

The Centrality of Christ in the Church

by Keith Malcomson

This sermon emphasizes the centrality of the Lord Jesus Christ in the church, focusing on Christ as the foundation, cornerstone, and bridegroom. It highlights the importance of being aligned with Christ as the head of the body, the foundation of the building, and the bridegroom of the bride, preparing for His second coming.

Scripture: Ephesians 2:20, John 3:29, Ephesians 5:22, Psalms 118:22, Zechariah 4:7, 1 Corinthians 3:9, John 3:30, Ephesians 5:25, Ephesians 5:29

Topics: "Christ as the Foundation", "Preparing for His Second Coming"

Description

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Transcript

Will you turn with me in your Bible this morning to Ephesians chapter 2, Ephesians 2 and we're on our series, The Centrality of the Lord Jesus Christ, The Centrality of Christ and we've taken a break for three weeks during School of Christ and we've come back now to part 6. But let me just remind you as we turn to Ephesians chapter 2 to read it, that in part 1 that we started several weeks ago, we began with the centrality of Christ before eternity. Then second of all, we dealt with the centrality of Christ in creation. Then third of all, the centrality of Christ in the Bible.

He is the theme of the entire Bible, every verse, every chapter, every book. Our fourth message was the centrality of Christ in the nation of Israel. Part 5, the last time we taught on this, was the centrality of Christ in the cross.

But I want to go further here and deal with here this morning as we read from Ephesians 2, the centrality of Christ in the church. We are the church and I want to deal with that this morning, the centrality of Christ in the church. Read on from Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 11.

Wherefore remember that ye in time past being Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision in the flesh made by hands, that at that time ye 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. But now in Christ Jesus ye who were sometimes afar off are made

nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace who hath broken, who hath made both one and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having abolished in the flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in himself of twain the one new man.

So make in peace and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby and came and preached peace to you which were afar off and to them that were nigh. For through him, that is Christ Jesus, through him we both have access by one spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God.

And notice this, this is our text here this morning, and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone and whom all of the building fitly framed together groweth unto a temple in the Lord, and whom ye also are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. Can we pray together as we come to the word of God here this morning. Father, we thank you for the scriptures, we thank you for the Bible, we thank you for this book that was infallibly inspired perfectly without fault, without mistake, without anything missing from it.

It was given to us by the Holy Spirit and it makes Christ central in all things, in eternity, in the Bible itself, in the nation of Israel, in creation, and Lord God even in the church, the body of Christ, the bride that is being made ready, the temple of the Lord that is growing even in this generation, we want to hear this morning in our gathering and all that we do as a gathered bunch of believers, oh God, to see the centrality of Christ in all we do, nor God that Christ should be at the center of our fellowship, our relationship, our songs, our prayers, our worship, our adoration, our evangelism. My God, in everything that we do, that Christ would be at the very center of it. In Jesus' name, will you speak to us and open our eyes, in Jesus' name, amen.

My message, the centrality of Christ in the church, reading from Ephesians chapter 2, you are a habitation for God, you the church, the body of Christ, are a habitation for God. This letter of the Ephesians was written to a church, a gathering of believers in the great city, Ephesus, which is in today's Turkey. In the first century, when Paul wrote on to it, Ephesus was a city of about 250,000 people.

It was the capital of Asia Minor, or what we know as Turkey today, and in fact it was the second, if not the third, biggest city in the entire Roman Empire and the entire known world. All roads in the province of Asia Minor converged on the seaport of Ephesus. It was the home of one of the seven great wonders of the ancient world.

What was that ancient wonder of the ancient world? It was the temple of Diana, or Diana, or Artemis. That temple was the most renowned religious temple and building in the whole ancient world. It was one of those ancient wonders, one of the seven ancient wonders, and it was the largest building of its kind in the entire Roman Empire.

Everybody knew about that temple. Everybody talked about that temple. Every religious person admired that temple.

The religion of the city of Ephesus dominated not only the city, but it dominated the entirety of Asia, the province of Asia, and people flocked to worship in this temple from all over the province. No, from all nations they came, all languages, all cultures, all areas, but she dominated Asia Minor. They flocked on the roads to worship her and to be caught up in the worship of that remarkable temple that was admired by every nation and every culture, even the Romans of that generation.

It was the center of the worship of false idolatry. It was a beautiful building, a large building, an expensive building, and it was admired by all. But God, listen this carefully, but God did not dwell in the midst of temples made by the hands of man.

You see, in Ephesus, God had a plan. What was God's plan for Ephesus? He bypassed the great temple. He bypassed the multitudes, the wealth, the splendor, the majesty of what man had.

And when the gospel first came to Ephesus, God had a plan to create and then raise up a dwelling place in this city for himself. It was not according to man's plan, or man's thinking, or man's timing. God was going to bypass all that was of man and he was going to raise up his own dwelling place, a dwelling place that he would dwell in.

You see, in Ephesians 2 and 22, when it talks about the church being a habitation of God, do you know what it actually means? This is the Greek. It means a permanent dwelling place, or an address in the city of Ephesus. In other words, God was saying, I want a dwelling place, a living place.

I want a house. I want somewhere where I can identify within the city of Ephesus. So God didn't look at Diana's temple.

