

God's Great Household p2

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Bible Text: Ephesians 2:18-22
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Ephesians 2. These truths are so liberating, so empowering. If pastors and church leaders in particular would just grasp what is here, it would free them from so many entanglements and so many difficulties. The apostle again as he gets to the middle or so of chapter 2 and continues on, he begins to put shoe leather on the doctrine. And by the way, that's always what follows. We're never just to preach to, impress our intellect. Doctrine was written for the church so the church might embrace it, joy in it and walk in it and one another together in interdependency and courage and nourish and challenge and care for each other as we walk in that doctrine. So the Bible predominantly is written to a group and the New Testament predominantly is written to local churches so that we would grasp these things together and hold them together and walk in them together. So building on the great great magnificent way Paul has unfolded the great Gospel of grace through Jesus Christ, he comes down now to some practical things about who we are and what God is doing because of this work on earth through us, in his church, for his glory.

Ephesians 2:18,

18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you [that's Gentiles] are fellow citizens with the saints [that's Jews], and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

So he has given us all these glorious doctrinal truths about salvation by grace, through faith in Christ alone, all of the great dynamics and wonders of sovereign grace that saves us, and then he says that's now being worked out in time and space history. God did that on the cross through his Son, now the Spirit through the preaching of the word is causing actual things to happen in people's lives, saving individuals and bringing those individuals together.

So we are calling this "God's Great Household," and one of the things you need to understand about the Bible is the Bible has a grand overarching theme from Genesis to

Revelation and that is that God has chosen to save for himself a people and he would save those people so that they might know him, love him, and enjoy him, and find eternal pleasure and treasure in him, and that will bring him glory. It's great glory for us, amen? But by saving us, and giving us a heart for him, by the way, which we would never have naturally possessed or could have developed, by changing our hearts and giving us a new affection for him and the things of God, we come together as the people of God, wrought by the Spirit working in our hearts and drawing us together, to love him, honor him, treasure him, and serve him, and find our joy in him, and that lasts both for time and for eternity.

So that's what God is about and we are seeing that he builds this great household, first of all, this is review, I. The agent of the building is the Spirit. He says we have our access, verse 18, "in one Spirit." Whomever the Spirit draws, convicts, regenerates, and births new life into, they are welcome as members of Grace Life Church. Amen? Whomever, red, yellow, black, white, it doesn't matter the ethnicity, the culture, the background. It doesn't matter. If the Spirit of God brings them to treasure Christ, they are home here. Amen? It's just a beautiful thing. I don't have time to say any more about that.

II. In review, the provision for the household is Christ. He says here that he is the cornerstone, verse 20, "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone." He's the foundation. He's the source. He's the reason. It is his merit and his work that provides for everything that is done in the house. If Jesus had not performed the work, the Spirit would not have anything to bring and apply to our lives. The Spirit makes application to us and on our account of all of the accomplishments of the Son, Jesus Christ. He is the corner stone.

Now, hurrying on to new material, III. We've talked about the agent of God's great household building, the Spirit; the provision for God's great household and the building of it is Christ; now thirdly, the authority and instruction for the building of the household. The authority and the instruction for the building of the household and that is the Bible, the Scriptures. It's very clear in this text.

Look at verse 20, "having been built on," here's the interesting phrase, "the foundation of the apostles and prophets." Now, that's interesting. You might say, "I thought Jesus was the foundation?" Well, he is but it is broader than that in one sense. The foundation of the apostles and the prophets. Now, here is where we have a firm disagreement with the Roman Catholic Church. When they would see a verse like that, "built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets," they would literally say, the early pope being Peter and the succeeding popes are the foundation of the church, and we must go to them and through them and their associates, the priests, in order to be in God's household. That is a grave error. None of this rests in any human being. The point is that God superintended through those apostles and through those prophets to write for us the completed Canon of Scripture, that is the New Testament. And in the completed Canon written by those early apostles, we have the full and final and completed revelation of God's Son, Jesus Christ, and salvation through him. The foundation is their writings which point us to Christ. It's the Bible. It's just the Scriptures.

