

## EPHESIANS 1:16-23

### SERVING TOGETHER

“I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 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. 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.”<sup>1</sup>

**I**t was Memorial Day, 2015. Twenty-three-year-old U.S. Marine Sergeant William Stacey had been killed in combat in Afghanistan earlier that year. The young Marine had written a letter to his family which was to be read only in the event of his death. In that letter, the young Marine explained why he was fighting. During a Memorial Day service held in Kabul in that same year, Marine General John Allen, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, read that letter which Sergeant Stacey had written.

Sgt. Stacey’s words read that day stated, “There will be a child who will live because men left the security they enjoyed in their home to come to his. He will have the gift of freedom which I have enjoyed for so long myself, and if my life brings the safety of a child who will one day change the world, then I know that it was worth it all.”

Commenting on this letter, Dr. Jim Denison wrote, “We remember [the] men and women who died so we could live. Each of them left the security of their homes to defend ours. They paid the ultimate price for their nation and for each of us. It’s been said that the reason you’ve not received a bill for the freedom you enjoy today is that its price has already been paid. Today we remember those who paid that price and pray for those they left behind.”

In his commentary, Dr. Denison transitioned to the theme that is dear to each Christian. “As we remember their sacrifice, let us also remember the One who gave everything for our eternal life.” Then, he cites **ROMANS 5:6-8**, reminding his readers that, “Christ died for the ungodly”—that’s us! Continuing his citation of the Apostle’s words Denison also observes that “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Now, listen to the rest of Dr. Denison’s commentary that was written over one year ago. “On March 15, 1985, Wayne Alderson appeared on *The Today Show*. The occasion was the 40th anniversary of his crossing into Germany, the first American soldier to do so during World War II. He has a permanent crease on his head from a wound he received on that day.

“Asked about his most significant memory of the event, Alderson told about a red-headed friend who saved his life. Alderson had come face to face with a German soldier. He shot the German, but not before he had thrown a grenade at Alderson which exploded and sent him face-down and wounded into the mud. Nearby, a German machine gun began firing in his direction. Alderson knew that if the grenade wound did not kill him, the machine gun would.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

“But his friend turned him over so he could breathe and threw his own body over him. He died protecting him from certain death. With tears welling up in his eyes, Alderson said, ‘I can never forget the person who sacrificed his life to save me. I owe everything to him. I can never forget ... I owe everything.’

Denison concludes by asking, “What do you owe the One who saved you?”<sup>2</sup> There is a thought-provoking question for each of us to answer. There are other thought-provoking questions that arise from this same consideration. What do you owe the one who encouraged you when you were discouraged? What do you owe the one who prays for you and holds you accountable before the Lord? What do you owe the one who instructs you in the Word of God? What do you owe your fellow saints who minister to you, building you in the Faith? The questions are more than merely academic; these questions are essential for healthy Christianity.

**THE FORGOTTEN SACRIFICE** — “I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.” Though Remembrance Day is upon us, I don’t want to focus on the sacrifice of those who gave their lives for our freedoms. It is not that such remembrance is not important—it is important for us to remember. Among the freedoms we enjoy today is the freedom of worship—the freedom to seek God and to honour Him according to the dictates of our own heart. However, an essential element of the freedom to worship as we believe right and proper is the freedom of association. We attend the church of our choice and affiliate as we desire; no one dictates where we must attend or whether we must belong—we have freedom.

A congregation of the Lord does not just happen. I am well aware that the Spirit of God is always at work guiding believers to unite, forming churches to serve Christ through serving one another. I understand that churches form to provide instruction in the Word, to strengthen one another through fellowship, to worship and to evangelise. This is evident from even a casual reading of the life of the first congregation, the New Beginnings Baptist Church of Jerusalem.

Those saved after Peter preached on that great Day of Pentecost “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 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 2:42-47]. Those elements that mark a church of the Lord Christ were evident from earliest days.

I know that the redeemed don’t merely profess salvation, they reveal the presence of the Risen Christ through uniting to accomplish His will in their lives and in the communities in which they are situated. King Agrippa, Bernice and Festus commanded the Apostle Paul to give a defence before them. He spoke of the commission he received when the Risen Son of God appeared to him as he journeyed to Damascus. Paul testified that the Lord said, “I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” [ACTS 26:16-18].

