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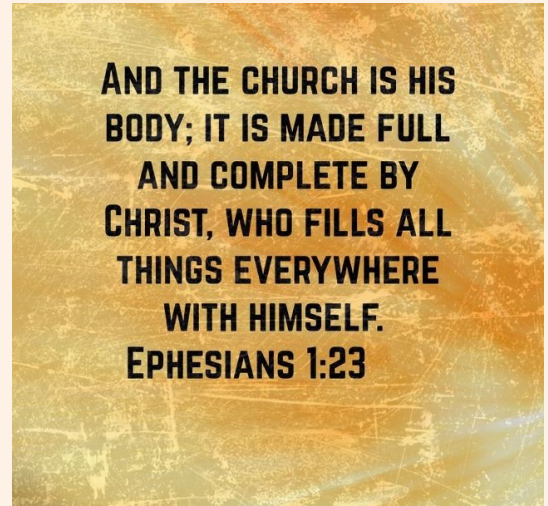
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The Church – His Body

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in your knowledge of Him. I ask that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know the hope of His calling, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and the surpassing greatness of His power to us who believe. These

are in accordance with the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God put everything under His feet and made Him head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Eph. 1:15-23



In this section of Ephesians Paul speaks about his prayer for the saints at Ephesus. He begins with thanksgiving and then moves on to describe the spiritual wisdom that God imparts to his saints. The knowledge of God imparts hope to the believers and is assured by the power of God working in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It culminates in the church which Jesus came to establish. The church functions as the spiritual body of Christ in the world.

Faith in the Lord always leads to love for all the saints. This is not the first time that Paul had heard or knew of the faith of those in Ephesus. He had lived and worked among them for 3 years or more. From his imprisonment in Rome Paul continues to hear of their faith.

Strong faith in the Lord leads us to love all the saints. Paul wrote in Romans 12:10, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.” And in 1 Thessalonians 4:9 Paul wrote, “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.” Paul was impressed by the Ephesians’ love for all the saints, and he gave thanks for that love.

Love for our brothers and sisters in Christ is encouraged throughout the Scriptures. John writes in 1 John 3:14, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love *his* brother abides in death.” Our spiritual lives are dependent on our love for the brethren. John also writes in 1 John 2:10, “Anyone who loves a fellow believer is living in the light and does not cause others to stumble” (NLT). If we want to walk in the light, then we must love our fellow believers. This love leads us to

care for one another in such a way that we are careful lest we cause others to stumble.

We could continue to multiply passages about love for one another. When we do not love the saints, it is evident that our faith is weak and may be dying. As John said, He who does not love his brother abides in death. What is dead is our faith which leads to spiritual darkness. No wonder Paul was thankful for the Ephesians' love for all the saints because it was evidence of their spiritual life and wellbeing.

Strong faith in the Lord leads us to love all the saints.

Paul says that his thinking about their faith and love led him to offer continual prayers of thanksgiving. Paul said he had not stopped giving thanks. I am sure Paul did a few more things than just offer prayers of thanks for the Ephesians, but the point is that he was deeply thankful.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe." Paul was a thankful person, and it is something he did without ceasing; in another words, Paul was in the habit of giving thanks for things. This is a good habit to cultivate. A thankful person is usually a happy one.

Paul wrote to the Colossians, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful" (Col. 3:15). When he wrote to Philemon about his slave Onesimus, Paul said, "I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers" (Phile. 1:4). Paul gave thanks often for his Christian brothers and sisters. It would be wonderful if we were always giving thanks for the faith and love of the brethren.

Such an attitude of thankfulness would forge a lasting bond of peace and love in the church.

Paul prays that God will give the Ephesians the spirit of wisdom and revelation. He is praying here for the enlightenment of the Ephesians, and notice that he asks for wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of "HIM". Jesus is the one we need to know. Paul isn't talking here about us being clever or more astute than our neighbor.

We can capture what Paul means in the words he wrote to the Corinthians:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God

Paul was in the habit of giving thanks for things.

made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Cor. 1:18-25)

The kind of wisdom and revelation Paul has in mind here is the kind that leads us to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not proud and puffed up. It is not calling attention to itself, but rather it is pointing men to the Savior. So, we need our eyes opened to see the hope of his calling, the riches of his inher-

itance, the greatness of his power.

What is the hope of his calling? The writer of Hebrews states it this way: “This *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the *Presence* behind the *veil*, where the forerunner has entered for us, *even* Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 6:19-20).

This hope is the anchor that keeps us from drifting away. We are anchored in Jesus our High Priest who is in the presence of God pleading our case. He was tempted like we are, so he knows our trials and perfectly understands our needs. Our hope in Christ will never disappoint us. It is insured for us because Jesus gave himself for us.

Paul wrote to the Romans, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produc-

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es perseverance and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom. 5:1-5).

Our hope in Christ isn’t just pie in the sky after a while. It sustains us in life’s trials, and it is instrumental in building strong character in us. The Christian faith leads to justification and produces peace with God. Through his grace we rejoice in hope, and the Holy Spirit fills our hearts with the love of God.

What are the riches of his inheritance? Our inher-

itance in Christ is eternal life. We are joint heirs with Christ. The Apostle Peter proclaims in 1 Peter 1:3-5, “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Our inheritance in Christ is not corruptible; it will not fade away or perish with time.

What is the greatness of his power? In Matthew 6:13 Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” God has the power to deliver us from the evil one through faith. God is all powerful and his kingdom reigns over all.

