

# The Building

## Ephesians 2:11-22

### Introduction

Let me read you something from the website of the Greater Springfield Visitors Center:

*Springfield, Ohio is known nationwide for its architectural heritage. From commercial and public buildings, to private residences and community parks, Springfield possesses some of the country's finest examples of many architectural styles ... The entrepreneurs and wealthy business owners that called Springfield home from the 1880's to the 1930's left their mark with significant artifacts that are still being enjoyed, and studied, today.*

I am not on commission ... but our city has a great heritage – one each of us ought to know more about.

One of the most notable buildings is, of course, the Westcott house, a prairie-style home designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright was a unique character. If you hired him, he would make it clear that he did not “design houses.” He “created environments.” He dictated every detail of the house, inside and out. He designed stained glass, fabrics, furniture, carpet and all the accessories of the house. Legend has it that, in at least one case, he even designed the gowns of his client's wife. Wright believed that:

*Buildings strongly influence the people who inhabit them.*

With that in mind, let's turn to our Epistle reading for today.

In the book of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul uses three images to describe God's people, all of which begin with the letter “B”:

- In chapter 5, we are the BRIDE of Christ
- In chapter 4, we are the BODY of Christ
- In chapter 2, we are the BUILDING of Christ

Whenever Frank Lloyd Wright designed a home, it could easily tell it was one of his, because every Frank Lloyd Wright prairie-style home has identifiable characteristics. In the same way, the building that God constructs has easily identifiable characteristics.

Now, let's be clear. God's building is not made of brick and mortar. It does not have stained glass or pews or organs. It does not have a singular address. God's building is people – His Church. You and me. So what are the characteristics that define us? I see three.

### #1: BUILT ON THE FOUNDATION OF THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS

*... built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20a)*

The strength and durability of any building has everything to do with the foundation on which it was built. Do you remember the story of the wise and foolish builders at the end of the Sermon on the Mount? (*sing the song*)

The rock upon which God builds His Church is the testimony of faith of those first people who proclaimed the faith of Scripture: the apostles and prophets. Those people who said "This is the Word of the Lord." It is their faith on which we stand. It is the word they proclaimed that makes God's church solid and long-lasting.

That is one of the reasons in this denomination that the creeds are so important. The creeds help us understand the essential questions of the faith. Every time a major conflict arose about how to interpret some Christian teaching, the early church fathers got together and hammered out a creed. By so doing, they clarified what was truth and what was heresy.

This congregation and many others in many other denominations have been forced to make decisions because what we saw being proclaimed by our leadership differed from the foundational faith of the prophets and apostles. We had to decide whether the historic teachings of the faith were primary or whether denominational loyalty was primary. We chose the foundation of faith.

So the first characteristic of God's building is that it is anchored to the historic teachings of the faith. That is true both for congregations and for individuals.

## **#2: SHAPED BY THE CORNERSTONE OF JESUS CHRIST**

*... with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:20b)*

The cornerstone is the first stone set in the construction of a masonry foundation. It is also known the setting stone. It is the most important stone since all other stones will be set in reference to this stone, thus determining the position of the entire structure.

Over time cornerstones became more of a ceremonial piece. We have a couple of them around this building and they were installed after the building was done. They have inscriptions with the dates of the on them. We also put a time capsule behind it.

As in the time of this passage of Scripture, the cornerstone is key for two reasons.

- First, it is the first part of the foundation.
- Second, it determines the shape and orientation of the building. It is the standard by which the architect establishes the walls and the trusses, and every other part of the building. Everything ties to the cornerstone.

Consistently, the Scriptures tells us that Jesus is the cornerstone. Isaiah was among those who wrote statements like this:

*"Look! I am laying a stone in Zion.  
It is a stone that has been tested.  
It is the most important stone for a firm foundation.  
The one who depends on that stone will never be shaken. (Isaiah 28:16)*

Architecturally, everything in a building relates to the cornerstone, so in the church everything is based on its relationships to Jesus Christ. If it doesn't relate to Jesus, it is not part of the church. We can think of that in terms of any program or idea that a congregation might consider, but most importantly we need to think of that in terms of the people we know. If there is no relationship with Jesus, they are not part of God's church. Everything relates to Him.

### **#3: RISES THROUGH THE INTER-LOCKING LIVES OF EVERY CHRISTIAN**

*And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. (Ephesians 2:22)*

Paul doesn't give a great deal of attention to what kind of building material we are, but when the Apostle Peter wrote something similar, he described Christians as "living stones."

*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 2:5)*

I like that imagery. It communicates several things to me about how you and I fit within this structure that God is building.

#### **1. Each stone is different.**

Different shapes, different sizes, different functions. Different spiritual gifts. There are no two stones alike, but we are all a part of the same building (God's church). The building needs everyone of us if it is to be built.

#### **2. We are strategically placed by God Himself.**

We are chosen and shaped to fit into the position we occupy by God Himself. It is His building, and He decides how each stone fits. (Like packing a moving truck.)

#### **3. The stones are also linked to each other.**

Christians cannot be isolated. We are part of an interlocking whole. Sometimes it looks pretty jumbled, but the Master Builder always knows what He is doing. For the church to be the church, we need to be engaged in the lives of each other.

#### **4. The stones draw attention to God.**

It's His building. When you look at such a structure, you never celebrate any one stone. You marvel at the whole thing. The attention always belongs to God. It's His temple. He lives in it.

#### **5. Your stone is one part of an extended work.**

God began this construction process nearly 2000 years ago. Millions of stones already in place right now. And you are one of them.

### **APPLICATION**

You and I, together with all those Christians who have come before us, and all those Christians who worship in other congregations on this day in places all around the world – we are the building God is constructing.

- A building set firmly on the faithful proclamation of God's Word, as first articulated by the prophets and apostles.
- A building shaped by the relationship people have with Jesus Christ, our cornerstone.

Now let me take you full circle to the statement made by Frank Lloyd Wright about the buildings he designed.

*Buildings strongly influence the people who inhabit them.*

The role of the building God makes ... that is, the role of the church composed of you and me ... is to strongly influence the people around us. Our mission is

*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 2:13)*

It is to bring those on the outside to the inside, turning people from foreigners and strangers into fellow citizens and members of the household.

*Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household (Ephesians 2:19)*

It's not about us. It is about Him. About inviting people into come into a relationship with Him.

Every week there is an opportunity to invite, and we need to be doing that. Some opportunities are very non-threatening (Baseball game, CarFest, SummerFest). Some are educational (SS, Bible study). Some are inspirational (worship). But the best invitation is the one that invites them to meet Jesus.

Amen.