



# Ephesians

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**Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, Ephesians 2:19**

These words take us back to verse 12 –

“...that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”

After that, Paul explained how both Jew and Gentile have been united into one fellowship. In further explanation of that, he says, “Now therefore...” It is a summary idea of what has been explained in those preceding verses.

He then follows with, “...you are no longer strangers and foreigners.” The word for “stranger” signifies “an alien.” The word “foreigners” is more closely aligned with someone who lives in an area, but is not a member of the culture of that area. Abraham, for example, lived in Canaan. However, he was not a Canaanite. Instead he was a pilgrim or a sojourner. He had free movement in the land and was friendly with those of Canaan, but he could not really have been called a citizen as they were.

Next Paul gives the contrasting thoughts by stating the word “but.” Instead of being apart from the commonwealth of Israel as strangers and foreigners, the Gentiles are now “citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” We have been brought into that commonwealth, and we have full rights as citizens of the nation, and we have full membership

in the household of God. The contrast is seen in the two words of each category. Those who were “aliens” now have citizenship; those who were sojourners now have a household.

Through the work of Christ, all people are entitled to these benefits if they will but reach out and receive what He has done.

Life application: Paul’s words again show us that through the work of Christ, we have a new status. He doesn’t say that we now have the right to citizenship (as if it is something future and which could be lost), nor does he say that we now are accepted in order to be welcomed into God’s household (as if we could do something which would cause that door to be shut). Rather, he states that the transaction is complete in Christ. The deal is done!

**...having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,** Ephesians 2:20

Paul now more fully develops the words of the previous verse which noted that the Gentiles are now “members of the household of God.” This household is being built into an edifice. The nature of the edifice will be explained in the next verse, but for now it is noted that this household was “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.”

The meaning of these words is generally taken as the Old Testament prophets and the apostles, but this is not the full sense of the words. First, if this were so, it would have reversed the order saying, “...the prophets and apostles.” Secondly, Paul uses this same term two more times in this same epistle –

“...which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets:” Ephesians 3:5

“And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers...” Ephesians 4:11

The edifice which is being built is upon a foundation of these two categories. As apostles are a New Covenant concept, they are in the preeminent place, being noted first. However, it would be incorrect to assume that only New Covenant prophets are being designated here by Paul as will be seen.

But this brings in a seeming contradiction to 1 Corinthians 3:11 –

“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

In that verse, Paul calls Jesus Christ the foundation. How can this be resolved? It becomes discernible by Jesus’ words in Matthew 16:18 –

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

In that verse, Jesus was not referring to Peter as the rock (meaning the foundation). The words of the verse do not agree in gender, and thus it is not Peter who is being referred to. Rather, it is the proclamation that Peter had made in a preceding verse –

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Matthew 16:16

Peter’s declaration that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah) is what the church is built on. Understanding this, the words of Paul become clear. The term “apostles and prophets” is not speaking of the individuals, but rather the proclamation of the individuals. The proclamation of the apostles, and the prophets (of any age) whose words point to Jesus as the Messiah, are what Paul is referring to. The prophets of old anticipated Christ Jesus; the prophets of the church expound upon this truth. Therefore, there is no need to exclude the OT prophets from this verse, even though that is not an unrealistic possibility.

Next Paul says that, “Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*.” This is a concept which goes back to the 118<sup>th</sup> Psalm –

“The stone *which* the builders rejected  
Has become the chief cornerstone.” Psalm 118:22

Jesus ascribed this verse in the psalms to Himself in each of the three synoptic gospels. Peter referred to it in Acts 4:11, and a similar OT verse, which is found in Isaiah 28:16 is used by Peter in 1 Peter 2:6, 7. Paul also refers to this stone in Romans 9:33.

The cornerstone of a building is considered the most important of all. It is the first laid and it is that upon which all else is built. Everything else rests upon its surety as a foundation stone. This stone is that which is most honorable therefore, and it is that which is most evident. Such is Christ in the edifice which God is building.

The chief cornerstone is Christ, and the foundation is the proclamation concerning Christ. From there, everything else will find its proper place within the edifice.