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<sup>2</sup> Jim Denison, “A Fallen Marine’s Letter to His Family,” <http://www.denisonforum.org/cultural-commentary/395-a-fallen-marines-letter-to-his-family>, accessed 27 May 2015

Then, the aged prisoner confessed, “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance” [ACTS 26:19, 20]. Focus on the message that Paul delivered throughout the days of his service before the Lord and to the churches. Paul preached repentance and faith, to be certain; but notice what a critical element often neglected in the messages delivered this day—those saved were expected to “perform[] deeds in keeping with their repentance.” This message is in keeping with the message declared from the days of the Baptist. John demanded, “Bear fruit in keeping with repentance” [MATTHEW 3:8].

I must clarify this point so that no one hearing me will be confused. We are not to bear fruit in order to repent; but when we repent we will bear fruit! We do not do good deeds in order to be saved; but when we are saved we will live as redeemed people! Someone has said quite well, God accepts us as we are, but He does not leave us as we are.

Writing the brotherhood, the Apostle of Love emphasises one mark that is characteristic of believers. John wrote, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

“By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother” [1 JOHN 4:7-21].

The overarching emphasis in this passage is that the redeemed individual *loves* the brotherhood. He or she seeks to be with the brotherhood because he or she loves the brotherhood. This is not love of an ideal—this is practical love for individuals, some of whom are not particularly loveable. This love demands that the redeemed get their hands dirty with loving! When I say that biblical love demands that we get our hands dirty, it simply means that we invest ourselves in one another. When we are saved, the Spirit of God entrusts to each of us gifts as He determines is needed for the assembly wherein He places us. When we attempt to “join the church of our choice” rather than seeking the will of the Lord God, we circumvent what God has equipped us to do. When we accept His appointment, we serve as He wills and we strengthen the Body. As Paul has stated when writing the Corinthian Christians, in serving one another at the direction of the Spirit we build up, encourage and console [see 1 CORINTHIANS 14:3]. Because this is true, it should follow that when a Christian does his or her own will the results will be to tear down, to discourage and to berate. Serving ourselves, we will exalt the self at the expense of the Body of Christ.

Today, we have exalted the individual at the expense of commitment to the assembly. It is as though each professing Christian assumes that the Body of Christ is solely for her benefit. Though each Christian benefits greatly from the ministry of the congregation, the tendency is to imagine that we stand alone. For many years, it has been our custom to read the Church Covenant before partaking of the Lord's Table. A careful reading of that covenant we have made with one another demonstrates that we do not have the option of despising the Body—not if we take seriously what we declare. We aver and avow that we are entering into covenant with one another as we recite the words of that covenant.

We assert that we will walk together in Christian love, striving for the advancement of this Church, promoting her prosperity and spirituality even as we support congregational worship, ordinances, discipline and doctrines.

Among other promises we make, we commit ourselves to be faithful in our commitments. Surely, that means we will honour our commitment to build up this congregation through investing our gifts and our lives into one another, to encourage one another to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and to console one another as we struggle to discover and to do the will of God.

One promise, in particular, seems often to be ignored. The promise in question reads, “We further promise to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember each other in prayer; to help each other in times of trouble; to be not easily offended and always ready to forgive and settle differences, remembering Christ's command to do so quickly.” If the conduct of many erstwhile members is indicative, this is an impossible promise to keep. We seem to be easily offended, intransigent and unwilling to settle differences, hoping to punish the Body through refusal to keep the commitment we made when we sought to unite with the assembly.

I am asking those who have shared these services to think carefully. Is there no one present who has blessed you? Can it actually be that among those who share in the services of the church that none have made you stronger through sharing in prayer, made you stronger through sharing in the challenges you faced or through sharing even in your joys? Is it actually possible that no one who shares the service with you has encouraged you when you were weak, or consoled you when you were grieving? My point is simply this—it is time that we should be called to account to give thanks for one another and to remember one another in prayer.

Of the early Christians, Tertullian noted that they voluntarily provided a monthly offering “to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons, for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God's Church, they become the nurslings of their confession.” These followers of the Way loved one another deeply from the heart. Unlike many of the professed followers of Christ today, they were devoted to one another and not easily offended. Their concern was for the welfare of fellow Christians and the glory of Christ Jesus.

