

The Stubbornness of God
Ephesians 2:17-22
Jeremy Cagle, April 19, 2020

Good morning everyone and welcome to another Sunday morning service here at our YouTube channel. We know that many of you are from our church family, but some of you are our guests; you have found us online all over the world wide web and we want to say a special welcome to you. It is so good to have you join us this morning. If you can believe it or not, this is our sixth time to meet like this. This is our sixth time to video a Sunday morning service in light of the Coronavirus. It may be a few weeks more; we're not sure how long this will last. It could be a month or as long as that. But it is a privilege to serve the Lord and be together any way we can, and so we're so grateful to have you with us today.

The Global News Network recently published an article in which they survey different ways churches are responding to the Coronavirus, and they found that many of them are doing what we're doing. They're meeting online. They're doing services just like this, but some are doing other things. Some are doing small group meetings; they're meeting in person with groups of 10 people or less with the pastor. They come in, they have a word of prayer with him, some scripture reading, and then they go out and another group comes in. Other churches are having what they're calling drive thru services where people come in in a car, and they stay in the car and meet together that way. Some are even doing drive around services. I found this one kind of interesting, but they drive around. They plan a time when they drive around and listen to the Sermon on the radio all at the same time. But however they do it, the church is still continuing to meet worldwide. The church has not given up the work of the ministry, and that's an encouragement, and this is what we're currently doing.

And we've gotten some good feedback from this. I've heard some wonderful things from our church family. For example, some young families have told me that they've started watching the service online with their kids and made a family day out of it. They've started a family tradition where they have a word of prayer and they sing some songs together and then watch the sermon that way. One family even told me that afterwards they go into the kitchen for some coffee and cake and shake each other's hands just like we do on Sunday morning, so their little ones can have fellowship time. Other folks in our church are watching the sermon every week and talking about it with their care group on Zoom. They watch the sermon at 9:30, and then they have care group time and 11 and do it that way. But however you do it, this is a great opportunity for us to be together as a church.

It's been said that the church that prays together stays together. And that's true. Prayer is essential to the life of the church. But we could also add that the church that suffers together stays together as well. And the church that goes through times like this stays together. This is a unifying thing

The Stubbornness of God

for us. This is a time for us to come together over the Word of God and that leads us to our passage for this morning. And brings us to the subject that we're going to talk about today. Because today we're going to be in the book of Ephesians. So if you would, turn open your Bibles with me to the book of Ephesians. And we're in chapter two together. We took a break from this last week in light of Easter. But now we're back in it to talk about the church because that's what our passage is about this morning. It tells us how much the church means to God. And I just want to read our passage for today before saying a few words about it. And if you would read in Ephesians 2:11-16 with me, there it says in verse 11,

Therefore remember, that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who were called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands – remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by having it having put to death the enmity.

If you notice, as you read this, it starts off with the word "therefore," to point you back to what was said earlier. It points you back to the previous passage where Paul says when you became a Christian, a great change occurred in you. And when you came to faith in Christ, verses one through ten tells you that you underwent a great conversion, and it was a conversion with a single purpose. It was a conversion with a single goal in mind and that was to put you into the church. Paul says you weren't changed to go through the Christian life alone. You weren't changed to be a Lone Ranger. Paul did this to put you alongside of others in the church. In the words of this passage in verse 11, He takes you who were formerly Gentiles in the flesh, you were who were uncircumcised, and separate from Christ. And He brought you near by the blood of Christ. That means near to God, and near to others. God took you who were out there, and he brought you in here into the church. He puts you into a community of Christians.

