



ONE CHURCH

EPHESIANS

Ephesians 1:15-23
Lesson 2—The Christ of the Church

December 26, 2021

Introduction

America is a land of churches. In some parts of the country, including the one we live in, you are hard-pressed to drive more than a mile without seeing a church building.

The problem with modern culture is churches can seem to exist apart from Christ. Some religious groups have congregations but deny the divinity of Jesus. It sounds absurd.

Paul wants to make a point in Ephesians. The church does not exist without Jesus. He is the “hub” of the church.

The only way to achieve oneness in Christ is to have Christ at the center.

In this lesson, we want to focus on the power and position of Christ and what that means for us as God's church. The reason is simple. The church acts the way it does because Christ is who he is.

Discussion

His Position

In our society, position is a subtle indicator of status. We speak of being "low on the totem pole," and it tells the story of a minion doing the work of others.

It was even more critical in Paul's time. Status and position were defined in two ways. One was physical space, and the other was the name they were called.

In vs. 20, Paul indicates Christ's position, not only for the church but in all realms.

"that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places," (Ephesians 1:20, ESV)

He is seated "at the right hand." We sometimes refer to someone important as being "his right-hand man." The right hand of a ruler was the most position of power.

It is what James and John wanted from Jesus.

"And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."" (Mark 10:37, ESV)

This request set off a firestorm among the disciples because they knew they wanted to be the most influential figures in the kingdom.

We see it today in the way a president meets with his cabinet. While we think that the president sits at the head of the table, that is incorrect. He sits in the middle chair. Surrounding him are advisors. The most important positions are the two most power-

ful cabinet members to his left and right. They are the Secretaries of State and Defense.

Paul tells us the moment that Jesus was seated at the right hand. When he was raised from the dead, he sat at the right hand. Many scholars believe this is an allusion to Psalm 2, a coronation psalm read when a king was crowned in Israel. For Jesus, his crowning took place at his resurrection.

Paul tells us he is in a unique position in heaven by using this term.

But he uses another concept to describe the exalted position. It is the "name."

"far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come." (Ephesians 1:21, ESV)

He has a "name above all name."

Titles are important. Today, the protocol of names is a significant matter in royalty. When addressing an emperor, you must say, "His or Her Imperial Majesty, Emperor." In the Rome of Paul's time, the emperor was always (at the consequence of death) referred to by the title "Dominus," which meant master or lord. It indicated his position to the citizenry.

But it says Jesus has a "name above all names." No matter how exalted a ruler is, how exquisite his title, Jesus as a name more supreme, more regal.

This simple phrase shows that no ruler in all the earth has the power Jesus does. Paul punctuates this point by saying it is not just for this age, but the one to come. He is the Lord of eternity, not merely earth.

Jesus is not a figure of history, a man who lived in Nazareth and died in Jerusalem. He was more than the emperor, the high priest, more than anyone on the planet. For the church, he occupies a throne that governs all we do.

Paul goes on to describe his power.

His Power

Power and authority are different ideas. Authority gives you the right to do something, but power makes it happen. Jesus has the authority of the right hand and the power of God himself to act.

In verse 22, Paul describes his power.

“And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,” (Ephesians 1:22, ESV)

He has “put all things under his feet.” The term “put” is positional. The “all things” stand under (the meaning of the word). But it is more than a semantic issue. A powerful picture is attached to this idea.

When a king conquered another, it was more than a military loss. A king forced (usually at the point of a spear). Once in this uncomfortable prostrate position, the conquering king would put his foot on the neck of the conquered. It was a graphic demonstration not of having him “under my thumb” but literally “under my feet.”

Paul says that Jesus, through death, burial, and resurrection, has conquered all things, including the power of Satan, the power of death, and the power of sin. He stands on the neck of the vanquished foe in a powerful display.

No ruler has a compliant nation. No monarch could say he had “put all things” under his feet in the physical world. Instead, he is constantly fighting the battle.

This created a second kind of power.

“And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,” (Ephesians 1:22, ESV)

He is also “head over all things” to the church.

We know how vital our heads are. That four-pound blob of gray matter between our ears does so much.

It sustains life. Our heads and brains control physical functions such as breathing, blood pressure, and a host of other metabolic actions.