As a final side note, if Peter were the foundation of the church as Roman Catholics incorrectly claim from a misinterpretation and misuse of Matthew 16:18, then Paul would have at least mentioned him in a separate category here. He does not. Peter was one of a select group, but by no means was he elevated to any high place or honor among them.

Life application: Verses like this one need to be carefully considered in order to avoid misinterpretation of them. This verse has been used by some to allege there is a contradiction

in Scripture, something which is incorrect. It has also been used by nutty people to make unfounded claims that they are prophets of God, and thus a more important part of the church than others. Again, this is something which is incorrect. It is Christ who alone is to be elevated in the church, and His word is free of contradiction.

**...in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,**  
Ephesians 2:21

In this verse, Paul now explains what being “members of the household of God” means. An edifice was implied, but now we learn what type of edifice it is. He begins the verse with, “...in whom.” This is speaking of Christ. He is the foundation, and it is upon Him that the building is founded and continues to grow.

The next words, “the whole building,” show that it is one building being erected out of many parts, but those parts are inclusive of both Jew and Gentile. There is no distinction between the two, thus demonstrating the supremacy of the work of Christ. If a distinction was made between the two for the purpose of the building, then it would diminish His accomplishments and make our status within the building dependent on what we were before being joined through His work. It can only be after receiving Christ that any merit is imputed to a person in the matter of good works for rewards.

Going on, we as believers in Christ are “being fitted together.” This gives the idea of the craftsman using the materials in a house to erect that house. Boards are precisely cut, stones are shaped, tiles are placed with care. Each person is a unique member of this building. Jew and Gentile, male and female, various cultures and ethnicities... all being fitted according to the wisdom of the Master craftsman.

It is through this process that the building then “grows into a holy temple in the Lord.” The verb is a present active one. It is on-going, and it is continuous in nature. The building is a living-organism which is being fitted for the purpose of being “a holy temple.” Peter makes a similar note about believers in his first epistle –

“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—<sup>5</sup> you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”  
1 Peter 2:4, 5

Like Peter, Paul saw that the temple in Jerusalem was merely a type and a shadow of what God would do through the church. The word for “temple” is *naos*. It is that part of the temple where God Himself resides. Thus, the church is to be considered as the Holy of Holies; the place where God meets with man.

The verse finishes with the words, “in the Lord.” The verse began with “in whom” and with it ending on the same thought, it becomes obvious that the building is erected upon the foundation of Christ; it is built up in Christ; and it will be completed by Christ. This is actually seen in the words of Zechariah 6 –

“Behold, the Man whose name *is* the BRANCH!  
From His place He shall branch out,  
And He shall build the temple of the LORD;  
<sup>13</sup> Yes, He shall build the temple of the LORD.  
He shall bear the glory,  
And shall sit and rule on His throne;  
So He shall be a priest on His throne,  
And the counsel of peace shall be between them both.” Zechariah 6:12, 13

Christ is the Cornerstone, He is the Builder of the temple; and He is the Capstone. It is all a work of Christ for the purpose of having a place where God may dwell among His redeemed for all eternity.

Life application: Should you feel that you are not a valuable part of what God is doing in His church, consider this verse. A building is not complete without each and every piece being fitted together. God has selected you to be an integral piece of the temple in which He will dwell for eternity. If this is so, then you are most precious indeed. God doesn’t make mistakes and your inclusion in His temple is with purpose, intent, and love.

**...in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.**  
Ephesians 2:22

The entire thought from verse 19 is as follows –

“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 fitted 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.”

Therefore, “in whom” is speaking of Jesus Christ of verse 20. It is also the same term “in whom” of verse 21. Next, “you also” is in the second person plural and is speaking specifically of the Ephesians. However, as Paul’s letter is a part of Scripture, it includes any Gentile who receives it and who is also in Christ. Those included in that thought are “being built together.” Each Gentile who receives Christ is, like the Jews to whom we once were alienated from, being used as a part of the building of this temple. The words refer to individuals, not groups.