Pagans witnessing this devotion of early Christians to one another said of these believers, “See ... how they love one another ... how they are ready even to die for one another.” Tertullian contrasted the followers of Christ to the pagans among whom they lived by observing of the society in which those early saints lived, that “[the pagans] are animated by mutual hatred” and “[they] will sooner put [one another] to death.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Tertullian, “The Apology,” in **Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian**, Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (ed.), S. Thelwall (trans.), vol. 3, **The Ante-Nicene Fathers** (Christian Literature Company, Buffalo, NY 1885) 46

How does a professing Christian differ from a pagan when he chooses to quit because he didn't get his way? How does a professing Christian differ from this fallen society when she rejects the Brotherhood of Believers because the preacher said something that offended her? I will offend eventually, not because I seek to offend, but because I am but a mere man with all the frailty of any other man. Christ alone will never offend; He is the only One who is perfect.

**THE FRAGILE RELATIONSHIP** — “I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ.”

The unity of believers in the congregation of the Lord has been described as a rope of sand with the strength of steel. This is an apt description. We unite as a congregation of the Lord, doing so on a voluntary basis. No one is coerced into uniting with the assembly. We are not born into the church, but we are born again into the Kingdom of Heaven. Those who are born from above seek out fellow believers in order to fulfil the will of the Lord. God's Spirit directs His own redeemed people to find and unite with other Christians.

Here is the thing that is often overlooked, especially by anyone arguing that we have the right to determine where we wish to be—we long for fellowship. Let me speak to this business of “fellowship.” In a recent message, I spoke of the fellowship we share in the Faith.<sup>4</sup> In that message, I noted that the fellowship of the Faith differs from friendship. Friendship can be somewhat superficial in that we share limited time together because interests happen to intersect. Interestingly, friendships can be built on activities that are primarily negative. People can meet together, even share a meal because of their bitterness toward their situation in life or because of shared anger toward a person or even anger against a church. Candidly, such “friendship” doesn't have much chance to stand the tests of time since it is built on quite a flimsy foundation.

However, fellowship speaks of something more than mere shared interests. In the previous message cited, I noted that fellowship—true fellowship as presented in the Word—consists of sharing at the spiritual level. Sharing a meal is a less noble activity than sharing time in prayer or sharing time in study of the Word of God. Tearing another down through gossip or complaining how poorly you have been treated is certainly less honourable than sharing through serving one another in love. In the congregation of the Lord we share in the sufferings of the Lord, thus entering into a spiritual bond. As we unite in worship, we fellowship in the Faith. Building one another, encouraging one another and consoling one another leads to the fellowship that Christians long for; and such fellowship is anticipated in the assembly of the faithful.

Even a casual reading of the New Testament convinces us that such fellowship is fragile. If this were not so, why would we see emphases to love one another found throughout the Word? Writing the Roman Christians, Paul urges, “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality” [ROMANS 12:9-13]. Clearly, loving as brothers is vital in the estimate of the Apostle. There is no room for promoting oneself before your brothers and sisters.

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<sup>4</sup> See Michael Stark, “Winter or Never” (sermon), October 16, 2016, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/2-Timothy-4.19-22-Come-Before-Winter.pdf>

In what is possibly the earliest letter from the Apostle to have been included in the canon of Scripture, Paul has written, “Concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more” [1 THESSALONIANS 4:9, 10]. Though this persecuted congregation was commended for the love they had for one another, they were urged to love with even greater intensity. Can we even speak of loving intensely when we know so little of suffering and when we seek to become islands unto ourselves?

Perhaps only the Gentile Christians needed such encouragement to love one another. Such a thought is dashed by the words of the Apostle to the Jews. Peter wrote to the Diaspora, “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God” [1 PETER 1:22, 23]. Christians are commanded to love sincerely. Love doesn’t promote oneself at the expense of others.

Let me direct your attention to one final passage that speaks of the need to work at esteeming one another within the fellowship of believers. Again, this portion of the Word comes from Peter, Apostle to the Jews. He writes, “[Jesus’] divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall” [2 PETER 1:7-10]. Christians are expected to be always striving to become stronger in the Faith—not merely in acquisition of knowledge about what is written, but diligent in practical application of what is written in the Word.

