

A Satellite View of the Church

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Well it's a joy for me to welcome you to our service this morning as the pastor of Truth Community and we are so glad to have you. I see a lot of new faces in the audience and it's good to have you. I was able to talk with some and others we're just able to greet from the platform but we're glad that you are here and you're here on a good morning in the sense that we are on the beginning end of a new study in the book of Ephesians. I just want to say that it is a joy for me and for my family to share in the life of Truth Community and I hope that those of you who attend here regularly feel the same way. That joy, that encouragement, that sense of belonging will only deepen as we understand why we are here, where we came from and where it is that we are going and what we're supposed to do in the meantime. The way that you understand that and the way that you have that sense of origin and that sense of direction and that sense of destination is to understand what the Bible says about the church and about how the church came into being. When I say "the church." I'm not talking about our church in particular but how is it that anybody became a Christian? How is it that what we know as the body of Christ came to be? When you understand that, you can understand what the purpose of the church is and then begin to aim after that and become what we're supposed to become. It's not about generating the largest attendance possible. That's irrelevant. It's not about conforming to the world, that is actually contrary to our purposes. We're not here to make people in the world happy with what we do. Charles Spurgeon said that, "The church is not formed to be a social club, to be a power in politics or to promote its own opinions. The church is a body created by the Lord to achieve his own and ends and purposes. It exists for nothing else." The church is that group of people called by God and born of the Spirit who are true believers in Jesus Christ. The church is a supernatural entity. It is a spiritual entity, in other words. There is the universal church consisting of all true believers everywhere and there is the local church, an assembly of believers in one particular locality. To simplify all of this, to bring it down to one little narrow statement from which we will launch a month's long study of the book of Ephesians: the church is a group of people who share common life in Christ. That's it.

That is what it means to be a church and the book of Ephesians is going to show us our origin, where we came from, and it's going to show us the consequences for our life as a body of true Christians. Once we understand that it's not our desire to be a social force; once we understand that it's not our desire to be a political force; it's not our desire to be

the biggest possible organization that we can possibly be or to draw attention to ourselves by those who watch such things, once we clear our minds out of all of that gunk, that's a technical spiritual term that they taught us in seminary, gunk. Once you clear your mind of all of the false views and the false assumptions that surround gathering together, you're now free to be able to say, "Okay, what does it mean to be a church? What is it supposed to look like? What are we supposed to do? Who are we supposed to be?" Today we start that study in the book of Ephesians and this message this morning is designed to be an overview message of Ephesians and what that is going to do, it's going to be a satellite view of the church. This is the church from about five miles up. What it is that we are like, what we are supposed to be as a church, this is what this message is about today. A satellite view of the church. It's an overview message on the book of Ephesians. We're going to break this into two halves basically because the book of Ephesians breaks into two halves. The first three chapters and the last three chapters have different focuses although they are organically connected together. But the first three chapters of Ephesians talk about the call of the church and the last three chapters talk about the character of the church: where did we come from and who it is that we are supposed to be. That's going to be our focused here this morning.

Let's start this way: to have the most foundational understanding that you could have about the church of Jesus Christ is to understand that the church, that group of believers, that body of believers, is a group of people that have been called by God to himself for his own purposes. We do not exist to please ourselves as a body of believers. We exist to fulfill the purposes for which God has called us and the book of Ephesians makes that clear. So I'm going to have two major points in this message this morning and then there will be subpoints for each one. Here's the thing: as you understand what the church is, you understand the significance of your life as a Christian. You understand yourself as you understand the church if you're a believer in Christ. And if you're not a Christian, then a message like this is a call from God on your life to come out of the world and to come into the body of Christ. That is so crucial to understand that when God calls a man or a woman to Christ, when God calls the church into existence, he is calling them out of the world, out of the environment of the world, out of the thinking and the philosophies and the conduct of the world into something completely different which he defines and which he orchestrated for his own glory and for our own good. It's good to take a breath sometimes, isn't it?

Our first point this morning for us to understand is: the call of the church. Where did we come from? How is it that this body of believers has endured over time across generations. How is it that it exists in different geographies, in different locales throughout the world? How could that be? Well, the call of the church tells us that the church exists because God himself called it into being. Just like at the start of Genesis we see that God called creation into being by his spoken word, so also by a powerful work of his sovereign will, he calls the church into existence. The church is reflective of an act of God and that's what we're going to see as we go through the book of Ephesians here.

