

**Ephesians**  
**Our Union with Christ: Three Compelling Illustrations (Part 2)**  
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I invite you to take your Bibles and turn with me again to the second chapter of Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus and to the surrounding churches. For those of you who are visiting with us, you find us in the middle of a number of months' study of this great letter of Paul to that great church where he lived for almost three years. And as he writes back to these people, we just see his heart pulsing through what he teaches, and as he teaches them what's important for them to know, he teaches us what's important for us to know as well.

We find ourselves in the second half of chapter 2, rehearsing the unity that we enjoy in Christ. And you know, I was thinking this week, as we've been studying this passage, how out of sync this passage is with the culture in which you and I live. We live in a culture that can be defined in a number of ways. Social anthropologists and apologists have sought to define our culture using a variety of words. But if you look at what they've written, one word seems to consistently appear in the assessment of the American culture in which we live today. It's the word "narcissism."

"Narcissism" describes a trait of self-love and self-centeredness. The term comes from Greek mythology, from the Greek myth of Narcissus. Narcissus was a handsome young Greek man who rejected the advances of the nymph Echo. As punishment, Narcissus was doomed to fall in love with the reflection of his own shadow in a pool of water. That's a wonderful description of our culture, people in love with the reflection of themselves.

It reminds me of a friend of mine who, a number of years ago, every time we were together, and we were in front of a mirror, he would suddenly get this shocked expression on his face, and then he would say, "Oh no, it happened again." And the unsuspecting person with him would say what? And he'd say, "I got better-looking." That's a description of the culture in which we live. You see it in so many ways. Some of them are absolutely ridiculous.

I don't know if you read the article last year, it was in our local paper, about the situation in Yorktown, TX. There was a fourteen-year-old incoming freshman who tried out for the Junior Varsity cheerleading squad. Sadly, she didn't make it. And so, as the article describes, she cried

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for three weeks about missing being a part of the Junior Varsity cheerleading squad. Well, her parents, instead of doing what any self-respecting parents should do and that is remind her that this is a life lesson, that there will always be people that are not as good as you are at various things and who are better than you are, and you're to do the best you can to the glory of God, that you are to work harder for next time if you'd like to participate. Instead of doing any of that, they thought the best way they could help their daughter was to sue the school because obviously she deserved it. That is a ridiculous picture of narcissism gone amok. It really is all about you, and if people, other people, don't recognize that and acknowledge it, then do whatever you can to convince them and to show them, to change their minds.

That's an extreme example, but sadly, the same kind of excessive self-love and self-centeredness permeates all of our culture, even, sad to say, the Christian culture. I read an article just within the last couple of months about a large, notable church with a distinctive history in our area's history, that had decided it was going to reach out to a number of niche markets. And by the way, this is how the article was written. This is how the pastors of the church referred to their shift in church philosophy and approach.

They wanted to enlarge their market share, if you will, of people in the church. And so, they decided to have a number of distinctive services intended to reach different groups. This is the end result of a contemporary service and a traditional service. Let's not stop there. Let's notice that people have a lot of different likes, and after all, it is all about them. The world is all about them and what they want. So, let's have a number of different services, one for those that are over fifty and one for those that are teen-agers. And let's just have a lot of different services and fragment the church so that people can have what they want.

Narcissism is diametrically opposed to how we are to live our lives as Christians. The message that that church was sending its people is that the church really is all about you and what you want. And we're trying to find a way to feed what you want and your self-love. But our lives as Christians are not to be about us. They're to be about God first and foremost, and then about others. This is what Jesus taught us. In fact, we've been learning here in Ephesians 2 that we are inseparably connected to other Christians. Beginning in verse 11 and through the end of the chapter Paul explains that Jesus Christ has united all of those who believe in Him. He has united them regardless of their backgrounds, whether they are Jew or Gentile, whether they are slave or free, male or female. Regardless of those differences, He has united them to God, and He has united them to each other. We have studied exactly what this union is and how it was

accomplished, and now we find ourselves in the last four verses of this great chapter looking at the results of that union that Christ has accomplished.

Let me read for you these wonderful verses beginning in verse 19.