1 Corinthians 3:10 is a good cross reference here. Paul says, "According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I," that's Paul, "laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it." Now, Paul, what do you mean? I thought Jesus was the foundation, now, Paul, you're saying you laid a foundation? Here's what Paul means, "I preached to you the truth of Christ which later has been written as the finished Canon of Scripture, and my teaching and my doctrine pointed out, revealed to you, taught you, Christ." God has just ordained and I submit to you this takes some faith. I have no way that I can somehow put things under a microscope or under a telescope to prove to you that this is some sort of objective fact. It's beyond that. There is a faith here and that faith is this: that God has ordained that he will reveal his Son through the faithful preaching and teaching of the word about Christ which is the finished Bible, the New Testament. It's the Scriptures. The Scriptures become that manual, if you will, that instruction and authority for the building of this household.

1 Corinthians 3:11, "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." So here we have the written word about Christ is called the foundation, then we have the living Word, Jesus Christ himself is called the foundation. Which one is it? It's both. It's both. Without the written, sealed, secured, finalized word of God which teaches us of Christ, we would never have revealed to us the living Word, Jesus Christ. You don't get one without the other. One way of saying it, and all of these fall a little bit apart analyzed very carefully because no metaphors or illustrations hold up to the infinite mind of God, but in one way the Bible is the written word of God and Jesus is the living Word of God. That's why he referred to himself as "the Word." He is the very expression of God.

So we have the foundation of the word of God, that the household of God is built upon. Now, think about that for a moment. Think of the security in that. We don't have to wait for some slick guru, some elitist Gnostic like they had in the first century, some advanced intellect to come and say, "Oh, we have found the way to find God." No, it's revealed right here. You can hold it, you can read it, you can study it, I can preach it. It's right there and we don't leave it to the dictates or, we might say, the manipulations of some other human being. We look at it as it is taught objectively and clearly, written by the original apostles. So the church rests on Christ. He is the foundation, but the teaching or the doctrine about Christ which is essential for the conversion of souls and the building of the church in all ages, is the teaching of the early apostles and prophets and they recorded their teaching in Scripture.

A couple of amplifications of this as we go a little further, look at Ephesians 3 there and look at verse 1. Paul says, "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles-- if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit." So this

was Paul's clear conviction that God had a mystery. Now, mystery doesn't mean something that is beyond knowing, it means something here that hasn't been completely unveiled. Now, certainly there were some things about Christ unveiled in the Old Testament but the completion, the whole of it had not been unveiled. And Paul says here, "Here's the way this is working: God has called some men holy apostles, through whom he will give the revelation and we are giving it to others and then by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we are writing it as sacred Scripture." So again, where is the foundation? Where is the authority and instruction for how to build God's household? It's the word of God. It's the word of God.

Do you know what's interesting and you may remember me telling you this, that I didn't really grow up in church and I was something of an agnostic myself, and I remember we have a church member or two here that went to my high school and they can attest to this, I remember debating in a history class that the Bible was not the word of God; that how do you know it's the word of God? How do you know men didn't just write that? I didn't want to honor that Bible because it contradicted me. Amen. It said I was a sinner. It said I was a vile person. It said I broke the law. I mean, who wants to hear that? But then one night in my car driving back to Middle Tennessee State University listening to a Presbyterian preacher on the radio, I was born again. I was saved. I came to awareness of my sin and the glorious love of Christ came into my life. I was totally changed. And it was interesting, from that moment on, I loved the Scriptures. There was no big, gigantic, philosophical, scientific investigation into the authenticity of the Bible. No, God changed my heart. Look, God didn't call you to be an apologetic on the trustworthiness of the Scriptures, he called you to be a truster and a proclaimer of the truth in the Scriptures. Look, read it.

