

## **Covenant Community**

The Importance of Covenant in Community

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## **THE IMPORTANCE OF COVENANT IN COMMUNITY** **Ephesians 1:22-23**

Ephesians 1, a perfect song to lead into our study of the Word; strong song, "Savior King" over the church, His Bride. It's one of those songs, I don't know about you, there gets a point in that song where I just stop singing and I start yelling. Does anybody else do that? Like, it doesn't really matter if you're on...like hitting notes or anything, it just...maybe I'm the only one. Maybe the people around me wish I didn't have that philosophy but...

Ephesians 1. This morning, I want to take us to two of my favorite verses in all the New Testament concerning the church, what it means to be the church, Ephesians 1:22-23. Over the last couple of weeks, we've been looking at this picture of covenant community, and we've set the foundation in Hebrews 10:19-25. We saw two foundational truths. First, as followers of Christ, were recipients of a new covenant, and this new covenant has changed everything, because as recipients of a new covenant, it doesn't just change our relationship to God; it changes our relationship to each other. We are members of a new community.

So, in the weeks to come...and we'll take a break for Easter and Secret Church around that time...but in the weeks to come, we're going to look at what it means for us, not just to be in Christ, but to be united to each other and committed to each other in covenant community. This morning, we are looking at the ramifications of covenant for community. We're going to look at verses 22 and 23, which comes at the end of a prayer that Paul prays. It's the first of two prayers that Paul prays in the book of Ephesians, which are great in helping inform us in how we pray for each other. I would encourage you to look at Ephesians 1:15-23 and then Ephesians 3:14-21.

This is a letter that Paul wrote to Christians at Ephesus. He was likely in prison when he wrote this letter, and he is writing it near the end of his life, and he comes to Ephesians 1:15, and he begins to pray for them to know the person of Christ and the power of Christ. Listen to what he prays. Verse 15, Paul says,

*For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*

God, we pray that you would help us to realize what it means for Christ to be head over all things, and specifically, for Christ to be head over all things for the church. What it means for us to be His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way. God, we pray that you would help us to realize who we are, what we have, what we're here for as a church. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

## **The Ramifications of Covenant for Community ...**

Ramifications of covenant for community. I want to show you three ramifications in this text that really...it's really not just this text. Verses 22 and 23 are loaded, but they're informed by all that's going around it in Ephesians. So, I'll just let you know, we're going to be all over the place in Ephesians, because in order to understand the beauty and the grandeur of what Paul is praying here at the end of this prayer in verse 22 and 23, we've got to look all around it.

So, the picture is, Paul is writing to these believers and telling them who they are and what they have, and the implication is...don't miss this...this is not just about believers in Ephesus; this is what it means for us to be the church, the body of Christ in this room. The ramifications that we're going to see in Ephesians are ramifications, they're realities represented in this room, in this body this morning, and so I want us to dive into them, and I pray that God by His Spirit will give us grace to see the magnitude of what's being expressed here.

### **We have been united by the grace of Christ.**

Ramification number one: We have been united by the grace of Christ. This is what Paul is saying to the Christians at Ephesus and what the Spirit of God is saying to us today. We have been united by the grace of Christ. Now, at the end of verse 22 and 23, Paul says the church is His body. Now, we talked about this about a month and a half ago when we were studying Ephesians 4, this theme of body. So, we're not going to camp out here too long, but you look here, and you might already have it circled from when we did this before, but that word "body" in verse 23, "we're His body", it's repeated over and over and over again in the book of Ephesians.

Go to Ephesians 2:16. You might circle it just each time you see it if it's not already circled. We'll fly through these. Ephesians 2:16, Paul says, "*...in this one body, to reconcile both of them to God through the cross...*" One body. Then, Ephesians 3:6, "*This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body...*" Circle it there. Then, you get to Ephesians 4, numerous times in Ephesians 4. Ephesians 4:4, "*There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to one hope when you were called...*" Down in verse 12, "*...to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...*"

Get down to verse 16, "*From him the whole body, joined and held together...grows and builds itself up in love...*" Verse 25, "*Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.*" Then, you get to Ephesians 5, twice in Ephesians 5. Ephesians 5:23, when he starts talking about husbands and wives, he starts talking about body of Christ. "*The husband is the head of the wife...*" Verse 23, Ephesians 5:23, "*The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body...*" Over in verse 30, he says, "*We are members of his body.*"

Now, keep going to the right and go to the book of Colossians, which is one book over to the right. You'll got to Philippians, then Colossians, one book past [Philippians]. Colossians 1, I'm going to show you a couple of different times some relationships...Paul wrote the book of Colossians, between what Paul is saying here in Ephesians and Colossians. Look at Colossians 1:18. He says the same thing here about the church being the body of Christ. Colossians 1:18, talking about Christ. He says, "*Christ is the head of the body, the church...*" See how he is equating church with body there. Then, down in verse 24, "*Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body...*" Circle it there, "...which is the church."

