

Title: Building By Divine Design  
Date: August 23, 2020  
Subject: Pictures of the church – the temple of God  
Scripture: Ephesians 2:20 – 22; 1 Peter 2:4 – 5; 1 Corinthians 3:9 - 17

Back on the farm, we knew it was coming. It came every year. I won't say we eagerly anticipated it. It was more like dread. Rock picking day or days will do that to a person. It meant getting out a tractor and hayrack. The lucky one of us boys got to drive the tractor...very slowly while the others had to search the field, dig in the dirt to pick up stones and rocks and take them to the wagon. We tried to carry as many as possible to minimize the trips. Pick with one hand and cradle in the other arm. Sometimes we used 5 gallon pails to load up and then haul back to the rack.

It didn't help when dad tried to inject humor. "This would be a lot easier next year if we just pick the Mama rocks." The neighbor kid was just gullible enough to think that was possible. Every year.

There were rules. Don't pick stones smaller than a kid's fist. Don't throw rocks from a long distance. We didn't like having to walk all the way to the wagon and figured it was faster to throw the rocks. You do know what happens when you throw a rock and hit something that's flat. It can bounce through to the other side where one of your brothers or your dad was and hit them while they were placing their rocks on the wagon or had bent down to pick a stone near it. Plus throwing the stone might break a board (which was deemed worse than hitting a brother).

The job was tedious, tiring and dirty... but it had to be done because you needed to get those lifeless, no good stones off the field so they wouldn't ruin the machinery. Most of the stones were pretty useless. We couldn't sharpen our batting eye for softball with them like we did the small misshapen crab apples that prematurely fell from the trees. They'd splatter. Instant applesauce. Dad didn't like it as he thought we might use apples that were partially good. The rocks would be cast on the rockpile in the corner of field, hopefully to be forgotten. Occasionally there were some that piqued our interest because they had a little different coloring and could be considered to be decorative.

We are, or I should say, had been spiritually dead stones.

Read Ephesians 2:19 - 22.

Our good friend Paul has words cascading from his mouth as the Lord gives them to him and he relays them to his assistant who wrote down the words. I hope the guy was quick. The metaphors are numerous and jumbled together.

This morning's focus is on the church as a building. It's a special kind of building. A temple. Some think the temple reference was meant to conjure up the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. The latest iteration was built by Herod and was absolutely magnificent in its architectural splendor. It was a 150 foot cube.

However, since the church in Ephesus consisted of many Gentiles, the temple they probably thought of was the one they'd often previously attended and dominated their city. It was the temple dedicated to the false god Diana, also known as Artemis. It was regarded as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. An ancient historian was so wowed by it that he felt the other wonders lost their brilliance and the only place grander the sun shone upon was Olympus, the home of the gods (Antipater of Sidon). The temple was immense, about three times the size of the ark built by Noah. At 425 feet in length, 225 width and 60 height, it would barely fit on our property.

We can be sure the image the readers had in mind wasn't some little, dilapidated shack that had been hastily thrown together. It was one that inspired awe and reverence.

A building begins with the foundation. King Herod was the master builder responsible for the temple during the days of Jesus and Paul. His plan was to turn Mt Moriah into a massive temple mount complete with courtyard up to 1600 by 900 feet. One stone he used broke the tape at 44.6 feet by 11 by 16 and broke the scale at an estimated 600 ton. He could build a lot on top of that block.

The foundation is the most important part of any building. And the most important part of the foundation is the cornerstone. In today's world it's largely ceremonial, but in ancient days, it was the piece that garnered the most attention. It was the starting point and determined the layout of the entire building. Builders wouldn't take just any old stone they came across and use it as the cornerstone. It had to be one that had been tested. Contrary to what we might think, not all stones are all that stoney. When force or pressure is placed on them, they disintegrate and crumble. That doesn't work very well on a building of substantial size and weight.

Jesus is identified as the cornerstone. He meets all the necessary criteria of size, strength, durability and beauty. Scripture often depicts Jesus in this position and acknowledges some people will trip over him, but others will realize who he is. This verse comes from the Old Testament – “So this is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed’” (Isaiah 28:16). It's the person of Jesus Christ, his being, his acts on behalf of humanity including his death and resurrection.