And what Paul goes on to say in the chapter is that God is not done with that process yet. He goes on to say is that God has not finished building the church yet because the Word goes on. And if you look in verse 17, he goes on to say,

And he came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the

The Stubbornness of God

saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

I'll explain this to you in a moment, but Paul goes on to say now that the Lord isn't through with His church yet; He isn't finished with it because verse 21 says we are being fitted together and growing into a holy temple and being built into a dwelling place. And if you notice, all those verbs are in the present tense. This is all to say this is an ongoing thing. It's still happening today because God is still building His church. There's a phrase you hear a lot in Christian circles today, you know, you hear it on the radio and you hear it at Christian conferences, and that is, "Come see what God is doing." Let's go look out for what God is doing. Well Paul tells you what God's doing right here. There's no mystery to this. God is building the church. That's what He's doing. He's saving people and putting them into a family so they don't have to go through the Christian life alone. He isn't just building wells in Africa, although He certainly can do that. He's not opposed to that. And He's not starting food banks or homeless shelters around the world either. He's doing that to some degree, but primarily first and foremost, He's building the church. That is His mission. That is His passion in life. He's not starting colleges. He isn't writing books. God isn't going on a speaking tour. This is what He's doing. Which means if you want to be part of what God is doing, you need to do this as well. If you want to follow Him, you need to get on board with His overall mission for the world and you need to help build the church, be a part of it.

To say it another way, God is stubborn about this. God is stubborn about His church because He doesn't give up on it. He doesn't quit on it. You know, if you think about it, there are a lot of reasons to give up on the church today. There are a lot of reasons to call it quits. Because the church can be so disappointing. A church can be such a mess.

One Deacon said, "We're all just a bunch of God-fearing Christians in here until someone sits in our pew, and then all hell breaks loose. And then the devil comes out of us." And we've all seen that before, that we've all seen terrible things happen in the church. In fact, you could make the argument that the church is the most fractured organization on the planet. You could say it's the most divided place on Earth. One source I read this week said there are 47,000 Protestant denominations in the world, 47,000 of them; and that number seems high until you think of all the splinter groups and sects that we don't know about. And then it doesn't seem high. And it's all for the reason that we can't stop fighting. It's all because Christians can't get along.

It's been said, if you get 10 Christians in a room, you'll get 50 different ideas. And yet in the midst of all this, God doesn't quit on us, does he? In the midst of all this fighting, God has not given up on his church. Some people have one bad experience in church, and they quit. They

The Stubbornness of God

have one bad encounter and they never come back again. I can think of a relative that I have who has told me they left the Christian faith over a bad experience they had in the church, they just, they just checked out on it. Well, if you think about it, God has had thousands of bad experiences in the church. He's had millions or billions of them, and He has never given up on His people. He never gave up on Israel. You can read that all throughout the Old Testament. It was just one bad experience after another with them and He's never given up on the church.

You can really see this if you think about all the different names for the church in the Bible, think about all the different titles that we see that God has given it. For example, the church has been called His body and His bride and His household in Scripture. It's referred to as His flesh and His family and His children, His sons and daughters in the faith. You know, it would be one thing if the Lord just saved us and left us at that. It'd be one thing if He forgave us and gave us eternity, but He does more than that, He makes us his sons and daughters. He makes us into His flesh and blood. The church is called His kingdom, His temple, His assembly. It's called His vineyard and His flock all to say that this is how much the church means to Him. This is how important the church is to God, and it should be this important to us as well.

There's a Latin phrase that says *ubi Christus ibi ecclesia*, which means "where Christ is there is His church," where Jesus is there His people are. Where He goes, we go. We cannot get away from Him. And I think this is important to talk about today because so many people forget the church right now. I think this is an essential topic for us to consider this morning because so many Christians have given up on the church. You drive around Chilliwack, and what do you see? You see churches on every corner. I mean, you can't get away from them, no matter which way you turn, but you know what you don't see? You don't see all the Christians who stay home and don't attend one. What you don't see are all the professing believers who stay home on a Sunday morning and have nothing to do with the church. Go to a Christian conference in town, go to a concert, go to a Christian school and you'll see hundreds of Christians, maybe thousands there as well. They're very passionate about that thing. They're very committed to those sorts of things, but they're not committed to the church. You don't see the same passion about the body of Christ because people have forgotten this today, and we need to get back to that. We need to get back to what God is passionate about, which is what we're going to talk about this morning.