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

Now the key words are in verse 19, "so then." Those words mark a change in the flow of Paul's argument. What follows those two words are the practical consequences, or the logical results of the union that he's been describing. And to help us better understand those logical results, Paul uses three images, three pictures, three illustrations, from everyday life. And those three images taken together help us understand the results of what Christ has accomplished for us.

The first image or picture comes in the beginning of verse 19. As we saw last week, Paul says that we are citizens, fellow citizens, of God's kingdom. We are fellow citizens of God's kingdom. That means that God is now our king. We have been transported out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. God has become our king and all other Christians have become our fellow citizens in this new kingdom, in this new country, in which we live, if you will. So, we have become connected to other Christians. We have been united to them in the same way that citizens of a country are united to each other.

The second picture that he gives is at the end of verse 19. He says we are members of God's family. Notice how he puts it. He says you are of God's household. That means that God is now the father of every Christian, as we saw last week. That's a wonderful truth. If you're in Christ, God is your Father. That's how He wants you to think of Him. And that also means that all Christians, regardless of their backgrounds, are now fellow-members of the same family.

Today we come to Paul's third illustration. Not only are we fellow citizens of God's kingdom and fellow members of God's family, but we are also stones in God's temple. We are stones in God's temple. Paul here changes his metaphor. He leaves the metaphor of a kingdom and the metaphor of a family, and surprisingly, he compares the union that we have experienced with

God and with each other to a building, to architecture. Now we might ask, why would Paul go there? Well, the Greek words for “household” in the end of verse 19, and the word building that follows, those words in Greek are very closely related. They look very similar. They come from the same root. So, mentioning God’s household in verse 19 may have suggested this image to Paul. But this was an image with which he was very familiar. In fact, he’d used it six years earlier in his letter to the Corinthians, which we’ll see in just a few minutes. I should say his letter to the Corinthians, his first letter to them, 1 Corinthians.

But regardless, Paul turns from the metaphor of a family to the metaphor of architecture. Why would Paul do this? Well, obviously Paul was a son of the city. He grew up in Tarsus, as I think I’ve shared with you before, which was the third largest city in the ancient world, behind only Rome and Alexandria in Egypt. He lived in Jerusalem during his teenage years under the tutelage of Gamaliel. And then after, he returned to his home town of Tarsus. So, probably before Christ began His ministry, Paul left Jerusalem and returned to Tarsus where he lived a number of more years until he returned to Jerusalem to snuff out this new sect that had been started by a crucified Jewish man claiming to be the Messiah.

And of course, on the Damascus road, he encountered the living Christ, was radically changed, and from there he continued ministry to the large cities of the ancient world. He spent 18 months in the city of Corinth. He spent almost three years in the great city of Ephesus. And when he wrote this letter to the church in Ephesus, he’d been in Rome for more than a year. So, Paul had lived in some of the greatest cities of the ancient world. He had seen some of their magnificent buildings. So, it’s not surprising that his mind goes to this image of architecture.

But there are a number of other reasons that are even more important. One, in particular, I want to call to your attention. And that is that it was Christ Himself who first used this metaphor to describe the church. In fact, this metaphor of a building, of architecture, was the very first picture Jesus used to describe the church. You remember what He said to His disciples in Matthew 16:18, after that wonderful confession by Peter that Jesus was in fact the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus said, “I ... say [un]to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock [that is, the rock of your confession, the truth of who I am] I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” So, Jesus introduces this image of architecture into the life of the church. It continues throughout. I’ll show you in a few minutes in 1 Corinthians 3, Paul uses this image. In 2 Corinthians 6:16 he says we, as the church, are the temple of the living God.

Turn to 1 Peter, though, 1 Peter 2. Peter uses this same image in just a beautiful way. First Peter 2:4, he talks about Christ as this cornerstone, rejected by men. Verse 5, You also, now talking to the Christians. You also as living stones. That's a wonderful picture. It's an unusual one. It's as if you are living stones, being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

So, we are stones in God's great temple. Now turn back to Ephesians 2:20 and let me remind you of the context in which Paul is writing this. Remember that he's trying to show the Jewish and Gentile believers in the church in Ephesus that they are now united together. And believe it or not, this third picture, of Christians as a building, actually conveys a deeper, more profound unity than the other two pictures do. It's clear Paul intends a progression, certainly between the first two pictures. I mean, obviously, the second image of a family is much more intimate and profound than the image of a citizen. Most people are, by nature, far more committed to their family than they are to their country. But on the surface, Paul's third illustration seems to be kind of a step back.