We Christians are taught to recognise that we have fellowship with one another. The fellowship with one another which we enjoy grows out of our shared fellowship with the Risen Lord of Glory. The opening words of John’s First Letter read as follows. “This is what we proclaim to you: what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and our hands have touched (concerning the word of life—and the life was revealed, and we have seen and testify and announce to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us). What we have seen and heard we announce to you too, so that you may have fellowship with us (and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ). Thus, we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

“Now this is the gospel message we have heard from him and announce to you: God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him and yet keep on walking in the darkness, we are lying and not practicing the truth. But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” [1 JOHN 1:1-7 NET BIBLE].

Fellowship is not a feeling; fellowship is an investment in one another for Christ's sake! Fellowship is love in action as we invest our lives in one another in the Faith. Fellowship, biblical fellowship, describes our relationship to one another as followers of the Master. Because this is true, fellowship is easily destroyed. The relationship of believers can be an extremely fragile commodity. Therefore, fellowship must be protected and handled with care.

This is the basis for the Apostle's prayer in this Ephesian encyclical. Though he is thankful as he hears of the faith of those serving in the churches throughout the Province of Asia, the Apostle was driven to pray for them. And his prayers were not of the vague, nondescript sort that characterises so many prayers of contemporary Christians. He prayed for these saints to have wisdom and knowledge of Christ. He prayed for the eyes of their hearts to be enlightened. This is not mere "God talk" as the Apostle clarifies what is in view as he seeks God's blessing. Paul wants these saints to "know what is the hope to which He has called" them. He asks that God will enable them to know "what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints." And he asks that these saints may know "what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe."

The saints are to be wise and to possess knowledge of God. Moreover, they are to be enlightened. Let's look at the concept behind hope, inheritance and power with which the Apostle asked God to bless His holy people. **Hope** is brought to fruition through the salvation we have received. Paul will write in this letter, "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call" [EPHESIANS 4:4]. The hope of the believer is grounded upon the call to life in Christ the Lord. Before coming to life in the Son of God, we were hopeless in the world, as the Apostle has written, "Remember that you were [in your former life] separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" [EPHESIANS 2:12].

Note that Paul is not asking God to enable these believers to know *how great the hope is* that He has given; neither is he praying that these believers will know *what kind of hope* He has placed within those who follow the Master. Paul is praying that believers will actually **know what the hope is**. He prays "that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you." Understand, then, that the Apostle is praying that believers will know not the object hoped for, but that they will be transformed with a new attitude of mind defined by hope.

Believers have received **the hope of the resurrection**—we do not fear death because we know that should we die we have eternal life and that we shall be raised at the return of Christ. Again, believers now have **the hope of eternal life** [see TITUS 3:7]. This confidence of eternal life is the present possession of all believers. This is a new quality of life we have now. Believers have **the hope that is laid up in Heaven** [see COLOSSIANS 1:5]—we who believe have an inheritance laid up for us in Heaven. We who believe await **the blessed hope** [see TITUS 2:13], the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. All this is the heritage of the saints. However, because we have been redeemed, we live in hope. Paul writes, "To this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the Living God, who is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe" [1 TIMOTHY 4:10]. This is important because if we focus on what lies ahead without focusing on what we have, we will fail to esteem Christ's beloved church.

The reason I say that failure to focus on what we have leads to failure to esteem the congregation of the faithful lies in the next clause. Paul prays that believers will know "what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints." The phrase "in the saints" defines "**His glorious inheritance**." This congregation is not merely an organisation—this is God's glorious inheritance; and God says of this congregation that we are His riches!

Perhaps we pass by what is written too quickly as we read. Of His holy people, God compares them to jewels as He says, through Zechariah:

“On that day the LORD their God will save them,  
as the flock of his people;  
for like the jewels of a crown  
they shall shine on his land.”

[ZECHARIAH 9:16]

I am not confusing the churches of our Lord and the people of Israel. However, if God’s love for Israel is so great that He speaks of them as jewels of a crown, what shall we make of Christ’s love for His redeemed people?

We are taught, “Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” [EPHESIANS 2:13-22].

One of the very meaningful statements concerning God’s estimate of His redeemed people is found in the final book of the Old Testament. Malachi writes, “Those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name. ‘They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him’” [MALACHI 3:16, 17].

On numerous occasions, I have pointed to Paul’s statement concerning the saints in Thessalonica. It is a powerful and beautiful revelation of how the Lord sees His people. “We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore, we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

“This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed” [2 THESSALONIANS 1:3-10].



