

God's Dwelling Place in Ephesus

by Keith Malcomson

The Church at Ephesus became a dwelling place for God, built upon the foundation of Christ, composed of believers united in Christ, and characterized by love, fellowship, and communion.

Scripture: Acts 16:6, Acts 19:1, 1 Corinthians 3:11, Ephesians 1:22, Ephesians 2:22, Ephesians 5:25-26, Ephesians 5:29, Ephesians 5:32

Topics: "Church Unity", "Spiritual Temple"

Description

Keith Malcomson preaches about the Church in Ephesus being built as a dwelling place for God through the Spirit, contrasting the man-made temples of the city with the spiritual temple formed by believers. The believers in Ephesus, marked by their personal encounters with Jesus Christ, became a permanent dwelling place for God, spiritually, heavenly, eternally, and beautifully. The Church in Ephesus was likened to a building, a body, and a bride, emphasizing unity, growth, and intimate communion with Christ as the head.

Transcript

Eph.2:22, "In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

This great city of 250,000 people was the capital of Asia Minor and the 2nd biggest city in the known world. All roads in the province converged on this rich sea port. It was the home of one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple of Diana (Artemis), which was the largest building of its kind in the Roman Empire. The religion of this city dominated all of Asia and people flocked here to worship their gods in the many beautiful large and expensive temples. But God did not dwell in the midst of these expensive man-made temples.

God had a plan to raise up a dwelling place in this city but it would not be according to man's plan, thinking or timing. On Paul's 2nd apostolic journey Paul hoped to enter Asia, and no doubt to make a b-line for Ephesus but he was "forbidden of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 16:6). After a very long detour he arrived at Ephesus with his co-labourers Aquila and Priscilla (18:18-20). Although Paul moved on quickly to return to Jerusalem, he left behind him this wonderful Christian couple whose home became a virtual dwelling place for God in the midst of this pagan city.

Upon Paul's return to Ephesus early in his 3rd apostolic journey, upon his return to Ephesus he initially met twelve men who he led to faith in Jesus Christ and then baptised them in water, after which the Holy

Ghost "came upon" them and they "spoke with tongues, and prophesied." These newly born-again Spirit-filled believers were to make up the initial church in Ephesus. What an inauguration. After Paul preached for three months in the synagogue he was opposed by unbelief and evil speaking from the Jews. He then "separated" out from the midst of the synagogue gathering those who had believed on Christ and became His "disciples" during that time.

Paul continued to preach daily at the school of Tyrannus as well as to teach and preach in the homes of these believers for the next three years. Paul so preached the Word in their midst that "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus" and "God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul." So great was this move of God that "many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds" and many brought their witchcraft and magic books together, which was worth a great fortune, and burnt them before all. "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed." The people of Ephesus very quickly discovered that God had found Himself a dwelling place in their midst and from the midst of that dwelling place was making His presence felt throughout the whole province.

In our text the apostle says "ye." By this he means the Church at Ephesus. Those who have been elected (1:4), adopted (1:5), accepted (1:6), washed in the blood, redeemed, forgiven (1:7), made alive, born-again, saved (2:1, 5, 8), predestinated (1:11), sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:13). He goes on to say: "ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." All of this was the work of God's Holy Spirit in order to make these sinners, these children of wrath, who were once dead in their sins to be a dwelling place for God Himself.

The believers which made up the Church at Ephesus were marked out by a living experience and a personal intimate life changing encounter with Jesus Christ. Chapter one of this letter reveals that all these experiences, concepts and doctrines were centred in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. But he writes that it was "...through the Spirit." It was a work of God's Holy Spirit to form them into a dwelling place for God. No man could ever hope to create a dwelling place for God in this city.

These believers became a "habitation of God." This Greek word *katoikētion* literally means a permanent dwelling place. This exact term is only used in one other place, Revelation 18:2, "Babylon the great...is become the habitation of devils." But here in Ephesus the Lord had found a permanent dwelling place made up of redeemed sinners. Praise God.

This dwelling place for God was spiritual, heavenly, eternal and beautiful. It was not carnal, natural, worldly or man-made. The Greek word *epouranios* is used five times in this Epistle. It means "heavenly places." This is where the church is said to dwell "and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:" (2:6). This heavenly dwelling place is set in very stark contrast to everything of this natural world and its order.

As we begin to read Paul's Epistle, written during his first imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:30), we see that this Church had been literally caught up in God's eternal purpose to become God's dwelling place (1:4, 5, 9; 11). This plan was laid down in eternity past. The great riches and beauty which would adorn this house of God was all found in the person of Christ.

The Spirit of God inspired Paul with three wonderful thoughts to help us so that we might understand what it means for God to make the Church His dwelling place. Let us simply look at these three wonderful pictures.

1. This dwelling place is like a Building

The physical bodies of believers is at times called the temple of God (I Cor.3:17) but here we are told that "ye...are builded together." In other words many believers are joined together to make up this building. Each believer is a living stone in the building (I Pet.2:4-5). Only as we are built together with other believers can we be the dwelling place of God. In verse 21 we are told that the building is "fitly framed together." This means to 'render close jointed together' or to 'organize compactly.' Literally each believer (stone) is placed in close union with each other. Then in verse 22 we are "builded together" meaning we are literally built and constructed together into that dwelling place. There is no place for isolation, separation or individualism here. To be caught up in this wonderful plan means fellowship, union and unity with other believers. Those who isolate themselves have no vision of a dwelling place of God and they understand little of God's divine purpose in Christ.

