

"The Glorious Church of Our Lord Jesus" Ephesians 1:18-23

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by C.W. Powell

Ephesians 1:18-23

18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, 19 And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us—ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, 20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, 21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: 22 And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, 23 Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. Ephesians 1:18-23

Two weeks ago, on Easter Sunday, we saw that the exceeding greatness of the resurrection of Christ is manifested in the transformation of the lives of those who believe: that the faith, the hope, and the charity or love, that is the work of the Holy Spirit is the result of the resurrection of Christ and the sending forth of the Holy Spirit to the people of God.

Today I would like to see that this great power of the Holy Spirit is in behalf of the church of Jesus Christ, the body of Christ, the fullness of the work of God in the world.

In this passage we see that Christ is made the head of the church and there is no other head but Christ. His power and authority is distributed from heaven to His members by the Holy Spirit that is given to us. This is the reason that one of the attributes of the church is “spirituality” or invisibility, for the things that concern us here cannot be seen by men. We do not know who is working by the power of the Holy Spirit, or by the power of the flesh, except as the church becomes visible by the working of this mighty power.

Christ, the Messiah, our head, has but one body, the Church. He is complete only when the fullness of his body is made up through the mighty work of the Holy Spirit in the world. In order to complete His body, the church, all power is given to him in heaven and in earth, and all things are put under His feet that the great work of the church might be completed.

In order to illustrate this mighty power, I would take you this morning to the book of Acts, and paint some scenes before you, so that you might know what is the meaning of these wonderful words in Ephesians. Remember the figure used here: Christ is the head, the church in His body, His body is being completed by the mighty working of the Holy Spirit, so that Christ might be complete in His body, that no part be missing in the last day.

Scene 1. Acts 1:5-8. The church would be the work of the Holy Spirit, which was the meaning of their baptism. Not circumcision which emphasized a natural seed, but Christ who begets His people by an incorruptible seed, by the Word of God which lives and abides forever, according to 1 Peter

Scene 2. Acts 2:14-21. 120 at Pentecost. Both men and women. 1:13-15. The Holy Spirit came upon all in fulfillment of Joel: They all spoke with tongues. No difference in the general office of the believer. Women were there because the prophecy of Joel is said to be fulfilled, that the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon God's servants and His handmaidens, and that all would prophecy: sons and daughters, young and old.

This was the inauguration of the church, and it came upon the individuals which were assembled: not just the apostles, but upon every single believer. Of course, these gifts did not continue in the church but the very presence of them at the founding of the church seems to say a great deal, as much perhaps as the fact that only male apostles were chosen by our Lord. The exercise of the general office included both men and women prophesying in church, as is also indicated in 1 Cor. 14, when the special gift ended and women were forbidden to prophesy in the congregation so that things would be done decently and in order. With the end of the special gift, the general office of believer would not permit even men to speak in worship, for preaching and teaching are restricted to the male, clearly, reserved to those appointed and called of God, recognized by the church by the laying on of hands.

This was also a business meeting of the church at its very founding, the only business that we know was the choosing of an apostle to take the place of Judas who had died under the wrath of God.

Scene 3. Acts 5:1-10. Both Ananias and Sapphira were slain by God for their sin of lying to the Holy Ghost. Their punishment was certain, swift, individual, directly from God. Women ought to be very careful how they participate in the sins of their husbands and the rebellions of their husbands, even in the church, and no man has a right to compel his wife to anything that would involve her in failing to take responsibility for her own soul and her own moral and spiritual life. The only Mediator between God and man [generic term in the sense of Genesis 1:27: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them."] is the Lord Jesus Christ. It is ungodly and wicked for the male to assume more than is given him. It is also interesting in the case of Ananias and Sapphira that both came in separately to church—three hours apart—and both told the same lie and received the same punishment.

Sapphira couldn't plead that she just did what her husband said to do. Come to think of it, she didn't have a chance to do so; her punishment came swiftly and sternly and she was dead before she could think up an excuse. It might very well be true that women are complicit in the sins of their husbands and do not take personal responsibility for their actions but hide under a mantle of "male headship" that does not exist as a covering for their sins. Go ask Sapphira if it will work in the day of judgment. In such cases women would be better served by the example of Abigail, rather than Sapphira. We must all give account of ourselves before the Judge of All the Earth.