The call of the church, the first three chapters of Ephesians. And what is the call of the church? First of all, the church is under a call from God. That's subpoint A if you like to

outline it with that level of care. The call of the church is a call from God and what that means is that immediately, even with what we've just said so far, we have immediately had our minds elevated beyond this realm in which we live into a completely different realm. Because we didn't organize ourselves, as it were, we didn't make ourselves Christians, we can understand that there is a separate purpose for us that is reflective of the fact that we were called by God. Now the call of the church is great, therefore. The call of the church is awesome. The call of the church is majestic because the church reflects the eternal purpose of God. The church reflects the eternal purpose of God. There is a reason why we try not to focus too much on human personalities and human circumstances in our services. There is a reason for that. It's designed to help you and to help me remember that the the focus of what we gather together is the Lord Jesus Christ as he has been revealed in his precious word. And so we focus on Christ when we come together and that's a reflection of the fact that the church exists because of a call from God. God chose his people before the world began.

Look at Ephesians 1:3. What's going to happen from here on out now in this message, is we're going to read a lot of Scripture without a whole lot of explanation because I want you to see how Scripture fits together and what the flow of the thought of the book of Ephesians is. If I tried to comment on every verse, we would be here until next Memorial Day and that wouldn't be a good idea. So we're just going to read passages and try to see the broad themes. But Ephesians is a book about the church and in Ephesians 1, you see that the church exists because of a call from God. Look at chapter 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." You see right there, it just the zeros in and puts Christ and God the Father on full display and it starts right there. That's the whole starting point of understanding the church. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Everything mushrooms out of that. That is the seed from which everything else flows.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Notice, we're on the receiving end of the blessing. It's not that we bought our way into the church with our own good works, we are on the receiving end. We are the direct object of the verb. God blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

Verse 4, "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." Here is what you need to see from that passage and we're going to go through all of these verses in detail in the future but just understand and look and see that it's God choosing us, not us choosing God. That it is God blessing us, that it is God predestining us to adoption as sons. That this is according, verse 5, it's "according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of His glory which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." We are on the receiving end of grace. We are on the receiving end of the eternal purpose of God if we are true Christians. The church is a reflection of the purpose of God and God alone. It originated in the will of God. It came about because of the operation of his purpose and the object of

that is his glory. It originated in his will, it ends up in his glory. There is a transcendent purpose at work in the true church of Jesus Christ and it is a God-centered, Christ-centered focus because the church exists based on a call from God himself. Wow. As we think through that as a body of believers together, there should be a sense every time that we come together, be it on a Tuesday night or when we come through those doors on Sunday morning, there should be a holy hush in our hearts that says, "This is something significant that is happening. This is a reflection not of just me getting up early on Sunday morning, this is an outworking of the purpose of God himself as we gather together. It is high. It is lofty. It is noble to be a part of the true Church of Christ."

And it's evident, as you continue on in Ephesians 1, it's evident that this was not something that we did on our own but rather we were on the receiving end of mercy which we needed because we were sinful and we were unworthy of being in the church of God in our own strength, in our own deserving because we were sinners and we fall short of the glory of God. There had to be a reconciliation that took place and what Ephesians teaches us as we continue to read on, is that God himself initiated that and accomplished it on our behalf.

Look at Ephesians 1:7, having just made reference to Christ as the Beloved at the end of verse 6, it says in verse 7, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses." Parenthetically, which otherwise would have kept us out of the church, right? A holy God can't have an unholy people and so there had to be redemption, there had to be cleansing, there had to be forgiveness of that which otherwise alienated us from God. Verse 7, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight 9 He made known to us the mystery of His will." There it is again, right? Not our will, God's will. "According to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been." There it is again, we're on the receiving end of an act, an intention of God. "Having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory." You see it, right? God the Father in verses 3-6, chose us before the foundation of the world. Christ secured our redemption with his own blood so that the eternal purpose of God, his will, his intention, would be carried out in the church.