He wasn't interested in that. He had another plan. It wasn't according to the religion of man.

On Paul's second missionary, apostolic journey, he actually desired to travel into Asia for the first time and no doubt make a beeline for Ephesus, which is the very capital. That was his thinking, his desire. But do you know what it says in Acts 16 and verse 6? He was forbidden of the Holy Ghost to enter into Asia.

After a very long detour, he eventually, at the end of that second missionary journey, he arrived at the city of Ephesus for the very first time with his two co-labourers called Aquila and Priscilla in Acts chapter 11. Although Paul moved on quickly to return to Jerusalem, not Germany, Jerusalem, he didn't stop there very long, but he did leave his two friends Aquila and Priscilla behind in the city. They were a wonderful Christian couple whose home became the first literal dwelling place of the Lord.

Their home became a dwelling place for the Lord Jesus Christ. That home became the gathering place for the first Christians in that great city. And God didn't choose the temple.

He chose a home, a Christian couple and a bunch of believers that began to gather there. Upon Paul's return to Ephesus early in his third missionary journey, just outside the city, he met twelve men called disciples. They knew John's baptism, but they hadn't been baptised in water into Christ.

Neither did they know about the Holy Spirit, but they did know about repentance and discipleship. They did know that Christ was the Lamb of God. They were regenerate, but rather ignorant in many ways.

You know, when Paul met them, he baptised them in water in Jesus' name. He laid hands on them and after being baptised in water, the Holy Ghost came upon them and they began to speak in tongues and to prophesy as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance. These newly Spirit-filled believers, only twelve of them, were to make up the initial church at Ephesus when Paul began to establish the church.

What an inauguration! Since the world ignores the church, religion ignores the church, the rich and famous ignore the church, but I assure you, God is seeking after a dwelling place in every city, in every town, in every village, in every area. God himself is seeking a permanent dwelling place, not in buildings, not in

what impresses man. He's looking for a handful of genuine, real Christians and he wants to make a permanent dwelling amongst them.

After Paul preached for three months in the city of Ephesus, in the synagogue amongst the Jews, he was opposed by unbelief and evil speaking from the Jews. He then separated himself after three months out from the midst of the synagogue gathering and he gathered those who believed in Christ and believed this message, who wanted to become disciples and he began gathering in a separate place within the city of Ephesus. Paul continued preaching daily at the school of Tyrannus, every single day in that city.

He rented a little room, gathered a few disciples. Not everyone could be there, but these were going to be the ones who were going to preach and evangelise. These are the ones God is going to use to carry the gospel.

We don't know if Paul ever left the city of Ephesus during the next three years, but we know the Christians he touched went everywhere, telling men and women of Jesus Christ. There was a remarkable influence came out of the city of Ephesus. From the school of Tyrannus, he began to preach in homes of individual believers.

Many homes began to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and so Paul preached the word of God in their midst and as he did in the city of Ephesus. Listen, it says in the Bible, all they which dwelt in Asia, all of 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 in Ephesus and in Asia that the Bible says many believed and came and God confessed their sins and they showed their wicked deeds openly and many brought their witchcraft and magic books together which was worth a great, I mean an enormous fortune in that day and they burnt them publicly saying we've repented of our sin.

We wasted all of our money, all of our living on this, but you know what, as of this day, this is real repentance, we've had enough of it. You know what it used to be when a sinner got born again in the church, you know one of the first, no one told them to do this. They would come in and they said I had a bonfire, I got rid of all my old CDs, I got rid of my old audio cassettes and videos and I got rid of pictures and I got rid of clothes that I never should have been wearing and I cleaned out my house and I burnt the books and I burnt this and I burnt that.

You never had to tell anyone. It used to be in the church that when someone met Christ, immediately they cleaned that house out. You know why? They wanted their home to be a dwelling place for God.

They wanted Christ to be there. They wanted Christ to be made real in their home and so the word of God prevailed. The people of Ephesus very quickly discovered that God had found himself a dwelling place in their midst and from that dwelling place, he was making his presence and his power felt throughout the entire province.

My message here this morning as we look at Ephesians is the centrality of Christ in the church. What is the church? The word church used in the Bible and used frequently here in the book of Ephesians is Ekklesia in the Greek. It is used 115 times in the New Testament.

113 times it is translated with the word church. The Ekklesia or the church. This word church is made up of two Greek words.

The first part is ek which means the origin or where you come out of. So to be part of the church, you've come out of something. You've come away from something.

You've separated from a certain lifestyle. The other word kelio means to be called, to receive a personal specific calling to come out. Not just to come out of, not just to come away from where you were, but to be gathered together.

You see the word church actually means a gathering of like minded people who have experienced the same thing in the same way from the same person. It is a called out assembly. You as an individual are not a church.

You can't be a church. Neither is your family a church. You can't go to Starbucks.

You can't go to McDonald's. You meet up with Jimmy Bloggs who is a believer who never goes to church and you say, you know what, we are the church. We are having church at McDonald's.

That's a load of tripe. That person doesn't even read their Bible because if you read your Bible you would never say that. You couldn't say it.

You see the church is a gathered out assembly. A grouping of believers from the same area gathered together. They are called, called out ones.

You can't be the church by yourself or with one other individual. You have to gather with the body of Christ. To be called out is to come out of a bigger group into a smaller group, a select group, an assembly that is gathered.