God loves His church; He is stubbornly passionate about it. And we need to be that way as well. So let's talk about that. If you're taking notes this morning, in Ephesians 2 we're going to look at four ways that God builds his church. That's our outline for today. That's what this is about in Ephesians 2:17-22. We're going to look at four ways that God builds his church. And by the way, some of you have asked before of the different locations that we've done our service in this morning. We are in the beautiful farmland of Chilliwack, and we found some farmland here to do this service with and this is a great place to talk about the church; it's a great place to talk about creation, anything related to the Lord. It's a beautiful, beautiful setting here. We're so

The Stubbornness of God

grateful to be here. But to show us how stubborn God is about His church to show us that He never quits on it, Paul says God just keeps building and building and building it. In this chapter he says God just keeps growing and growing and growing His church. Two thousand years of church history and He's never quit on it. Century after century, fight after fight, bad experience after bad experience, and the Lord has never given up on this. It reminds us to do the same. We need to love it as well.

We're going to talk about that with four ways that God builds His church. The first one is by giving us access. So if you're taking notes, the first way that God builds His church is by giving us access to Himself or to salvation. In other words, God builds the church by letting us into it. He builds the church by opening the door wide open for us to come in. If He didn't do that, we could not join the church. If God did not open the door wide open there's no way we could ever be a part of it, but He does that so people like you, and I could join. Then if you look in verse 17 there he says,

And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near. For through Him, we both have won our access in one Spirit to the Father.

And just to say a few words about, if you remember, earlier Paul said the Gentiles were far away from God because verse 12 says,

Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Which sounds pretty bleak. It sounds pretty bad. But all that simply means that you were shut out from the presence of God; you did not have access to that. The word "Gentile" is from the Greek word *ethnos*, from which we get the word "ethnic," and it simply means somebody from another race; it just means somebody who isn't Jewish. And Paul says remember that at one time you who were not Jewish, had no access to God. You had no way to get to Him. You know, God was somewhere in the heavens and you were somewhere on earth and there was no way for you to breach the gap.

In fact, in ancient times the people understood this because they made it very hard to get to God or to the gods. All the pagan religions had a list of rules and rituals that they put in place to keep you from getting to the gods because the gods were too holy. They were too transcendent, so they would have you offer a bowl or a goat before you would come to worship. Many of them would have you cut yourself or harm yourself or starve yourself to get to God. They had all kinds of different ideas about this. Some of them you had to make a pilgrimage, some you had to give

The Stubbornness of God

your money, but all that was for the reason that you could not get access. You had to climb all those steps in order to find your way to him.

The Jews had a similar idea with the Lord as well. They thought the same way about him. In fact, like I told you at our Good Friday service, the Jews had a huge veil or curtain in the temple which was located right outside the Holy of Holies to say that you could not come in there. God's presence in the Ark of the Covenant, the Holy of Holies was shut off from you. This curtain was an interesting thing; this veil, it was 60 feet long, 30 feet wide, and it took over 300 priests to move it back and forth to remind you that this place was not for you. Jew, Gentile, whoever, you could not cross the threshold. In fact, they were so serious about it that when the high priest would go past the veil once a year to offer sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, they would tie a rope around his foot so that if he went in and he was too sinful and he died in the presence of God, they wouldn't have to go in and get him. They didn't want to go in and die too. So they had a rope around his foot and they just dragged him out. Because that's what they thought of God's presence. That's what they thought of this issue. God was inaccessible. God was unapproachable.

And if you read verse 17 again with that in mind it says, "And He came and preached peace to you who are far away, and peace to those who were near." In many of your Bibles, verse 17 is capitalized because it's an allusion to Isaiah 57 where the Lord preaches peace to those who are far away. That refers to those who were far away in captivity, the exiles in Babylon, but Isaiah says God preaches peace to you who were far away in Babylon, to you who are near. Then he says in verse 18, he says, "For through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father." The Word "access" there, it's an interesting word, because it's the word *prosagōgēn* in Greek, which refers to the person who brought you into the presence of the people. Refers to the person who brought you into the throne room to see him.

In the ancient world, you couldn't just walk into the presence of the king. You couldn't just march into the throne room because it's a capital offense. If you did that, the king would kill you because you're not worthy. So you had to have someone to bring you in. And Paul says that's what Jesus did. That's what our Savior did. He brought you into the presence of the King. Matthew 27:51 says that when Jesus died, He tore the veil. He tore the massive curtain that separated us from the presence of God; He brought it down to the ground to show that the separation was over. It didn't exist anymore.