How can a building be a greater illustration of unity than that of a family with God as the Father and the children all together as children in the same family? How can a building be a better illustration of unity we enjoy in the church than that of a family? Well, think about it for a moment, just in the reality of families as they typically are.

Sadly, there are many families that are splintered and shattered through sinful choices, through attacks and counter-attacks. There are spouses who live together for years in the same house in a settled state of conflict. Parents and children may be so completely at odds that they go for years without speaking to each other. Sibling rivalry can escalate from childhood squabbles into a cold war, and eventually even into full scale fighting. But regardless of how fragmented a family becomes, regardless of how much they separate and divide, regardless of how much as individuals they take their own path, whether they like it or not, in the end they are still what, a family. And so, you can get the wrong picture from that of a family. That of individuals taking their own path and still sort of loosely belonging to a family by name.

And so, this third picture will not allow that. Between the stones of an ancient building there was an essential unity. Now you have to get out of your mind to fully appreciate this picture, the idea of the brick and mortar homes in which many of us live. That's not how the ancient world did it. There was no mortar used. Instead, stones, particularly in the building of a temple as Paul is describing here. There would be great stones of marble or granite carefully prepared and

squared and then the master builder would take those stones, see where they best fit in that building, and lay them into that building. If, after the stones were laid, they wanted to block the flow of air for cold or heat purposes, they could come in and fill the cracks that remain with some sort of a substance, but essentially the stones were simply sitting on each other, held together and in place by the force of each other's presence.

If you were to break apart the stones, what happens? The building collapses. It ceases to be a building. That is Paul's key point here. As the church of Jesus Christ, you and I are so interconnected that we have to rely on each other like the stones, the great marble slabs, in an ancient temple. And if one is removed, you risk the collapse of the entire building. The building no longer stands. It's crucial that you keep that in mind as we work our way through these verses.

Now, I want us to look at this third metaphor of the church in detail. I want us, as we do so, to track with the flow of the apostle Paul's thought here. So, we need to start as he does with the materials that go into making the church as a building. What materials are a part of this building? Notice that Paul lists several. The first one he lists in verse 20 is the foundation. Notice verse 20. "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets..." Paul says that church there in Ephesus, that church to which I'm writing, your church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Folks, there is no more comprehensive, profound statement about the nature of the church in all the Scripture than that one. Pardon the pun, but it is absolutely foundational. Wherever there is a true church, this will describe it. Because it's so important, I want us to devote the rest of our time this morning to understanding this one phrase, this one material, in its fullness and applying it very practically to how we live and how we make choices in today's world.

So, let's start by breaking it apart. We want to look at this foundation. First of all, we have to be clear on who these two groups are that Paul mentions, the apostles and the prophets. Who are the apostles? Well, biblically, if you were to survey the New Testament, you would find that the apostles are distinguished by three criteria. First of all, they were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ. In Acts 1, you remember, when they were looking to replace Judas after the resurrection of Christ, they lay out that criteria. He must be a witness of the resurrected Christ.

Secondly, they were handpicked, commissioned, and sent by Christ Himself. This is absolutely essential. You just didn't decide you were going to be an apostle. People in your church didn't decide you were going to be an apostle. Jesus Himself handpicked and sent these men. In fact,

the word itself is not an English word. The word “apostle” is simply transliterated from Greek. The Greek word is “apostolos.” It means an official messenger sent on behalf of another. That’s what it means. To be an apostle meant that you were, by definition, “hand-picked, and commissioned and sent by someone else,” in this case, Christ Himself.

Thirdly, the apostles were uniquely empowered by Christ. They were uniquely empowered. There are a number of passages we could look at. We could look at the second chapter of Hebrews, but let me just remind you of 2 Corinthians 12:12. There Paul writes, “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you....” In other words, I performed among you the signs of a true apostle, “signs and wonders and miracles.”

