

**The Significance of the Church**  
**Ephesians 1:15-23**  
**February 25, 2008**  
**FBC Waynesboro**

The most prevalent image of the church in the New Testament is that of the church as the body of Christ with Jesus being the Head of the church. Jesus rules over the church and the church is the avenue through which Jesus rules. This is the most prevalent image that brings together indivisibly the person of Jesus with the people of God in the church. But it is not the most beautiful image. That belongs to the picture of the church in relationship to Jesus as the bride relating to the bridegroom. This image is found in the Gospels, the letters of Paul and the final book of the Bible. It is a beautiful image.

Its beauty is enhanced by our understanding of what happened at a wedding during that day. Marriages most often were predetermined by the families of the bride and the bridegroom. The bride knew who her bridegroom would be and the bridegroom knew the same often long before they would come together as one. The bridegroom was required to pay a bride price in order to purchase his bride. That still happens in a number of places in our world, even in Kenya; where several years ago a group of Kenyan men were telling us what the prospective bride price would be for some of our ladies. Enough said about that one! But the price then and now was costly, sacrificial, not cheap. A wedding time was set and sometime during the beginning of the wedding the bridegroom would go get his bride. She did not know exactly when he was coming so from early morning and throughout the day even into the night, she had to be ready. Her attendants were with her and assisted in getting her ready. They would look and they would listen. Then came the sound of the shofar followed by the merriment of shouting and the sounds of singing. The bridegroom would gather his bride and take her with him to begin the seven day festal celebration, the center of which was the wedding banquet. At the end the bridegroom home literally to his father's house.

What a beautiful picture of the relationship of Jesus to His church. Jesus loves the church. Jesus laid down His life for the church. Jesus is Lord over the church. Jesus lives and makes Himself known to the world both in and through the church. And one of these days the shofar of the Lord will sound and there will be a great shout from heaven and Jesus is going to come for His bride the church and take her home. There we will receive the rewards for what we have done "in the body." We will return with Him to the earth to rule with Him upon the earth and after that to occupy with Him and for His praise the new heavens and the new earth

forever and ever. And all of it because of Jesus and for the church. It is impossible for a person to say, "I love Jesus," and not love His church. That is the whole point of this first chapter in what could well have been among the final writings of Paul.

This passage begins with a phrase that points us backward and a prayer that pushes us forward. It connects what has been with what is about to be. It connects the first fourteen verses with the verses of this passage. The prayer is a prayer of thanksgiving, 15. Paul thanks God for what is happening to them in their relationship to God and in their relationship to one another. When he prays with gratitude for their faith, he uses a very peculiar phrase. It is not possessive as it is translated. It is pointed and personal. Literally the phrase is "the according to you faith." The faith. The one and only faith. One Lord, One faith, One baptism as he will say later. The faith that is focused on Jesus alone and is seeking to serve Him alone. That is the point. He is grateful that their faith is firm and focused. They are not being carried away by every wind of doctrine or by every current of the culture. He was concerned about this in all the churches but particularly in Ephesus because of its strategic location. Go with me back to the tearful meeting that he had with the elders of the church in Ephesus, Acts 20. Look at verses 28-31. These wolves were in every church. They still are. Their message departs from what brings glory to God in holy living to what is good for us that will fulfill our fleshly desires. It leads laxity in our love for God so that we can say we love Him while not living for His glory. It leads to compromise in our commitment so that we say that we are committed to Him while investing more time in energy in the things of the culture than in the things of God. It leads to division in the church and disruption in the home and all due to people listening to howling wolves rather than shepherds who speak the truth of God. It happened in Galatia. It happened in Ephesus, Revelation 3. It happened in Corinth. It happens here. But at this point could say the people there, "I thank God for the focus and the force of the faith that you express in commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ."

This kind of faith is the foundation for what follows. Paul is grateful for their love for one another which is gracious and genuine. Love is birthed by faith not faith by love. Love that does not emerge out of truth cannot and will not be true love. The foundation is faithfulness to Jesus, focus on Jesus and following Jesus. What emerges out of this foundation is genuine love for one another. Paul refers to the people in the church as "saints." The word means "holy ones." It points to people who are sinners who are being saved by the grace of God as seen in their living their lives for the glory of God. They know that they have been saved because they live as those who have been set apart by God's grace to live for

God's glory. "For this reason after hearing of the faith which you exercise in relationship to Jesus as Lord and the love which you have for all the saints, I am not ceasing in giving thanks for you as I mention you in my prayers." This phrase points us backward to what comes before and forward to what comes ahead. What comes before is what we have as believers because of Jesus; what comes ahead is where what we have in Jesus is experienced and expressed which is in and through the church. So that the first fourteen verses are about Jesus in relationship to us and the next eight verses are about us in relationship to Jesus. The point of connection is the church.

Ephesians one consists literally of four sentences: 1-2, 3-12, 13-14 and 15-23. We are going to examine now verses 3-14 because they show us what we have in and through Jesus. Because of Jesus. If you do not know Jesus, none of these things apply to you. They have no meaning to you. But they can. You can today give your life to Jesus and all of these seven realities will be yours. They give you security for the future and significance in the present. Verse 3 is the introduction. It makes it clear that the blessings that come to us come from God through Jesus out of heaven here and now. These are seven powerful privileges provided to us by the power of God through Jesus Christ.