Which leads to several applications here and this is a wonderful passage. This leads to several lessons for us to take home. One is this, it means you don't have to go through a priest anymore to get to God. You don't have to go through a list of rules and rituals before you can come to Him, you can just come to Him through Jesus Christ. You can pray, you can worship, you can read your Bible, you can have fellowship with God directly through Him. You don't have to do what the pagans did, you don't have to do what the Jews did, you can go straight to the Father.

The Stubbornness of God

This is how stubborn God is about His church. This is how serious He is about it, so much so that He made it possible for anyone to come through the blood of Christ.

You know, a pastor was once visiting a man who was dying in the hospital. He was watching him take his last breath when the nurse said, “I think we need to call a priest, I think we need to call a man of God.” And so the pastor said, “Well you know, I’m a pastor, maybe I could help.” And the nurse said, “No, no, we need to call a priest. And the pastor asked her, he said, “Well what do you want that for? This man’s a Christian. This man is born again. Which means he already has a priest. He has a great high priest, Jesus Christ, the Son of God who can take him straight to God the Father. What do you want to call another man for?”

Friends, that’s a good question, and we all need to ask ourselves something like that this morning. Why do you need any more than Jesus? Why do you need any more than this? He’s all you need.

And we might want to say a few words about this just to be clear. Say a few words about this because this greatly impacts how you view the Christian life. But this was the issue that divided the Protestant church from the Roman Catholic church. At the end of the day, this was what broke the camel’s back – who had access to God. That’s what the Reformation happened over because the Catholic Church said that only the priests did and no one else. They said that only the clergy had access to Him. And if you wanted to go to God, you had to go through them. They even had a term for this called “sacred totalism.” Sacred totalism meant that they were the sacred ones. They were the holy ones. And you could only approach God through them. They were the mediators. They were the intercessors. And the Reformers, men like John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Luther stepped in and said, “No, you don’t; you can go through Christ alone.” No, you don’t have to go through all of that stuff now. You don’t need a priest or an intermediary. You don’t need rules and rituals, you can just come through Jesus Christ. In fact, they were so passionate about this, that they said, “This means that a farmer or a cook can come to God just as easily as a priest can.” A servant or a slave can come to God just as easily as the clergy because they come through the same Savior. Isn’t that beautiful? Isn’t that good news?

Which leads to another application. And this one just repeats kind of what we said earlier, but we need to say it. This means anyone can come. And this is huge, because as some of you may be hearing this this morning thinking “Well, but you don’t know what all I’ve done.” Doesn’t matter what you’ve done. You can come through Christ. You can say, “Well, you don’t know my background.” Was your background worse than a Gentile godless pagan? That’s who Paul is writing to here. Anyone can have access to God through Christ.

You know, this may sound offensive but if we’re not careful, we can get very Catholic in our thinking sometimes. We can get very standoffish because we can tell people that you can’t come

The Stubbornness of God

to God unless you come through us. You can't be a Christian unless you say what we say, and do what we do, and talk like us, and look like us, and be like us, and follow our rules. That's not what you see here. That's not what this verse says. This verse says you can come to God now, right now. This says you can have access to Him and join a church. Now if you come through Christ; you just need to believe in Him. He's the one who gives you access. We don't, I don't. A priest doesn't. You can sacrifice 1000 bulls on an altar, none of that will give you access Only Christ.

John MacArthur says that if you can join the universal church, you should be able to join the local church as well. If someone is trusted in Christ and they're in fellowship with Him, then they should be able to be in fellowship with us on Sunday mornings. Friends, we don't want to make this harder than God does. We don't want to make this more difficult than He does. If someone wants to be saved, they just need to trust in Christ. That's how you have access to God. That's how you have access to the church

Which leads to another point to consider this morning. Brings us to another way God is building His church. The first one is by giving us access. I think this one is so beautiful we could just probably close in a word of prayer right here and call it a day, because of what Paul says here. This was revolutionary. I mean, this changed the world in the 1500s. This changed Paul's world. And the first ones that got saved and join the church were slaves, women, who were who were looked down upon in the first century, because for the first time in their life, they could actually have true religion. For the first time in their life, they could be an equal part of humanity. So this is an amazing thing. But God is so serious about the church that He gave everything to lead us into it. He gave Christ to give us access.