So, over and over again, Paul is referring to the church as the body of Christ. Now, this was particularly important when you come back to Ephesians, because of who he was writing to. The Church at Ephesus, the Christians at Ephesus were made up of both Jews and...Jewish and Gentile Christians. They had Jews and Gentiles in the same church, which was a huge deal. There was a dividing line, so to speak, between Jews and Gentiles in the first century. There was hostility between the two. You didn't associate. There was...it wasn't just a religious barrier; it was ethnic, social in every way. This barrier that separated Jews from Gentiles.

The whole picture of what Paul is saying in Ephesus is that God has brought Jews and Gentiles together, and they were struggling to be united together. They were struggling with the division that still separated them culturally and socially and ethnically. Even...you look at Ephesians 2, and you see this. Look at Ephesians 2:14, read this with me, and you can see the picture that Paul is addressing here and the division between Jews and Gentiles. He said in verse 14,

*Christ himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.*

You hear those words, "dividing wall", "barrier", "hostility", and the whole picture of the gospel is it breaks it down and says, "No, we're together, united by the grace of Christ as a body." So, what Paul is doing in these first few chapters, especially, is he is showing the basis for the unity they have, and I want to show it to you in three different facets there in your notes, because this is the same basis for the unity we have in this room, for the unity we have as a local body of believers, as a church. What is that basis?

Well, it starts with what we once were. Stay here in Ephesians 2 and look at verse 1. Listen to how he starts grouping everybody together. He says, Ephesians 2:1,

*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.*

How's that for unity? Together, we were dead in our transgressions and sin and objects of the wrath of God. You want to talk about misery loves company. This is what unites us, Paul

says, and for three verses there, he gives one of the most grim, most important descriptions of humanity in all the Scripture.

He breaks it down into a variety of different ways, and you've got this in your notes. First, catch what he's saying here. Paul says, "You, we, together, we were dead in sin, dead in sin, dead in your transgressions." You had no spiritual life; you're dead spiritually. There's not different degrees of dead. You're not more dead or less dead. Jews were not less dead, and Gentiles, they're really dead. Jews are kind of dead. No, you're dead, period. There is a finality here.

I was in Florida this last week as we had a funeral for my grandmother, and just carrying that casket from the hearse to the burial site, that's a...it's a humbling thing to carry a casket. There is a solemnity, there is a seriousness, there is an overwhelming finality and unchangeableness that's there. This is the picture Scripture gives to describe us apart from the grace of Christ. Not sick in sin, not in the hospital, but dead in sin. In the casket, no life, dead in transgressions and sin. Catch the magnitude here.

Then, he says, "In which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air. You were living in darkness, following the ways of this world and the god of this world." 2 Corinthians 4:4 talks about it. Paul says there how our minds were blinded to truth. We were living in darkness. Ephesians 4:18 and 5:8, both talk about how we were engrossed in darkness, our hearts overcome with darkness. John 3:20, Jesus said we lived in darkness and we wanted nothing to do with the light. Living in darkness.

Children of disobedience, dead in sin, living in darkness. We were children of disobedience. We followed the spirit of him who is now at work in those who are disobedient. This is a humbling picture. This takes us all the way back to Genesis 3 when the Adversary tempts Adam and Eve to disobey God, to defy the rule and the law of God, and they do. They disobey God, and Paul says in Romans 5, that all of us, we are children of Adam. Jew, Gentile, regardless of ethnicity, regardless of background, we are children of Adam.

We have a tendency to minimize this some when we talk about sin, when we try to explain sin. "Well, sin is when you do something wrong or sin is when you lie to someone, and that's what Jesus came to save us from." No, no, no, it's much, much deeper than that. It's not that we just have done a few things wrong. In our hearts, we are disobedient; we are defiant toward God. We are following the spirit of the one who is at work in those who are disobedient.

