

**God's View of the Church**  
**Ephesians 1:15-23**  
**May 9, 2010**  
**FBC Waynesboro**

“Most young adults today don’t pray, don’t worship, and don’t read the Bible, a major survey by a Christian research firm shows. If the trends continue, ‘the Millennial generation will see churches closing as quickly as GM dealerships,’ says Thom Rainer president of LifeWay Christian Resources. It surveyed 1,200 members of the 18-29 year old Millennial generation and found 72% say they’re ‘really more spiritual than religious.’ Among the 65% who call themselves Christian, ‘many are either mushy Christians or Christians in name only,’ Rainer says. ‘Most are just indifferent. The more precisely you try to measure their Christianity, the fewer you find committed to the faith.’

“Key overall findings in the survey released today (April 27, 2010): 65% rarely or never pray with others and 38% almost never pray by themselves either; 65% rarely or never attend worship services; 67% don’t read the Bible or other sacred texts. Many are unsure if Jesus is the only path to heaven. ‘We have dumbed down what it means to be a part of the church so much that it means almost nothing even to people who already they are part of the church,’ Rainer says. The findings, which document a steady drift away from the church dovetail with a Lifeway study of teenagers done in 2007 that were church dropouts and these studies by Lifeway have been independently confirmed by similar studies done in February of this year by the Pew Forum on religion and public life” (USA Today, April 27, 2010).

Now it would be totally unfair and fully inaccurate to stop here. Because at the same time that this research was going on something else is happening among this same age group: an explosion of serious commitment and life changing devotion to the truth of the Bible and power of the Gospel. No generation has more passion for Jesus and for the living out of the truth of God than the Millennial generation but what we are finding is that the old wineskins of many traditional churches will not work for this generation. What they see is churches that are trapped by tradition rather than totally committed to the truth of God, churches that are run by ritual rather than requiring sincere evidences of grace in the live of people before admitting them into membership, churches that are

propelled by programs rather than by the power of God centered in the Gospel of Jesus, churches that do the same thing over and over again rather than asking what God is doing and being willing to do whatever it takes to join Him in His work. And all over this country and the world led by God-centered and Gospel-driven men like David Platte and Matt Chandler God is raising up and redeeming His church from the ruins of religion. And God is doing this work because He has such an exceedingly high view of His church. That is the point of this prayer in Ephesians 1:15-23.

The purpose of this prayer is found in verse 17. Paul prays that the sovereign God who is the father of our Lord Jesus Christ who is the ruler of the universe might reveal to us by His Spirit and through His Word what is needed so that we might know Him. He wants us to know Him and the knowledge of Him comes by way of the revelation of Himself and His Truth through His Word under the anointing of His Spirit. There is no other way of knowing Him. It happens when God opens the eyes of our heart so that we can know. Stop right there. The word for “know” in verse 18 has two very distinctive and equally important meanings: it means to see with the eyes of the heart and it means to know in the depths of the heart. Knowing comes through seeing and seeing comes through revelation. That is why you can apply your best analytical abilities to the Bible and never see or know the truth of God, but when God opens the eyes of your heart you begin to see the logic of the Bible in a way that makes human logic look lame. So, here is how it happens: God wants us to know Him. So He comes to us and opens the eyes of our hearts so that we have eyes to see and reveals Himself to us in His Word and we see Him and know Him and love Him and serve Him and it is all because of Him.

He wants us to know His power, 18. He want us to know the hope of His calling. Two words here demand our attention. The first one is “hope.” Biblical hope is no pipe dream. I hope that I have a safe flight tonight and tomorrow. I hope that the weather in Kiev is nice. Biblical hope is grounded in the grace and goodness of God in doing for us and in us what He declares. We see this in Colossians when Paul refers to our hope of glory as Christ in us. Christ in us is a reality and gives solid ground to our hope. Or we see it in Romans when Paul speaks our rejoicing in our hope of sharing in the glory of God which is very real and the very reason that in the midst of suffering we do not complain but give praise to God because of what we are absolutely sure is real. Hope is living daily

with the confidence that God is as good as His Word. The second one is “his calling.” Now this is not a specific group of people but refers to every person who has been called by the Spirit of God to come to Jesus and be saved by the grace of God. It is His calling because it is only by His initiative that we are saved. It is calling into a relationship and it is calling into a responsibility. The relationship is with God through Jesus and the responsibility is to live as servants of God in the world for all of our days because it is God by His Spirit who is living in us. This is power. And God wants us to know His power.

But it is not only power that comes from His calling that grounds us in the midst of the struggles of life, it is power that is experienced in and expressed through our lives. Break down the words in verse 18 and you will see four truths that are here about God’s power. It is the power of all that is meant by the name “God.” The wealth of all that is God’s is given to those who are His so that we can live for the praise of His Name. And this wealth of God is glorious because we live in the awareness every day of the presence of God with us and in us. He is sustaining us. He is seeing us through. He is showing Himself to us. Thirdly, the inheritance is what God promises to His people and provides for His people. It is that which God gives to us to enjoy for all eternity the fullness of which will only begin to be ours one millisecond beyond death. It is why Paul says that if our commitment to Christ is only about life in this world we are of all people the most to be pitied. Fourthly, Paul makes it plain that this power of God is experience only among the people of God. It is given to those who belong to God who are a part of the body of Christ who in gathering to worship and study experience the great grace and goodness, the wonderful presence and power of God. God wants us to know His power as seen in His calling us to Himself and as seen in His commitment to His people.