You are called by God, called together, called around something with a certain community now formed of the same people meeting in the same place at the same time to do the same thing. I've heard for years now, I know our circumstances are different the past year and a half. I know internet's been so important.

I know it's hard to find a church anywhere in this area. I understand that. But having said that, never miss the meaning of what church is.

Church is face to face fellowship in the same place at the same time, the same people doing the same things. That is the biblical definition of the church. When we come to this wonderful letter of Ephesians, we get three pictures of the church, which I believe describes to you and reveals to you what is the body of Christ.

Let me go further. What is the centrality of Christ in the church? Let me give you these three pictures here this morning. First of all, the head of the body.

Second of all, the foundation of the building. Third of all, the bridegroom of the bride. This letter to the Ephesian church that we just read about, raised up just down the road from this great temple of Artemius of Diana.

Here is a gathering of people and God himself describes them in three different ways. But you know what? Without Christ, you don't have a church. Without a head, you don't have a body.

Without a foundation, you don't have a building. Without a bridegroom, you don't have a bride. Have you ever heard of a bride walking down the aisle by herself saying, I'm getting married today.

Where's your bridegroom? You can't get married. Oh yes, I'm a bride. I've got the dress on.

I'm told everyone I'm getting married. I'm a bride. That's the church of this generation.

They are a bridegroom-less bride. That's what most churches are. They are a building without a foundation.

They are also a headless body. You say that's ridiculous. Yes, it is ridiculous.

But you know what? Most Christians of this generation, that's what they look like. I cannot see their head. They have no common identity.

I can't see them getting ready for their bridegroom. I can't see what they built on. They call themselves, we're the church.

As an individual, I'm the church. No, you're not. No, you're not.

You can't be. In fact, it's utterly impossible for me or anyone else to claim to be the church unless it's with others. You cannot obey the scriptures about the church.

You cannot function as a church. You cannot do the will of God as a church. You cannot be the bride of Christ as an individual.

You cannot be the temple of God as an individual. You cannot be the body of Christ as an individual. You can only be a member.

You can only be a part. But saints of God, I'm showing you the centrality of Christ in the church. First of all, the head of the body.

Don't miss the connection. I'm talking about Christ and the church. Christ is the head.

The church is the body. Listen, Ephesians chapter 1 where we read this morning. Ephesians 1.22. And God hath put all things under his feet.

Notice in this verse, it talks about his feet. Christ is the head. He's not the feet, yet he has feet.

The feet are the lowest part of the body. But he's not talking about Christ himself. Christ is the head.

As far as the body of Christ goes, Christ is the head. And yet he's talking about the feet, that God has put all things under his feet. And he gave him Christ to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body.

Notice here the church is called the body of Christ. It is literally called that. If you're to understand what a church looks like in a local area or worldwide, you need to see it as the body of Christ.

Christ is the only head of the church. It doesn't have any other head. Elders are not the head.

Pastors are not the head. No apostles are the head of the church. They cannot be.

There is only one head universally of the church. And he doesn't live in the Vatican. I can promise you that.

His headquarters is in heaven at the right hand of the father. That's where my head is. That's where my headquarters is.

That's where my government is. You know that through the head all the instructions come. The commands to your toes, to your hands, to your body.

All the information. The head is the government. The head gives the instruction.

The head makes the decision. The head feeds in information. Do you realize without a head you have no information to feed to the body? Without your head your body cannot function.

It's utterly impossible. Then again in chapter 5 verse 23 it says Christ is the head of the church and he is the savior of the body. And so we see that Christ is the head of the church.

We read this again in Romans chapter 12 and in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 we have the picture of the body of Christ. The church is a body. It's made up of many individual members.

Each one of us in a local church is a distinct member. You're not meant to be like anyone else. You're not meant to function like anyone else.

You have your own function, your own plan, your own purpose. But you're connected to the head. A member that isn't joined to the head functioning with the body, there is something wrong.

It is not God's perfect plan. It may be for a time you're isolated. You're alone.

You can't find a church. I understand that. But that is not God's ultimate plan.

That's always second best. That is never his primary will. It says in Colossians 1 and 18, and he, that is Christ, is the head of the body, the church.

And in all things that he might have the preeminence. Why is Christ the head of the body? So that he has the preeminence, the first place before all else. No one else in the body.

I don't care if you're a hand, a foot. I don't care if you're the heart or the intestines, whatever you choose to be. If you're not the head, you don't have first place.

I'm sorry in this church you'll never be the most important person. I told Candace that in my marriage. You'll never be first in this marriage.

Can I tell all of you, you're never going to take the place of preeminence. We're not going to make decisions based on you for this church. We're not going to change the entire church because you have an idea, or you cry, or you have a fit, or you get in a tantrum and throw your toys on the ground.

We're not going to change it for you. You know what? If you're in the body of Christ, you need to come in line with the head. I can tell a member of the body that's not listening to the head.

It goes and, you know, if my arm started to do strange things, you go, uh-oh, what's up here? Why is this arm doing that? There's a dysfunction here. Why is it that Christians who do not function as members of the body, we think they're normal. They're not normal.