I remember hearing one day Dr. Adrian Rogers, I think was the first one I heard say this. He said he ran into a man who worked at the space center, that's where he pastored early on in Florida and the man was an intellect and the man said, "Well, you know, I don't believe in God." And Dr. Rogers said, "Well, have you been everywhere in the universe?" And the guy said, "Well, no." He said, "Well, how do you know God couldn't be somewhere where you haven't been?" He said, "Well, I guess intellectually that's true. Then I'm just an agnostic. Well, I just doubt that God exists." He said, "Are you an honest doubter or a dishonest doubter?" He said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, an honest doubter would say I doubt God exists but I'll spend at least 30 minutes today and I will pray and say, 'God, if you're real, show me,' and I'm going to read and study this Bible. An honest doubter will look and investigate thoroughly what the Christians believe is the evidence." Dr. Rogers testifies that that man came in a few months later and said, "I've come to believe in Jesus Christ." You see, there are only two kinds of doubters: honest doubters and dishonest doubters. You see, a dishonest doubter does not want to find God the same reason a thief can't find a policeman. He's not looking for him. He doesn't want to find him. And if you love sin, and by the way, all men love sin until God changes them, you still love it after he changes you but you love it less than you love God. You still love it but you love it less than you love God but God had to change you to get you there and you're not going to want to embrace this holy book because you are so unholy unless God changes your heart.

Well, the foundation and this is wrought by faith in us, it was wrought by faith in the Apostle Paul. How do you think the Apostle Paul would have the audacity to say, "I am one of these holy apostles given this previously veiled mystery of how God is saving his people through his Son, Jesus Christ"? Faith is the way he did it. Faith, the instruction and authority, I think I worded it the authority and the instruction for the building of God's household is the word of God.

Another good cross-reference, Matthew 16:18, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." Again, this is where we part with Roman Catholic theology. The Roman Catholics will say, "You see there, Jesus gave the first pope, Peter, the authority to let people in the church. He is the rock the church is built on." Have you looked at the pope? I remember when the last pope was pope before this pope. I've never seen a more feeble, frail, pitiful looking creature in all of my life. Are you not glad the church isn't built on him? I'm going to tell you, the church is built on the Lord Jesus Christ and he is not feeble, nor does he wear party hats in church, nor does he stumble around and fumble around and barely be able to hold his manuscript when he reads it. The church is built on Jesus, not any man. No, when Jesus told Peter, "Upon this rock I will build My church," he's basing that on what Peter had just said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Then Jesus said, "Upon this rock, I will build My church," the rock of the doctrine of the preaching of Jesus Christ that is faithfully recorded in the word of God. The church is built on him.

Here's one way you might outline it, if you will, and again this doesn't hold up in perfection but one way you might outline it and that is the architectural drawings for the household were laid out to some degree in the Old Testament. We have types and shadows of Jesus and the great household of God that God is building and was going to build, but still they looked through a glass dimly compared to us because they were on the front side of the cross. There was something of the blueprint, if you will, but they couldn't see it all yet. Then you go a little further, the corner stone came. Look, once you get the corner stone laid, it's just a matter of time for the rest of it. Are you hearing me? But without the corner stone, nothing in the building is going to come together. But the corner stone came, Jesus Christ. He died on the cross, was buried, was raised for our justification. And then you have the foundation. The foundation is the doctrine of the apostles and prophets sealed as the Scriptures, and as those are preached and taught and proclaimed, then you have the next thing and that's the structure of the body or rather the household being built. Faithful preaching of the word, the working of the Spirit, folks are birthed into the family of God and the household is being built. Architectural drawings, the Old Testament. The corner stone, Jesus Christ. The foundation, the doctrine of the apostles and prophets sealed as holy Scripture. Then the structure itself being built, the preaching of the word, the Spirit changing the hearts and the household being built up. That's the way God means for it to work.

Now, I told you earlier if pastors and church leaders could grasp this, it's liberating. The reason why it's liberating, I remember those days and I know I beat this horse to death but

I beat it to death because we are getting attacked right and left with it, not us but Christendom in general, and that is that pastors feel constantly under assault to find some way to make carnal, unregenerate people love Jesus and love the church. Are you hearing me? And so everything imaginable is being done in churches to try to help people love the church instead of relying on the Spirit of God to use the word of God to change men's hearts. That's kind of left on the back burner like, "Oh, we believe that. Of course. We're going to throw that in." No, you don't throw that in, that's in all the way. That's not just on the back burner, that's the front burner, the side burners, the whole burners, the infrared burners and everything, God using his Gospel through the Spirit to transform men, women, boys and girls hearts. So the point is that God's household is a Bible-based, Bible-led, Bible-dependent, Bible-saturated household.