The Psalmist declares in Psalm 62:11-12, “God has spoken once, twice I have heard this: That power *belongs* to God. Also to You, O Lord, *belongs* mercy; for You render to each one according to his work.”

In the verse cited above Peter points to the demonstration of God’s power in raising Jesus from the dead. He says that God’s mercy begets us to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus.

Paul taught that Jesus lives by the power of God, and we will live with him by the same power: “... since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you” (2 Cor. 13:3-4).

Paul will speak a little later in Ephesians 3:20-21 of God’s power at work in us: “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works

in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” The greatness of God’s power is witnessed in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and that same power is at work in God’s children, the church.

Paul speaks of the sovereignty of Christ and that Christ is seated at God’s right hand in the heavenly places. In Peter’s sermon on Pentecost he spoke of the exalted Christ: “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear” (Acts 2:32-33).

It is in the heavenly realms where Christ is now seated that he makes intercession for us. The writer of Hebrews speaks of our great High Priest: “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:14-16).

The church is not a substitute or an alternative plan.

What a powerful truth this is for us. We have an advocate in heaven who knows all about our human condition. He understands us and can sympathize with our weaknesses. He was tempted like us though he never gave in to sin. This gives us great confidence as we come to his throne of grace seeking his mercy and help.

Paul concludes the passage cited at the beginning of this article by stating that Jesus is head of the church, which is his body. “And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, which is His body,

the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23).

The church is not a substitute or an alternative plan. From the beginning God’s purpose was to put all things under Christ and make him the head of the church. Some teach that when Jesus came the first time, he was thwarted from establishing his kingdom, so he made the church as a kind of substitute. Paul affirms in this passage in Ephesians that the church is a part of God’s eternal plan of salvation for man.

When Peter made the confession, “You are the Christ, the son of the living God,” Jesus said to him, “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven’” (Matthew 16:16-19).

The church is the spiritual kingdom of Christ on earth. Jesus said he would build his church and even his death would not prevent it from happening. The church and the kingdom are used here interchangeably. He builds the church and gives Peter and the apostles the keys of the kingdom. They are not two different bodies of people; they are the same. Paul uses the church in connection with the body of Christ in this passage. He said he is head of the church, which is his body.

The church, the kingdom, the body. They are not three separate groups of people; they are all the same group of believers in Christ spoken of under different descriptive terms. How could anyone ever think or say that the church is not important? If the church has no value, then neither does the kingdom or the body of Christ because they are all the same.

The Hebrew writer sums up the significance of the church, the body of Christ, the kingdom of God in Hebrews 12:22-29:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much

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more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, “Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.” Now this, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.

Henry Ward Beecher said, “The Church is not a gallery for the exhibition of eminent Christians, but a school for the education of imperfect ones.” Paul prayed in the passage cited above, “I ask that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know the hope of His calling, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and the surpassing greatness of His power to us who believe.” Paul prayed for the enlightenment of the

Ephesians and surely this is a prayer that we all need. We are not yet perfected in Christ, but by the power of God’s Spirit we trust that we are growing more into the image of Jesus Christ.

Dwight L. Moody wrote, “Church attendance is as vital to a disciple as a transfusion of rich, healthy blood to a sick man.” Paul wrote, “These are in accordance with the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.” We pray that God is working with his mighty strength to redeem and empower his church, his body, to be that active, saving, merciful body in the world that will be zealous for good works and will be a beacon of faith. As the church we must continue to assemble together faithfully and stir each other up to love and good works (Heb.10:24-25).

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“The Church is not a gallery for the exhibition of eminent Christians, but a school for the education of imperfect ones.”

Christians Must Influence the World

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:13-16

We can be salt and light by living righteously.

Jesus' statement on influence begins with the influencing agent salt. He said, “You are the salt of the earth.” If the salt loses its salty taste, then it is no good. It is good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. Salt, good salt, influences or enhances the flavor of food, or in the case of morals, it influences in a positive way for society to be good.

How does salt lose its flavor? An outside influence agent comes in contact with the salt. In Jesus day salt was stored inside animal skins. The salt contained impurities that absorbed moisture and the pure salt would dissolve and would become tasteless and useless. Just as the outside influence, moisture, renders salt useless, sin renders our Christian influence useless. Christians must enhance or preserve and safeguard the world for Jesus just as salt enhances the flavor of food.

Jesus continues with His teaching on influence, saying, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:14-16). Just as light affects darkness, brings to light in a positive way, we must let our “light shine before men” so that they might see how we live and God in heaven will be glorified, praised, and worshiped.

How are Christians to be “the salt of the earth”

and “the light of the world”? We can be salt and light by living righteously. What does it mean to live righteously? “If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away” (Matt. 5:40-42).

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:43-48). Salt enhances the flavor of food. If salt does not enhance the flavor of food, it is good for nothing. It has no good. It is useless. Christians that do not affect the world around them are of little value to God. Christians must not become like the world around them. We must affect those around us in a positive way, just as salt brings out the best flavor in food.

A city set on a hill cannot be hidden! Its night lights shine, and it is easily seen for miles. If we live for Christ our light will shine like lights, showing others the way to Christ and what He is like. We hide our lights by living lives of sin, by being quiet when we should speak, by not explaining our light to others, by denying that we are lights for Christ, by letting sin dim our light, or by not helping those in need, like widows and orphans.

Christians must become lights in this world of sin. We must be a lighthouse guiding souls safely into the kingdom of God. We must be beacons of truth. Our light must never go out because we are “the light of the world.”

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