And the purpose of this process of building is “for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” The word for “dwelling place” is *katoikétéron*. It is used only here and in Revelation 18:2. The term “dwelling place” is a literal and good translation of the word, but the idea of this dwelling place is that it corresponds to the temple which was once a part of the worship in Jerusalem. What was seen in types and shadows is now being realized in the church. God is literally dwelling in us, and we are each a part of the whole dwelling place which is being built by Him.

The term “God in the Spirit” once again brings in the idea of the Trinity. The Pulpit Commentary notes that, “...the temple is the habitation of the First Person; the source of its life and growth and symmetry is the Son; the actual up-building and glorifying of it is by the Spirit.”

Life application: Consider what God has done in your salvation. He offered Jesus to us. By faith we received Him and were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (Ephesians 1:13, 14). In this exchange, we were made a part of the temple which is being built as a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. As each of these points is recorded in Scripture, then why should we worry about whether God continues to accept us or not? Can God make a mistake? No! Therefore, our salvation, by necessity, must be eternal. Thank God for what He has done!

### **For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— Ephesians 3:1**

The words, “For this reason” take us back to the previous chapter which highlighted, in particular, the bringing in of the Gentiles to the commonwealth of Israel. It being a spiritual entity means that we now share in the same benefits of that of Israel, without having replaced Israel. God is working on building a household out of both Jew and Gentile in which He will dwell. It is “For this reason” that Paul begins his next line of thought.

In the coming chapter, but especially in verses 1-13, Paul is going to meticulously weave two thoughts into one. These thoughts will be built upon the preeminent thought of the previous chapter, that of Gentiles being grafted into the commonwealth of Israel. The first thought is an explanation of this new concept of the bringing in of the Gentiles. The second thought is the result of the first, which is Paul’s selection as the “Apostle to the Gentiles” (Romans 11:13) to both reveal this mystery and to provide instructions concerning it.

The reason why verse 13 is selected as the end of the insert of this two-pronged discourse is that it says, “For this reason, I Paul...” in verse 1, and then it says, “For this reason I bow my knees...” in verse 14. Because of this, it seems that the insert thought runs especially from verse 2 to verse 13.

After stating His name, thus designating the identity of the one whose task will now be explained, he further identifies himself as “the prisoner of Christ Jesus.” This is a phrase he will repeat of himself in several other epistles. It shows the length that Paul was willing to go

through for the sake of the gospel, even unto imprisonment. It further shows that the gospel is not chained, even if he is. In essence, the chains of Paul reveal the will of Christ for Paul. As a prisoner, Christ is able to use him to show that His gospel can overcome any such obstacle. This truth has been borne out countless times in history since then, and it continues to be borne out in the world today.

It is to be noted that there is an article in front of “Christ Jesus” in the Greek. It says “the Christ Jesus.” Paul is showing that there is one Christ, or Messiah, and that He is found in the Person of Jesus, and in Him alone. He is the Christ who was promised at the beginning and it is He who is revealed in the message which Paul now proclaims to the Gentiles.

Finally, Paul notes that he is Christ’s prisoner “for you Gentiles.” The very purpose of his imprisonment, as well as all of Paul’s sufferings, was to make the gospel known outside of the Jewish people. It was the Jews that pursued Paul from place to place. As they did, the message spread. It was often the Jews who brought Paul before the leaders of whatever area he was in. When they did, the gospel message spread. And at times, Paul was imprisoned because of the words and accusations of his own countrymen. And when this occurred, the gospel spread. The wisdom of how God transmitted the gospel, both then and now, is especially evident in such cases. Where there was a supposed triumph over the message, it turned out to be a victory for its continued spread.

The chains of Paul are a way of showing empathy for his audience as they struggled with their own conversions. They may have lost friends, jobs, or even family over their receiving of Christ, but Paul was with them in spirit. He was also subjected to such difficulties, and yet he was able to spiritually overcome them. Thus, his words were intended to show them that they could too.

Life application: If you want proper church-age doctrine, stick to the words of Paul. Everything else is written for our learning and edification as well, but Paul’s letters are especially directed to the Gentile-led church age. They are our “marching orders” during this dispensation of time.