Just note that those at Ephesus were: "...built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;" (2:20). Christ is indeed the only foundation that can be laid (I Cor.3:11). The apostles and prophets ministered and preached Christ as the only foundation. If we were built upon any man, ministry or organisation we could not abide as a building and dwelling place for God. Christ as the foundation assures us that the building will endure every storm and all buffeting of Hell. Jesus Christ is not only the foundation but the Builder; He works through such vessels as Paul, Aquila and Priscilla in raising up such a dwelling place. Any preacher who is serious about building God's people into a dwelling place where God can manifest His glorious presence will be sure to build upon Christ alone and to preach Christ alone.

Notice that this building "groweth." It is not static or stagnant but enlarges and increases spiritually as each member grows into the likeness of Jesus Christ. It also grows physically as others are saved and added to it. This work of building each stone together and of enlarging the building is the work of the Spirit. Unity and growth comes by the Spirit not by the demands of the law, the command and threats of a preacher or the efforts of man.

2. This dwelling place is like a Body

Christ is the head; the Church is His body. It is God, the Father of glory, who raised Christ from the dead and sat Him at His right hand, making Him to be "the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (1:22-23; 4:12). The one who is head of this body is over all things. All things are under His feet. He has total authority and dominion over all things in Heaven and earth. And this very one is our functioning head. No earthly leader can be head of this body; only Christ. Our HQ is in Heaven. The HQ of the Church at Ephesus was in Heaven.

Being our head speaks of personal union. He is the source of the whole body. All instruction, information, wisdom, revelation, understanding and vision come from Him. The body cannot function apart from Christ, and Christ is the source of all activity in the body. But more than that; mystery of mysteries, Christ who "filleth all in all" in His omniscience, is given an actual dwelling place by the Church to be His visible body on earth.

The greatest divide between men in that ancient world was that of Jew and Gentile. Yet Christ made in Himself one new man "in one body by the cross having slain the enmity thereby" (4:14-16). The work of Christ on the cross destroyed every hostility, hatred and opposition that could possibly divide, separate or isolate individual members of the body. It is not only by the Cross that men are brought into the body of

Christ; but by the Cross each member is maintained in fellowship with each other. And so, we are instructed to not get angry or lie to each other "for we are members one of another" (5:23). Such things only harm the unity and function of the body.

It is God's purpose that the body "grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:" (4:15). In verse 16 we again see that the body is "fitly framed together" and "compacted" which means to drive together or unite. In Colossians this same Greek word is translated as "knit together." This is accomplished by "speaking the truth in love" and "every part" or every member working effectually together in love. Calvary love expressed by the body will make the body grow. God's dwelling place on earth is a loving, growing functioning body.

3. This dwelling place is like a Bride

Thirdly, the Church is pictured as a wife, and Christ as the husband. In chapter 5 as Paul teaches the husbands how to act towards their wives, and the wives how to act towards their husbands, he suddenly breaks in upon this instruction by saying "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (5:32). Although his teaching in these verses to husbands is drawn continually from the example and pattern of Christ's love and care to the Church, he suddenly states that this relationship between a man and his wife is a "great mystery." A mystery in the Bible is always something concealed which God wants to reveal to His people. In other words when a marriage is in correct order it reveals something of the wonderful union of Christ and the Church.

As a husband dwells with His wife, so Christ dwells with His Church. It is not a formal religious theological fact; it is a covenant relationship of friendship, fellowship, communion and love. First we see that Christ is the head of the relationship. That does not merely mean that He is the source; it means that He takes the lead and is responsible for the needs of the Church. The husband is the head of the home and there is a "submission" (v22-23) due from the wife in order that he may fulfil his God-given role. The Church submits to Christ and so Christ is able to be her Saviour. Those who contemporarily teach that there is no command for a wife to submit to a husband or who twist it to mean something else do great damage to the teaching of the Churches submission to Christ. The Church in her function and relationship does not fulfil the same function as Christ and does not demand mutual submission.

Secondly, the primary responsibility of loving is due from the husband. All the buck stops here. The emphasis and burden first and foremost is that he must love her just as "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." This love of Christ is given in order that the Church might sanctify herself so that she may be His dwelling place. He gave Himself and laid down His body at Calvary in order to have the Church as His wife. A Church that is being made the habitation of the Lord is being wooed to submission in every area of life and is being prepared through the "washing of water by the word" in order that she might be sanctified and so presented to Him a "glorious church." A so-called church that is a prostitute, a harlot or a rebel cannot be God's dwelling place.

Lastly, he "nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:" Christ nourishes the Church. This means that He rears it up from nothing and trains it unto the place of maturity. To cherish means to brood over or foster with warmth just like the mother hen with her chicks. What a beautiful picture of Christ dwelling with His Church. What a wonderful covenant bond. What a wonderful love, care and concern. What wonderful intimacy of communion and fellowship. This is our third picture of what it means for the Church to be His dwelling place.

The Church at Ephesus was a building built upon Christ alone, a body rightly related to her Head, and a bride living in willing submission to Him. No wonder that she was fit to be a "habitation of God." And as a result her candlestick shone as a light into all of Asia Minor while her love was pure and bright. .

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