Then, as you continue to read in Ephesians 1, you see that God in the person of the Holy Spirit, sealed us so that we would never be lost and what a blessed thing to say to those of you who come from Arminian backgrounds, who come from environments where you have been taught that you could sin your way out of salvation, that what God made happen you could undo in your life as a Christian. That is utterly false and foreign to the call of God on the church. Look at verse 13, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation - having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory." God, when

he saved you, put the Holy Spirit inside you. He sealed you in Christ so that you could not somehow leak out and the word that is used there has the idea of a down payment. God, in giving you the Holy Spirit, has made a down payment on your soul and he will complete the final redemption of your soul in heaven. You will in no way be lost. How could you? How could the church ever be lost? This is a reflection, the church is an outworking of the eternal purpose of God before time began. The church is on the receiving end of the perfect work of Christ that secured the full and free forgiveness of our trespasses. Now here we are, sealed by the Holy Spirit, there is no place to fall out.

So beloved, the church universal, true Christians, watch this: true Christians are on the receiving end of a Triune work of God that will most certainly be fulfilled. Where did the church come from? It came from a work of the Triune God which executed the eternal purpose of God the Father before time began. That's why you're a Christian today. That's why I'm a Christian today. It's not because I was out looking for God. I wasn't. I remember the night of my conversion. Trust me, I was not looking for God when God intervened in my life and saved me. We were all like sheep, lost, wandering, not knowing where to go. Most of us to one degree or another, having been bound up in false religion, teaching us that we could be good enough to earn God's favor. Well, God had to wipe all of that away. God had to clarify and pierce our minds to realize that we were lost. That you are lost if you're not in Christ and there is no way that you can save yourself. And he convicts us like that so that we would cast ourselves on the mercy of a sovereign Savior who died on Calvary to forgive us of our sins and it's not, "God, here I am. Look at how good I am. You must receive me." It's the exact opposite. It's, "God, here I am with eyes looking downward and shame at my sin. God, here I am in all of my undeserving. Have mercy on me, the sinner, and please receive me into your kingdom based on the gracious invitation of Christ."

It's two completely different views of what it means to be a Christian and the only way that you ever get to that point of self-renunciation, of utter repentance is by a work of God on your heart as you listen to the Scriptures, as you read the Scriptures. All of that to say, and I'm so glad that we get to come back to this in future weeks to talk about it more: is that the church exists because of the call of God. The church was God's idea, not ours. The church was the work of Christ, not ours. It was the Spirit applying it to our hearts, not our figuring it out with our unaided mind and will. And so as we think about the church, as we think about being a church in the local assembly sense of the word, we realize there is a high and lofty call that is at work here. We start to get a taste of that but do you know what? The truth of the matter is, for me and for you is that while we can kind of get glimpses from what we just read of how great this call is, the truth of the matter is that we see but in a mirror dimly. We just see a fraction of it. We don't fully get it. We can understand it truly but we don't get the full greatness of what that means and so when the Apostle Paul wrote this letter and he had just written these great truths about the church, what you see him doing in verse 15 is he immediately goes to prayer. He prays that the church would understand its great call from God, that the God who called us into existence would lift us beyond our normal capacity to understand and strengthen and illuminate our minds so that we could better grasp the greatness of the call and that we would not lapse into thinking about it in a marginal, horizontal, earthly way.

Look at what Paul does in verse 15. He's just expounded this great Triune call of God on the church and in response to that truth, he doesn't congratulate us on our choice, he goes to prayer. Look at verse 15, he says, "For this reason." For what reason? Because of the great call of God on the church, "having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, I do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers." He says, "I'm so grateful for you, I give thanks to God for you." Do you know why he's thanking God for them? Because God is the explanation of them. You thank the one who gives the origin of the gift. He's thanking God because he is the origin of this church to whom he is writing.

Then he says in verse 16, "I pray for you." You pray for us? What do you pray Paul? Here's what I pray, verse 17, I pray, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him." Verse 18, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened." You see, he wants us to know it better than what we do. He's praying that they would grasp something more of the majesty than what they could get just from what he just said and so he's calling upon God who called the church into existence to increase the church's understanding of its great call. He says, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." He's praying, he says, "You have this position that God has given to you and now it is my earnest prayer that you would understand that better." This is all a reflection of the great call of God. God called us, Paul says, "I pray that you would understand that call more than you do."

