



## “The Church, the Fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 1:15-23)(8.20.23)

Ephesians 1:15-23  
Amplified Bible

**15** For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, **16** I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers; **17** [I always pray] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may grant you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation [that gives you a deep and personal and intimate insight] into the true knowledge of Him [for we know the Father through the Son]. **18** And [I pray] that the eyes of your heart [the very center and core of your being] may be enlightened [flooded with light by the Holy Spirit], so that you will know *and* cherish the <sup>[a]</sup>hope [the divine guarantee, the confident expectation] to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the <sup>[b]</sup>saints (God’s people), **19** and [so that you will begin to know] what the immeasurable *and* unlimited *and* surpassing greatness of His [active, spiritual] power is in us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of His mighty strength **20** which He <sup>[c]</sup>produced in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand in the heavenly *places*, **21** far above all rule and authority and power and dominion [whether angelic or human], and [far above] every name that is named [above every title that can be conferred], not only in this age *and* world but also in the one to come. **22** And

He [d]put all things [in every realm] in subjection under Christ's feet, and [e]appointed Him as [supreme and authoritative] head over all things in the church, <sup>23</sup> which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills *and* completes all things in all [believers].

## The word of God for the people of God.



LET US PRAY.

Title: **"The Church, the Fullness of Christ"**

## INTRODUCTION:



I saw this on social media and thought how appropriate it is for so many American Christians.

Here is the caption for the picture:

"Don't get us wrong, we LOVE church. You need church. The point is, DON'T STOP THERE, otherwise you will be consumed by cultural influences and desires! Our journey as faithful followers of Jesus Christ doesn't end with just one hour every week at church.

Sanctification is a process that requires patience, sacrifice, and self-discipline (all unpopular in the culture these days), but JESUS IS WORTHY! What things are you

willing to give up TODAY in order to grow closer to your Lord and Savior? "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'" (Matthew 16:24)"

You can change the label in the boxes to make this applicable to your circumstances. Maybe some of your boxes could be watching various sports. Some people are drawn to so-called "Reality TV" shows. Some people are news junkies always trying to stay abreast of what is happening in the world, but at the sacrifice of peace. Even good and productive hobbies might rob you of precious time that could be spent in relationship with God.

Let us suppose that a father and husband has a workshop and a garage. He is always tinkering with a car or fixing something. The lawn and yard are immaculate even if it requires twice weekly cutting. He is faithful, works hard, and is a good provider. But, he spends virtually no time with his wife or his children. How does this cultivate godly living and equip his family to cope with the serious challenges of this world?

Let me ask you another question. Can an empty church exhibit the fullness of Christ? Of course not, because the people, the believers, the saints, the called out, are the Body of Christ and they are the Church. Jesus is the Head over the Church and the Head requires the Body as the Body requires the Head.

Paul uses the Body as metaphor several times. Every part of the Body is important and has a specific role in the life of the Body. Every person in the Body has been spiritually gifted by God to serve the rest of the Body and the mission of the Church. Anyone that draws back or falls away is withholding from the Body – from Jesus Christ – the blessing with which they were equipped to share with others.

BODY:



This portion of scripture that we just read starts with a passionate prayer of thanksgiving by the Apostle Paul. He is writing to the Ephesian Christians and commends them for their faith and their love for all God's

people. He wants them to progress in their faith walk to another level of knowledge, hope, and experience of God's power.

But first, let us look at the Spiritual blessings in Christ laid out in Ephesians 1:3-14. <sup>3</sup> [a]Blessed *and* worthy of praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has **blessed us with every spiritual blessing** in the heavenly realms in Christ, <sup>4</sup> just as [in His love] **He chose us in Christ** [actually selected us for Himself as His own] before the foundation of the world, so that **we would be holy** [that is, consecrated, set apart for Him, purpose-driven] and **blameless in His sight**. In love <sup>5</sup> He **predestined *and* lovingly planned for us to**