Those are the three criteria that distinguish a biblical apostle. Witnesses of the resurrected Christ, commissioned and sent by Christ Himself, and uniquely empowered by Christ to do that which others could not. The apostles in the New Testament are, of course, the twelve that Jesus picked during His earthly ministry minus Judas, who was a betrayer from the beginning. In Galatians 1, James, the Lord’s brother, is called an apostle, and Paul himself in 1 Corinthians 9:1. These men saw the resurrected Christ, and they were hand-picked by Him, and they were given a special mission. That mission was to speak for Christ, and about Christ through their preaching and through their writings. They were appointed proxies for Jesus. This is so important for you to understand about the apostles.

In fact, let me show you what our Lord said to them. Turn back to John 14. This is crucial for you to understand in the role of the apostles. John 14, of course we’re picking up the night of the last supper. This is the upper room discourse. Jesus is talking to His disciples. He says to them, (by the way, at this point Judas has left, so He’s just talking to the eleven). He says to them in John 14:26. Let’s start in verse 25. He says,

These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you...” [In other words, while I’ve been with you I’ve taught you certain things.] “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

Now, folks, this passage has legitimate application to us, but it was not written and addressed to us. This is to the eleven. Jesus is saying to them, “while I was with you, I taught you certain things, and when I leave, I’m going to send the Spirit, my Father and I will send the Spirit, and

the Spirit will teach you all things, and the Spirit will bring to your mind everything that I taught you while I was here.” This was a promise to the apostles of Jesus Christ.

Now, turn over to chapter 16. Jesus comes back to this a little later in the evening. Chapter 16, same night, same upper room discourse, John 16:12,

I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you.”

Now notice the flow of thought here. Jesus has said, I taught you a lot while I was with you. There are other things I want to teach you, but you’re not ready for them now. So, again, I’m going to send the Spirit, and when the Spirit comes, He’s going to teach you all that you need to know, and He will bring to your mind and remembrance everything I’ve taught you.

Now with that in mind, turn over to chapter 17. What are they supposed to do with all of this? Here we come to what’s called our Lord’s high priestly prayer. This is really the Lord’s prayer. The one that’s commonly called that is the disciples prayer that He taught us to pray. But here’s the Lord’s prayer, and in it, notice what He says as He comes back to this theme again. He prays in verse 7. He says, “Now they have come to know [He’s talking to the Father about the disciples, now they have come to know] that everything You have given me is from You.” What’s He talking about. Well, look at the next verse, He explains it. He’s talking about the words. “for the words which You gave me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me.”

Verse 14, “I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” Verse 17, Father, use this word that I’ve given them to sanctify them, and verse 18,

As You sent Me into the world with the word I have sent them into the world with the word. For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves may be sanctified in truth. Verse 20 “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, [My apostles] but for those also who believe in Me through their word.”



Now do you see the train of thought here? The progression? Jesus says I wanted to teach you a lot more than I taught you. I did teach you a lot, but I wanted to teach you more. When the Spirit comes, He will teach you, He will remind you of everything I taught you. I've given you the word of God, you've believed it and received it, now you are to take that word and to pass it on to others and they will believe in Me through your word. This is Jesus' mandate to the apostles to communicate His word. They were proxies for Jesus. That was the job of the apostles, to take the word given to them by Christ and the Spirit, ultimately from the Father, and communicate it to us. The New Testament is the ultimate fulfillment of their mission, given to them by Christ, which we hold today. That is the apostles.

So, go back to Ephesians 2. Understand that's their primary role, receive the truth, understand the truth, be led into all truth, communicate the truth so that others will believe in that word as well.

Now, verse 20 also speaks of the prophets. Who are the prophets? Well, the word "prophecy is actually not a translation from Greek, but it's a transliteration. Our English word comes from the Greek word "prophetes." The word literally means "to speak before" or "to speak for another." More than 3800 times in the Old Testament, prophets introduced their message with expressions like this. "The word of the Lord came to." "The mouth of the Lord has spoken" "The Lord says." "The Lord spoke." "Hear the word of the Lord." You see, a prophet was one who did not speak out of his own heart, but spoke on behalf of another. The prophet was God's messenger, God's mouthpiece.

