

How the Realities Affect Us

Ephesians 2:21-22

Two weeks ago we looked at three striking realities about Jesus which encourage us as we try to practice our belief in Him. We saw from Ephesians 2:20 that Jesus is the Theme of our Lives, the Cornerstone of our Faith and the Fulfillment of our Hope. Today, from verses 21-22, we look at how those realities about Jesus affect our life together in the Church.

While we're talking about realities, we have to remind ourselves that sometimes we are not easy to get along with. Entire books have been written about conflict, about getting along with people who don't want to get along. All of us at some time or another get in a mood or a spirit where we just simply don't want to get along with anyone over anything. I have in my personal library a book entitled *Whatever It is, I'm Against It*. It's an anthology of what people have said in opposition to different subjects. It seems that some people delight in being disagreeable or difficult to get along with. We are no different in the church. Just because we are members of a church doesn't mean we have some magic powers which keep us happy and loving all the time.

Take the church at Ephesus, for example, to whom Paul wrote this letter. I'm not sure but that they needed frequent reminders of what their life together in Christ was to be like. Their pastor was a young man by the name of Timothy. Paul wrote two separate letters to him, and they are found in our New Testament, and when we look at them, we uncover some clues about what was happening in Ephesus. In 1 Timothy 2:8, we have an indication that the Christians there found it difficult to adjust to sharing this life in Christ together: *"I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing."*

No, getting along with others, even other Christians in the same church, has never been easy. Paul addressed that problem in Ephesians 2:21-22. He continued giving the Ephesian Christians some striking realities about Jesus, but now he turns to realities about Jesus which affect their lives together.

1 Jesus is the Harmony of our relationships, v. 21
In verse 20, Paul had compared the Kingdom of God to a building, *"built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone."* In verse 21, Paul used architectural terms, and continued that metaphor of the building. Here is what he wrote: *"In him the whole building is*

joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.” The King James Version reads that the building is “fitly framed together.” That is one word in the original language, and Paul apparently invented it to make his point. He combined three different words into one, and when we look at them a little closer we come away with a real good understanding of what he’s saying here.

One word means “together” and gives us our English word “symphony.” Another word means “to collect,” or “to gather.” But the third word means “joint,” and it gives us our English word “harmony.” It’s a word which described a joint or a juncture of two stones, or the sides of the two stones that were worked so they would fit together tightly. A mason would have used this word to describe the “whole elaborate process by which stones were fitted together” (Robinson). They would drill holes in the stones, insert bronze dowels and fix them in place with molten lead before putting the upper stone in place. But before that could be done, the stones had to be cut and chiseled and hammered to make sure that they would fit together just perfectly.

So Jesus is the Foundation and the Chief Cornerstone, and we are the blocks in the walls, and we have to be fitted together. That glorious work began long before we came along, but we are being added to all the work that has gone before. Our shape, our function, our role in the building, are all determined by the Foundation and the Chief Cornerstone. I can’t take this block away from the Foundation, put it over here and say it’s part of the building. We are not only interrelated to the Foundation, but to every other block or brick in the building.

This is where harmony comes in. The task of fitting us together into the church of God is an ongoing process, which helps us to grow up in Christ. I come to know Christ, and I have to be hammered and chiseled and shaped and cut to make me fit. Sometimes God’s chisel has to knock off an attitude, or trim a belief that is wrong, or anything else that has to be done in order to fashion me into a stone that will fit into the wall. Sometimes that includes trials or illness, sometimes stretching of our patience, sometimes misunderstandings, sometimes a host of other things that God uses to make us fit together perfectly into the structure which is called the Church.

But this basic word translated “fitly framed together” had a medical use as well. The writer of Hebrews used the word to describe the joints of the body when he wrote, *“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing of soul and spirit, **joints** and marrow: it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart”* (4:12).

Think about what a joint is in your body. It is the place where bones come together, where they fit together, so that they work together. An excellent example of this is the hip joint, where the “ball” at the top of the femur fits into the socket of the pelvis. That’s a little simplified, but the point is that the two have to work together so that we can walk. When everything works properly, there is harmony there in your hip joint.

Jesus the Cornerstone is the One Who binds us together in a spirit of harmony and love that cannot be matched or even adequately imitated by any other organization or group of people anywhere on the face of the earth. You say, but what about those churches which split because of disagreements among the members? What about those people who seem to delight in stirring up strife? Since peace, love and harmony come from the Master of Reconciliation, then anytime those things are absent in a body of believers or in a person’s testimony, it’s safe to say that He is not there, either.

I believe we can infer from this Scripture that if two Christians have difficulty getting along with each other, then it is a good chance that one or both of them have not allowed Jesus to be the Cornerstone of their lives. The problem comes when we refuse to allow Jesus to be what He claims to be for us. Jesus as the Cornerstone gives harmony in our relationships only when both sides in the relationship allow Jesus the proper place of Lordship in their personal lives.

2 Jesus is the Architect of our lives together, vv. 21b-22

Paul further says about this building that it *“rises together to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together.”*

There’s a couple of phrases here that deserve our attention. The first is *“rises together,”* and the second is *“being built together.”* The word *“rises”* means “to grow” as the King James Version indicates. It meant growth of every kind—size, numbers, age, maturity, glory, power. Paul used a form of the word here that shows that this growth of the temple of the Lord is not automatic, that its growth depends on fulfillment of our responsibilities, decisions and activities. On top of that, Paul used a present tense verb, which indicates that this is a continuous action. Here’s why that is important: this building Paul is writing about is a building still under construction. It’s happening in the present. It’s happening right now.

The phrase “being built together” is one word in the original language, and this is the only place it appears in the New Testament. It means “to build in along with,” or “to form as an essential part of a structure.” This word has the idea of an

architect sitting at his drawing board designing a building, designing in certain features right from the very beginning—perhaps a wall of windows here, a door there, a fireplace over there—then working with the construction crew to see that those features are included during the actual construction.

We Christians do not exist and grow in Christ in isolation, apart from each other. We are designed by the Chief Architect to live and work together. We are “built in” to each other. We are being caused to grow into a holy temple in the Lord. He has designed us from the very beginning to be what God wants us to be. The basic features, qualifications, and characteristics have already been designed into our life together in the church. What are those qualifications which allow us to function together properly? Paul wrote about them in another place, where he called them “The Fruit of the Spirit”: *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”* (Galatians 5:22-23b).

We get into trouble in our relationships with each other when we cast the blueprints aside and try to build the Kingdom of God, which includes this church, according to our own ideas of what it should be. Without Him, the church makes no sense at all.

Today’s invitation is a plea to make our church even better than it is already, by facing these two realities about Jesus which directly affect our relationships together: Jesus is the harmony of our relationships, and Jesus is the architect of our lives together. When we sing the melodies of praise to Jesus together, we sing in harmony, even if it doesn’t always sound that way musically. When we submit to the Master Design of the Architect Who put us together, and when we live in obedience to the guidelines He has given us, we become *“the dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.”* That reality has the force and the power to change lives! Won’t you become a part of it by surrendering more completely to Jesus today?