This is...think about this picture. When you look at the news, and you see...you see what the Adversary is doing in the world, and you see murder sprees, and you see evil and immorality, the work of the Adversary in the world. Paul says, "You, you were following the same spirit." You say, "Well, I didn't murder. I didn't do things like that." No, no, we as children of disobedience were far more subtle in our disobedience and, in many senses, more dangerous, because we cloaked it in cultural goodness and religious self-righteousness. He said, "You were children of disobedience, gratifying the desires and the cravings of the sinful nature. Captivated by sinful desire, following its desires and thoughts." Paul uses this same language in Romans 6 when he talks about how we're slaves to sin, gratifying the desires of the sinful nature.

Then, as if this was not enough...dead in sin, living in darkness, children of disobedience and captivated by sinful desire. Then, he says, "Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath." Here is the description: Dead in sin, living in darkness, children of disobedience,

captivated by sinful desire, and doomed to hell, doomed to hell. "Condemned," Jesus says in John 3:18. "You're condemned." "An enemy of God," Paul says in Roman 5:10. James says, in James 4:4, "Enemies of God, objects of the eternal wrath of God." This is what unites us. Think about it.

What unites us in this room this morning as the people of God...what unites us is not that we live in the same country, not that we have the same customs, not that we share similar socio-economic statuses. It's not that we have the same ethnicity or that we have the same personalities or the same tastes. All these are periphery. What unites us in this room, all of us on the same plain, we are each and every one, desperately in need of the grace of God. No one more than the other, all, we were dead in sin.

This is where Ephesians is just so beautiful, because we have some of the most humbling depictions of the depravity of man and the severity of sin, but it's when we see the seriousness of sin that we realize the glory of grace. Paul says in verse 4, "*But...but because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved.*" Praise God, it is what we once were, keyword "were". What did He do?

Now, I'll come back...it's here in Ephesians 2, all the way down to verse 10, but come back to Ephesians 1:4. I've got to remind you of the way this book opens up, and I want us to see what He has done. I have so much to learn, I have so much to discover, to realize in my Christian life, but this I have learned. I have learned to talk about my conversion experience in passive terms. Passive meaning something was done to me, because I was dead. There wasn't anything active going on from the casket in me. I wasn't coming to Christ and converting myself to Christ; Christ converted me. Christ came to me; God came to me.

That's exactly what Paul talks about in Ephesians 1:4. We were dead in sin and doomed to hell and, verse 4,

*He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will - to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment - to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.*

*In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included to Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance into the redemption of those who are God's possession - to the praise of his glory.*

Praise God, praise God.

What we were and what He did. Check this out. All persons of the Trinity involved in this picture right here. What did the Father do? The Father planned our salvation. He chose us in Him; He predestined us to be adopted. He has freely given us the One He loves. Brothers and sisters, I do not know how to explain this. I do not know how to fathom this, but the reality that Scripture teaches is that God has taken objects of His wrath and purely by His grace, turned them into objects of His affection not based on anything in them, but solely based on His grace. This is what Ephesians 1 is teaching us here.

Somebody came up to me after the first worship gathering, "How do you reconcile this?" I don't know, but it's gloriously true. It's the grace of God. Think of this, before the sun was formed and the moon was created, before one mountain appeared on this earth or one drop of water was put into an ocean, before anything in all creation, God in heaven looked down and set His affections on us and predestined us to be adopted as His sons and daughters. If this does not drive us to our knees in adoration, humble adoration, nothing will. He planned...how can God...how can a holy God plan salvation for those who are dead in sin and want to be dead in sin? They're satisfying their sinful desires in that and don't have a desire to turn to Him. How can a holy God do that?

Second, the Son purchased our salvation. The One He loves. Verse 7, "*In him we have redemption through his blood...*" Redemption, to purchase, to pay for, to buy...Christ bought us with His blood. We are a blood bought body. He reached out His hand of grace into us from the cross and made a way for us to have forgiveness of our sin in accordance with the riches of God's grace. He purchased our salvation. How? How can what Christ did 2,000 years ago on a cross be appropriated in my heart, in my life today?