Be careful, be alert, be discerning of counterfeits. Be discerning. Satan's whole ploy is to twist the truth, put a little spin on it so that it looks right but it isn't. And so many of these things have happened through the years. Modern psychology, there is a lot in psychology some years back that began to use the Bible. Now, they kept psychology as the core and they just kind of stuck Scripture on it here and there to make it seem like, well, Christianity agrees with psychology. And that's a gross misuse because – listen – Christianity is not about adding a few verses to psychology so people can have better lives. Christianity is about the radical truth of the Gospel transforming people's hearts which will make them right with God and then give them a better life, but it's always in that order. And that's why many many years ago we threw out all aspects of so-called Christian psychology because it was psychology with the Bible stuck on it and we just went back to the Bible and counseling got really easy in a lot of cases. Yes, we always must be careful, especially when somebody is hurting and they are hopeless. We must love them and we must show compassion and we must give them hope, but the overwhelming majority of time our problem is sin and the answer is repentance, and we don't like to hear that.

Here's what people want to hear, "Can you show me how I can hold onto sin and feel better? Can you show me how I can hold onto sin and my marriage work better? Can you show me how I can hold onto sin and get over this depression? Can you show me how I can hold onto sin and get over this anxiety I'm struggling with?" And our answer as Gospel ministers is, "No." Because if I am able to get you by, if I am able to get you to cope for a little while, I've just dug a deeper ditch. You are just further in the ditch of looking everywhere but to Christ for your hope. So the modern psychology movement and then the Christian psychology movement is one way and I believe some good men, I'm going to say a man's name and I appreciate the good that he has done, but I believe even men like James Dobson had far too much psychology in what they were teaching, though I do appreciate a lot about James Dobson. I do believe his heart was genuine.

When I first became a believer, it was phenomenal how many parachurch groups were out there and they were doing all of these discipleship studies and I thought, boy, that was the ticket. Man, if we could just get people in discipleship studies and hold each other accountable and memorize scripture together. But you've got to understand, I didn't grow up in church and I was just dyed in the wool sure this was the way to get it done, and then

occasionally and I'm not exaggerating here, but occasionally in those discipleship studies, they weren't written by pastors and church leaders, they were written by discipleship study leaders, occasionally they would put in their curriculum, "And by the way, go to church," as if the church was kind of an addendum on here. Like the real thing is being in discipleship but, by the way, you've got to belong to a church.

That's radically upside down and finally when the light went off, you'll remember me telling you this story, when I realized one day that I was very critical of the churches I knew as a new believer and there were real grounds for me to be critical, by the way. You know that. I know that. Now, I've said this a million times and I'll say it again: my heart wasn't right, I had too much pride and too much zeal but my analysis of the church was right. It was in a mess. So I thought the churches kind of lost it and if there is any defense of the parachurch discipleship group movement, it's because they looked at the church and saw a pitiful example and thought we can do it better through discipleship groups. Well, I'm sorry, God hadn't traded his means of the church in yet.

So God said to me one day, I remember it as plain as day, and he didn't say it audibly but it was just through a series of listening to preaching and studying the Bible and God spoke to me and somebody said, "Did he speak audibly?" No, it was louder than that. And God in effect said, "I'm going to do my work through my church. You can get in the church and be a part of the answer instead of staying on the outside just ridiculing and criticizing all the time." And that's how I came into the church and that's how I came to Grace Life Church. And I'm sorry, I know it's been a problem for you for all these years but that's my story. And I just decided, let's get in the church and let's be as biblical as we can be. Let's see if the church can really be everything it's supposed to be. And I found out that if the church is right, all the other ministries are non-essential. I'm not saying they are all bad but they are not essential. You see, there is only one real ministry on earth that is essential, that's the local church. The others come and go and they may do some good and they may be a blessing and they may be a help to the church, but they come and go. But the churches here in every age, in every generation until the kingdom comes. As a matter of fact, the church will be here in its glorified united state after the kingdom comes.

So the parachurch movement was another way that we got away from what does the Bible say about building a household and how it is to be built. Now, I struggle a little bit with that because I know some good folks in that and I appreciate what they're doing but the church must be the center and the means because that's what the Scriptures give us. Have you noticed this: as Paul went everywhere and he preached and his associates preached throughout the known world, they didn't start Fellowship of Christian Athletes, they didn't start Gideons International, they didn't start Navigators, they didn't start Campus Crusade for Christ, as much as I like some of those organizations. Everywhere without exception, they preached the Gospel, saved souls, established New Testament churches and appointed elders. No exception whatsoever. You think, "Poor old Paul, if he had just been as smart as we were, that all these other creative ways to do ministry." No, Paul was set on God does God's work God's way. Now, let's be balanced. We're not against these ministries. Now listen, we just let nothing, nothing, nothing rival God's

authority and instruction for how the church is to be built and that's the Bible and the Bible tells us it is built through local church work.