**be adopted to Himself** as [His own] children through Jesus Christ, in accordance with the kind intention *and* good pleasure of His will— <sup>6</sup> to the praise of His glorious grace *and* favor, which He so freely bestowed on us in the Beloved [His Son, Jesus Christ]. <sup>7</sup> In Him **we have redemption** [that is, our deliverance and salvation] through His blood, [which paid the penalty for our sin and resulted in] **the forgiveness *and* complete pardon of our sin**, in accordance with the riches of His grace <sup>8</sup> which **He lavished on us**. In all wisdom and understanding [with practical insight] <sup>9</sup> He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup> with regard to the fulfillment of the times [that is, the end of history, the climax of the ages]—to bring all things together in Christ, [both] things in the heavens and things on the earth. <sup>11</sup> In Him also **we have** <sup>[b]</sup>**received an inheritance** [a destiny—we were claimed by God as His own], having **been predestined** (chosen, appointed beforehand) according to the purpose of Him who works everything in agreement with the counsel *and* design of His will, <sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ [who first put our confidence in Him as our Lord and Savior] would exist to the praise of His glory. <sup>13</sup> In Him, you also, when you heard the word of truth, the good news of your salvation, and [as a result] believed in Him, **were stamped with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit** [the One promised by Christ] as owned *and* protected [by God]. <sup>14</sup> The Spirit is the <sup>[c]</sup>guarantee [the first installment, the pledge, a

foretaste] of our inheritance until the redemption of **God's own** [purchased] **possession** [His believers], to the praise of His glory.

Wow! That is an overwhelming account of the amazing blessings of being a Christian. In the 15<sup>th</sup> verse, the Amplified Version says, "your love for all God's people," which is a shortcoming. Most English translations refer to "all God's people" as saints (little "s" saints). This is one of Paul's favorite ways to refer to Christ followers. He calls us saints more than 30 times in his letters.

When you think about the miraculous spiritual blessings in Christ that we just read, the title of "saint" seems most appropriate. But the title and the description also call us to a higher standard. We need to live into our calling. Paul reminds us in the 18<sup>th</sup> verse that we have been called – called by God, and we responded in faith.

The Apostle Peter also says we were called by God: 2 Peter 1:3 (NIV84) His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

Let us take a moment for self-reflection. Are we living our lives as if we are the called-out people of God? Are we living our lives out as saints? Are we living into the Spiritual blessings in Christ as Paul laid out in verses 3-14? Most of us would have to answer...No! And that is a sad thing. We are short-changing ourselves. We are not living for our Savior and the Kingdom of God in a way that glorifies God like we should.

I have known Joe Noto for a little over 20 years. We lived on the same street in Galloway and I gave his son chess lessons. Over the years, God moved mightily in Joe's life. Through a series of blessings, and Joe's hard work, he developed a successful HVAC company.

Some of our church members know Joe because he has done some major work for Emmaus Church. Not only did he provide professional trustworthy service, he gave us very good deals. On more than one occasion he went above and beyond; and even provided labor and parts for free. I am thankful for our friendship and the service he has provided to Emmaus.

My wife, Carol, had heard through social media that Joe had been in a serious accident. I kept meaning to contact him, but somehow I always got distracted or busy. But, this past Tuesday, I finally called to check on him.

When I called, I got an immediate text saying he would call me right back. Sure enough, a few minutes later my phone rang, as Joe's name appeared on my screen. He was calling me from Cooper hospital. He was there for his sixth surgery since July 3<sup>rd</sup>, the date of his accident.

I am not sure I will get all the facts exactly right, but let me share Joe's story the best I can remember.

Joe and a mechanic friend had been working on restoring a motorcycle for about two years. Lots of time and lots of cash were invested in this project. On July 3<sup>rd</sup>, the bike was ready for its inaugural ride and celebration. Joe was enjoying the ride, not too far from his home, but in a

fairly remote area. A person in a car ran a stop sign and without warning was unavoidably in Joe's path.

Joe hit the car and was literally launched high into the air. Time seemed to slow down and he thought, Lord, I am going to die. I have reached the end and am on my way to heaven. Joe was almost right.

He suffered severe injuries. One leg was broken in several places. He lost some toes. There were several internal injuries and lots of bleeding. It seemed like a long time before the first responders arrived and again a long time to get him to the hospital. As Joe waited, he still thought he was going to die and was talking with the Lord.

So, Joe went through six surgeries over the last six weeks. That is a lot of time in the hospital and a lot of time in recovery. It was a challenge to run his business via cell phone at the hospital and then a computer at home, all the while facing his serious health challenges.

How is this story applicable to today's scripture? Joe had an epiphany during this ordeal. Do not waste a minute of your life. He had been in a relationship with a woman whom he loved. Don't waste a minute of your life. Joe has proposed and she said, "Yes!" And, Joe has embraced this concept for all his future decisions and actions. Don't waste a minute of your life.