It brings us to another point to consider this morning. A second way God is building His church, and that is by putting us on the same foundation. The Lord builds His church by giving us access to Himself, but He also does it by putting us on the same foundation; so that one person doesn't stand on one foundation and one stands on another. That's how you get a building to fall, right? It's so that one person doesn't believe one thing about eternity and salvation, and the other believes another; we all have the same foundation. And if you read on in our passage it says,

And He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets.

Just to walk you through this passage here when Paul says, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household," he's just

The Stubbornness of God

repeating or playing off of something he said earlier in verse 12, which we already read. But he brings us up here to say, "This is that is what you were, but this is what you now are." In verse 12, "You were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise," then in verse 19, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints in God's household." Why? Because you have this access to God. Why have you changed like that? Because God has thrown the door wide open for you. The change that God has made in you is complete. Now, it's what Paul's saying here. The conversion is a total conversion.

You know, before no one could be citizens except Israel. They were the only ones who could be part of the household of God. But now God has brought you so close to Himself. He's given you so much access to Himself that you can be part of His household as well. It's one thing, it's a privilege to be a servant in the house of God. Amen? But you're not just a servant. You're a member of the house. You're a citizen.

As a result of that, he says, "You have been built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets." As we all know, every house has to have a foundation to sit upon. Every house needs a resting place, otherwise it will fall. And this is the foundation the church has, that of the apostles and the prophets, which is a reference to the Bible. This is a reference to the Word of God because that's what the apostles and prophets wrote. The prophets wrote the Old Testament, they wrote the books of Genesis through Malachi; the apostles wrote the New Testament, the books of Matthew through Revelation, and this is what the church is built on. This is what it stands on today. It stands on the Bible, which shows you the stubbornness of God because throughout its long history, the words of the the Bible haven't changed. The words of the apostles and the prophets are still the same as they were when they were first written. The foundation hasn't changed.

A lot of things have changed about the church, a lot of things are different. You're watching this on a computer screen, I'll tell you that's different. The fact that when you come to church on a Sunday, you come in a car, that's different. Electricity, heating, air conditioning, all this stuff, those are different; but the book that we teach hasn't changed. The Scriptures have remained the same. You know, I would like to think that if the Apostle Paul would come back today in the 21st century, he'd be shocked by a lot of things. He'd be surprised by a lot of things, but I hope in our church, he would not be surprised by what he heard out of our mouth. I hope he would not be surprised by what we taught. Because we teach, what he taught; it's found in the Bible. You know what he believes, we believe, what the apostles taught, we teach.

You know, this also means this is the only way to have a church. It means this is the only way to build it. If you don't have this, you don't have anything. If you don't stand on the Bible, you can't build a church. You might build a country club or you might build a social gathering, but it's not

The Stubbornness of God

a church. Which is kind of scary to think about because some of the fastest growing churches in the world today don't do this. They don't teach the Bible, and this is the scary thing about that. That means that God is not the one building that, Satan is. God only builds a church on His Word. He only builds a church on scripture. And I'd like to say a few more words about that. But let me just move on to the next point we see here.

Move on to a third way that God builds His church and that is by giving us the same Cornerstone. God builds the church by doing giving us the same Cornerstone, which means that we have the same pillar to stand on as well. We have the same standard to line ourselves up with. It's just kind of building on this idea of a foundation. And if you look in verses 19 through 20, it says,

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone.

That's the second time Paul references Christ here. He mentioned Christ earlier at least mentioned the idea of Him. When he says, "For through Him we both have one access and one Spirit to the Father." That "Him" there is Christ; this is the next reference to Christ in the passage, But what Paul is saying here is this, you know, it's been said that the strength of a building lies in its angles. The strength of a building lies in its corners. Because if the corners are wrong then the building won't stand. If the angles are wrong then the whole thing will collapse. The roof won't hold up, the walls won't stay together. And that's what Paul is talking about here. The cornerstone is the stone that held all that together. The way you build a building is you put the foundation down. And the first stone you lay is the most important stone. It's called the cornerstone, because it's the one that gives you the angles to the rest of the building. It lines up all the walls that are going to be put in place. It gives you the right direction and that sense it holds it all together.