Doesn't that even teach us something about the spirit in which we should approach the church? Approach the Scriptures? Approach our life together? There is something supernatural that has taken place in the lives of true believers and when we come together as a body of believers, we are fulfilling an eternal purpose that was settled before time began, long before our birth. We are living out in time what God determined and preordained before time began. Well, how do you ever begin to understand that? You know, we're used to thinking on the level of, what's on TV? Or what's in the newspaper? Or what's on the radio? We think in such superficial terms. Our minds aren't naturally equipped to think at this level of depth, of this breadth of greatness. Paul is praying, "God, they need your help to go beyond their natural capacity, that your Spirit would open their mind in a way that they wouldn't otherwise see because God," Paul prays, "I want them to grasp this. I want them to understand it." This is surpassingly great. This is surpassingly transcendent.

Brothers and sisters in Christ here in this room today, you and I are simply not accustomed to thinking in the realm of transcendence. We're not accustomed to thinking in the realm of this eternal greatness and so Paul pleads with God to help us understand. He goes on in verse 19 and he says, "These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places." What happened to us

spiritually is reflected in what happened to Christ in his resurrection and ascension. We went from being spiritually dead to being spiritually alive. The power that did that in our lives is the same power that brought Christ out of the grave and ascended him into heaven. No wonder he's praying. You'd never guess this. You would never guess this.

Verse 21, "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection 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." Paul compares the life of the church and the power that brought the church into being. He says, "It's the same power that raised our Lord Jesus Christ out of the grave." That is the same power that is at work. That's a great, magnificent power. There is a might. There is an awesome strength that was exercised to bring the church into being. There was an awesome strength that was exercised to bring you to Christ, to bring me to saving knowledge of Christ. This was not something that we did on our own power. Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father draws him." And what you're going to see as we talk about this, Paul is going to say in chapter 2 why it took so much strength.

So we said that the church exists because of a call from God and it was a call from God. Now, that's chapter 1: a great call from a Triune God. Paul prays, "I pray to God that you would understand this because it was a supernatural power, the same power that raised a dead man to life." That's the same power that made you a Christian, that called the church into being. Now, that's great. That's ennobling. Do you realize that there is a massive purpose at work here even if I can't see it and fully understand it? Now, here's a question: why such a big deal? What required so much power? Well, it took power, it took God's power, it took his strength, it took his might because of who you and I used to be. You see, the call of the church is a call from God but secondly, the call of the church is a call out of sin. Out of sin. Why did it take a spiritual resurrection for you to be born into Christ? Why did it take a spiritual resurrection to give birth to the church? Because you and I were dead. There was not a spark of spiritual life within us and so we had to be called out of sin by a great spiritual power.

Look at chapter 2, verse 1 of Ephesians. Paul says, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." Oh, but it gets worse. He's not done yet. "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." We had to be called out of sin. Now listen beloved: what you see in that passage which we will go into more detail in a few weeks, is a comprehensive overview of how desperately lost you and I were before Christ and if you are not a Christian here this morning, I am reading your current autobiography to you. This is who you are right now if you are not a Christian: dead in sin, verse 1; verse 2, dominated by the devil. It says that we "walked according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." So we were in a spiritual grave, cold and lifeless and the one who was guarding our grave was Satan himself. We had a ruler over our spiritual corpse keeping

us from getting out and we didn't have the power to get out anyway. This is desperately bad. This is desperately hopeless but that was our condition before Christ.

Then he goes on. Look at what he says in verse 3, "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh." This is a description of earthly life before Christ. Paul says, "This is how we all formerly lived. There are no exceptions. The church is composed of people who used to be like this." People who "lived in the lusts of the flesh, indulged the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." We lived in the spirit of the world and we liked it there and even if we were religious, in false religion, we loved our false religion. It didn't make us better, it made us worse that we were worshipping falsely. There was no merit in that. So that it goes to the point of saying that we were dead in and of ourselves, that Satan was blinding us and beyond that, over the sphere of the heavens, we were children of wrath. Whose wrath? God's wrath. God justly displeased and dishonored by our sinful way of living, ready to pour out wrath, as it were. His judgment righteously would have been our lot. So for us to be a people belonging to Christ, for us to belong to God, understand that what Paul is saying here is that God had to make a powerful call on our lives to get us out of that realm. We could never have escaped it on our own.