This does not mean that the principle of male authority is not real and taught, but it also must be noted that it must not be given an absolute quality that relieves the woman for responsibility for her own soul. The things of this earth, whatever they are, are subordinate to the things in heaven, and no relationship should be absolutized—by that I mean that nothing of this earth can be used to explain everything of heaven.

The fact that every confirmed and knowledgeable Christian partakes of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper is a continuing reminder of our own individual connection to Christ and our own individual responsibility to grow in the knowledge and understanding of our Lord.

Scene 4. The Ethiopian church was founded by a eunuch, who was baptized by Philip. Why on earth would God send His Spirit to cause a eunuch to read the Bible, and then sent a deacon to tell him what it meant. He then allowed that deacon to baptize that eunuch, and then send him on his way to start a church. Obviously, he was the male head of nothing. He would never have a family. Had God gone mad, or was he stating something emphatic, something that the prophet had already said: Isaiah 56:1-7: when the Lord Jesus establishes the true temple, eunuch and strangers will know the peace of God and have their offerings accepted just like everyone else. God cares nothing for the seed of the flesh. Let us look at the Is. 56 passage, which speaks of the church.

“1 Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed. 2 Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil. 3 Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. 4 For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; 5 Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. 6 Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; 7 Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.” (Isa 56:1-7 av) Jesus referred to this passage when He cleansed the temple.

The church is made up of those who are born of a supernatural seed, so that even a Eunuch or a stranger from Israel who hears the gospel and believes can be immensely fruitful in the building of the church. The Ethiopian church was founded by this Eunuch, according to tradition. Why this event; why it's inclusion in the history of the work of Christ in the book of Acts, if it were not highly significant. This Eunuch could never have been a priest in Israel, but he could be a prophet, priest, and king in the church of Jesus Christ.

Scene 5. Acts 10. Two visions are recorded: Cornelius, a Roman soldier, sees an angel who told him to seek Peter at Joppa. Meanwhile Peter is sleeping and sees a great sheet come down from

heaven with all manner of living creatures in it. He is told to kill and eat. He refuses because many of the animals were forbidden to him by the law. God said, 'What I have cleansed, do not call common.' Peter went with Cornelius to speak to his relatives and friends. As he spoke the Holy Spirit came upon them and they were baptized. Here we see that the Gentiles were to be brought in. There is no indication that Peter spoke only to men. In chapter 11, Peter said that God had given the Holy Spirit to them in the same way that He had been given to them at the beginning, to the 120 believers, both men and women.

Scene 6. Acts 16:12-15. The church at Philippi was originated in a prayer meeting of women by the riverside. Lydia and her household were baptized. [If you are a Baptist, you will insist that only those who made personal decisions could be baptized, but by what authority would infants and servants in the Lydia's household be baptized, all us Reformed types? There is no man in sight in the whole history of these events.] She was a wealthy seller of purple. Must we assume that only small children were involved in this baptism, or might we also assume that a wealthy woman might have male servants? Does this event in Philippi serve as a counter point to the conversion of Cornelius and others whose households were saved, showing that a woman can be instrumental in bringing her whole house to Christ. Does God also cleanse women so that they may participate fully in the life of the church without the curse of Eve's sin hanging over her? Is Christ sufficient for her sins too? The Holy Spirit did pretty much as he pleased? [Acts 2:39] The work of the Spirit is as the wind, according to Jesus in John 3, and does according to his own will. This is a new administration or covenant. Because there is a new mediator all of the old order is passing away, to make way for the head who is in heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, the head of the church.

Scene 7. Therefore, the history of Acts does not seem to indicate that the work of the Holy Spirit was based upon a different set of pre-suppositions from those of the days of Moses. It will be the work of the Holy Spirit, the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, doing His own will in the life and work of the Church, gathering to Himself His body. The new wine of the Gospel would not be poured into the old bottles of Moses and Aaron but there would be a making way for a glorious expansion of the Gospel to the whole world.

This is the very meaning of baptism as over against circumcision. Baptism is a fulfilling of the promise of circumcision, that the Lord Jesus would come. The Messiah would not be born of the seed of the flesh, but of the Holy Ghost, so that man might not glory: he would be born of the woman, the true male head of the church, who would send for his Holy Spirit so that gathered to Him out of every tribe a nation a people who are born of that Spirit, as Peter tells us: Peter 1:

“17 And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: 18 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; 19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: 20 Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, 21 Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God. 22 Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one

another with a pure heart fervently: 23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. 24 For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: 25 But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.” (1Pe 1:17-25)

May God Bless you.

Amen and Amen.