So, for those of you who may not know we need to have the Incredible Mrs. Cadorette’s Mother, Sue, and her brother, Jon out of their home by the 30th of June- this includes all the furniture and belongings still in the house. **THE question is: will everything fit into the storage unit?** So as the **Family Packer**, I spent part of Wednesday re-packing the storage unit with the goal of getting as much as possible off the floor so that we’re using all the vertical space of the unit- by stacking. *It’s like playing the video game Tetris- in slow motion … with furniture*. And like Tetris [or any proper bit of packing] **each piece must fit just so** for the sake of *stability, weight distribution and stackability.* This one providing a base for that. And that one holding the weight of the other. *To do that the pieces must be fitted together just so*

Not unlike the new siding or the wallboard going up in the remodel of our house: **each piece is necessary** and **each piece has to fit just right**. And a skilled drywaller or carpenter are critical to a successful fitting of each part into the whole.

Now it’s most likely Paul is writing to **“blended congregations”** of Jewish and Gentile Christians- probably more non-Jews than Jews. And it is now- and has always been- God’s plan that, in the coming of Messiah, God’s salvation would reach the ends of the earth, that is: *that it would be available to every human regardless of ethnic origin* [Rev 7:9, Matt 28:19]. *The multi-ethnic faith community we call The Church was NEVER a fallback plan or God having to “punt” when Israel couldn’t “make the down.”*

The **building of this multi-ethnic faith community** where ALL the pieces [near/far] are equal and necessary in Christ was **ALWAYS** the Father’s goal. And **Jesus, the Son of God**, - born as an Israelite male, a descendant of Abraham and David- was THE ONE to *fulfill the law in Himself and so break down the barrier that was the LAW via his death on the cross* [2:14-15]. With the barrier gone and God’s Holy Spirit present the Good News of the Gospel could go out and bring peace to those near or far away.

Let’s take a look

**\*\*\* 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near;**

Here Paul is referring to **Jesus as the one preaching Peace**. Paul is borrowing a phrase from **Isaiah 57:19** where God is speaking to the Israelites who are in exile - refugees in a foreign land longing for home. He’s clear they’re getting the consequences of their actions but he promises to heal them. **Is 57:19** …Peace, peace to him who is far away and to him who is near,” Says the LORD, “and I will heal him.” In Isaiah those “far away” are the disobedient Jews sent off to exile- but God still plans to bring them peace.

In Ephesians, the **“near”** ones are the Jews whose proximity to God came through the Law, Prophets, covenants, Temple, sacrifices, etc. Those **“far away”** are the Gentiles who had none of those “having no hope and without God in the world” [2:12].

So these Gentiles were even MORE far away than the exiled Jews.

**But Jesus,** with all the authority of the Father- the Creator of all things, *declares PEACE to everyone:* **those near and those far away.** In Acts 10 when God sends Peter to bring the gospel to Cornelius the god-fearing Centurion- a gentile! Peter realizes what God is doing and tells these “far away” ones about the “good news of peace through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all” [Acts 10:36] *The Lord Jesus Christ, King of all Kings and Lord of all lords declares PEACE.* And so it shall be no matter how far away we may be.

I was a fan of Christian singer **Wayne Watson** back in the day. In days when I had time for music his often filled up our house. He had a song called **“Long Arm of the Lord.”** It was all about running from God and how far away we might run from Him but as the hook went: *“You can never outrun or go beyond the reaches of the long arm of the Lord.”* *Jew or Gentile you cannot be too far away for Jesus’ peace to reach you.* No matter what, Jesus preaches Peace!

**\*\*\* 18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.**

The proof of this peace is that **all of us** in this multi-ethnic family of God [jew or Gent] **have access to God** through the one Holy Spirit that lives in all of us as a result of our allegiance with Jesus.

Remember this from John’s gospel: **John 16:7** “But I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I am leaving; for if I do not leave, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. Jesus had to die on the cross, rise again, and ascend to the right hand of the Father and then the Holy Spirit could be given.
That Spirit **unites us to the Father and to one another** regardless of our ethnicity.

*If you love Jesus you have the Holy Spirit within you***.** Since we all have the same Spirit then- if we submit to it- from that Spirit there should come a unity because as in **Eph 4:4** *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you also were called in one hope of your calling; **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6** one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

It’s through **our Faith in Jesus that we have the Holy Spirit** within us. And the Holy Spirit is our direct connection to the Father. And this is true for everyone for whom Jesus is Lord. Same Spirit: Same connection.

**\*\*\* 19 So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household,**

So Jesus declares Peace to all equally- Jew or Gentile. And the Holy Spirit gives us all equal access to the Father- Jew or Gentile. And those two things together mean “there are no outsiders in God’s family.” **Every one of us belongs.**

**And no one belongs more than any other.**

Some of us in the FBC family are quiet. You don’t say a lot. You don’t share a lot.

You don’t bring a lot of prayer concerns up during prayer time. *And it’s possible to think* [mistakenly] *that those who talk more, belong more.*

Or one could think [mistakenly] FBC Board Members belong more cause they’re leadership.