We're not simply talking about the teachings of a brilliant scholar or the charitable acts of a kind man. He is the perfect and holy Son of God and is also fully man. He is the perfect sacrifice for sins. He is the rock of truth. He is the Living Stone. In him there is no imperfection, crack, or subtle discoloration. He is perfect in every way. There's nothing fake in his persona or untrue in his teachings. Our confidence of his sufficiency is in the words we often sing: “On Christ the solid rock we stand. All other ground is sinking sand.”

Sadly, most people choose to stand on their own -- who they are, their achievements, their goodness, their thoughts, their beliefs. They figure they're good enough.

Visual illustration: Boxes to stand on.

Having a sufficient cornerstone brings us to the foundation. It needs to line up with the directions given by the cornerstone. It takes its cues from it and draws its strength from it.

The spiritual foundation built upon Jesus the cornerstone is the apostles and prophets. This is the New Testament men like Peter, James, John, Paul, Silas, Barnabas who filled those positions. More specifically, it's their teaching and preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. These people were truth tellers. What they taught meshes perfectly with Christ and becomes a solid and integrated foundation with the cornerstone.

We come to what's placed on top of the foundation -- the rest of the building, the building material. In another spot (1 Peter 2:4, 5) the building material is referred to as living stones. This points to the idea that the church is a living, dynamic organism and not just some human organization run by human wisdom.

Whenever a person places their trust in Christ, they're placed into this building by the Holy Spirit. They become part of the building process. More stones are added and the building rises as blocks are joined to one another.

Jesus didn't invest himself, didn't give his time, blood, sweat, tears and himself to gather building stones from around the world and throughout time just to make an ordinary building. His architectural concept and vision is that of a holy temple. Each person is individually a temple of God (1 Corinthians 6:19). Because Christ paid the tremendous price of his death to enable this to happen, we're constrained to flee from sexual immorality and honor God with our bodies.

Each believer doesn't remain their own temple. The idea here is the bringing together of followers of Christ into one magnificent building.

This temple is God's dwelling place. The purpose of a temple is place where God is praised, honored, and worshipped. It's holy as it's dedicated to him and each of the blocks is set apart for that purpose. They need to be clean. This is done as the living stones practice holiness.

We're building materials and builders. Please turn to 1 Corinthians 3. The metaphors are mixed... again. READ 1 Corinthians 3:9 – 17.

Paul identifies Apollos and himself as part of the construction crew. In the case of the apostle, an expert builder. He's not conceited but merely stating the fact. He's like the witness called to court who when asked to identify himself, stated he was the world's greatest expert in a super specialized field of criminology. He wasn't boasting... simply stating the fact.

Paul is regarded by most Christians as the greatest follower of Jesus Christ. Think of his accomplishments. He spread the Gospel throughout the then known world. He's the human author of at least 13 New Testament books. He suffered long and hard for the cause of Christ. So, it shouldn't surprise us that the Lord has a high view of the man and led him to include the truthful analysis.

Paul is quick to acknowledge constructing the building of God isn't a do-it-himself project. He recognizes others were building on the foundation he laid. Then he segues to all who have a part in building. In case there's any question as to who that might be, terms like *each one*, *no one*, and *any man* are used. The conclusion is builders include all Christ-followers.

The question arises: how are we building? Are we building according to the heavenly architect's blueprint and standards? Are we using proper materials? Are we putting in a proper work week? So that's four questions, but who's counting? Question #5.

Let's explore a little deeper. The end of v. 10 cautions builders to be careful about how they build. This again would be according to God's code, his standards found in his builders' construction manual, the Bible. We have to make sure we're building on the only adequate foundation which is Christ.

V. 12 brings us to the subject of building materials. Some are quality and some aren't. Specific examples aren't given. But we can ask the question: What does God consider to be valuable – gold, silver, costly jewels? If we go back through the opening chapters of 1 Corinthians, we find proper material includes teaching that is Christ-centered and Christ-focused. Another quality material is that which builds for unity.