We need to apply this to our daily Christian walk. We must be serious about our relationship with God. We need to invest the time. And, this not out of a sense of duty or obligation. It should be the desire of our heart



out of gratitude and recognition for what the Almighty has done for us. Remember what the Lord told the Church of Laodicea in Revelation 3:14–16 (NIV84)

<sup>14</sup> “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. <sup>15</sup> I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! <sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”

Lukewarm seems safe. After all, we don’t want to be known as extremists, right? If we are cold, that isn’t going to attract people. If we are hot, we might scare them away. Passionate worship and passionate preaching might make people uncomfortable. Let’s just keep doing what we have always done. Let’s not rock the boat or make waves. Except, Jesus finds that sort of faith unpalatable. He is about to spit them out of his mouth.

If you were accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Imagine one of God’s angels following you around during the day with a clipboard. The angel is taking notes and observing your behavior, your words, and your motivations. Is there obedience to God in your walk?

Does the angel see the fruit of the Spirit? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. [For] against such things there is no law.

Do you exhibit a character in line with the love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13? 1 Corinthians 13:4–8 (NIV84)

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. <sup>8</sup> Love never fails.

This reminds me about Jesus' letter to the Church of Ephesus, the Ephesians to whom Paul wrote this letter. Revelation 2:1–5 (NIV84) *To the Church in Ephesus*

**2** “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: <sup>2</sup> I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. <sup>3</sup> You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

<sup>4</sup> Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. <sup>5</sup> Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.”

Jesus is admonishing the Ephesians because their love has dried up. Their zeal has lost its zest. Their fervor has fallen out of favor. Other things have been allowed to

push their love of Jesus, their love of God, to the periphery of their lives. Jesus warns them that unless they repent, He will remove the light of His presence from them.

Preacher John MacArthur asks some thought provoking questions after quoting Colossians 2:9–10 (NIV84)

<sup>9</sup> For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, <sup>10</sup> and **you have been given fullness in Christ**, who is the head over every power and authority.

“When we talk about a sufficient Christ, we are only echoing what Scripture says. And if this is true, and it is, then why does not the church and why do not individual Christians pursue the knowledge of Christ and the trust in the resources that are in Him? Everything is ours in Christ. Christ is all and in all. Why then is He not the focus of our lives? Why is He not the object of our affections? Why does He not draw the attention of our waking moments and the occupation even of our dreaming hours? Why is He not the heart of our life? Why is He not the very soul of our ministry?”

Remember also the intimate connection between the head and the body, between Jesus Christ and the church. There must be an alignment and unity between them. The body is in submission to the Head and is purposed to act on behalf of the Mind of God. Jesus completes and fills all things in believers. At the same time Paul tells us that Christ’s Body is the fullness of Him. Can you conceptualize that? Certainly, that is a high calling.

Maxie Dunnam in *The Preacher's Commentary* makes these observations:

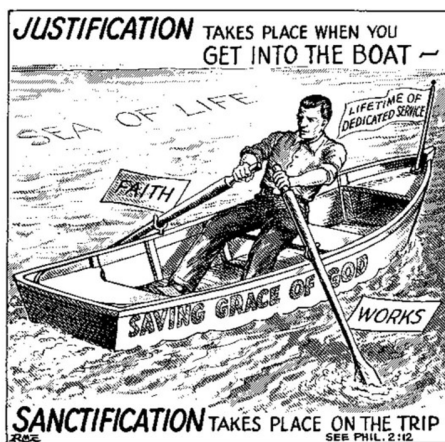
"The church is a continuing incarnation of Christ. That means that whatever Christ *would* do, the church *must* do. As the body of Christ, the church complements and fulfills Christ Himself.

Sinful though she may be, the church must furnish bodily hands and feet for her exalted Lord. For Paul, with his Hebrew mind, spirit without body was inconceivable. Christ is Spirit, and resides as Spirit with the church. For the Spirit to act incarnationally in history, the church must be the instrument.

As the image, the earthly manifestation of her risen and exalted Lord, the church is the "colony of heaven" (Phil. 3:20, Moffatt). We seek to approximate in this earthly order the eternal design of God—the hope which awaits us in glory."

#### CONCLUSION:

I want to leave you with a visual depiction of how we can live into our high calling as saints of God.



Philippians 2:12–13 (NIV84)

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God

who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

James 2:14–17 (NIV84) *Faith and Deeds*

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? <sup>15</sup>

Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup> If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? <sup>17</sup> In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Well, that picture is good as far as it goes, but it does not include what we are beginning to learn from today’s scripture. We will get into more details next week, but today we focused on the necessity of taking our Christian journey to the next level, individually, and corporately. Because verse 23 tells us, The Church, which is Christ’s Body, is the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way.