Spirit...the Father planned our salvation, the Son purchased our salvation, and the Spirit preserves our salvation. Scripture teaches the Spirit opens our eyes to the light of the glory of gospel in the face of Christ. The Spirit changes our lives. This is the new covenant. The Spirit comes into our hearts, regenerates us and changes us, transforms us from the inside out, and He does it as a seal, as a deposit. The picture here is like earnest money. When you put money down for something, it says this is earnest money. It's payment that I'm making, and it's a guarantee that there's more coming soon.

Now, we don't know much about that today in our economic times, because there's not much guarantee coming soon here. We don't know...put our money down, you don't know where it's going, but we can know this, brothers and sisters: If the Spirit of the living God is inside of you, you can know that for all of eternity He will be inside of you, and He will keep you to the end, and your salvation will be complete, and you will have the inheritance of those who are God's possession. That's good. That's good.

Why? Why would God plan our salvation, the Son purchase our salvation and the Spirit preserve it? Why? We see it three different times, each time the person of the Trinity are mentioned, what they're doing. Look at verse 6. Why did the Father plan our salvation? Verse 6, "*...to the praise of His glorious grace...*" Why did the Son purchase our salvation? Verse 12, in order "*that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be for the praise of his glory.*" Why does the Spirit preserve our salvation? End of verse 14, the redemption of those who are God's possession, "*to the praise of his glory.*"

God has designed salvation so that His glory is put on display at every single step. Father planning, purchase...the Son purchasing it, and the Spirit preserving it. This is...do we realize the magnitude of what Scripture is teaching here, what we once were, what He did for us? I think we have a tendency to underestimate the gravity here, and even a tendency, an unhealthy tendency, when we think about our conversion, when Christ changed our

hearts, when Christ redeemed us, and we were justified before God by the work of the Spirit and the Son and the Father in our lives.

When we think about our conversion, oftentimes, when people share about their conversion, oftentimes, we will listen to people talk about how all the stuff that they did before they came to Christ. They were addicted to all these things and involved in all these things and engrossed in all these things, and if that's your testimony, then that's a good thing; it's a good thing to delight in where God met you and how God brought you from that.

At the same time, it's a bad thing in the sense that there are oftentimes others who are sitting there listening, thinking, "Man, my testimony is kind of boring compared to that. Like, I was 8 years old, right? Hadn't gotten into drugs yet and wasn't involved in these things." So, people...I have thought it; people have thought it, and people have said it, "Well, you know, my testimony is just not that exciting." Can I remind you, you were, I was, we all were dead in sin and doomed to hell, eternal damnation, objects of the wrath of God, and not of our own merit, but by the grace of God, He reached down His hand into our hearts, and He changed them. He opened up our eyes. He forgave us of all of our sin, and He made us alive to God forever for all of eternity; that is not boring stuff. That's good stuff.

Like, don't think your testimony is not exciting enough. This is the picture, this is what God has done. He has united us in His grace, and as a result, Paul says, in light of this picture you see surrounding it, we are...this is who we are now...we are His body. We're the body of Christ. To think of what we once were, now described as members of a body, not a cold institution but a body, a living organism, united together in Christ. This is what Paul is saying.

Let me show you something really cool in Ephesians 1:4. I want you to follow with me here. Now, remember who Paul is writing to. He's writing to groups...a group of Christians that includes Jews and Gentiles. Which one is Paul, Jew or Gentile? Paul's a Jew. He's writing this, and I want you to look with me at the pronouns he uses. Now, just in case it's been a while since English class, pronouns are the "I", "we", "you", "they". I don't want to insult your intelligence, just want to make sure we're all on the same page, okay?

Look at the pronouns here, and I want you to follow with me, starting in verse 4. We'll just read the verses we just read. Paul says, "He chose us." Okay, that's the pronoun, is that singular or plural? Okay, plural. Okay, I'm not...I'm really not intending...okay, all right, we got "He chose us". Singular or plural? It's plural, and it's first person. It's referring to him and others. Second person would be referring to you, okay? Third person is "they". So what we've got is "us", first person plural: "He chose us".