If you find an individual saying, I don't need, I'm a part of the worldwide church, exactly where is that? Oh, I meet with all Christians. I'm in unity with all Christians. Okay, so what's all their names? And tell me about their character.

And tell me how you personally are ministering to all members of the body. No one can do that. If my hand begins to shake over here, not listening to the head, I go, you've got a dysfunctional member of the body.

We need to treat it. We need to take you to a doctor. We need to isolate you.

We need to talk to you. But we need to find out. If my leg decides to walk out right now as I'm preaching, I've got a problem.

I need to bring, my head is going to bring that foot into order. I'm saying, you aren't going for a walk downtown. You're not going to go and kick football.

You're going to aid me in preaching the gospel here this morning. Since the head of the body, when you begin to see that in Ephesus, there was the body of Christ, how could I recognize it? It's got a head. It's got feet.

It's got an entire body. It's remarkable. Notice the headship of Christ.

You don't find a real church without a head. Where you find a real church, you're going to find a head. A head giving instruction.

You're going to find the government is not amongst the people. The government is over the people. It is in Christ.

It's in a person who's seated at the right hand of the Father. It's his instructions. It is his command.

It is his leadership. You know what? I'm a man under orders. I'm a preacher that has taken orders.

I'm submitted to somebody. I'm submitted to authority, and that makes me a member of the body. An individual unsubmitted, you could say, oh, but I'm centered on Christ.

Then why do you not function in the body? You see, to have Christ as your head means you are going to seek out a body of Christ. You're going to seek out other believers. You're going to find your place, not as an individual Christian, but as a member of the body of Christ.

That's how I recognize you're walking with Christ, a real genuine convert to Christ. I won't need to go and beg them. Oh, I had an experience.

I had a dream, I had a vision. Will you baptize me? You don't see them again. You don't see them again.

You know what that tells me? I have to question the relationship with the Lord Jesus. Christ always puts an individual in the body. You see, the head is the most elevated, the most influential.

It's the place of intellect. It issues commands to the body, not discussions. It's not looking for opinions.

It gives the command. It regulates and controls the entire body. The body is the instrument of expression for the head.

The will, the desires, the thoughts, the commands are communicated to the body from the head or the mind. It is the source of life. It is the source of government.

It is the source of authority. Saints, Christ is the head. He is the head.

And you know what? You don't get a body without a head. And you don't get a head without a body. You see, there's only a body of Christ in Limerick City because there's a head.

There is an authority. There is a government. It was Christ who planted this church.

It was his plan, his desires. He didn't just raise up a faceless system. He dealt with individuals.

He saved this one. He convicted this one. Someone else hears the gospel.

Look around you at the unique testimonies in this room. Just like the 12 outside of Ephesus, there's specific testimony. I was saved out of drugs.

I was saved out of alcohol. I was saved out of atheism. I was saved out of Catholicism.

And we come together. Do you know who gathered us? Do you know who called you to be together, who called you out to be an assembly, a gathering, a body of Christ? Who could have done that? It was the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a remarkable thing.

Notice what else the Bible says elsewhere. Just notice these things. The Bible teaches in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13 that we are baptized individually into the body of Christ.

The word baptized means you are immersed. You are submerged. That's what the word baptized means.

There's no sprinkling of babies in the Bible. It doesn't exist. Baptism means you get utterly submerged underwater.

That's what water baptism is. But listen, it talks about you being baptized into the body of Christ, or put into the church, or submerged in the body of Christ. Why is it you find Christians who've never been baptized into the body of Christ? As a part of their regeneration, that doesn't save you.

I'm not talking about salvation. I'm talking about the fruit of conversion. If you're born again, regenerate, made a child of God, then a part of that, a knock on effect, is you're baptized.

At the point of salvation, you get baptized. You may not have realized this, but you get baptized into the body of Christ. It says here in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13, for by one spirit.

This isn't all about the baptism in the Holy Ghost. Christ baptizes you in the Holy Ghost. When we come to baptize Shona and Karen, I will be there baptizing them in water.

I'm the person actually doing it. It's in the water. But notice this verse, what it says, by one spirit.

Who's doing the baptizing? It's not Christ. It's not a preacher. It is the Spirit of God.

We are all baptized into one body. Who does it? The Spirit of God takes you and baptizes you into the body of Christ. Whether you be Jew or Gentile, bond or free, and have made all to drink into one spirit.

Have you experienced that? If Christ is the head of the body, do you know what it means to be baptized, submerged into the body of Christ? I'm not talking about the loss of individuality. No. Your individuality comes from a walk with the head.

We are not conforming to each other. We're not trying to look or sound like each other. Do you know what? We are conforming to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If I conform to him, listen to him, there's going to be a common identity. In this hour, you can hardly find people who stay together in the body of Christ. And I believe it's because so few have been immersed in the body.

Doesn't matter whether you're rich or poor, Gentile or... doesn't matter. Everyone, the Spirit of God baptizes people into the body of Christ. A Christian without a body, there's something wrong.

Either there's no churches where you are, or you're a rebel against God. It's one or the other. It can't be anything else.

Listen to another point here. Not only baptized into the body, holding the head. Holding the head.

In Colossians 2 and 19, it says, holding the head. It's a biblical command. Do you know how to hold the head? Christ is the head.