Please excuse the quality of my drawing 😊

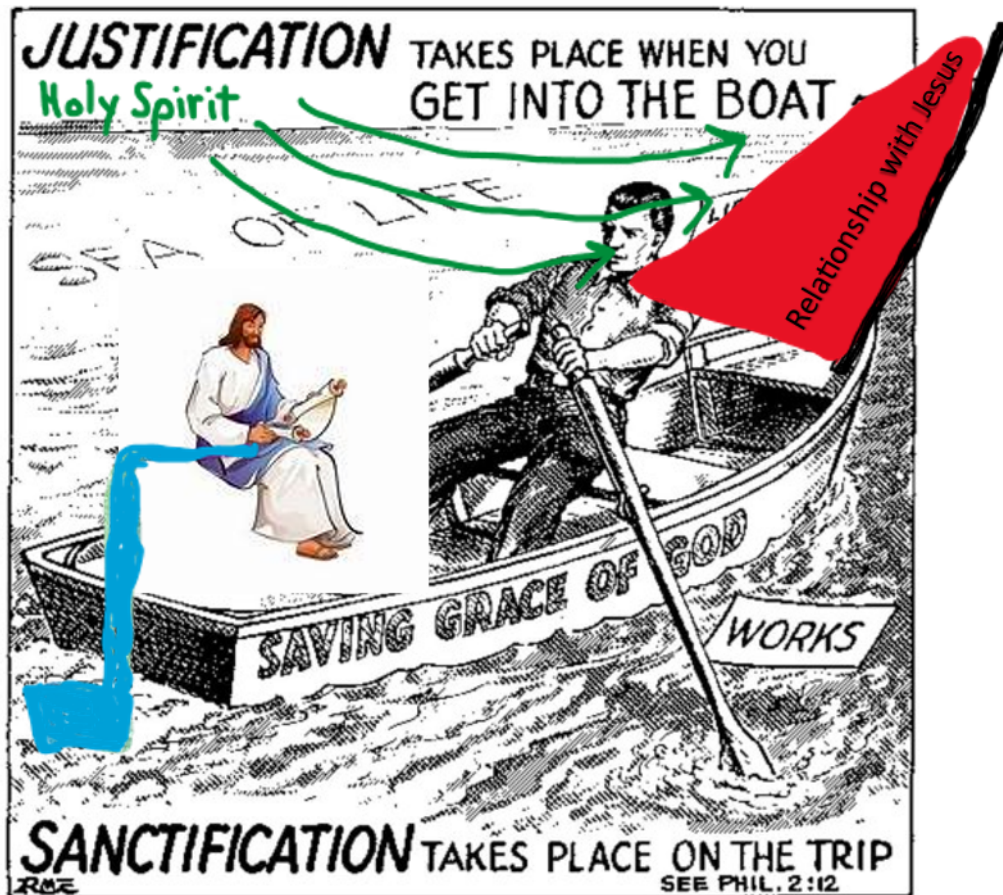
Explain:

Jesus

Rudder

Sail

Holy Spirit



1. Make sure Jesus is in your boat. You must have a close personal relationship. Make sure Jesus is steering your vessel.
2. The fuller the sail of your relationship with Jesus, the more powerful the force of the Holy Spirit will be in your life. It will make your rowing a little easier.
3. On this journey, one aspect enhances the other. The closer the relationship, the greater the progress. The greater the progress, the closer the relationship.
4. As this depiction applies to individuals in the Body, it applies to the whole Body. It applies to the Church.

Alexander Maclaren gives us some perspective:

“If we lived, as we ought to live, in the habitual apprehension of the great future awaiting all real Christians, would it not change the whole aspect of life? The world is very big when it is looked at from any point upon its surface; but suppose it could be looked at from the central sun, how large would it appear then?

We can shift our station in like fashion, and then we get the true measure at once of the insignificance and of the greatness of life. This world means nothing worthy, except as an introduction to another.

Not that thereby there will follow in any wise man contempt for the present, for the very same reference to the future which dwarfs the greatneses and dwindles the sorrows, and almost extinguishes the dazzling lights of this present, does also lift it to its true significance and importance. **It is the vestibule of that future, and that future is conditioned throughout by the results of the few years that we live here.”**

Amen and amen. Let us pray.