We were dead in sin and so we had to be called out of there and look at what he does as Paul continues on. He's still talking about the call of God in the full context of the first three chapters and here he says, he's looking as it were, at that time, that episode, that moment in time where God moved in our hearts and awakened us to spiritual life. Look at verse 4. Two glorious words for a man in sin, "But God." We were like that "but," by contrast, something else, something different, something unexpected, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." This is the eternal purpose of God being exercised in time in the act of regeneration in a soul. God imparted spiritual life to us when we were spiritually dead. He made us alive in Christ.

Beloved, here is what I want you to see: chapter 1 showed us the great eternal purpose; the beginning of chapter 2 showed us our spiritual corpse. When you put all of that together, you start to understand the church had to be an act of God. In a positive sense, it was his purpose before time began. In a negative sense, we couldn't have done it on our own. So how is it then that we find ourselves Christians gathered together in a local assembly that is a reflection of the greater universal church of Christ? How do we find ourselves in that most blessed position? We find ourselves here today as Christians because God did something for us as an exercise of love, mercy and utterly undeserved grace. He has shown favor and blessing to us where his wrath and judgment and abandonment to the devil himself was what our lot deserved. That's why we're here. That's the greatness, the majesty, the awe-inspiring goodness of the call of God on us. He made us who once were dead alive. That life was manifested in ways that we will see in the last three chapters of the book.

Look at verse 6. God, "raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come," this is a passage, this is a verse still future to us today, "so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Our your eternal future is going to be a display in the heavens of the greatness of the kindness and mercy of God that he had on us in saving us from sin and making us a part of his people.

I'll call a time out here. Let's just take a little break and breathe a little bit here. This will help you understand the pulpit of Truth Community a little bit. When you get a glimpse of the greatness of the purposes of God in the church, the greatness of salvation, the greatness of what still lies ahead of us, there is a reason why we don't waste our time talking about a lot of trivial things from the pulpit, why we don't try to simply focus on how we can best get through next week together. It's too earthly. It's too earth-centered. It's too man-centered to do that. That's not why the church exists. We exist to proclaim the glories of the one who saved us and when you understand those glories, everything else is chaff and corn husks by comparison. We have a great call. We've been called out of sin and we must understand our purpose and rise up to it even in the very way that we worship together on Sunday morning. That's why. That's why. We don't want to be flippant. We don't want to be angry, complaining about the crumbling world around us. Yeah, the world is crumbling around us. Do you know what? I'm going to heaven. This is so temporary and passing that our desires, our interests, our affections, are swept up in the greatness of the call of God on the church of which he has seen fit to let us be a part of. And so the things that alarmed at one time suddenly seem very trivial by comparison to the greatness of the purpose and call of God on his people.

Paul reemphasizes in verse 8, chapter 2, Paul reemphasizes how it was that we got to this position and when you read the text and you just let the text say what it says without being preconditioned by things that perhaps well-meaning people told you in the past, when you read the text for yourself, you just see that this was a work of God. It was a work of God. It was a work of God. It was a work of God. Paul says it so many times in so many ways, his intention, his will, his choice, that when you just let Scripture speak, it's astonishing that anyone misses it. Verse 8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works," anything you did with your hands it's not from that. That's not the origin. You cannot boast about it. Verse 10, "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works," and even those good works, "God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." You see it, right? A call from God. A work by God. A work for his glory. We are on the receiving end. We are not the end in ourselves. We are a means to an end as a people of God. We are a means to an end of the manifestation of the glory of God throughout all of eternity and we're just getting started here in the church on earth. What you understand about your purpose as a Christian and what you understand about what we understand corporately about our purpose as a church, is going to determine the direction in which we go. We exist to proclaim the excellencies of the one who called us. And that is a privilege. That is a gracious gift for us to have and we are just so delighted and grateful and thankful that God brought us into that great hall of glory.