To put it another way, the prophet speaks a message from God. Prophecy then, is revelation from God. I don't think it can be put any better than in Jeremiah 1. God calls Jeremiah to be a prophet, and then He says this: here's his job description. I will put My words in your mouth. That was the role of a prophet. I will put My words in your mouth. And it's not explaining existing revelation. I am not acting in the role of a prophet this morning. I am in the role of a teacher and a preacher. I am simply explaining to you the revelation that's already been given. The role of a prophet was to speak with fresh revelation from God. It is new truth. A prophet is one who brings new truth from God, one who gives divine revelation.

Typically, that revelation takes one of two forms. It is either predictive revelation, that is, it predicts the future. Or it is moral and ethical revelation. The prophets often predicted the future, but really more often they received revelation from God and they preached against the sins of the people. But in both cases, the key and primary characteristic of prophecy is that it is always new

revelation. So then, throughout the Scripture, a prophet is one who speaks new revelation from God. But what exactly is Paul referring to in Ephesians 2? Who are these prophets here? Well, let me just be honest with you. Throughout church history there's been much debate about who these prophets are. Some have said "well, it's talking about the Old Testament prophets, so that the church is founded on the Old Testament as well." Others have said "no, it's talking about the New Testament prophets." And some say it means both.

Well, I think, obviously, it can include both and to some extent it would be appropriate to say that it includes both. But it seems clear to me in this context that Paul intends primarily the New Testament prophets. Let me tell you why. There are several reasons. The first and most obvious one is the word order. Notice he says apostles before prophets. If he were talking about the Old Testament, chronologically, Paul would normally have used "prophets" before "apostles" to indicate that time. Also, in this context, he's talking about a new thing. Remember, in this passage, this is the new thing God is doing, this church inhabited by Jews and Gentiles. That points to new revelation, New Testament revelation, not to old.

But I think there are two passages in Ephesians that sort of seal the deal. Look at Ephesians 4:8-11. Notice the order here. Paul says in verse 8 that, when Christ ascended, as a result of that ascension, He gave gifts to men. What gifts? Verse 11, He gave some *as* apostles and some *as* prophets.... So, Jesus ascended, and as a result of His ascension, He gave prophets to the church. That would be New Testament prophets, because they are after the ascension.

But I think the passage that really drives it home is Ephesians 3. Ephesians 3:4. Paul says I'm writing about this mystery. Verse 5, "which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men" [So in the past, unknown] "... it has now been revealed [how, or to whom?] to His holy apostles and prophets...." That would seem to imply that by "prophets" Paul is referring to New Testament prophets. So, I think it's clear then that by "prophets" Paul means those men in the New Testament church who were given to the church in its early days before there was a New Testament, to speak revelation from God. As the New Testament was completed, the need for both apostles and prophets went away. God had provided His complete revelation in a book. So that's the role of the apostles and prophets.

But the question comes then, if those are the apostles and those are the prophets, then in what sense were they the foundation of the church? Well, it could be that because they were some of the first converts. They were the foundation in the sense that they were early in the life in the church, in coming to Christ. And that's certainly true. But I think there's a lot more here. Look

back at chapter 3 again, and verse 5. Notice the emphasis Paul makes here in what we got from the apostles and prophets. What they contributed to the church. He says this mystery which didn't used to be known has now been what? revealed to the apostles and prophets. The clear implication is that the role the apostles and prophets played in the life of the early church was revelation, was God's truth revealed. That's the sense in which he means. The apostles and prophets are the foundation of the church in the sense that what was revealed to them and what they taught served as the foundation for the church.

Six years earlier Paul had written to the Corinthians, in his first letter to them, and he had expounded on this picture. Turn back there with me to 1 Corinthians 3. First Corinthians 3. In verse 9 Paul uses this image. He says you are God's building. And then he launches into an explanation of that. Verse 10.

According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder  
I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful  
how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is  
laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Now how does this compare to what Paul is saying in Ephesians 2? Well notice here, Paul likens his role as an apostle to that of a skilled master builder. It's a Greek word that occurs only here in the New Testament. A master builder was the craftsman who had the greatest experience and skill and who was therefore given the responsibility over the entire building project. He was the construction manager, if you will. God gave Paul the responsibility to oversee the building of the church. And he says, like a skilled master builder, I laid the foundation.

Now, in our day, for many buildings, we would get the impression that the foundation and who lays it is really not that important. Yes, it needs to be level, but it's really not that big of a deal. That was certainly not true, it's not true today, but it certainly wasn't true in the ancient world. Laying the foundation was absolutely crucial. Large stones were meticulously cut and each one carefully laid in place, and the rest of the building, every other stone in the building, was laid and trued against that foundation and those foundation stones.