The rest of the book reveals materials like thought patterns, attitudes and behaviors that honor Christ. 10:31 informs us that whatever we do, we're to do it all for the glory of God. A desire to do their best and work hard. Love pops up again in this picture of the church (chapter 13). Not acting in a superior manner.

The attitude we're to take isn't that we're doing it because we love kids or like to teach or because I'm gifted in a certain area, but we're because we're doing it to bring honor to Christ through the way we serve. The wise builder doesn't become possessive but realizes everything is God's and that he or she is a workman who is “just doing my job.” Other good building materials are the *one anothers* to be shown to the rest of the building. Desire to keep the temple clean.

The unwise builder uses inferior materials. If you had a home project and somehow got an unwise builder, it'd be evidenced by not showing up for the job, laziness, not returning your calls or answering your questions, excuses, poor work habits, taking the easy way and cutting corners that would impact the integrity and appearance of the building, and simply wouldn't care. Instead of working toward a masterwork like the guys from This Old House, he'd settle for this trash house.

The bad spiritual builder uses wood, hay and straw. Some insights about building with bad materials from the church in Corinth: marked by jealousy of other people's abilities and achievements as indicated by those who were jealous of Paul and Apollos, get into quarrels which often leads to division (The Corinthians liked to argue, “My teacher is a better teacher than yours and my leader is a better leader than yours.”), more interested in personal power and their own empire, think their part of the building is the absolute most important part and everybody should recognize that without his contribution the whole thing would fall apart.

Other defective materials are when a person is more concerned with popular teachings than biblical accuracy and right living, teaching what itching ears want to hear and being one of those who wants to hear what itching ears want to hear, operating according to the ways of the world and its standards, using them as measuring tools, routinely live a life of sin.

They try to do their own thing, not what benefits the body, or I should say, building. They're not building on the foundation of Christ but on their own foundation. They're selfish and narrow-minded. They're

half-hearted in the way they follow Christ. They feel religion and the things of God are only part time issues as in Sunday, maybe, a couple of prayers during the week when they need help, and they're golden. They're willing to break relationships with other living stones.

Being part of the construction crew isn't a case of doing our own thing and trying to slap up a roof and paint. There are Christians who build in such a way that they're all about the glitz and the glamour and the outward appearance of things but really don't have a very stable connection with the Savior. They don't spend time in his word, trying to understand who he is and what he's done. They emphasize themselves and people pleasing rather than Christ's priorities.

Before a family can move into a newly constructed house it has to pass final inspection. The inspector checks to make sure everything is up to code and safe. It's when he gives the okay that people can assume occupancy.

The work of those who are building God's temple face a final inspection. The quality of each person's work will be tested by the Chief Inspector. The Lord will use his rigorous standards and everything that has been done will be shown for what it is. Fire gives light but also burns up that which is fuel. Those whose work survives will receive a reward. Those whose building efforts will be burned up will suffer loss. The person will be saved but won't receive the rewards they could have. We want to make sure our part of the building is fireproof.

The section we read ends with another warning. V. 17 talks about someone destroying God's temple and that God will destroy that person because God's temple is sacred. Who is the destroyer? Is it the devil? Is it those who don't believe in Christ?

The destroyer actively and purposefully seeks to destroy God's temple and demolish his work. It may be those who infiltrate the church to undermine its teaching. It may be those who cast doubt about Jesus being the only way, who quietly insist or loudly shout there are many ways to God. Their fate is sealed. They'll be destroyed.

Each local church is a representation of the totality of God's temple. Therefore, it's also God's temple as Paul reinforces to the church in Corinth in 3:16. "You are God's temple. God's Spirit lives in you."

We are God's temple as Campbellsport Alliance Church. God's Spirit lives in us.

We were stones who had been cast aside as being worthless, lifeless, no good, useless and all but forgotten. Jesus takes these stones, our lives, from the dirt of sin and depravity. He washes and cleanses them. He transforms them into beautiful building blocks. They're like the priceless and precious jewels of the foundation, walls, and gates of the holy city that comes down from heaven that will shine with incredible brilliance.

It's the longest construction project in history as it won't be completed until Christ returns. It's worth the wait as it will be absolutely dazzling when the Lord is finished.