This congregation is beloved in God's sight. The assembly wherein He has placed you is precious in His sight. God Himself chose each redeemed individual and placed that individual in his or her congregation. Thus, together the Body is growing into a holy temple to the praise of His glory. Remember that the Apostle charged the elders of the congregation of the righteous, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood" [ACTS 20:28]. The congregation is not a mere organisation—these saints are "His glorious inheritance."

Then, the Apostle focuses on God's *power*. I am not convinced that we truly understand the power that is exerted in our midst and on our behalf. One reason we don't appreciate His power is that we focus on attempting to compel God to use His power for our temporal benefit. However, His power is meant to bring glory to His Name.

We have seen that power without actually understanding that power. Paul says the power of God worked "in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places." God's power was demonstrated in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and when He exalted Him. It is that same power that saved each redeemed individual. Think of that! We who are saved have witnessed firsthand God's power—the immeasurable greatness of divine power has been demonstrated in us! Jesus was "declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead" [ROMANS 1:4], and each Christian is declared to be a child of God through faith in the Risen Son of God. Christians are saved through the Gospel, which "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" [ROMANS 1:16].

When I speak of the relationship being fragile, I do not mean to imply that God's power is insufficient—it is beyond human comprehension. Neither do I mean that we should imagine that His power is incapable of keeping us secure in the Beloved Son—we are secure in Christ. What I do mean is that our relationship to one another is fragile. When we cease focusing on God and what He has done in creating His church, we cease to respect this divine creation. Those who are untaught may perhaps value relationships bounded by time; but the redeemed will value the relationships formed in the assembly of the righteous because these relationships are eternal. When a professing saint walks away from the assembly claiming to have been so offended that he can no longer worship, it says that that individual had begun living again for this dying world. He has ceased seeking God's glory and is seeking his own glory. Hence, what should never have been broken was shattered through the promotion of the self.

**THE FINAL WORD** — "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." Jumping ahead to the final two verses of this opening chapter, I note that Paul endeavours to ensure that his readers are focused on the exalted Saviour who is over all. We are not waiting for the Master to be made Head over all things to the church—He is now Head over all things to the church.

Perhaps you remember Paul's instruction to the Christians in Philippi. "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" [PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11].

Christians live in anticipation of the revelation of Jesus Christ at His return. However, He is now the Risen Lord of Glory. As He prepared to ascend into the glory, Jesus assured His disciples, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me” [MATTHEW 28:18]. If Jesus now has all authority, we must ask a couple of questions. Does Jesus have all authority in this congregation? If He has all authority here, what changes should we be making? Ultimately, the congregation of the righteous is an intersecting of multiple lives, each of which testifies that Jesus is Master. If He is Master, how do we quit participating in the life of the Body? Is it that we “have had enough” and we write a letter saying, “I quit?” Do we simply cease attending services or cease participating in the life of the Body? Do we simply begin attending another congregation, telling ourselves that the programming is better or telling ourselves that we are less easily offended by the messages presented there? Ultimately, the question each one is required to answer is whether Jesus is Master or whether we are ruler over our own life.

If Jesus is Master, we must deal with Him when we seek out where He would have us serve, the place for which He has equipped us to serve. And we must deal with Him when we decide that we will cease serving. Candidly, these steps are seldom taken—our anger surges or our interests wanes and we walk away from the commitment we once made. We join because we decide we want to attend a particular church—perhaps the programme meets our expectations, perhaps the preacher is a good speaker or perhaps we see ourselves gaining some particular benefit and so we join. Then, as is inevitable when we are in control, we will be offended. The preacher will begin to step on our toes, or we just grow lazy and no longer want to be challenged or we simply find ourselves drifting away and we quit.

What is needed in this day is a model that adopts the New Testament method. God’s Spirit adds to the church those who are being saved and we walk in concert with Him. When the congregation is endeavouring to keep in step with the Spirit, all alike are growing in grace and truth and Christ is glorified. When the Risen Lord directs those within that congregation, they will be sent out to establish new churches or to strengthen weaker churches. In this way, Christ is glorified and His people are made stronger.

Now, the question for each one listening today is “Where are you serving?” Has God placed you there? Are you investing your life in those who share the service with you? Can you see Christ’s glory manifested in your service? The doors of this church are open to all whom the Spirit directs to us. Amen.