

• **Gentiles – once aliens are now in the one-and-only church**

The gentiles were aliens ^{☒1}; God reconciled them to Himself and brought them into a reconstructed, law-free, Israel ^{☒2}. So what is their position now? They are in the one-and-only church. Paul describes their position in the church in three ways. *'So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God' ☒3. You are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner-stone ☒4 in whom the whole building being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord ☒5, in whom you also are built together to be a dwelling-place for God in the Spirit' ☒6.*

☒1 2:11-12

☒2 2:13-18

☒3 2:19

☒4 2:20

☒5 2:21

☒6 2:22

1. The church is like a city state

1. **The church is like a city-state.** Before, these gentile Ephesians had not felt at home among the people of God, and had no understanding of the national life of the people of God. But now these gentile Christians feel completely at home. With the law removed from its central position in the life of Israel, Israel has been re-formed. The Holy Spirit has been poured out on the remnant of Israel, at Jerusalem, on the Day of Pentecost. Now the gentiles have been brought into this newly restructured Israel, and even people like these gentile Ephesians became 'fellow citizens' with the first Jewish Christians. They have a new spiritual identity as God's people, and the same allegiance to Jesus that their Jewish Christian friends have. They are heirs to all that God promised Abraham and his seed. In this new 'holy city', some are Jews, some are gentiles, but all are fellow-citizens.

• **Jews and gentiles are fellow citizens**

2. The church is like a family

2. **The church is like a family.** This picture is a deeper one. One is closer to one's family than to fellow-citizens in a city-state. God is our Father; Jesus is our elder brother. Christians are brothers and sisters to each other. We choose our friends, but brothers and sisters are people that are given to us without our choosing them. Christians **are** our brothers and sisters; it is a God-given fact. There is a deep family-unity, a family likeness among us. There are family traditions and family secrets. Even despised gentiles are full members of a highly privileged family.

• **Brothers and sisters**

3. The church is like a building

3. **The church is like a building.** This is a yet deeper illustration, more profound than the previous two. For relationships in a city-state may not be close. Relationships in a family are closer, but in a building bricks and stones are built into each other. The illustration points to something even closer. Paul works out his illustration in five directions.

• **The foundation is apostles and prophets**

The foundation consists of apostles and prophets. Some believe (i) that the apostles and prophets are a unique one-generation group of men who were the channels of revelation for the first generation of the church. A once-for-all work of Christ is accompanied (on this view) by a once-for-all prophetic and apostolic revelation, including eye-witness testimony to the resurrection.

(ii) At the other extreme are those who insist that apostles and their prophetic colleagues continue to the end of the age.

(iii) My own view is that these two extremes must be combined. On the one hand, Ephesians 4:11–16 teaches that apostles and their prophetic colleagues must continue until the full maturity of the church. The apostles were men who founded churches. The prophets were their colleagues who spoke from God with words given by God. The first generation of apostles clearly had special responsibilities: eye-

• **Special responsibilities of the first generation**

• **The first generation is the model for later generations**

• **The cornerstone is Christ**

• **A particular character**

• **Living stones**

• **God's dwelling place**

witness testimony to the literal resurrection of Jesus, the writing of the New Testament documents, the establishing by their ministry the foundation of the church. The New Testament teaching is that the **later** church is taught by the first generation. The first generation – said Jesus in Matthew 28:20 – wins the second generation, ‘teaching **them** (the later converts) to observe all I have commanded **you** (the apostles and their colleagues)’. Jesus makes a similar distinction when He prays for the first generation and the later generations separately. He prays for **those** (in later times) who will believe in me through **their** word’ – the words of the group that travelled with and were trained by Jesus. This foundation of the universal church is surely ‘once for all time’ delivered to the saints in one generation. There may be apostles and prophets today; but today’s apostles cannot contradict the first apostles! The first generation is the model for later generations. It was the first apostles who were, personally and in their teaching, the foundation of Christ’s church.

The cornerstone is Christ. The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, ‘*Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone.*’ The ‘cornerstone’ was part of the foundation; it was the stone into which the other stones had to fit. (I reject the translation ‘keystone’ which was something different.) What determines whether a person is a Christian is whether he or she is ‘in Christ’. No one is truly part of God’s church unless he or she is united to the Lord Jesus Christ. Every true Christian has fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

This holy building has a particular character. It is a building which is firm in its unity, it is a growing building; it is a holy temple.

This holy building has living stones. We Christians are the stones. There is a lot of variety in this ‘holy building’. All sorts of nationalities and temperaments and characters are to be found there. They are not all oblong bricks as in most modern buildings, but the stones are of varied shapes and have to be chiselled and carved to fit well into the walls.

This holy building has a Resident. These Ephesian Christians – and we Christians of today – are ‘built together to be a dwelling-place for God in the Spirit’. God dwells among us, just as He came to inhabit His tabernacle and Solomon’s temple. Jesus builds His church, His temple. God comes to dwell in it. We – Jewish Christians and gentile Christians – experience Him by His Spirit.



	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)</i> books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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