In his commentary on Ephesians, John Calvin said that the Apostle Paul calls Christ the Cornerstone because the Jews and Gentiles were two separate walls but were formed into one building through Him. They were two separate groups that became one with the help of Christ in the middle. Which is a great picture for this because Jesus is the one holding the church together. He's the one who's kind of the glue or the tie that binds. There's a hymn that says, "Blessed to be the tie that binds." I mean, that's who Christ is. You don't come to church because we're all the same race. You don't come because we're all the same social background, you don't come because we're all the same country, you come because of Christ. And that's what brings you together.

The Stubbornness of God

And it can be a little confusing here because in some places in the Bible, Jesus is called the foundation. In 1 Corinthians 3:11, for example, it says,

For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Christ.

And so there, He's the foundation. There He's the one we stand upon, but here He's called the cornerstone because He unites us. The idea of this chapter is unity, and the fact that we're all one in the church. Jesus has been called the cornerstone because He has that role with us. He's the one who unites us. He's the stone that all the other stones line up with, which leads to some applications here.

There's some lessons we learn from this. For one, this means that God has built the church to last. God has built the church to last because He's built it on this Foundation, and He's built it on this Cornerstone. Chilliwack has got a lot of buildings going up right now. Well, maybe not with the Coronavirus, but when the economy's doing well, we're building, building, building around here. But I'll tell you, all those buildings are not going to last. Matter of fact, if you come back in a couple hundred years, I'll guarantee probably none of those buildings will last. They're all going to tear down at some point. God has built the church to last. Nothing will keep it from growing, nothing will keep it from moving forward.

You know, if you were a Christian living in the first century, you might have your doubts about that. If you were living at the time the book of Ephesians was written, you might be kind of concerned that the Lord would build a church like this because it was under persecution back then. It was having a hard time and Christians were under attack by the Romans who were killing them and throwing them in jail. So the church would meet in houses under cover of darkness, it would it would meet in fields, it would meet in the tombs under the underground. And so it looked like it was a pretty puny thing. But Paul says that's okay because it has this Foundation. It doesn't matter what it looks like, doesn't matter where you meet, because it has this place to stand upon. God will build his church; He's stubborn about that. He is persistent over it. I guarantee you friends, when we're dead and gone, there will be a church. And when they're dead and gone, unless the Lord returns, there'll be a church there too. The church is built to last.

Another way to look at this. Another application is that the strength of the church doesn't lie in us. It lies in Christ. The power of the church is not in us. It's in Jesus, and what He's able to do. It's not about our abilities or our gifts or our talents. It's not about our buildings, or our programs, or our facility. It's not whether we're smart enough, or strong enough, or powerful enough. None of that has anything to do with this. This is about Christ. He's the Cornerstone. He's everything to us.

The Stubbornness of God

Leonardo da Vinci once took a friend to look at his painting on the last supper, and after looking at it for a while, the friend said, "Well, the most striking thing about it is the cup that Jesus drank from." The most impressive thing about the painting is the vessel that he was using. To which Leonardo da Vinci responded by erasing the cup from the painting, because he said, "Nothing will take attention away from Jesus. Nothing will draw attention and glory away from my Savior." Friends, that's the point of the church; that's what the church does. We are here to make sure nothing takes glory away from the Savior. We're here to make sure nothing takes attention away from Him. I think that a lot of people have left the church today because we've forgotten this. I think that we have so many fights and we get into such a mess of times because we don't put the focus on Christ anymore. We put it on other things.

Like many of you, I've seen a lot of fights in the church, I've seen a lot of conflict. And I would say they all started, all the conflict started, when someone forgot about what they were coming to church for. They forgot about Jesus and they put the attention on me, me, me, my hurts my pain. And they started a war. Paul says that's not the way it's supposed to be in the church. We should not conduct ourselves that way. The church is about Jesus. It's not about us. We're not here to make things flashy. We're not here to make things relevant. This is relevant. We're just supposed to tell them about Christ. That's our goal.