When you understand the call of God, it changes the purpose for which you live. Now, as it goes on and we said it was a call out of sin. We're talking about the call of God, the church's call. It's a call from God. It's a call out of sin. In verse 11, I just want to show you this really briefly. We're called out of sin. We were called when we were not a people. Most of us, if not all of us in this locale, we're Gentiles. We are non-Jews. In verse 11, Paul says in Ephesians chapter 2, verse 11, "Therefore remember," call this to your mind. Don't forget this point: "that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called 'Uncircumcision' by the so-called 'Circumcision,' which is performed in the flesh by human hands." There is a conflict here alluded to between Jews and Gentiles. Verse 12, here is what you and I as Gentiles are to remember. In this privileged position that we have in Christ, here is what we should remember that would humble us and help us keep the right perspective. He says in chapter 2, verse 12, "remember that you were at that time," that moment of your salvation, "you were separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." He's reminding us of how utterly hopeless our position was. Not only were we dead in sin, we were outside of the chosen race of the Jews. We had no claim on the promise of God. We had no participation in the biological genes of that nation which God had promised to bless. We were outside of Christ, the only one who could save us. We were separated from him and we couldn't get to him from where we were at.

What Paul is painting here, think about it this way: there is a sense in which right now we're looking at a spiritual photo album and we're looking back into the past and we're seeing what it used to be like. This is a picture of where we were at spiritually. For those of you that aren't Christians, this is present tense. This is a selfie of you right now. For the rest of us, for those of us that have the glory of being in Christ, this is what we used to be: separate from Christ, excluded, strangers, no hope, without God in the world. You see, there is an utter crushing of human pride in Ephesians when you understand the call of God. We glory in being Christians but we understand that it's not from ourselves.

Verse 13, "But now," there is the contrast again, "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Once again beloved, we were brought near. We were on the receiving action of a work of Christ. We did not run to him, as it were, in our own strength and find him on our own because we so much wanted him. No, it was the exact opposite. He wanted us despite our undeserving. Verse 14, "For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments," and on it goes.

A simple summary of this call out of sin: God brought us near to be his people otherwise we would have had no hope. We would have been destined for destruction. You and I. That's what the call of God means upon us. That's the implication of it.

Now, there's a third aspect to the call of the church. We said it's a call from God, it's a call out of sin. These are all just so wonderful. Salvation is not purely negative in that it erases our sin, it does that but it does so much more because, you see, the call from God

on the church is a call out of sin but it's also a call into blessing. It's a call into the unending favor of God, the unending goodness manifested to us, blessing of God. God has called his church into the love of Christ. It wasn't purely negative, "Don't touch the hot stove." It was a positive, "Here is a feast for you to eat." It is not simply, "Don't sin," it is, "Here is the bestowal of my love and grace upon you for all of eternity."

Look at chapter 3, verse 14. This Paul was a prayer, I tell you. He said, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God." Verse 20, "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." Boom! Boom! Boom! What a climax. You see, God hasn't simply called us out of judgment, he has called us into a realm where he intends to manifest and display and communicate the love of Christ and the blessing of God to us throughout all generations, throughout all eternity. That is the call of the church. We have been called out of death into life, out of judgment into eternal blessing. If you're a Christian, beloved, based on the authority of God's word, you will not miss it. No matter what the difficulties of life are right now, no matter how crushing the weight of life, of broken relationships and of other matters of difficulty that are endemic to this fallen world, no matter what that may be that you brought in, look up. Look up. Look out. The call of God transcends all of that in your life. You are destined for glory and you will most certainly inherit it. Live in the reflection of the goodness of that now rather than being consumed by the trials that you see in front of you. Let your life be defined by the word of God. Let your sense of purpose and direction be defined., "I am a child of God, called from him out of my former sin into present and future blessing of incalculable proportions. Of course I'm joyful. I'm so focused on that, I can't even pay attention to the amputations."

Now, in light of the first three chapters of Ephesians, now what? We're not there yet. What happens between now and glory? That's the purpose of the last three chapters of Ephesians where Paul talks about not the call of the church but the character of the church. This is what we are to become. You see, our call in Christ impacts us. We live differently from what we used to. We live differently from the world. I am going to do my levelheaded best to be disciplined in the time frame here. The character of the church. What is it that is supposed to mark our life in the body of Christ? First of all, we are to be marked by a walk of unity. A walk of unity. Salvation has reconciled us to God and now life in the church, relationships in the church, our relationships with one another should mirror a peaceable spirit that is reflective of the objective peace that we have with God because he has reconciled us to him in Christ.

