



## Overview of Ephesians

### **The Lord's Church is Magnificent**

by Jim Ward

The term *church* occurs nine times in the book of Ephesians. With nine additional references to the church using the term *body*, and one each using *household of God* and *temple*, it is apparent that this is one of Paul's major themes. The church is obviously significant in God's scheme of things. Nowadays, though, it seems to me that we overlook the church in our teaching and preaching. Let's try to remedy that neglect just a tiny bit in this brief article. Please consider a chapter by chapter approach to Paul's treatment of the importance and magnificence of the church.

#### **Chapter 1**

**Christ, the Head of the Church.** God the Father raised His only Son from the dead, set Him above every power, and "gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body" (v. 22). This headship emphasizes the authority of Jesus. Following the resurrection, He came to His disciples and said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt 28:18). The power of Jesus is also evident from His position as King of His kingdom.

We must make the following point with care: the Head and the body (or the King and His kingdom) are incomplete without each other. Headless bodies function only in ghost stories and horror movies. But with this statement, I don't mean to say that Jesus is somehow less than perfect or that He "needs" anything.

My point is that Jesus has entrusted a major part of His functioning on earth to His body. We sing an old song that says, "Christ has no hands but our hands to do His work today." And therein lies the magnificence—to say nothing of the responsibility—of the church. Christ, our

Head, intends that we, His body, cooperate with Him in the saving of the world. A magnificent task for a magnificent body!

## **Chapter 2**

**The Body of the Reconciles.** The book of Genesis reveals (1) that Adam and Even sinned soon after creation and separated themselves from God, (2) that all mankind followed after them, and (3) that God intended to redeem the world through Abraham and his descendants. The Lord separated this family from the rest of the world, chiefly by giving them a special law, the Law of Moses. Thus, when Christ came into the world to carry out God's plan of salvation, mankind was separated into two great parts: Jews and the rest of the world (Gentiles). Furthermore, every person in both groups was separated from God by sin. How, then, were these great rifts to be bridged, how were Jews and Gentiles to be united and how were sinners to be reconciled to God?

Jesus accomplished both in one sacrificial act: He died on the cross. And by this death He abolished the law which separated the Jews from the Gentiles (v. 15), and reconciled "them both to God in one body" (v. 16). How magnificent is this redeemed body, the church!

## **Chapter 3**

**The Purpose of the Church.** The church is to make known "the manifold wisdom of God ... to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose" of God (vv. 10-11). This reveals that the church, eternal in the mind of God, is to demonstrate the many-sided—that is, the complete—wisdom of God.

To make known the manifold wisdom of God does not refer to the evangelistic responsibility of the church. yes, we are to preach the gospel in all the world, but this text is discussing something else.

It refers to the ideal essence—the nature, character, attributes, purposes—of the church as a creation of God. Just as the works of an architect, a composer, a poet disclose the creators, so the work of God discloses Him and His wisdom. God receives "glory in the church by Christ Jesus" (v. 21). How magnificent!

## **Chapter 4**

**The Unity of the Church.** God united Jew and Gentile in one body, "thus making peace" (2:15). Here in chapter four, Paul calls it the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (v. 3). The saved do not create the unity; it is their task to keep or maintain it. They will do this in two ways.

The first is on the basis of their spirit or attitude. Christians will be lowly, gentle, and patient; or in one word, humble. In application, this means they will bear "with one another" (v. 2). They will stifle ambition and conceit, and in "lowliness of mind ... esteem others better than" self. Self-interest will give way to "the interest of others" (Phil 2:3-4).

The second is on the basis of seven "ones," seven divine strands—truths, if you will—which are woven together in the one gospel of Jesus Christ. "*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father*

*of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*" (Eph 4:4-6). Though we humans may never achieve this unity on earth, God's ideal and our pursuit of it is a magnificent thing.

## **Chapter 5**

**The Bride of Christ.** The view that sees human marriage as the chief interest of verses 22-33 misses the point. Paul says that he speaks "concerning Christ and the church" (v. 32). Christ is the "Savior of the body," the church (v. 25). He sacrificed Himself for her so that in the present "He might sanctify and cleanse her" and that at His return He might "present her to Himself a glorious church," a bride "holy and without blemish" (vv. 26-27).

This divine truth about the relationship of Christ and the church finds application in the realm of human marriage, but this is secondary to the text. Chiefly, Paul stresses that the beauty and magnificence of the church is due to what Christ has done.

## **Chapter 6**

**The Church at War.** This chapter has no direct mention of the church—at least, none that I can perceive. However, the language of it is kingdom language; the subjects of King Jesus must be armed and outfitted to wage and win the battle against the devil (v. 10). The magnitude of this struggle is apparent from two things.

First, it is the Lord's war. We Christians are to don the "whole armor of God" and fight for King Jesus. Our anthem is "Onward, Christian Soldiers." Nowadays, we don't seem comfortable with this violent kind of imagery. But make no mistake about it; we are in a war for our very souls. And God does not stint on provisions for the fight; we bear His "whole" armor; we wield the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (vv. 10, 17).

Second, the magnitude of this war is made clear by the nature of our enemy. We do not fight against "flesh and blood" but against Satan himself, "against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (vv. 11-12). John's Revelation makes clear that we fight not against mere mortals, but against "the great dragon ... that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world" (Rev 12:9).

The magnificence of the church lies in the magnitude of the One for whom she fights and the one against whom she fights.

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