Or one could think [mistakenly] those seated on my right “belong more” than those on my left.

Or one could think [mistakenly] that those present “in person” belong more than our streaming family. Now don’t get me wrong: I do think it’s better for the whole Church when all of us are physically together. *But that has nothing to do with belonging to the family of God.*

I mean, look at today! Nobody’s here but me today! *No one belongs more than any other.*

Imagine a worship gathering in a house church in Laodicea. There’s a Laodicean native sitting next to a Jew he’s wearing his prayer shawl, he knows all the lyrics to the Psalms they’re singing, and knows all the gospel stories about Jesus, and seems so holy, so at ease with this worship. This non-Jew, who’s heard about Jesus and believed and been baptized might feel like a foreigner, a stranger- an outsider. Paul is saying to that guy: Dude, you’re a *birth-certificate-carrying member of God’s household.* You’re a birthright citizen of the kingdom of God. You are a full equal among the united people of the one true God.

That’s some serious good news to any refugee or outcast.

**\*\*\* 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone**

**Ephesians, Philippians Colossians & Philemon** were all written by Paul while in Prison. Paul was in prison from **60-62 CE** -give or take- that’s @30 years after Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension.

*In those 30 years there has been a solid foundation built for the church through the Apostles’ eyewitness testimony about all that Jesus said and did* - about his willing death on the cross, about His utterly unexpected Resurrection to a bodily life after death and his literal ascension to the throne-room of God.

**One of the biblical requirements to be an apostle** is to have seen the resurrected Jesus. [ Acts 1:21-22 -filling Judas place.] And **one of the perks of being an apostle** was the on-going instruction of God’s Holy Spirit as Jesus promised: **John 16:13** But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

And besides the apostles, **Jesus, by the Spirit has also empowered Prophets** [Eph 4:11]. These are not the OT prophets. These are prophets of the NT period who are, not foretellers- tellers of the future; **but are forth-tellers, preachers who expound, frame for the culture, and apply the teachings of Jesus** and the OT scriptures.

Paul’s point here is: **this movement is no new thing!** This movement has legs and it’s moving on with vigor and vitality and has been so for the past 30 years. He’s telling his gentile audience: **you are part of a thing that, in time, will encompass all the earth.** This is no hack job Faith, no fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants Faith. This is the real deal with a strong foundation featuring Jesus, himself as the “Cornerstone” of that foundation.

Now there is a small issue with the **translation of the word Cornerstone.** There is some uncertainty as to whether *the chosen word should mean cornerstone or Keystone*.

**The first** [cornerstone] is the original stone set into the foundation that sets the level and solidity of the whole building. **The second** [keystone] is a stone at the top of the wall that intentionally binds two walls together.

Because Paul is *working a metaphor* about **a temple, where the bricks are Jews and gentiles** who have given their lives to Jesus, *maybe the keystone, joining two separate walls together, is the better choice,* but either works.

In any case THE big point of v20 is to *encourage the gentile contingent that they are equal partners in God’s long-term work in Christ to redeem the world.*

**\*\*\* 20 Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.**

When we began **I told you about my stacking furniture in the storage unit and how each piece had to fit just so.** And in the remodeling of our home, each piece, be it wall board or siding, or electrical boxes or plumbing- **all the parts are necessary to the whole and all the parts must fit just so.**

Jews in Roman Asia minor might have known that Herod’s temple was just completed -in AD 63- when this letter was on the road. Herod’s Temple was one of the wonders of the ancient world. **Josephus,** who saw it with his own eyes, reports: *“The exterior of the building lacked nothing that could astound either mind or eye. . . . “* It is said *Herod had 1000 Temple Priests trained as builders and stonemasons so they could do the work on the inner courts where non-priests were not allowed*.
Each stone, each pillar, each decoration, all perfectly fitted in place, set with precision and loving care to be the dwelling place of God, to be the singular place where Heaven and Earth met.

Remember, for the Jews **the Temple in Jerusalem was the political, social, cultural heart of Jerusalem.** It was the place of pilgrimage and celebration and, of course, the religious heart of Israel. But in 7 short years that temple will be burned, looted and pulled down to nearly nothing.

**In the meantime God is constructing a new temple made of people- both Jews and gentiles.**

In one sense it’s as if we all are **the living stones** -Jew and gentile alike- that **God is skillfully fitting together** to build a Temple fit for Himself. In that case all of the parts and pieces are critically necessary- YOU are necessary, to the structural integrity and the beauty of the Temple God is fitting together. No one is expendable.

If you are removed from the structure - whether you be a stone in the corner of a wall, or a carved leaf covered in gold plate on the decorative grapevine that adorned the Sanctuary’s entrance- God’s dwelling is diminished if you’re not there. And all of us – Jews and gentiles- suffer for the lack.