CS Lewis once said, "The perfect church service would be one that we were almost unconscious of because all our attention would be focused on Jesus and not on ourselves." I think he's right. Friends, the church is not a place that glorifies men. It's a place that glorifies God. In fact, while you're listening to this, you need to ask yourself the question, "What am I doing? Why am I listening to this message? Why am I going to church? Why all these things?" It's for Him, and not for us.

Which leads us to another point to talk about this morning, a fourth way The Lord is building His church. Just to review these other ones. The first one is by giving us access. The Lord builds His church by giving us access to himself. Before, the way to God was barred, it was locked off, blocked off from us, now it's open, wide open through Jesus Christ. Second way The Lord is building His church is by putting us on the same Foundation, which means He's given us the same book to follow. He's given us the same place to stand upon, the writings of the apostles and the prophets. A third way He's building his church is by giving us the same Cornerstone. He's given us the same standard to line ourselves up with. We line ourselves up with Christ. He is the one who unites us, draws us together. It brings us to one more point to talk about.

All that brings us to one more way that God is building his church, and that is by growing us into a temple. And one more way the Lord builds His church today is by growing us into a temple, which means He is growing us into a place where His presence is. He's growing us into a place where He lives. Before we couldn't come into His presence, before that was blocked off from us.

The Stubbornness of God

Now His presence is so wide open to us, that it actually lives inside of us. God has made us the place where He dwells. And if you look in verses 19 through 22, he says,

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Just to walk you through some of this here; as he's wrapping up the chapter and drawing it to a close, Paul says that not only has God built the church and put it on the same foundation, given it the same Cornerstone, but He's still doing it today. That's the idea here. The work still goes on. If you notice, we've already said this, but all the verbs in verses 21 through 22 are in the present tense here. They're all continuous to say this is ongoing, the building is ongoing, and it hasn't stopped. It says, "in whom the whole building being fitted together," that's another way of saying being glued together. Because it's an interesting word in Greek, it refers to the careful placement of each part of a piece of furniture so that they fit together. Some of you have gotten those assembly packages from IKEA and places like that. Well, this is what that is, it's referring to making the pieces fit perfectly together. God does that today in the church. He is perfectly placing us snugly together, and it says He's also growing us into a temple.

I'll say a few words about that in a moment, but this is a reference to spiritual growth. It means we're growing closer to God. Verse 22 says, "in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." It's been said that most of the cathedrals in Europe are in a constant state of construction. They're constantly being built so that new rooms and new buildings and new chapels are always being added to them. Paul says the Lord is doing that with His church. That's what verse 22 says, He is continually building us, continually adding new people and new gifts to the congregation to make us into His dwelling place. Before, God's dwelling place was in Jerusalem, before, it was in the Holy of Holies behind the veil that you could not enter. Now, get this if this doesn't blow your mind, now Paul says God's dwelling place is in the church. Not in not in the church building, in the church people. The veil has been torn and you can enter into the presence yourself. Or another way to say that is the presence of God can enter into you. Theologians refer to this as our mystical union with Christ or our spiritual union with Him because that's what it takes place here. Our spirits are united to Him. Our souls are brought together with Him. This is also referred to as our oneness with Christ because this is what happens here as well. We become one with Him, which draw so close to Him that you can't tell where He ends, and we begin. Because that is what our salvation brings.

Verse 22 says this is done in the Spirit, we are being built into a dwelling place of God and growing into a temple in the Spirit. So that's where this happens. That means the Holy Spirit,

The Stubbornness of God

He's the one who makes this possible. The Holy Spirit is the One who enters into our lives and enters into our souls at salvation and makes us a part of this. But this is how serious God is about the church. This is how stubborn He is about it. He makes us into His dwelling place on earth. He makes us into a place where His Spirit lives. Let me tell you something, I don't know about you, but I know what passes through my mind and my heart on any given day, and I would not want to live inside of it. God lives inside of us through Christ in the Spirit.