Paul laid the only legitimate foundation for the church. Look at verse 11. No one can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid. Paul does not mean that it's impossible for a church leader to try to build a church on a different foundation. That happens all the time. What Paul means is that if you do build on a different foundation, it will not be the church. Or at least, it

will not be the church of Jesus Christ. So, it's crucial to know then what this foundation is. And here in Corinthians Paul simply says, "the one which is laid" or the one already in place. In other words, the foundation I laid when I planted the church there in Corinth. What was it? It was Jesus Christ. Now, he doesn't mean the person of Jesus Christ. Paul didn't lay the person of Jesus Christ. He's talking about the revelation that comes through Jesus, or from Jesus, I should say, through His apostles and prophets about Jesus and His person and message. He means all the truth that God has revealed through Christ and about Christ and through the revelation given to the apostles and prophets of the early church. The church is built on the New Testament, if you like. That's what he's saying. The church is built on the New Testament revelation. That's crucial to understand.

Now in the few minutes we have remaining, let me give you several immense ramifications of this incredible statement of Paul's. Several immense ramifications.

The first and most obvious one is this. Any authentic church must be built upon this foundation. Any authentic church must be built on the same foundation. If you want to build a true church, you must build on the one foundation that has already been laid, the New Testament revelation that came from Jesus through His apostles and prophets, and is about Christ and His work. If you were to build on a different foundation it would be what? Not a church. If you were to turn back to 1 Corinthians 3, and you don't need to do that, in verse 10 Paul added this. "I laid the foundation, but another is building on it." Another, here, refers to the leaders of the Corinthian church, and ultimately to the leaders of every church, of any church. The picture is that of a massive, multi-generational building project.

You know, we build buildings quickly. When we build our children's building, it's going to take less than a year to build, and we're done. In the ancient world it wasn't so. It would be multi-generational. The temple of Artemis in Ephesus where these people lived took a hundred and twenty years to build. Herod's temple in Jerusalem, ninety years in the process of building. When it comes to the church of Christ, it's still being built two thousand years later. The master builder completed the foundation, and everything the rest of us build must be squared up to that. For generations the leaders of the church have been building. Workers have followed the plans and continued to build, and that's our job as well.

Today there are an endless array of options for how to build a church. A new approach for building a church comes along every couple of years. In fact, my desk is flooded every week with new ideas. If you'll only do this, you'll get amazing results in the church. It'll

revolutionize your church. Listen, it's not my prerogative to decide how I want to build the church, what I want the church to be. The elders and I are supposed to build by the blueprint, to stick with the plan, to square everything with the foundation. We are to build the church on the foundation of God's revelation. This is the priority of a New Testament elder.

If you were to go through the pastoral epistles, you know what Paul tells his young sons in the faith? He says, listen, here's what I want you to do with the treasure, the truth, the doctrine that's been passed on to you. I want you to preach it. I want you to live it. I want you to guard it. And I want you to pass it on to the next generation. That's our job. That's my job. That's the job of the elders in this church. It is this focus on God's truth, God's revelation, that marks a true church.

Listen to John Calvin. He was speaking of the Roman Catholic Church of his day when he wrote these words, but they are every bit as appropriate for the churches around us today as they were then. Listen carefully.

Although they put forward outward shows, this empty glitter which blinds the eyes of the simple ought not to move us a whit to grant that the church exists where God's word is not found." [He says, listen, there may be a great show. There may be a lot of glitter, but where God's word isn't, there isn't the church. He goes on to say,] "For this is the abiding mark with which our Lord has sealed His own. He who is of God hears the words of God.

Martin Luther put it like this.

The only mark, the only mark of a Christian church is following and obeying the word. When that is gone, let men boast as much as they please, church, church, there's nothing to their boasting. Therefore, you should say, do the people have the Word of God there. And do they accept it too. Wherever one hears the Word of God, there is the church of God.

The church should be built on the right foundation, the revelation of God in and through His Son.