The head also provides thinking and direction. It sorts out problems. Consider what happens when you are driving. Your mind makes a million microdecisions to keep you safe. It must calculate speed, acceleration, watch for traffic signals, be alert to other cars and their potential danger. It must command the body to brake safely and accelerate properly.

If it wasn't for your head, you could not find your direction home on a walk or how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Without the head, the body dies.

During the French Revolution, executions were done in the Reign of Terror using the guillotine. The head severed from the body renders the body useless.

Christ sustains the church, directs the church, and gives it life. A church without Christ is a dead body. The body exists and thrives because Christ is at the center.

His Completeness

Paul presents Christ's third trait as that he "completes" things.

"which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." (Ephesians 1:23, ESV)

Verse 23 is a complicated verse that has stumped scholars for years.

The term "fulness" speaks of the filling and the final result.

In Mark 6, Jesus fed the 5000 with five loaves and two fish. In the end, scrapes were gathered into a basket. Mark says:

"And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish." (Mark 6:43, ESV)

The baskets were “full.” It is the same term Paul uses.

In the ancient world, it described ships that had a complete crew. They needed nothing else.

In the first chapter, Paul uses it for the first time.

“as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” (Ephesians 1:10, ESV)

Time had filled the space. In the same way, Galatians 4:4 speaks of the fulness of time.

How is Jesus the one who fills?

The plan of God was a winding path of what seemed to be disjointed events. We saw the flood, Abraham, Egypt, prophets. But it was not until Jesus came, died for man’s sins, and rose from the grave, God’s plan was completed.

He is the one who completes God’s picture of salvation. Nothing else puts the cherry on top.

But there is a subtle interplay of the passage between Christ and the church.

His Lordship

In the last two verses of this lesson, we read:

“And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” (Ephesians 1:22-23, ESV)

It is about Christ and his church.

As we have seen, he is “head of the church,” which means he gives direction and life to the body.

But it says that the church is "his body." A head without a body is nothing but a medical specimen.

Without Christ, the church does not exist.

But there is more. Without the church, Christ is incomplete. He puts them together.

In Ephesians, Paul emphasizes the unity of the body. It is a letter about how to live in the body. How do you take Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, and make them into one?

The church is as much God's plan as Jesus is.

Some today carry with it a strange concept. You can have Christ without the church. Christianity is a private faith, a one-on-one with Christ with no need for the church.

Several years ago, a questioner asked him what God's most significant idea was. He did not think long. He said it was the church. The church is what makes Christians alive. It is not sitting in your room meditating on the divine but interacting with others. Faith grows in a community, not in isolation.

The early chapters of Acts bear this out.

On the day of Pentecost, 3000 were baptized. But note what it did say as well:

"praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." (Acts 2:47, ESV)

They were being added to something, the church.

It was true of Paul himself.

When he was converted, he went to Jerusalem, but a persecutor's reputation preceded him. In the narrative, he points out the importance of the church.

“And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.” (Acts 9:26, ESV)

For Paul, being part of a body was paramount. It was not optional but expected. Yet, the text contains a wrinkle we tend to overlook. In verse 23, Paul writes:

“which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” (Ephesians 1:23, ESV)

It says that the body is the fullness of him. It is a curious phrase but an important one.

It is clear from the book of Acts that Christians planted churches where they lived and reached out to win their fellows to Christ. Jesus put the church on earth to continue his work. He told his disciples to go and make other disciples.

One legend tells of Christ returning to heaven. The angels ask, “how will you keep it going?” He answers, “I have left it to my followers to continue my work.”

The angels are perplexed and a little shocked. “You are going to expect them to do it? What other plans do you have?”

And Jesus answered, “that is my only plan.”

We are the hands and feet of Jesus on this earth. We carry on his mission. We complete him as he completes us. Our work “fulfills” him, as did his establishment of the church “fulfills” us.

Never forget the importance of the church. While politicians want to hijack them for their own purposes, Christ has a greater purpose in mind—the world's salvation.

Conclusion

God had a grand scheme.

When man sinned, the plan was put into motion. The coming of Jesus to earth to live, die, and be raised was the pinnacle.

Jesus becomes the focal point of history. He exerts his will and power but does it through his body, the church he created.

He works in us and through us. He unites diverse people through his saving action to show God's ultimate will in this world.

Look at the church. You see in it the Christ of the church and the plan of the Almighty. Never take it for granted.