Well, then of course, we have mentioned this numerous times in the past, another misuse of the Bible in the church is the man-centeredness of the modern church. This is kind of tied in with the modern Christian psychology movement, church was all about me. I need to go to church where I am loved and where I am blessed and where I am lifted up and where I am encouraged and where I am made to feel important. And typically that means in my own state where I am. My point is you will be blessed and you will be encouraged and you will be lifted up if you come to church humbly and repentantly under the word of God. But I can't help you if the Spirit hasn't given you an enablement to be a repent when you come to church. If you come to church full of yourself, you're going to leave miserable unless you repent. Are you with me? That's the way it is designed to be. I didn't make this up, folks. That's the way it's designed to be.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the most published pastor of all time, a Baptist pastor in London of the mid-nineteenth century used to say, "There are so many that come into our church unhumbled. They'll stay a while unhumbled and then they will leave unhumbled." What he means is if the Spirit doesn't humble them to be a repent and receive the word of God, they get bored here, they get mad here and leave. And that's always been the way. That's the case with Jesus Christ. That's the case with the Apostle Paul. That's been the case in every age. What am I saying? The Bible is the authority and the instruction for the building of this household.

Well, IV. we'll close with this: the glorious conclusion to the household. The glorious conclusion. It's going to all be brought to a glorious, and I might say, eternal conclusion because there is no ending to it. But notice what he says here. It's an all glorious household because all the stones that make up the house were picked and shaped by God himself. In verse 21 he uses this phrase, "in whom the whole building, being fitted together." Then in verse 22 again, "in whom you also are being built together." You are being built together. In other words, God is picking and shaping the stones that make up his household. In 1 Peter 2:5, "you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house."

1 Corinthians 12 gives us those lists of spiritual gifts but two things powerfully come out as Paul is talking about all the spiritual gifts in the body of Christ. 1. God gives gifts to each member as he chooses. You have the gift of mercy, you've got about 20% mercy, about 60% exhortation. You've got about 20% prophet. And you've got about 100% mercy. You've got more exhortation than prophecy. Everybody has a spiritual gift mix and it is unique to you as God wanted you to have it. You didn't pray for it. You didn't name it and claim it. God gave it to you. He gave it to you at your conversion just like your natural talents were given to you at conception. You have to develop them but that's what happened.

Now, secondly, not only did God gift each member, God places each one in the body just as he chooses. In other words, God brought you to Grace Like Church of the Shoals with

your particular gift mix because you've got a work to do here no one else can do. It's a glorious thing that God is doing. Sometimes people will tell me, "How do I find my job, then? I think I have this gift and this gift and this gift." First of all, it's highly likely that God is going to give you a job that's not matching with your gifts to start out with. Did you hear that? It's probable that you'll have to do stuff not where your gift is to start with.

It was so good for me to be an associate pastor for eight years here and do student work for eight years and just do whatever I was told for eight years, and a whole lot of those things were not what I was gifted in but I needed to do them. Here's why, are you listening? God is much more concerned about your godly character than in your godly performance and when he gives you jobs in the body that don't fit who you are and you just humble yourself and do it because it needs to get done, then he grows you in character, and if you'll do that, you can never miss where you are actually supposed to get to. You can't miss it. You just can't miss it. Why do you think Moses kept sheep for 40 years? Character building. Now, he was supposed to be the great prophet/leader of the people of Israel and he is keeping sheep, stinking sheep. You know, you can almost think Moses was just some day out there with the sheep saying, "What am I doing out here?" God said, "I'll tell you what I'm doing, I'm trying to get you to where you quit raising your fist toward me and screaming what am I doing out here. And if I can get you there, then I can get you to where I want you to be, to where your gifts and calling is." Why do you think Joseph spent that time in the dungeon? Why do you think Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego and Daniel spent those times in the prison cell and in the persecutions in Babylon? God was training them in character before he gave them their role in the body. Why do you keep the nursery? Why are you doing this, that, and this and that when you might have gifts that could do this and this and this? God knows what he's doing. Now, look, either he does or he doesn't. You say, "Well, if the leaders of this church had any sense, they'd let me do this and this and this." Well, just pray that God will help us leaders who have no sense. He's big enough to work through stupid people like me, and I mean that honestly. I don't have all wisdom but I can tell you what, I passionately care for the church to advance.