Chapter 4, verse 1, "Therefore," because of everything that I've said in these prior three chapters, therefore, here are the implications of that. "Therefore," based on what I've said,

"I, the prisoner of the Lord, I implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Beloved, we should be so humbled by the greatness of the call on our lives that it makes it easy for us to live in peace with others who have received the same salvation as us. That is why in the past, that is why to the best of the ability of the elders of this church, we will do everything that we can with God's help and with yours, to preserve a unified, peaceful body for years to come. We will not be tolerant of divisive people. We will not be tolerant of people who are pursuing their own selfish ends in the church.

Right now I want to tell you, that's not a threat to anybody in here because we enjoy a peaceable unity. Dan Jackson and I were talking about this before we came, we love the harmony in our church. I'm not aware of a single divisive person that's in this room right now so I'm not talking about anything present. I'm declaring a present intention about the future of our church. We will guard this unity and those of you that love this church, I ask you to help us guard it together. Will you do that with us? Guard that unity. Keep short accounts of complaints with one another. Be swift to forgive one another. Realize that your leaders will sometimes not be all that you would hope. We can do that. We're motivated to do that because of the transcendent purpose of God at work and we realize that the purpose of the church is unity. Unity is a primary purpose of spiritual leadership in the church.

Look at Ephesians 4:11, "He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers." Here is spiritual leadership in the formation and life of the church. Verse 12, "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ." Okay Paul, what? Verse 13, "until we all attain to the," what? You can say it. "Unity." The purpose of spiritual leadership is to preserve and build up the body so that that unity of faith, "that knowledge of the Son of God, a mature man to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." Here is what you have to understand, here is what we have to understand together. For those of you that are visiting, our church has been around for about two years now. That's how long we've been together. We're still in our infancy. I had to say that to set up the next metaphor. While we're in this incubator where we have peace in our midst, we have to understand that what we now enjoy in this developing form is what is supposed to take even deeper root. It's supposed to manifest itself in the life of the church and collectively all of us together are committed to that principle of unity. I believe that that is a defining mark of what we as a body want to be. That's great. Having been in churches in the past where I had big, bearded guys calling me out in church meetings and stuff like that. I don't want to go back to that. I'm sure you don't either.

But we recognize now that unity is the purpose and one of the things...you know, there will be a time, I'm just going to pull all the veils back and just be really direct with you. There will come a time soon where I anticipate when new people come when we move permanently to our new building, there will be other people that will come who haven't been a part of the life for a couple of years and haven't had the foundation. We will

welcome them. We will love them. We will embrace them. But as new people come, there will be opportunity for people who don't share our commitment to unity to try to worm their way in. It's the nature of life in ministry. What I'm asking you to do now is to commit yourself to this principle of unity now so that we can all be on guard. We can all be instruments of preserving that unity and when someone comes in who wants to be a divisive influence, who wants to break it up, people who are unknowingly the instruments of Satan to disrupt the purpose of God in the church, that we would all have each other's backs on these kinds of things and say, "You know what? That kind of harshness, those divisive words, that kind of gossip, that's foreign to life in our body. This is a problem that I personally as a member of Truth Community, I can't tolerate that. I don't have to wait for my pastor to find out about it, I'm going to deal with it now because this is too precious. This is contrary to the purpose of God, the call of God, the character of the church." Its unity. Not in devotion to a pastor or to leaders or to anything else, in devotion to Christ. Look at it. This is the call of God. Chapter 4, verse 3, I implore you, "preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." A theologian called R. B. Kuiper said, "Unity is the essence of the body of Christ."

Now, it's a walk of unity, secondly it's a walk of holiness. It's a walk of holiness. What is our character to be? Our character is to be marked by unity; it's to be marked by holiness. The church is designed to be separate from the world's conduct. Look at chapter 4, verse 17, "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart," he goes on in verse 19. Look at verse 20, "But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self." Verse 23, "be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." It's a walk of holiness. Separated out from the thinking and conduct of the world.