God wants us to know His purpose. His purpose is to exalt Jesus in the world as the ruler of the world who redeems out of the world a people for Himself. What is God doing in the world? He is saving sinners and gathering together the saints to join Him in His work in the world. He is building His church and bringing alongside His church those ministries that enhance the goal of the church so as to extend and expand His Kingdom until at last all things are brought into subservience to Jesus. I need to say here a word about the purpose of the church and the place of “parachurch” ministries. The purpose of the church is to glorify God by the gathering of believers to worship God and to study His Word so

as to grow in His grace that leads to the scattering of those believers as Gospel witnesses who are in the world to declare the good news of Jesus so as to make disciples. God in His grace as raised up ministries to come alongside the church to strengthen the church in the fulfillment of this mandate and mission and the church ought not only to be grateful but to join hands with these ministries whose mission is the same as the church: the glorification of God through the declaration of the Gospel to the ends of the earth for the purpose of making disciples. We see that in STL, Augusta Care Pregnancy, Guido Christian Training Institute, Penfield etc. and it is good and right for the church to join hands and heart with ministries who have Gospel proclamation as the driving core. We praise God for these kinds of ministries but must be aware that the doing of good and the declaration of the Gospel are not the same thing. Our elders must exercise prayerful diligence in deciding by biblical standards who we partner with and who we don't partner with for no other reason than the basic truth that the church is called to God things that are Gospel things and this is the good work in which we are to be involved.

We could settle here for a long, long time but I want you to see what God has given us as His people for the fulfillment of His purpose in the world. It is an overflowing power, it is a super abundant power, it is a supernatural power, it is a superbly strong power, 19 because it is first resurrection power. The same power that God used in raising Jesus from the dead, He gives to His people who are called and committed to His work in the world. Think about it. God gives us resurrection from the dead power when we are doing what He has called us to do; but that power is not promised to us when we are doing what we want to do. So, why are so many churches so dead and without the power of God in what they are doing? I can answer that: because what we are about is not what God is about. God is about saving sinners and discipling the saved so as to raise up an army of soldiers who are so sold out to Jesus that we take delight in storming the gates of hell and find great joy in our being so distinctively different from the world.

But it is not just resurrection power that He gives us to accomplish His purpose, it is ruling and reigning power, 20-21. Jesus rules from heaven over every person or power, over every philosophy or program, over every president or pope or prime minister, over everything and everybody to do His work for the glory of His name. And what does it look like to the world? Well, it looks like

foolishness and weakness; it appears as a waste of time and money; it seems as if we are investing time and energy in misplaced priorities and misspent energies. While the world is having its fun wherever the world goes to have that, the church gathers to worship God the center of which is an antiquated form of communication in techno-visual age and then goes from worship to declare the gospel of God's grace for sinners most of whom in our culture are not listening and will not listen because they see no need for anything or anyone to make their lives better. But the Bible says that God will hold all who have rejected Him accountable to Him so that He will deride those who have mocked Him even as in the last day they are begging for His mercy even as He pours out His vengeance upon them.

God wants us to know Him. He wants us to know His power. He wants us to know His purpose and the power that He gives us to join Him in fulfilling His purpose but He wants us to know that there is one and only one focal point for the fulfillment of His purpose and it is the church. Jesus is the absolute authority over His church. The church is His body. And then Paul explains what this means: the church is the fullness of God so that it is in the church that we experience the fullness of God made known to us in Jesus Christ through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. If we want to experience God, we will do so in and through the church. That is why people board a tour bus on Sunday morning to, even at great risk, gather for the worship of God. That is why we go to places in the world where there is not gospel witness to proclaim the Gospel and to plant churches because it is the church that is the crown jewel of the work of God in the world. But Paul goes one step further: he says that the church is the fullness of God through which God fills everything in every way. How does God make Himself and His purpose known in the world? Through the church. It is the church that is the fullness of God and it is through the church that the witness to the Gospel goes to the world. So the goal of missionaries is simple: to proclaim the Gospel so as to plant churches, to strengthen existing churches through resources and ministries and all of it because this is what brings glory to God because this is His plan for reaching His world with the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ. Listen to these words by Bryan Chappell, "the filling of the world with Christ's purpose for and through the church is the corporate hope we alone possess. No other agency on earth has this promise. God gives no other institution the promise or the power that it will be salt and light in the world. The world will ultimately and eternally yield to the influence of the church, because it is the body of him who is

head over all and thus, it contains and exerts His power in behalf of His own glory.”

In the early days of the French Reformation the Huguenots grew with a power that was supernatural. Three thousand churches were started over Roman Catholic saturated France in a seven year period. It was a phenomenon that no one could explain. The Roman Catholic Church and the French Monarchy finally had enough and began to persecute the Huguenots. Many tried to flee and many were killed. But the church did not cease to gather and to go. They found all kinds of ways and all kinds of places to meet. Many were discovered and many died. But nothing could stop them from meeting to worship and going to witness. The tangible remains of this movement is found in a little farmhouse in the countryside of France with little or no notice of its influence. Several years ago Bryan Chappell along with others went to Budapest to lead a pastors conference for pastors from Hungary, Romania, and the Ukraine. The older men told of persecution and pain; some had even been in prison for preaching the Gospel and for gathering with other believers. As Chappell listened and began to ask questions, he would learn that all who had suffered but remained faithful were descendants of the faithful Huguenots from France. And it was from multiple generations that these men had been taught the urgent importance of the church in the purpose of God and they persevered to see the day when the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is now being planted all over the Ukraine and Romania and Hungary. That is how God sees His church; How do we see her?