Then in verse 5, He predestined who? Us. Verse 6, "*...to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given*", who? "*...us in the one he loves.*" Verse 7, "*In him, we...*" Same picture, first person plural pronoun, "*we have redemption.*" Verse 8, "*...he lavished on us.*" Verse 9, "*He made known to us the mystery of his will...*" Verse 11, "*In him we were also chosen...*" Verse 12, "*in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.*"

Verse 13, "*And...*" What? "*you...*" See, he changes there? "*...you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal...*" Why did he switch there? Get the picture. Paul is recounting what God has done, and what Christians, Jewish and Gentile, knew in the first century, what God had done throughout the Old Testament. His chosen people in the Old Testament, the people of Israel, the Jewish people, and Paul is saying, "He chose us; He

predestined us; He did these things for us." Then, he gets to verse 13, and you could almost see his eyes fixing on those Gentile Christians and saying, "And you also, not just us, not just us Jewish Christians, you also were included in this picture. You also are in Christ."

This was huge for them. The result of this division between Jews and Gentiles in the church was oftentimes, Gentiles would feel almost like second-class Christians. "I mean, they're not really a part of the people of God; they're kind of like B-team. They came into this deal late. They're kind of behind the curve." That was the sense that was oftentimes created in this bringing together of Jews and Gentiles in the church. You know, it's not a Jewish/Gentile thing, necessarily, in this room, but there is a tendency...there is a tendency for believers in this room to sometimes think or, at the very least, feel sometimes like they don't quite measure up, like there's things in your past that you're not proud of and, really at the core, ashamed of, that make you look at other believers and almost see them at a different level, so to speak. You're a little more down the line, a B-team, second-class. I want to remind every single brother or sister in this room that you and I alike are the body of Christ. No one more important than the other, higher than the other. We are together in this thing, united as the body of Christ, because we were all dead, and we're all alive only by His grace. That's the picture Paul is giving us here. We're His body.

We'll fly through these next two. We're His building, His building. These are the two other images that Paul uses in the book of Ephesians. We're His building. You get to the end of Ephesians 2, when he's talking about reconciling Jews and Gentiles together. It's great verses, verse 19, "*You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself, as the chief cornerstone.*"

Listen to verse 21 in Ephesians 2, "*In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*" Now, when the Bible talks about the church as a building, it's not talking about bricks and mortar; it's talking about a people, but a people who are depicted as a building.

It's the same thing Paul in 1 Corinthians, when he talks about how our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and how the Spirit dwells in each of us; that's completely true in the New Testament. At the same time, 1 Corinthians 3...it says that in 1 Corinthians 6...1 Corinthians 3, he talks about how together we are a temple. The reality the New Testament is teaching us is that Christ dwells, the Spirit of God dwells in each of us and in all of us as a body.

We're His building, and we're His bride. Ephesians 5 is when Paul talks about the church as the blood bought bride of Christ. Revelation 19 talks about the wedding supper of the Lamb, when the bride of Christ, dressed and ready...that's us...will meet Him in all of His fullness. This is the picture. We are united by the grace of Christ. It's good to be a part of the body of Christ. This is what...this is one of those facets where we realize this is so much different...what happens in this room is so much different than any other organization or club or group of people or anything. There's a spiritual reality that's expressed in this room. We're united by the grace of Christ.

### **We have been filled with the power of Christ.**

Second, we have been filled with the power of Christ. Now, here's where it gets...well, I'm not going to say it gets good because it's been good, but it gets even better. Filled with the power of Christ. His body, verse 23...Ephesians 1:23, "The church is His body, the fullness of Him." Now, I'm going to take you on a little tour again. "Fullness..." Circle every time you

see the word "fullness". Ephesians 3:19, I want to show you how Paul in Ephesians...and we're going to go to Colossians again...uses this term "fullness", "completeness". Look at verse 3...Ephesians 3:19, he's getting to the end of this prayer that he's praying, second prayer he prays, and he said, "...to know the love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Circle it there, "fullness".

Then, you get to Ephesians 4:13, it talks about how the body of Christ is growing up into Christ, and when it says there in verse 13, last part of it, "...attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." So, circle it there. Then, go over to Colossians, remember, one book past Philippians. Colossians 1:19, listen to what Paul says there; Colossians 1:19, talking about Christ. "God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him." The fullness of God dwelling in Christ. Same thing he says in Colossians 2:9. Colossians 2:9, "In Christ..." This is just one of those verses that just...these verses just point to the deity of Christ. "In Christ all the fullness..." Circle it there. "...fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form."

