

The Church - A Privileged and Blessed Body Aug. 2014
Ephesians 1: 22, 23

Hello Dear Listeners;

To be loved, cherished, protected and encouraged to grow, meaningfully, is something very special. To know that you are not alone, but belong to a family is a privilege indeed. Especially when that family is governed by a gracious mighty ruler, a true King! The more so, when your fellow family members are sworn to support and care for each other.

You would think that if such a family is found in your neighbourhood for people would want to be closely associated with it. They'd even want to be part of it, if that was possible.

Yet there is such a family that appears to have ever diminishing appeal and importance. Its called The Church of Christ. While not that long ago it used to be made up of the majority of our country's citizens that is not so today. A recent survey indicates that no more than 20 percent of Canada's population attend a church service regularly. This while "regularly" in the survey meant no more than "once per month."

That's really, really sad for it means that eighty percent of Canada's citizens are missing out on a whole bundle of gifts and blessings which Almighty God offers to and through His Church.

It is so, if you would ask the person on the street on any given Saturday what he or she was planning to do the next day you would find many would be very busy. But not with that God-given command to "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep to holy."

Halford Luccock who was a Christian minister in the U.S.A during the last century once wrote

There never would have been as Pentecost in the early Christian church if the habits of that company in the Upper Room had been like the habits of multitudes in our churches today.

He suggested that the record of the New Testament might have been something like this:

The meeting was called for the first day not the week, but so many things interfered that of the company of 120 only 40 could be present. Peter and his wife had bought a cottage on Lake Galilee and were away from the hot city over the week-end. Bartholomew had guests and of course could not come. Philip and his family had been up late the night before, and overslept. Andrew had a business conference about a new fishing boat. James had to stay at home and cut the grass....

It's an indictment of our society which, instead of feasting on the living Word of God opts instead for stones as bread. No wonder that many a person's outlook on life has become callous, rocky, indifferent and even revolutionary.

Yet the bible still proclaims Jesus Christ to be "King Triumphant, strong to save." Still, "head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (Ephesians 1: 22, 23).

That's quite a statement and we need to consider it carefully. The apostle Paul wrote it " To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus," as he says in the opening verse of his letter to them. His letter is one of four so-called "prison letters". Paul wrote them when he was under house arrest, possibly in Rome or another place under Roman domination.

Ephesus was an ancient Greek City on the coast of Ionia, in present-day Turkey. The Christian church there was like a small island in a vast ocean of heathendom. Paul wrote this letter “ *to express his inner satisfaction with the Christ-centered faith of the addressed and their love for all the saints* “ (1:15) . ¹

In this letter we find a marvellous picture of God’s glorious grace towards the church. That grace which he gives to his faithful churches today that their members might be a blessing to the world and may stand united over against all the forces of evil that confront them.

In chapter one Paul immediately speaks of the spiritual blessings which had come to the believers from on high, where the ascended, exalted Christ now resides. In the verses 1-14 Paul elaborates on those blessings which saw the church of Ephesus established, and her members become partakers of salvation through the unmerited favour of Christ Jesus.

Then, in the second part of the chapter Paul concentrates on the reason for great thankfulness . For from on high the resurrected and exalted Christ rules all and every authority, power, person and thing, placing all of these and more “*under his feet,*” “ Under his feet” as even David, that Old Testament ‘Psalm writer extraordinaire,’ prophesied in Psalm 8.

What does it mean, but, as one Christian author puts it,

Everything was arranged in subjection under him. Nothing will therefore be allowed to stand in the way of their acquisition and enjoyment. He, (that is, Christ), is intimately and indissolubly united with the church. And he loves her with a profound and steadfast love. In her interest the Lord exercises his infinite power in causing the entire universe with all in it to cooperate whether willingly or unwillingly. ²

¹ W. Hendriksen, *New testament Commentary on Ephesians* , Baker, Grand Rapids, p. 61

² Hendriksen, *ibid.* pp 102, 103

Imagine that; no better, Believe that! All things in heaven and on earth; all of history, every nation, must serve the risen Lord, crowned Head of the Church. Because of what he accomplished on Calvary's cross. Because of his perfect obedience to his Father in heaven.

O it is so, not yet do we see the exalted position of the church which shares in Christ's victory over sin and death. In fact, there is outright persecution, and violence of faithful Christians. Even in this beautiful Canada of ours Christians are often marginalized and faithful churches which preach the Gospel, are not numerous.

Yet those faithful churches, though often scorned by those who do not side with Christ, may know themselves privileged and blessed. They make up Christ's "body" says Paul. That "body" of which He, Lord of lords is Head. Not only that but she is his "fulness. The fullness of him who fills everything in every way."

Think about that! This body, and not just a few individuals here and there, but a body, an assembly, "fills, completes, expresses and carries out the directives of her head".³

What a wonder this is. Christ's holy, catholic, (that is, universal) church, a body not without imperfections, but one made up of weak, sometimes slovenly, Christians, who stumble far more than they run, grovel much more frequently than standing tall for the sake of Jesus Christ, nevertheless is Christ's complement! "Jesus Christ," says John Calvin, that stalwart reformer of the church some five centuries ago, " is incomplete without the bride."

O No, not that Christ Jesus is defective, or that he is lost without us. But because he will not do without his bride for whom he died and lives and comes and reigns. In whose ranks he is present every time she gathers for worship on any given Lord's Day. On whom He and the Father have poured out the Holy Spirit to be with her forever. Through thick and thin, - despite the continual attacks of the evil

³ Hendriksen, *ibid* p. 105

one who knows he has lost the decisive battle on Calvary's cross when Christ proclaimed "It is finished" and the gates of heaven opened to receive him.

This being so, you would think many, would be barging down the doors of the church being ever so eager to get in. What about you dear listener? Do *you* believe in Jesus Christ and his "*incomparably great power*" for those who do believe?

May you do so and may you be joined to the ranks of those who treasure the benefits of belonging to the church which Christ has bought. May you seek out one of those faithful churches. I hope, next time to consider how you can find such a faithful church. Meanwhile I pray you will be able to say, and keep on saying,

I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord..... There the thrones for judgement stand, the thrones of the house of David. ⁴

Amen, may God be with you and thanks you so much for listening.

⁴ Psalm 122: 1, 5