Do you know how to hold him? Because it's a biblical command. Colossians 2 and 19, holding the head from which all the body by joints and bands have a nourishment and knit together increases with the increase of God. This term, holding the head, means to use your strength.

It's your responsibility. It means to seize the head, to hold onto the head, and to not let go of the head. It means to retain it and make it your own, to possess the head.

Do you see what I'm saying? If you are a member of the body of Christ, if you're in the body of Christ, you're commanded to actually lay hold of the head. You're to make him your head. You're to lay hold.

Do not let go of that grip. To possess him. And as you do, what happens? How do I know that you're possessing the head or holding the head? Do you realize it has an effect? What happens when someone holds the head? I mean, they seize him.

They're going, you're my head, not of my individual salvation. It's not talking about that. You are the head of the body, of a many-membered body, of a gathering of believers.

You're the head. He can't be my head as an individual. He is my head in the body.

Now, if I lay hold or seize him as the head, I'm going to start thinking like him. Listen, I'm going to start thinking like him about the body of Christ, about other members, about how I love each other. Look at the result in this verse.

From which, from the head, from seizing the head, all of the body by joints and bands have a nourishment. If you're holding the head, you're going to nourish the other members of the body. You're going to strengthen them.

You're going to feed them. And being knit together, that means a tight compact. If you lay hold of the head, we're going to be joint tighter together.

We are going to be literally knit together in a way that we can't be divided. And it increases with the increase of God. Baptized into the body, holding the head, but listen to this, edified in the body.

It says in Ephesians chapter 4 and 11 that he gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and some teachers. Why did he give them into the body? Everyone doesn't lead the body of Christ. You know what the Bible says time and time again about those that rule over you.

Who rules over you? No one's going to rule over me. Then obviously you're not in the body because this is clear teaching instruction. Now listen, God puts five ministries, gifted ministries.

They're gifts of Christ. They're not of churches. You can't create them.

You can't be positioned into them. It is the Lord Jesus Christ himself, the head of the church, that gives these ministries into the body. Why does he give them? There's three reasons, but I'm only going to mention one here.

Listen to why he gave them. It says for the edifying of the body of Christ, the building up of the body of Christ. God puts ministries.

There's few ministries, many members, but these ministries are put in to edify the body, to build it up, to encourage it, to exhort it, to enlarge the body of Christ. Not necessarily number-wise, but in maturity in their walk with God. And so we see that we're not only baptized into the body, we not only hold the head and minister to one another, we're also edified in the body.

But listen as well in Ephesians 4.15, growth in Christ, but speaking the truth in love, that we all may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. If you are in the body, if you're in a real church, if you're really in the body of Christ, I don't mean sitting here. I mean, if you're in the body of Christ, do you know what? We ought to be speaking the truth in love.

Never speak the truth without love. You can do more harm with truth. Oh, but I told them, I said, the Bible says, and I just said, if it doesn't have love, you can do a lot of harm.

But listen to love without speaking the truth is also damaging to the body of Christ. Oh, I just love everyone. This is my ministry in the church.

I don't tell the truth. I just love everyone. Then you're a lopsided Christian.

You could damage people by that. Just like someone speaking the truth without love, you loving without truth is damaging the body of Christ. Look what it says.

As we speak the truth in love, that we may grow up into him. Do you realize doing this, loving each other, speaking the truth, communing together as a member of the body of Christ, we all grow up into Christ who is ahead. Are you growing up into Christ as you grow stunted or as we fellowship together, as we commune together or some people, as soon as you speak the truth in love, zoom.

Where'd they go? They're gone. I hardly even dealt with anything. I know they're gone.

And then here's another point. Complete in Christ. Colossians 2 verse 10.

And ye are complete in him which is the head. Do you begin to see the head and the body? There's a relationship here. If you're the body, if you're a member of the body, you begin to look like something.

You know why? Because if you're rightly attached to the head, if you're under his authority, under his government, if you're listening to the head, you begin to function within a body. If you don't do that, there's something wrong with your relationship with the head. It says when you're joined to the head, you're complete in Christ.

You'll only find satisfaction. To be complete means full to the brim. You'll only be satisfied when you function in line with his head.

People in the body of Christ do more harm than good whenever they're not rightly related to the head. My second point, the foundation of the building. The first thing was the head of the body.

You've got a head and a body. It's the Christ and the church. Christ is central to the church as a body.

When you look at the church as the body of Christ, Christ is central, preeminent, foremost. It cannot function without him. It relies on him.

Saints, I wouldn't be here in Limerick if it wasn't for the head Christ Jesus. You bunch wouldn't be sitting here listening if there wasn't a centrality of Christ. But second, the foundation of the building.

Ephesians 2 verse 20, and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone in whom all of the building fitly framed grows together unto a holy temple in the Lord, and whom ye also are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. Notice here when we come to the foundation of the building, the church is seen as a building. But notice Christ is now the foundation.

He's not the head now. When we look at the church as a building, Christ is the very foundation. It says we are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

What is the foundation of the apostles and prophets? It doesn't mean those men or those ministries. It's their message. Who did the apostles preach? What foundation did they lay? It is the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

In the first century, what foundation did they lay in the church? Christ. Christ as high priest. Christ as prophet.

Christ as teacher. He is the foundation they laid. That's what the foundation of the apostles are.