I needed those eight years and literally, you ask Bob Pittman, ask Dr. Bob Pittman if he ever asked me to do any menial task that I didn't say, "Yes, sir." He was a big fellow. He didn't like going up steps. His office was up the steps. I can't tell you the days he said, "Go and get my coat." I ran up the steps and got his coat because that's what you do. You try to learn some character, you try to be disciplines, you try to be humble. Now, I got full of myself a time or two and I acted wrong. I had to go into Dr. Pittman's office and sit down and say, "Will you please forgive me? You are the pastor of the church and I shouldn't have said that to you and I should obey you when you give me instructions." Let's raise our boys to be humble first, then God will put them in authority later. You wouldn't have wanted me as your pastor if he hadn't beaten me up and beaten me around first. That's a strong statement. He didn't beat me around. But God knows what he's doing to get us ready for the roles he has for us. Then, of course, when God made me your senior pastor, he had a whole, whole, whole lot more chiseling to do. If you've been around, you know that to be true. And by the way, you've got a little chiseling too. Amen. We all did, but I had to have it for sure.

Well, the stones are picked and shaped by God. Secondly, the stones are included only if they line up with Christ, the corner stone. When you lay a corner stone in a household, that's what Jesus is, the only stones that can be laid there is if they are squared with the corner stone. If you put any other kind of stone there, you ruin the household. Listen to me: no stone gets in the house unless it squares with Jesus.

Just very hurriedly in verse 21 it says, "in whom the whole building is growing into a body in the Lord." That's twice in that verse. Then again in verse 22, "in whom you also." In whom you also, in whom, that's Jesus, "are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." If we start back to the beginning of chapter 1 in Ephesians, I'm going to run through this quickly. Chosen in him before the foundation of the world. Predestined through Jesus Christ. Redemption in him. In him we gain an inheritance. In him we have listened to the Gospel and believed. Sealed in him with the Holy Spirit of promise. Made alive with Christ, with him. Raised up and seated with him. Created in Christ Jesus. Through him we have access in one Spirit to the Father. In him we will be holy and blameless before him in love. Do you reckon Paul made it clear enough? You have to square up in him. It's your vital connection to Christ that makes you a part of the household. Now, how do I know if I have a vital connection to Christ? You have received him in faith. If you have come and said, "I'm a sinner. I have no hope in me. My hope is in Christ full and only." Then you fit in the household. If you squared with him, you fit with us. Amen? That's the way it works.

Not only that, not only are the stones picked and shaped by God, only the stones that are lined up with Christ fit in the household, thirdly, the stones are all linked together as an interlocking whole. As an interlocking whole. There is a radical interdependence. There are no Lone Ranger Christians. Everyone needs his brothers and sisters in his local church.

Verse 21 again, "in whom the whole body being fitted together." Fitted together. It has the idea of a close synchronization and connection. Verse 22, "in whom you also are being built together," the same idea again, "into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." The interconnectedness. There is a God-designed, God-ordained interdependency in the household of God. In Romans 12 when Paul gives the spiritual gift list in Romans 12, he makes sure that we understand that every member is dependent upon the other members. Now, you don't really see this in the typical evangelical or Baptist church. A church has to reach some level of maturity or some level of trueness or health and then you begin to see it so powerfully. It's a wonderful thing.

