

The Body as Building

“Therefore then you are no longer strangers and foreigners [outside the house] but you are fellow citizens with the saints [set apart ones] and householders of God, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone, in whom all the building, fitted together grows unto a holy [set apart] temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are being built together unto a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22).

The most penetrating question that a human being can ever ask is, “Who am I?” And part of the same question is, “What is it all about?” Here, in a few sweeping thoughts, the apostle provides some far reaching insights. You are a building and a dwelling place and a citizen.

But shouldn't that be the answer to what, not who?

Normally, yes, but in this case the building is a “growing thing.” It is not possible to describe our relationship to God in simple metaphors—it takes a large number of them and it takes the metaphors that lift us out of the normal human material concepts. Not only are we buildings, but we are sheep and vines and trees and grain, as well as fields and lamps and precious stones and even poems.

You are fellow citizens . . . For centuries the Gentiles had been excluded from the family of God—Israel. In fact in the early foundations of the Church, the Jews had considered the Gentiles to be outside the pale of God's special people and His purposes of salvation. It was only after Peter's interaction with the household of Cornelius that the leaders of the Jewish Christians agreed that God had also “granted salvation to the Gentiles.”

Now, of course, the barrier has been broken down and the Gentiles are allowed to be fellow citizens of the Kingdom of God, along with the Jewish believers,. Jesus said, *“Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; these also I must bring with me and they will hear My voice and they will become one fold; one Shepherd”* (John 10:16). It is well to note that the Gentiles were joined with the Jews to make up the family and not vice versa.

No longer strangers and outsiders . . . One of the basic needs of the human psyche or personality is the sense of “belonging.” That is one of the basic drives or motivations behind the social phenomenon of the “club,” to say nothing of the “street gang.” Together with the Jewish Christians, the Gentile believers became *bona fide* citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Not only were the Gentiles fellow citizens, but also fellow householders (living under the same roof). The word often translated by “foreigner,” is the Greek word *παροικος* (*paroikos*) which means literally “outside the house.” Not only are the Gentiles brought into the Kingdom, but also into the very dwelling place of God.

Built together . . . Not only are we members of the household of God, but in another figure, we are part of the building itself. The metaphor of the building

has the same impact as the metaphor of the body—the integral unity of the believers. And like the body, the building also has its integral parts and minute details. And also like the body, the building has its central figure. As Jesus Christ is the Head of the body, so also He is the Chief Cornerstone of the building. The Apostles and Prophets were the foundation in the sense of being the purveyors of the basic revelation of truth. But Christ was the Chief Cornerstone, which figuratively held the entire building together. The modern concept of “cornerstone,” is misleading. Today, a cornerstone is nothing more than a commemorative plaque. It has nothing to do with the structure of the building. In Jesus’ day, however, it was used in what we would call “keystone construction.” In an arch, for instance, it was the stone at the top of the arch that held the arch together, without mortar. There is such a structure in a modern day building in Washington D.C. The Supreme Court has a marble staircase which is built on the keystone principle, with a landing that is the piece that holds the entire staircase together, without mortar.

All the building fitted together . . . It is a word for the fine cabinetmaker. In today’s construction, the rough carpentry is done by the “framer.” Many a vacant property has become a whole village overnight with the erecting of literal forests of studs or two-by-fours. Then comes the finish carpenter, at which point the project slows down immensely. Perhaps the Apostles and Prophets could be likened to the framers who erected the basic structure. Then comes Christ who fits all the pieces together in the finish carpentry. In fine cabinetmaking, often very small pieces have to be fitted together—pieces which of themselves may not seem too important. But, as in the body, each member has a particular part that may seem quite insignificant compared to the more obvious and visible parts, but the cabinetmaker has his intricate design for each piece. And only the cabinetmaker knows how they all fit together. Thus, it must be left to him to decide what to do with each member, and not to the suppositions of human leadership. And thus finally fitted together, we all become a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Would you like to know what God wants to do with you? Commit the task to Him and trust Him to fit you into His pattern. There are thousands of suggestions as to what is a logical place of service to humanity, but only Christ knows exactly where you fit.

This is what Christ has been doing since His glorification. He told the disciples, *I go to prepare a place for you*. It could hardly be assumed that it would take the Creator of the universe two thousand years to build a heavenly city. But what He is building is the spiritual dwelling place. That is to say, He has been building His Church. It is a process that is continuous and will be “under construction” until He comes. He is bringing all the members together and fitting them together according to His pattern. The tabernacle in the wilderness was a great type of this process where each part of the structure had to be according to a very intricate pattern. As God said to Moses, “*See thou make it according to the pattern showed thee on the mount*” (Hebrews 8:5). Every member must be fitted into the body by the Master Craftsman. Our human minds cannot figure it out. The only way that we can fit the pattern is by looking to the Holy Spirit to see to it that we are at the right place; at the right time; doing the right thing.

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