have known of the great temple in Ephesus dedicated to the pagan goddess, Diana, or Artemis. This magnificent structure had over 120 columns, and was considered one of the great wonders of the ancient world. One of the columns is still standing in Ephesus today, and it gives us an idea of the former grandeur of this temple.

The Temple of Diana was so spectacular that the merchants of Ephesus made and sold little silver models of it. In Acts 19, Paul was on his third missionary journey: *“And about that time there rose a commotion about The Way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, made silver shrines of Diana that brought no small profit to the craftsmen. He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said, ‘Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover you see and hear, that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands: so not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute; but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised, and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worships.’ And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians!’”* (Acts 19:23-28). And after the uproar had quieted down, the city clerk said, *“Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from heaven?”* It was against this background that Paul wrote about the Church as being the Temple of the Holy Spirit. What a contrast! The Temple of the Holy Spirit was not a material building of wood and stone, built by men - it was a living structure, built by God Himself.

Doctrinal Points

1. Believers are citizens of Heaven.

Verse 19: *“Now therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints.”* We’re no longer strangers, or foreigners, or aliens – we’re fellow citizens with all the saints. Philippians 3:20 says that we are citizens of heaven. If you, personally, have trusted in Christ for salvation, then you are a citizen of heaven.

2. Believers are members of God’s family.

Verse 19: *“members of the household of God.”* The family is another model that emphasizes the unity of all believers. We are all brothers and sisters in God’s family. Last week I was chatting with a total stranger, and within ten minutes we found out that we were both Christians - and we were calling each other “brother”! Onlookers around us couldn’t figure this out! The world can’t understand our family relationship. Some are even jealous. We had instant fellowship because we were brothers in God’s family. Have you ever had that experience? It’s wonderful! Believers are members of God’s family.

3. Believers are the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

Verses 20-22: *“...having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”*

In these verses we have the primary figure used in this section of Ephesians 2 – a Temple. In verses 20-22 we have the foundation of the Temple, the cornerstone of the Temple, the Architect of the Temple, the materials of the Temple, and the purpose of the Temple.

a. The foundation of the Temple (v20).

“Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” The foundation of the church is the foundational teaching of the apostles and prophets. The prophets mentioned here are not the Old Testament prophets but the New Testament prophets. 1 Corinthians 12:28 says, *“God appointed for the church first apostles, and second prophets,”* followed by the other gifts. So it is New Testament prophets who are in view in verse 20. Ephesians 3:5 says that *“the mystery of Christ and its body, the church, has now been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets.”* The teaching of the apostles and New Testament prophets (such as this letter from the apostle Paul himself) is foundational to the Temple that God is building.

b. The Cornerstone of the Temple (v20).

“Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.” Jesus Christ is the focus of the foundational teaching for the Church. He’s the Cornerstone of the foundation.

There’s no contradiction here, by the way, with 1 Corinthians 3:11 which says that Jesus Christ is the Foundation of the Church – the apostle simply used two different illustrations of the building of the Church. In 1 Corinthians 3, the illustration is of a building (not necessarily a temple, by the way). We are the builders in that passage, building on the foundation of Christ. The point of the illustration in 1 Corinthians 3 is that we must take heed how we build. Here in Ephesians 2, the building is a Temple. God is the Builder, and we are the building blocks. The apostles and prophets and their teaching are the foundation. In the Ephesians 2 illustration, Jesus Christ is the Cornerstone - the most important stone that ties everything together.

It’s important to understand that these are two illustrations, and that there is no contradiction between Ephesians 2:20 and 1 Corinthians 3:11. There are no contradictions in the Bible! Imagine if I were to give two sermons about living the Christian life, using the illustration of driving a car. In one sermon I might picture that the Lord is in the driver’s seat and I’m sitting next to him. In another sermon I might say that I’m driving the car and the Lord is sitting next to me as the perfect Navigator. If I used these two different illustrations, you wouldn’t say that I had contradicted myself – you recognize that I just used two illustrations of the Christian life. Here’s an important hermeneutical (interpretation) principle: Don’t determine your doctrine from an illustration! Illustrations should only illustrate doctrine.

c. The Architect of the Temple (v21).

“In whom the whole building being fitted together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.” God himself is obviously the Architect of the Temple. He is fitting the whole building together according to His perfect plan. Notice that the building doesn’t put itself together - God fits it together, founded on the Cornerstone. It’s not thrown together haphazardly; it’s fitted together with precise planning and care. Isn’t that a wonderful thought? You, as one of the living stones, were picked and added to God’s Temple with precise planning and care!

The term *“grows”* here is a biological term. This is a living building. The Church is not an organization - it’s an organism. It’s living! You must have spiritual life to be built into this Temple.

d. The materials of the Temple (v22).

“In whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” We are the building materials of the Temple. No material building on earth today could be called the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The Temple of the Holy Spirit is not a building of wood and stone and stained-glass windows – it’s a building composed of people. We are the

materials. 1 Peter 2:5 says, “*you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house.*” All believers form the one true Church, the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

e. The purpose of the Temple (v22).

“You also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” Think of it! Forever, the God of this universe will dwell in the midst of His people and have fellowship with them. With us! Even now, while the Temple is being built, God is dwelling in the midst of His people by His Spirit. Not only are our individual bodies the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), but together, as a body of believers, we are the Temple of the Holy Spirit - now and forever.

The same thought is brought out in 1 Corinthians 3:16: *“Do you not know that you [the Church] are the Temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”* Both now and forever, believers are the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

Practical Application

Let’s not make noise in the Temple area!

The Temple area in Jerusalem was God’s sanctuary, and it was to be a quiet place. It was not a place for noise or disruption or commercialism. That’s one reason why the Lord tossed the money exchangers and animal sellers out of the Temple complex. When the Solomon’s Temple was built, all the building stones were cut and shaped at the quarry so that there would be no construction noise in the Temple area! The Temple was the House of God.

All believers together form the Temple of God, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, today. Unfortunately, some believers make a lot of “noise” in the Temple area. Wherever they go, they cause problems. They disrupt the believers in whatever local church they attend. They spend very little time in worship and Bible study. They just make noise in the Temple area. Do you know any Christians like that? Let’s be careful not to make noise in the Temple area!