

The Church

Scripture reading: Ephesians 5:15-33 {special emphasis on the church}

15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, **16** making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. **17** Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. **18** And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, **19** addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, **20** giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **21** submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. **23** For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the **church**, his body, and is himself its Savior. **24** Now as the **church** submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the **church** and gave himself up for her, **26** that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, **27** so that he might present the **church** to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. **28** In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **29** For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the **church**, **30** because we are members of his body. **31** "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." **32** This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the **church**. **33** However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

ESV

1 Peter 1:1-5

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:

May grace and peace be multiplied to **you**.

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for **you**, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

The "**you**" in this passage is the church!

And it caused me to wonder how much we value the church.

You don't need to be told this, but I will remind you anyway, the church is not a building!

The true church is made up of the kind of people we just read about in Ephesian 5.

People who are: *"... filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **submitting to one another in the fear of God.**"*

Did you look forward to meeting with the church? Oh, I hope so!

If you don't love the church, you don't love Christ!

It is so easy to be called a "Christian" in our day. For some it is as simple as making a "decision" about a proposition offered to your supposed free will. And then to just go on and live as though nothing has changed in your life. Because, in fact, nothing has changed in your heart!

The church is made up of people, of whom Paul said,

" For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones."

And, *" This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church."*

Confessions of Faith have great value as long as they do not supplant the Word of God:

The Philadelphia Confession of Faith

The London Baptist, The Westminster – Presbyterian

Each begins its section "Of The Church," with this definition:

"The catholic or universal church, which {with respect to the internal work of the Spirit, and truth and grace} may be called invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ, the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the **fulness of him** that filleth all in all."

Yes, praise God, we have and inheritance in Christ; but did you know that Christ has an inheritance in the church?

In Song of Solomon, that great parable of Christ and His bride, the church, in 2:16, the Shulamite says: "*My beloved is mine, and I am His.*"

Jeremiah 12:9

"My heritage {inheritance} is to Me like a speckled bird {vulture.}."

Therefore the church is defined as the mystical, invisible, body of Christ. The church is made up of all believers of all time from Adam and Eve and Abel, and down through history until the last person is saved and the trumpet is blown and Christ returns in judgment at the end of the age.

Now I want to consider the church as it is regarded by:

1. The unsaved world;
2. God, the Father;
3. God, the Son;
4. God, the Holy Spirit.

1. The unsaved world hates the church. The unsaved world will tolerate religion. The devil wants you to be "religious!" The unsaved world will promote anything that is not the truth. The very popular TV show about "angels" that help humans but deliberately does not mention Jesus Christ. In most movies and TV shows, whenever a Christian is portrayed, he or she is some radical, ignorant, fruitcake.

Jeremiah 12:9, which I referred to is, in context, how Israel appears to the nations because of her rebellion against Jehovah God. A "speckled bird," or vulture, because of its mottled plumage would be attacked by the other birds.

Israel, in the Old Testament, is a type of the church; and there is an old country song taken from Jeremiah 12:9 that reflects how the world views the church.

My heritage {inheritance} is to Me like a speckled bird {vulture.}

Listen to the words of this song: The Great Speckled Bird.

What a beautiful thought I am thinking, concerning the Great Speckled Bird.
Remember her name is recorded, on the pages of God's Holy word.
Desiring to lower her standard, they watch every move that she makes.
They long to find fault with her teaching, but really they find no mistake.
I am proud that I've learned of her meekness, I am proud that my name is on the Book.
For I want to be one never fearing, the faith of my Savior's true love.
When He comes descending from heaven, on a cloud as He writes in His Word.
I be joyfully carried up to meet Him, on the wings of that Great speckled Bird.

So the unsaved world watches and criticizes and mocks and scoffs and goes to hell.

How does God regard the church?

There is One God, yet He is manifested in three Persons of the Holy Trinity. So when I attribute an aspect of regard for the church to one of the Persons of the Godhead that does not mean that the other Persons do not have the same regard. There is perfect harmony in the Godhead with no conflict of will or purpose.

What is the eternal purpose of God regarding the church?

Ephesians 3:7-13

⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, ¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹ This was according to the **eternal purpose** that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. ¹³ So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

2. God, the Father; With the church in view: Heb 12:22-24 *"But you have come to Mount Zion and to the **city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel."***

Acts 20:28-29 *"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to **all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."***

1 Cor 3:8-9 *"For we are **God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building."***

Gal 6:16-17 *"And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the **Israel of God."** [The Church is the true Israel of God!]*

3. God, the Son; we have already said much in regard to Christ, the Son of God and the church.

Eph 5:25-28 *"Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish."*

John 6:37 *"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out."*

John 17:6-10 *"I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me. I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them."*

John 17:20-26 *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for **those who will believe** in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that **they may be one just as We are one**: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."*

Everything that Christ did He did for the church and for the glory of God!

I'm sorry if this offends anyone, but I am offended by an eschatology that makes the church second-class citizens, a parenthesis they say, some afterthought of God. When you learn what God thinks about His church, you must abandon such thoughts!

4. God, the Holy Spirit. What interest has the Holy Spirit in the church?

Rom 8: 9-11 "But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."

John 16:13-15 "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you."

The Holy Spirit regenerates, indwells, anoints, baptizes, guides, empowers, sanctifies, bears witness , helps, gives joy, gives discernment, bears fruit, sends out missionaries, comforts, yes all of this is for the church! Because Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it!

* * * * *

I have tried to look at how the church is regarded by:

1. The unsaved world;
2. God, the Father;
3. God, the Son;
4. God, the Holy Spirit.

But I have one more question, **how do you regard the church?**

Has the Holy Spirit convicted you of sin to the extent that you will quit your rebellion and place your trust in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross?
Have you, by faith, seen the glory of this Savior we proclaim?

Are you interested in having an inheritance in Christ?
Are you interested in being the inheritance of God?
Can you say: ***“My beloved is mine, and I am His.***

Has God broken your rebellion against Him?
Repent and come to Christ!

This is not an invitation to "join the church," but it is an invitation to come to Christ, to trust Him!

In this local body of Christ we don't sing 15 stanzas of "Just As I Am," and beg sinners to do that which they have not the ability to do. But we do sincerely invite sinners to publicly confess what the Holy Spirit has worked in their heart. If your entire trust is in the righteousness of Jesus as your Lord and Savior and you have never confessed Him in public, you need to do that. If you have never been Scripturally baptized as a believer you may wish to counsel with me or one of the other pastors. If you desire to be a member of this **local expression of the church** you are invited to make that known. AMEN!

Jim Gunn

Vineland Park Baptist Church
February 20, 2000
June 5, 2013