He goes on. I'm going to accelerate this a bit. He goes on in the rest of chapter 4 to say to put aside lies and falsehood, instead speak graciously and forgive. He says at the beginning of chapter 5, verse 2, look at it with me, "walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us." This holiness is a walk of truth. It's a walk of love. It's a walk wisdom. Look at chapter 5, verse 15, "be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise." So there's this conscious effort, this conscious pursuit of unity, this conscious pursuit of holiness. That holiness manifests itself in our relationships. Paul talks about wives and husbands at the end of chapter 5. He talks about parents and children in chapter 6:1-4. He talks about the workplace in verses 5-9, slaves and masters. We'll look at all of this in the future. Here's what I want you to see, beloved, in that very quick overview of love, wisdom, relationships: every aspect of our daily life is impacted and defined and influenced by the greatness of the call of God on our lives. That's what Paul is saying. As you go through those chapters, he's saying that this impacts everything and our character has a comprehensive call to be increasingly conformed to the Christ who called us.

Now, a final thing here. It's a walk of unity; it's a walk of holiness; it's also a walk of dependence. It's a walk of dependence and this brings us back all the way full circle. Paul says in chapter 6, verse 10, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." Translation: Satan arrays the host of his demonic force against the very purpose for which we exist. "Therefore," Paul says, "be conscious of the fact that this is not a stroll in the park but this is defined as a spiritual battle. As we pursue our spiritual purpose in Christ, there will be supernatural opposition to it. Therefore," he says, "put on the full armor of God. Depend on him. Be conscious of your captain and flee to him for refuge." Verse 13, "Therefore, take up the full armor of God," that protection which God has provided, "so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm."

Look at verse 18. Here is the dependence. You see, it started with the purpose of God. We go down to the bottom of the circle and we say, "Okay, this is for the glory of God," and then we come back up full circle to where we started, we must depend upon the one who called us. Verse 18, "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints." If prayer is anything, it is an expression of dependence upon God.

So what we're saying is this: we're saying that there is a great call of God on his people and where a true local church has come together, there is a great call upon it. There is a great call on Truth Community. Not that we're going to be the instruments of the international conversion of everything. It always strikes me funny. I'll drive on country roads, dirt roads, and you'll pass these churches that are 10' x 20' and you know that at most there are ten people there on a Sunday morning and yet they have this grandiose name out front: The Worldwide International Church of Outreach and Prayer or whatever. Come on, why not just say, "We're a country church." Let's just be real about it. Here's what I say that: when I say that we have a great call, I'm not saying anything about what the future manifestation or breadth of our ministry is going to be. That's really irrelevant to me. It honest to God, is irrelevant to me. I don't care about that anymore. When we say that we have a great call, it's not about who hears about us, who knows about us or who doesn't. We don't care about that. We absolutely do not care about that as Truth Community. That is utterly irrelevant to us. What we care about as a church is that we would recognize the greatness of the real call. It's great in the sense that our purpose is great because of the greatness of the God who gave birth to this body and the eternal purpose and the eternal outcome. That's what's great. Whether men think it's great or not, I don't care. I really don't care. That's not important. That doesn't matter. We're never going to go on big advertising campaigns to try to call attention to ourselves. It's enough that we have the attention of one, the attention of the God who called us. We just want to please him. That's all we care about. So we have a great call, not because of a great geographic breadth of impact but because we have a great God. We have a great Christ. We have a great salvation and that's what we love and that's what we will pursue. That is a satellite view of the church.

If you're not a Christian, I invite you to come. Come join us. Come to Christ. He calls you and says, "This blessing. I call you out of sin. I call you into my blessing. Just come and I will bestow all of this on you too." Why would you refuse? For those of you that are in this region, maybe new to our church, this is what we stand for. We invite you to join us as we pursue the purpose of the call of God on our lives.

Bow with me in prayer.

Our Father, we understand that the church of Jesus Christ is not a building, it is a gathering of your people come together to worship the God who called us to Christ. We pray that you would help us live out that purpose by pursuing a life, a body of unity, of holiness and of dependence upon our great God. Carry out, perfect, complete the purpose for which we exist, O God. Lord, for all of us, we would just want to say thank you. With complete inadequacy of expression, Father, we acknowledge our gratitude to you for saving us out of sin and calling us to such magnificent purposes, to be a part of the body of Christ, to be one day in heaven around the throne worshipping him, to be by name the objects of your saving purpose. Oh God, thank you. That is great beyond our comprehension and we pray that you would help us understand more the breadth and depth and height of that great call and that we would live out and receive the fullness of the blessing to which you have called us in Christ by your grace. We honor you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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