I assure you, Peter would be a very weak foundation. John would have been a very weak foundation. The apostle Paul never said, I'm the foundation.

Never once. Do you know what their foundation was? Is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. As stated here, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone in whom all the building fitly framed together, it groweth.

Notice that this is a building that's growing. It's not static, not built once and for all. All through the ages, it's growing, growing, growing, extending, and it's on the basis of a good foundation.

If you build a church without a good foundation, you've got serious problems. We as a gathering of believers, listen, you could say, I'm born again. I'm saved.

I see the blood. I'm forgiven. But to build together a temple, you can't build this temple by yourself.

Oh yes, I know as an individual, your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. But we're talking about something else here. When the church gathers together, we're called the temple, the house of God.

We're called a building. Do you realize if we all do different things as individual stones, I'm a stone, and I'm a stone, and I'm a stone, and maybe someone is getting stoned, who knows? But I assure you, all those stones have to be built together to be a house for God. We actually see here that Christ is the foundation of this building.

In Isaiah 28, verse 16, listen very carefully. It says, Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I, God, lay in Zion. Amongst God's people, I lay in Zion.

Do you realize Christ was laid as a precious foundation? He was literally laid down. Do you know he was laid very low? The Lord Jesus Christ came down as a man to be the foundation of this church, of this building, to become the very foundation on which the entire church is built. Do you realize Christ was laid by God? He was laid in human flesh.

He became a man. No, he became under law. Do you see how low he was laid? He was born of a woman, of a virgin.

That's how low the stone was laid. No longer are we looking at the head. We're looking at the stone that gets laid to build something on.

Can you imagine Christ coming, dying, suffering, being buried, rose again, and there's no building? Oh, I'm saved. I love Jesus. Where's the building? You know, most Christians have no vision of the church.

They say, I'm doing my bit. I don't like them. I don't agree with them.

Who do you agree with? And you know what? They have no vision that Christ wants to, in Limerick City, raise up a dwelling place. You know what the Bible says here? I want a permanent dwelling place in Limerick City. I want a habitation.

I want an address. And I'm not talking about a building, or a denomination, or LCC. I'm not talking about that.

I'm talking about a gathering of unique people together, who are joined together. Since without the foundation, that building won't be around very long. It'll splinter.

It will drown in the mud. It will fall over when the storms come. A foundation is absolutely vital.

God laid this foundation for a foundation stone. That term, a foundation stone, means the large, massive stone. I'm not talking about a stone in a building.

I'm talking about a large stone that gets laid on a foundation, and you build a house upon it. Jesus was to be the foundation of an entire building, universally and locally. He's called a tried stone.

He's been in the fire. He was ridiculed. He was tested.

He was scrutinized. He was abused. You say, I know what it's like to be rejected Christ far more.

Have you ever been rejected from the society, amen? I mean rejected Christ was a stone rejected. That's what the Bible says. He was rejected by the builders.

They said, you know what? We're building this beautiful building in Jerusalem, but we have no need for this stone. We're going to build it according to our plan, and we've got a vision of it, but we've got no place for this stone over here. Christ was a stone.

He was the only foundation stone, but the builders in Jerusalem, they rejected him. It also says he's a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation, and he that believeth shall not make haste. He is the first stone in the building.

Notice he's out of sight, and he's permanent. He's an everlasting rock upon whom you can build, but he's not only the foundation. He's also the capstone according to the Bible.

It says in Matthew 16, 18, you'll remember Jesus speaking to Peter, and he says, Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church. That wasn't Peter. Peter would have been abysmal as a foundation stone.

Peter later writing, he said, we are all individual stones, lively stones, growing stones. We are stones with life. Christ is the rock of offense.

He is the foundation stone. Peter knew exactly he wasn't the rock. He was only one stone in the hand.

We're talking about an entire foundation, but Christ is not only the foundation. Listen, he is the cornerstone. What is the cornerstone in a building? What is the cornerstone? Do you know Christ in the New Testament, three times he said, I am the head of the corner.

In other words, I am that stone that is the most important to build, not only the foundation upon which we build, but Jesus Christ is the head of the corner. What is the cornerstone? It is the most important stone in the building. Have you ever seen any of these old buildings and there's a big massive stone and they ride on it.

The Freemasons like to do this and they ride on it and they go, this is the cornerstone. It's a different color than the rest. It's bigger than the rest.

In fact, the entire building takes its measurement from that one stone. After the foundation, it is the most important stone. And do you know what it does? It joins the two walls that come together with the foundation.

That stone lines everything up, keeps it in order. Do you know what he's saying? See to be a stone in this house. This is what it looks like.

This is how you speak. This is where you fit. This is the direction you go in.

You know what he's saying? I'm an example of what it means to be a stone. You get all these stones that say, I'm building on the foundation, but I want to build over here. I don't like your little building.

They're like a bunch of little kids with their sandcastles who run through and kick it down when they don't like it. And they say, mine's better than yours. They've got no concept of the body of Christ.

They don't see that there is one universal building being built upon the foundation. Christ says, I am the example of the stone. You stone, you know, when we are in the army, you get about 30, 40 guys all in a line.

The sergeant or whoever was given the instructions, they come to them. You're looking forward. Make sure you keep your eyes forward.