One commentator said that there are several ways to look at this, Several ways to understand these verses. For one thing, you know, God is building his church. We know that it says that here, that's a sure thing. God is not building the economy right now, at least momentarily. Not building up your job because of the Coronavirus, but He's building the church. He's building his people. It also means God is part of this process. That's part of the idea here. He's personally involved in this. You know, God could have saved us maybe by just sending the angels or He could have at least built the church by just sending the angels, sending messengers, sending someone on His behalf. He doesn't do that. The Son comes, God the Son and God the Spirit to say God is personally invested in this.

And then finally, this means you have to be part of this as well. If you're a Christian, and you want to be involved in what God is doing in the world, you need to be part of the church. In fact, what this is saying is that you already are part of the church, you just need to realize it. You're already a member of the universal church, and you just need to flesh that out in your life by joining the local church. You don't have the right to say you had a bad experience in the church and blow this off for the rest of your life. That's not an option for you. You can't do that. You can't just say that you'd rather sleep in on Sundays or just have church over the internet for the rest of your life, that's not an option either. You need to be as committed to this as God is which leads me to ask you the question, are you committed today? Are you committed to a church today? I have to ask you that because it's not easy to do. I mean, it's not easy to be committed to the church because it can be disappointing. There are lots of reasons to give up and quit on the church. But God hasn't done that, and neither can you. The Lord has never given up on his church, and you can't do it either. To ask this another way, to get a real personal with this, let me say it like this. What church are you a part of today? What church are you committed to? Can you name one? I mean, most of the people watching this I'm guessing are from our church family, from Grace Fellowship Church, and so I'm not talking to you with that question. I'm thankful for you, grateful for you. We have so many people that are committed to the body of Christ where we're at. We're grateful for that, but some of you watching may not be plugged into a church. You may not be part of one. So let me ask you this, when the Coronavirus lets up and we can go back to our regular services, what are you going to do about that? Are you going to take the word of this passage, and let them sink in, and plug into one. Listen friends, you don't have another option. God wants you to be part of His church.

The Stubbornness of God

You know, when I when I think about church commitment, I'm reminded of a man I knew in the States who was dying of stomach cancer. He was in a lot of pain and a very uncomfortable, but He was always at church on Sundays. He came every week and someone finally asked Him, "Gary, why do you do that? Why do you keep coming every week even though you're in so much pain?" And he said this, he said, "You know what?" He said, "I can either hurt here or I can hurt at home." He said, "I can be in pain with you guys serving the Lord or I can be in pain all by myself on the couch," he said, "so I'd rather be with you guys."

My friends, can you say that today? Can you say you would rather be with the church family whether you're in pain or whether you're uncomfortable? I pray that you would. I pray that these words would sink into you, this passage would sink into your hearts, and you would plug into the church today if you haven't already. Let me close us in a word of prayer. Would you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, we do thank you, Lord, for Your word and the truth that we find in it. The fact that we are built on this Foundation, we're built on this rock in Christ, this Cornerstone, this blessing that we have. And Lord, I do pray for those listening that the words that we've read in the scriptures this morning would sink in and they would penetrate our hearts. We don't want to be like the foolish man who reads the scriptures and goes away and forget what they say. We want to go home and apply them. And so I pray that a passage like this would drive us to a greater commitment and love for Your people in the church. I pray for those who are committed that they would be encouraged to press on and excel still more in this, and I can think of so many people in our church family that are doing that. For those who have not plugged into a local church, Lord, would this stir them on in that direction. You died for the church, Jesus. You gave everything you had for it. May we give no less for what You've done.

We thank You Father that we are still able to meet even in the time of the Coronavirus. Lord, I pray that this time would let up soon; if it does not, I pray You will give us the strength to endure the trial and the separation we have from one another. Lord, we thank You again for your word. We thank You for the time to pour into it this morning. Would You go with us now throughout the week as we think about these things, and glorify Christ in them, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

We want to thank you for joining us this morning and encourage you to please go online and access some more of our resources on our Grace Fellowship Chilliwack YouTube channel. You can also find us online at gracefellowshipchilliwack.com. The Lord bless you and have a wonderful day.