First, we have been chosen in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight, 4. The word for chosen means literally "to be elected out of." Out of what? Out of what we deserve which is the judgment of God. Out of the world in its ways. Out of our selfishness which is the essence of sin. Out of death and into life. And all of that not because of us but because of Him. Chosen by Him and in Him and because of Him. When? Before the foundation of the world. Here is the great omniscience of our omnipotent and omniscient God. But His choosing us is for a reason. It is not haphazard. It is that we might be holy which refers to our position as one who has been selected and set apart for God. And blameless refers to the practice of our lives. How do I know that I belong to Him? I just listen to my heart that has such a deep desire for Him and I look at my life where what I want to do more than anything else is to please Him. That is the work of the grace of God.

Second, he predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with the pleasure of His will to the praise of His glorious grace which he has freely given us in the one He loves, 5-6. The word for "predestined" means literally "to establish the boundaries for our lives." He knows and He sees. He knows the end from the beginning. Here are the boundaries: He wants to adopt us into His family. He wants us to be His sons and daughters. He desires to have us

call Him Father which can only happen through the commitment of our lives to Jesus as Lord. That is the good pleasure of His will. That is what He wants. We are by nature the Bible says the children of wrath. We are born in sin. We enter the world separated from God and God wants to adopt us into His family and He wants that for the praise of His glorious grace. God saves us ultimately for His glory. It brings Him pleasure and is an offering of praise to Him. There is no greater miracle on earth than a self-centered, self-oriented sinner turning in repentance from His sin and being saved by the grace of God so that this sinner begins to live for what pleases God. Is that how you are living? Is this your life?

Third, We have redemption through His blood, 7-8. Jesus gave His life to purchase you and me from the bondage of sin. The image of redemption is so precious and powerful. It paints a picture of a no-good, useless, worn out worm of a person who is being sold in the public square and nobody wants this person who has proven over and over again how worthless they are. That's me and that's you. But Jesus pays the redemption price. He gives what is His very best for what is the very worst and brings with it forgiveness for all that has been and all that is and all that will ever be. But there's more. He also gives us by the presence and power of His Spirit the wisdom and understanding that is needed to see it and to be seized by it. Do you know what that means? There are people sitting here this morning that are in the bondage of sin. You are shackled in some situation and don't how to be set free. But right now the great Spirit of God is giving you the wisdom to see and the understanding to know that Jesus alone can set you free. And that is why you are here, don't you see---Jesus today wants to set you free.

Four, God shows us in Jesus the mystery of His will, 9-10. It is found in Christ. The phrase "all things together" in verse 10 is a wonderfully, powerful term that simply means "that which brings everything to a point of clarity." And Paul says that everything heaven and earth come to the point of clarity in and through Jesus. Are you confused and need clarity? Are you perplexed and need peace? Are you frustrated and need focus? Well, you will not find it in a seminar because it is found in the Savior; You don't need relief, you just need to rest in Him. He is the one and the only one who holds all things together, and if you are His, He is holding you.

Five, we have been called out by Him, 11-12. The word for "chosen" in verse 11 is a different word than the word that is used in verse 4. The word in verse four means to choose out of; the word here means to call out of. The first states an eternal truth: God knows who are His. The second speaks an effectual reality: God calls out to us. If you struggle with the sovereignty of God in

salvation with human responsibility for salvation both of which are in the Bible, then the reconciliation is right here. God chooses so that God knows who are His from before the foundation of the world but God calls out to us and let me read you verse 11 literally: “in whom also we have been called being predestined according to the purpose of the One who works (energy word, ongoing reality) according to the will (determined will of God, His sovereign plan) of His will (the work of God in and through us in the execution of His will.” So, how does God call out to us? How does God work in us? How does He bring us effectively to what He has decreed eternally? By the Work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a lost person who hears a believer sharing the Gospel. Isn't that how you were saved? Didn't somebody call you to give a response to the Gospel? The hyper-calvinists who would say to us that it is God's work and we don't need to do anything are wrong. The hyper-Arminian who says that it is our work and all our choice so that God doesn't do anything are wrong. God chooses for salvation those who by the grace of God because of the work of the Spirit of God through the witness of the Gospel choose to be saved.

Six, there it is in verse 13. When we hear and heed the Gospel, we are sealed. God marks us as His own. We belong to Him forever. Jesus told God that He had received all those whom the Father had given Him and no one could take them from Him. What security. What safety. What rest. What responsibility. The seventh privilege that is not place last by accident is that those who have been sealed by the Spirit have been set apart and filled with that same Spirit to grow in the likeness of Jesus and to give the Gospel of Jesus to the world. Those who are sealed by the Spirit show it in their praise of God and in their living of His purpose in their lives. This is their priority. This is their passion. This their purpose. And where does it happen. In and through the church, that is where we turn next week.