Stand in line, shoulder to shoulder. And I stand at them. So you can't see it.

But when I come to them and I'll go, third man, back, back, back, fifth man, and I'll say, Ford, seventh man, and I straighten that whole line up. You know what? You can't see as an individual where you're going to be. But that chief cornerstone says, you need a line up, Saint of God.

And I'll tell you, chair back a bit, Karen forward a bit, Mary, you need to move sideways a bit. And we're all there. And if you're listening to that chief cornerstone, all of a sudden there is a lining up.

There is a unique lining up. Only Christ can do this. It says in Psalm 118, 22, the stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner.

What a remarkable thing that says. Do you know, he's called the rejected stone or a stone of stumbling. To those that do not, listen to this, believe the word.

Jesus Christ is a stone, elect, precious, sure. But see those who do not believe the word of God, they trip over him. I mean the real Christ, the real stone, they keep tripping over him.

Why do you think that is? Because you reject the word of God. That's why you keep tripping over Christ. If you don't believe on them, you'll fall over them.

You'll keep tripping and go, I can't be like that. I don't want to listen to this gospel. Also in Zechariah, not only a foundation and a cornerstone, there's also the headstone.

In Zechariah 4 and 7, it says, he, that is God, shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shaming's crown. Grace, grace onto it. It's talking about an entire building.

Do you know what that stone is? It's the capstone. It's the final stone when the building's finished. Do you realize there's going to be a day when this building gets finished? The foundation is here now.

The stone is in place. You're to line up with it. But there is a capstone.

It's going to be the final roof on the building. You know who it is? It's the Lord Jesus Christ. There's going to be a worldwide universal temple.

Since we are that building, Paul again writing in 1 Corinthians 3 and 9, he says, we are labors together with God. And ye are God's building. Every true preacher realizes the church is a building.

I'm working on a building here this morning. I'm not working on a bunch of individual Christians. I want to see a building come forth.

Paul says he does this according to the grace of God, which is given me as a wise master builder. A master builder doesn't write up the plan. An apostle doesn't write down the plan or get it direct from God.

You know what Paul said? The master plan, I'm reading a plan. A plan is handed to me from God in the word of God. And from that plan, I begin to build the house of God.

Do you know what? I've never written up a plan for this church. I've never written up a vision for this church. I haven't laid out and said, God, what is your plan for LLC in Limerick? What is your divine plan? What are you telling me to do with this church? Do you know what he said? The same as I did with Jerusalem and Antioch and Ephesus.

Do you realize it's the exact same plan? Do you realize it's here? It didn't change one iota from Ephesus to Limerick in 2000 years. Not one iota. There's no unique vision.

You say I've got a special vision. No, you don't. No, you don't.

Unless it's birthed out of the scripture. You're not listening to this because I tell you the ones with special revelation and I believe God speaks. I know there's gifts of the Holy Spirit.

I know there's apostolic ministry, but you know what? All those that are running about Nisar with dreams and visions and special words and a personal vision of what God's called them to 99. It's a bit like COVID. 99.9% is a load of sham.

It doesn't exist. It come out of their imagination. Our BBC told them.

That's what I'm going to call them, COVID Christians from now on. That's it. As of today, I am coining a new phrase, COVID Christianity.

Man, I'm going to preach on that. Anyway, I'd better finish here. If I get all that, I assure you, I will not stop.

But third and finally, the bridegroom of the bride. You cannot have a bride without the bridegroom. And yet we have lots of brides going off to get married.

They're not even interested. Some years ago, out the road in Adair, Candice and me were going there for a coffee. And we're just walking around looking at Adair, the great city of Adair and the great sites of Adair.

And there was this beautiful wedding going on in the church there. And we said, come on, we'll go and look. And we stood at the wall and we looked over and they're all coming out, everyone dressed up and all the excitement and all the cameras and the video camera and all the families.

And then we suddenly realised something said, look at the bride. Look at her eyes, her face. Do you realise she wasn't a bit interested in the guy? Not a bit.

In fact, there's a couple, they didn't have eyes for each other. Do you realise if it was a normal average couple in Ireland today, they'd done everything together. They're in fact bored.

They're probably getting married because they're bored of each other. It's on the rocks. He's doing it to please her.

It's for the family. It's to have a nice day out. They have slept together.

They've done everything together. They've had every sort of fight you can imagine. There's no mystery.

She's not even in love with him. He's not in love with her. And they're both as two individuals getting married, going through a dead ceremony.

There's an awful lot of this in the church. You know what? You've lost your excitement about the bridegroom. You're there a bride.

I'm the bride of Christ. We are the bride of Christ. Jesus is going to be coming.

You're not in the least interested about him. You're not in love with him. You're not devoted to him.

You're not preparing yourself for your wedding day. You know what it says in Ephesians 5.22? Why submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord. Paul begins to teach about the relationship of a husband and a wife in the home.

A normal man and woman getting married and how the relationship's going to be. But suddenly you realize he's not actually talking about that. Yes, it's good teaching.

Yes, he's saying that. But he's not really. He's using that as an example.

He said, a man and a woman getting married, living together as husband and wife. It's an example of Christ and the church. Listen to what he says.

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church. He is the savior of the body. Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wife to their own husbands in everything.