Ramification number two: The only basis of our unity is the doctrine of the New Testament. The only basis of unity with other professing Christians is the doctrine of the New Testament. You know there's a consistent cry of unity with everyone who calls himself a Christian today. But

the true church, folks, is always built on doctrine, on the content of the New Testament message. Lloyd-Jones put it like this, “Whether we like it or not, Christianity is a most intolerant faith. It says that this and this alone is right and true.”

Paul put it in this way to the Galatians. He said, “if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, he is to be damned.” Listen, you know what that means? The fact that Paul was telling them that means that there was truth, that that truth could be known and understood, that it was exclusive to everything else that was error. Everything else was not the true gospel. Every other message would not save, but would damn the soul.

Today there are many people who claim to be Christians, but who scoff at the truths taught by the apostles and the prophets on the pages of the New Testament. People in liberal denominations in the health, wealth, and prosperity movement, in the cults, and even many in the emergent church movement connected to evangelicalism, various people will mock at the deity of Christ. Others will mock at His virgin birth or the substitutionary atonement or the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scripture. And then we are told that they are brothers and sisters in Christ, and we should embrace them. It’s ridiculous. Listen, the true church is always, always built on the foundation of the New Testament message.

Lloyd-Jones writes,

Paul preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified to the exclusion of everything else. He was intolerant. Do not listen to that other teaching, he says to the Galatians. It’s spurious. It’s a lie. It’s not a gospel. It’s a denial of the gospel. The foundation is the teaching of the apostles and prophets. We either accept their teaching and their message, or we do not. [And to finish up Lloyd-Jones,] if you accept it, you’re part of the true church, and if you don’t, you’re not. The only basis of unity is doctrine, the fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith.

Ramification number three. Let me hurry along. The foundation is already complete. You don’t add to the foundation, you don’t take away from the foundation. There are no more apostles. There are no more prophets. Whether you’re talking about apostolic succession with its papal infallibility and its speaking ex cathedra, or whether it’s prophets in the charismatic movement giving further revelation. Whether it’s Baptist popes, or whether it’s legalistic authoritarian pastors who bind their people’s consciences with standards and convictions that are nowhere

taught on the pages of the New Testament, understand the foundation has already been laid. We don't add to the foundation. That's not our job. We don't take away from it. We simply measure what we believe and how we live against the standard.

Number four. And finally, every individual Christian life, every individual Christian life, must be built upon the same foundation of the truth. Let me make it very personal. You claim to be a Christian. Is your Christian life built solidly on the foundation of the apostles and prophets? If this church must be, to be a church; then you must be, to be a Christian. To what extent does God's revelation govern what you believe and how you live? Are you a man or a woman of the book, of one book? That's the commitment we must make as individual Christians.

Perhaps nowhere in church history has that singular commitment to the foundation of New Testament revelation been more clearly modeled than by a young doctor of theology, a German former monk by the name of Martin Luther. In those immortal words at the Diet of Worms, in 1521, this is what he said.

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures, for I do not trust either in the pope or in the councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves, I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted. And my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I stand, God help me.

May God set our lives on the same foundation, regardless of what the cost may be in our families, at work, in our businesses, or in the world at large, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Every true church and every true Christian is therein described.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You so much for Your Word, for how it speaks directly to the core issues of our lives. Father, I pray that You would work in our hearts, that You would help us to embrace the foundation. Help us to square our own individual lives against it, and help us to square this church against it as well.

Lord, may we care most of all what the Bible says. Lord, I pray that You would help us to be committed to it regardless of how things around us may change.

Lord, I pray for someone here this morning who is not a Christian. Who isn't part of the building. They're not a stone in Your temple, but rather they have a heart of stone. It's cold to You. I pray that today you would draw them to Yourself. Open their mind and heart to see Christ in all His beauty, that they would desire Him and long to have the forgiveness that only He can give, and to follow Him with their lives.

Father, I pray for the person here this morning who is a believer in Christ, but who has strayed from the foundation in their personal life. Lord, I pray that You would help them today to resolve, to build again on the foundation, to square everything in life against the teaching of Your word, to live thinking about it, reading it, meditating on it, every day.

And Father, I pray for us as a church that You'd keep us true to You by keeping us solidly in line with the foundation that has been laid.

We pray it in the name of our Lord, the Lord of the church, and for His sake, Amen.