In Matthew 5:23-24 Jesus gave a powerful little parable or illustration, I guess I should say, that he said if you're there at the altar and about to give your gift, and he knew from a Jewish concept that was a very high priority of spiritual life is to bring your altar gift, he said, but there you remember your brother has something against you. Now, this is not for you to be obsessive compulsive about and try to think of something, that in some way you might have offended somebody. No, this is something where you know for a fact, they've told you boldly and clearly, "I'm offended. You owed me \$20 and you didn't pay

it." Something very clear, okay? So don't go home tonight and lose sleep OCDing over, "Have I offended somebody?" But if it's clear and obvious, some brother or sister has made it clear and obvious to you, he said then don't leave that gift, leave the gift, go and get right with your brother, then come back. What's he saying? He's saying you've got to understand you guys have to have each other when you're a true church. You've got to have. There is an interdependency God has ordained and don't let anything get in between you.

So all stones are linked together as an interlocking whole. Listen to the Presbyterian theologian, Charles Hodge. He said, "The building is not only united to the corner stone, Jesus, but to the several parts, one with another so that as to constitute a well-compacted whole." D. The stones are assembled in the house to draw attention to God. He puts us together so that the world would be caused to look at us and say a divine mind did that. Church, we are a, verse 21, "a holy dwelling in the Lord." Verse 22, we are a "dwelling of God in the Spirit." The Bible tells us the church is his body and he's the head; the church is his building and he's the corner stone; the church is his bride and he's the groom; the church is his workmanship and he's the Master craftsman; the church is his creation and he's the Creator. The church is to be a statement of his light and his truth into the world therefore there should be no divisions or disagreements ever allowed to fester. We may have them but we settle them. We don't allow anything to fester and nothing should be settled with selfishness. There can be no unholy lifestyle that is not lovingly confronted and corrected. Why? Because we're to make a statement of God. It's to draw attention to him. There can be no doctrine taught, sung or embraced that is not scripturally sound. Remind ourselves the church is not Jeff Noblit's church, it is not the deacon's church or the elder's church or the women's church or the brotherhood's church or the denomination's church or the majority vote's church, it is Christ's church. It belongs to him. It's to be consecrated to his use. It's not to be used for anything but for his glory and his service. It is sacred. It is set apart for God. It is his house and he alone has the authority over it.

Then one magnificent thought. I don't know where this came from. God may have given it to me. I honestly don't remember. But the last point: the stones are set in place mysteriously and quietly. Mysteriously and quietly. 1 Kings 6:7 speaks of how they built the original household of God, the temple, and it says, "The house, while it was being built, was built of stone prepared [and finished] at the quarry," now listen, "and there was neither hammer nor axe nor any iron tool heard in the house while it was being built." It was too holy of a work that there be any racket while the temple was being put together. Everything, all the finishing and polishing of every stone in the temple had to be done out at the quarry because it was just too holy of work to have any noise around it.

That's a parallel and a parable for us. The noisy, dirty, cutting, hammering, chiseling and polishing of our redemption was finished at the quarry of Calvary. It was all done there. They screamed at him there. They mocked him there. They punched him there. They spat upon him there. They beat him there. They thrust the spear in him there. They railed at him there. They hammered nails in his flesh there. It was there that he said, "Father, forgive them." It was there that he cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken

me?" It was there that he cried, "It is finished!" It was there that he was crushed under the thunderous blow of the Father's wrath in our place. And it was there that redemption's work was finished. And today the sovereign Lord through the work of the Holy Spirit is now placing the quarried stones in the building and it's a mysteriously quiet work and it's a holy work.

I got to share the Gospel with a man this week who visited our service last Sunday. He gave strong evidence that the Spirit of God was convicting him of sin and none of us saw it at all. It's a quiet and mysterious work. Nicodemus went to Jesus just trying to understand. "Nicodemus, what is this? You talk about eternal life, how does this work?" And Nicodemus says, or Jesus says to Nicodemus, "Well, it's something of a mystery. You have to be born again. It's like the wind." And Nicodemus still couldn't get it. There is a mystery to it. You just don't know when or how God is going to do it. Stephen Benson was baptized here in our baptistery a couple of weeks ago. Stephen's sweet wife and family and many of us had witnessed to him so many times through the years and then when God saw it right, he went out to the quarry and picked up the already finished, polished, chiseled, formed, redemptive stone and brought him to Grace Life and said, "Here's another one that fits just right." None of us saw it coming. You just never know. Isn't that good stuff?

Who can see the hidden silent work as God regenerates the heart, convicts of sin and imparts new life and adds another stone to God's great household? That's what we're getting in on. That's what we're about.