If you realize the church, when we look at the bride and the bridegroom, show me a church not submitted to the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm in the person of Christ. You're not obeying him.

There's things you know that are taught in this book. I'm telling you, sitting here, there's things you know and your conscience bothers you about and you're deliberately turning a deaf ear to and you're deliberately neglecting to say, just leave that for another time. You know what it says and you aren't doing it.

You know, even as I say this, you actually know what it is. I'm not talking about anything specific. I'm just talking about those things.

But do you know what to submit to Jesus Christ means to come under his authority, to listen to him, to be led by him, to follow him, to respect and reverence him. Do you realize there's a relationship between the bridegroom and the bride? I'm looking for Jesus coming. Why are you not living like it now? Why are you not living like a bride being prepared for that day? Like it's your greatest day.

It's your best day. I mean, your whole life is moulded around this. Jesus is coming.

You know, when it talks about the bridegroom, it points to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, his second coming in glory. In John chapter 3, it says John the Baptist was asked, who are you? Who are you, John? You're such a great prophet. You're a great preacher.

You're affecting an entire generation. Who are you? Listen to what he said. I am not the Christ, but I am sent before him.

He that hath the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom which standeth and heareth him rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. This my joy therefore is fulfilled. See what he said.

I am the friend of the bridegroom. The bridegroom is coming. He is Jesus.

I'm only a friend of the bridegroom. Show me a preacher who draws back out of the way, and I'll show you a friend of the bridegroom. John then says, he must increase, I must decrease.

Show me a preacher seeking to decrease to make Christ everything. You find a friend of the bridegroom, also a friend of the bride. I hope I'm a friend of the bride this morning because I do not want to steal anything that's rightfully Christ.

I don't want to steal the authority or the government or the influence or the instructions or the wisdom. It's his. I'm only a friend.

I'm only telling you what his character is, what his word is, what his desire is, what his plan is. But do you know what? Preachers, prophets must decrease. I'm a friend of the bridegroom.

But do you know what? There's one called the bridegroom. Who is he? He's the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you know what? He's looking for a bride.

Here this morning as we close, the Lord Jesus Christ, he's not only looking for a body, he's not only looking for a building, but he's looking for a bride. Three B's, a body, a building and a bride. And you know what? That body, building and bride is to be his permanent dwelling place within a city.

God actually comes to a city and he searches. If he's going to find a permanent dwelling place, oh, I think he dwells out at the wee meeting. But there's no order, no structure, no responsibility, no commitment, no leadership, no giving.

You call that a church? Christ is looking for a building. I mean a permanent dwelling. How do you find it? It's a body.

Here's my arm. Bye lads, see you next week. That's not a body.

A building. I think the ground's giving way here. Yeah, you bet it is.

Bridegroom comes to get married. Where is she? Oh, she's on holiday. Can I tell you this morning in this wonderful city of Ephesus, amongst these normal believers, it wasn't as spectacular as a great temple that was admired in the whole empire.

It wasn't that sort of building. It's a spiritual building focused on the Lord Jesus Christ, made up of many members who've been born again and fallen in love with Jesus Christ. And this building is growing, being nourished, expanding.

And the bridegroom, do you know what he's doing to the body? He's sanctifying it. He's cleansing this bride now. This is how I recognize the bride.

How do you know we're a bride of Christ being prepared for that day? How do you know you're part of the bride of Christ? Well, I can tell. You are now by the bridegroom being sanctified and cleansed by the washing of the water of the word of God. Show me a church that doesn't preach the word.

It's not a bride. Do you hear what I've just said? Show me a church that's not sanctifying or making holy the members. It's not a bride.

Show me a church that's not doing that. There's no bridegroom. He is actually not there.

But it also says he nourishes and he cherishes. He loves that bride and he's nourishing or feeding her even as the Lord does the church. I'm speaking about Christ and the church in all of this.

Let's stand. Let's pray as we close here this morning. Thank you, Lord Jesus.

Hallelujah. Oh, hallelujah. Blessed be your name.

Blessed be your name. Why don't you just love him where you are? Just to love him, just to worship him, just to bless him. Are you in your right place? Are you in the right order in the body, in the bride, in the building? Are you being lined up? Are you being prepared? Are you being aligned, moved into the right place in the building? Do you know what your place is as a member in the body of Christ? There's many that are seeking after dreams, prophecies, visions, running hither and thither in our world, and yet they're not functioning within the body of Christ.

How are you ever going to find your place without that? Since there is a place for you to fulfill here in the plan of God. When Christ builds his house, he's got a place for you. You are a unique stone in the building.

You are a unique part of the body of Christ that nobody else can fulfill. Only you can do that. And since, O God, it is here in the midst of us, lay hold, take a hold of the head.

Seize the head. Do not let go of Christ. Lay a hold of him, and you will be in the right place, doing the right thing, at the right time, reaching the right people.

Make sure you're in a right relationship with the head, with the builder, and with the bridegroom. Make sure your relationship is right, that you're submitted, that you're listening, that you're functioning, that you're under government. And if you are, I promise you will be set in the right place.

It is his job to set you. It's all of his grace. It's all by grace divine.

Since, it's just trust him. Let him work in your hearts and lives. Hallelujah.

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