In another sense each of us- within ourselves- is **the dwelling place of God** in the Holy Spirit [the Temple]- and – though it’s shocking to say it- each of us is -because of the Holy Spirit within us- a place where Heaven and earth meet; a place where the presence of God can be felt and known.

Even here- at FBC- all the pieces are necessary if we hope to grasp the fullest possible image of God. *[Right now the image of God in this place is nigh invisible- cause it’s only me.]*

Listen, because of the God-ordained differences in the way He’s created us, **I believe each of us contains something of God that is unique.** You have this aspect or perspective, or insight into God, something He’s built into you, that nobody else has. **Priscilla** sees things **Tye** doesn’t. **Tye** understands something **Vicky** can’t see. **Vicky** has insight that even **Phyllis** hasn’t realized, and **Phyllis** knows more of God than I will likely ever know. See what I mean: *every brick is necessary*.

In Jesus you 21… **are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.**  *All the parts of this multi-ethnic family of God are needed to make up the structure and beauty of the Temple in which God has now chosen to make His dwelling*. And that’s US! You and me, and all who name Jesus as Lord, submitting to Him and living faithfully for Him to the end. We are the dwelling of God in the Spirit.

**And God wants all of us -whether near or far- present and participating.**

**Jesus declares Peace to us all.** The Spirit gives us direct access to the Father, making us full equals among the Saints, the united people of the one true God.

Our foundation is sure- set on the eyewitness testimony of the **apostles** and the Spirit driven teaching of the **forth-telling prophets** empowered by Jesus who is the Stone that holds the whole of this temple together.

[As I said earlier] Peter, using a similar metaphor to Paul’s calls us **“living stones”** being built into a **“spiritual house.”**

All those stones have to fit together just so.

**As it is in the Temple, so it is in a family.** A family also has to fit together. And in the Family of God we are **not foreigners or strangers**, but fellow citizens with the Saints and of the Family of God. That’s you, my dears.

You are the holy dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

And so you are the Family of God.

Now I will sing you a little song.

**Family, you are my family**

**And Jesus, He is my Lord**

**And I’m so glad That we are here together**

**And I’m so glad That the Father is our God**

**Temple, we are God’s Temple**

**With Jesus as Cornerstone
And I’m so glad God fit us all together**

**And I’m so glad We’re the dwelling of our Lord.**

**Eph. 2:11**   Therefore remember that previously you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision” *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands— **12** *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the people of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

**13** But now in Christ Jesus you who previously were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

**14** For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, **15** by abolishing in His flesh the hostility, *which is* the Law *composed* of commandments *expressed* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two one new person, *in this way* establishing peace; **16** and that He might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the hostility.

**17** And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; **18** for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. **19** So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, **20** having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, **21** in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, **22** in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Because we missed our last Dinner Discussion on Ephesians and you know how much I love review.

Ten multiple choice questions to review our time in Ephesians so far. Get a pencil and write down the letter of the correct answer- 10 questions.

**Ephesians: Test of Smartness**

1. In his greeting we see Paul is writing to people he refers to as…

A. Dudes B. Goombahs **C. Saints** D. Fellow-Babies

2. In our best and oldest manuscripts of Ephesians two words are left out of the greeting. They are:

A. Happy Birthday, **B. In Ephesus,** C. Send Money, D. Call me

3. In 1:3 we’re told God has blessed us with what?
A. super human strength, B. a parking space just when we needed it

**C. every spiritual blessing,** D. a beautiful chocolate cake

4. In v10 the Mystery of God’s will is a plan to…

**A. Bring all things together in Christ** B. Take us all on a road trip to Disneyland

C. Escape for a few days to a nice AirBNB,

D. Give everyone a $5 gift certificate to Heaven’s Gift Shop

5. In v13ff after hearing the gospel message and believing, you were:

A. hand-stamped so you could leave Heaven for lunch and come back.

B. Assigned your own personal “Jiminy Cricket”

**C. sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise**

D. taught the secret gospel handshake

6. In 1:20 we’re told God raised up Christ and seated him…

A. not next to Skip B. at a table near the kitchen

C. in an FBC orange chair, **D. far above all rule and authority and power and dominion…**

7. In 2:1-3 which of these is a way they DID NOT “WALK?”

A. According to the course of this world B. According to the prince of the power of the air

C. indulging the desires of the flesh **D. like a chimpanzee.**

 8. What did God do because of His love and mercy and in spite of us being dead in wrongdoings?

A. Treated us all to Waterfront Pizza. B. Gave us a $5 gift certificate to Heaven’s Gift Shop

C. Gave everyone a pony!

**D. …made us alive together with Christ… and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him**

9. In 2:12 Paul wants the Gentiles to remember that in the past they were…

A. the coolest kids on the block

B. about as sharp as a bag of twinkies.

**C. having no hope and without God in the world.**

D. a few clowns short of a 3-ring circus.

10. Jesus abolished in His flesh…

A. all artificial sweeteners when he gave up diet coke. B. all gluten to avoid a gassy tummy

**C. The Hostility, which is the Law** D. a hangnail that had been bothering Him for some time