So, what we've got is Paul talking about the fullness of God and the fullness of Christ. However, it begs the question, "What does it mean, then, for the church to be the fullness of Christ?" Okay, we've got this picture, there's a fullness in God and the fullness of God is in Christ, all of His deity, in Christ. Well, what does it mean for the church then, to be the fullness of Christ?

Now, I want you to follow with me here, and follow this line of thought that Paul is showing us here, and we will come to a couple of truths that will take our breath away. First line of thought, start down this path, Christ has all authority; Christ has all authority. We just saw this in Colossians, the fullness of God who has all authority is in Christ. Fullness of God dwells...Christ possesses the fullness of God.

Now, Paul...come back to Ephesians 1 here. Paul, in the verses leading up to verse 22 and 23, gives us a picture of the authority of Christ, and it's a grand picture. Check out this portrait of Christ in Ephesians 1:19. He starts talking about the power of God, and in verse 20, he talks about the power of God displayed in Christ. I want you to see this picture of Christ and His authority. Listen to what it says. Verse 20, "The mighty strength, which God exerted in Christ when he..." Start here, "...when he raised him from the dead..." God raised Him from the dead. Christ has authority over sin and death and the grave. Anybody else have that kind of authority?

I mean, at this point...at this point, Jesus is separated apart from everyone and everything else. This is sufficient, but this is where He's just getting started so, you have this in your notes. First, He is the risen Savior. He's risen, but not just risen. Paul continues, this is where it gets started. "...raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms..." This is what we've seen the last couple of weeks. Christ sat down at the right hand of God. That He is exalted there, just like we mentioned earlier in our worship, Philippians 2:9-11, God has exalted Him to the highest place, given Him the name that is above every name, that the name of Jesus every knee will bow, every tongue confess that He is, what? He's Lord.

So, He is the risen Savior and, second, Jesus is the exalted Lord. Seated at the right hand of the Father, exalted as Lord over all. He begins to talk about what that means. He is, verse 21, "far above all rule and authority, power and dominion..." Now, when Paul uses words like that, "rule", "authority", "power and dominion", these are words that he uses in the New Testament. They were common in the culture of that day to refer to angelic beings, rulers, authorities, powers. Angelic beings, both good, angels in heaven, and demons in

hell...bad, spiritual forces of evil. The picture is Christ is above them all. That's what Hebrews 1:4 says, "Christ is superior to angels. He is above them all."

Then, I love, love this next part. "...*far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given...*" Isn't that good? Like, you think of a title a billion years from now, you think, that will show supremacy, and Christ tops it forever. You can't come up with a title over which Christ is not supreme. You think about the practical ramifications here. Christ reigns supreme over every leader in all of history with whatever title they attributed to themselves or had attributed to them.

He is risen Savior, exalted Lord, and Sovereign King. He is above all, and puts a period on it, Paul does, in verse 22, and says, "*God placed all things under his feet...*" All things. Christ is the King who reigns over everything. Everything that goes on in the United States and in China and in North Korea and Iraq and Afghanistan, it's all under His reign. Everything that goes on in your business or your home is under His reign. Everything that goes on in all creation is under His reign because all things are under His feet. Sovereign King.

Now, here's where it gets really interesting. What Paul is not saying here is that Christ has authority over the church. That's not what Paul is saying here. Now, follow with me. That's true that Christ has authority over the church. We see that at other places in Scripture, even this whole imagery in Colossians of Christ being the Head of the church, the body; asserts the supremacy over the body, but that's not what Paul says here. Listen to what he says. "*God placed,*" verse 22, "*all things under his feet and appointed him,*" follow this, "*to be head over everything for the church.*" Well, that's interesting. Not head over everything including the church, but God has placed Christ over everything...the language here is "for the church", "on behalf of the church", "as a gift to the church".

Now, what does that mean? Well, the next phrase tells us, "*which is his body, the fullness of him...*" So don't miss it. The body of Christ possesses the fullness of Christ. Next step here, follow this. Christ has all authority, and the church has the fullness of Christ. God has given Christ all authority for the church; the church has the fullness of Christ. Fullness, to fill completely. This is exactly...let me just read Colossians 2:9-10. "*In Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given...*" Paul says, "*...you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.*" So the church has the fullness of Christ.

Do we realize what this means when you put these two together? Follow here. If Christ has all authority, and the church has the fullness of Christ, then all the authority in all the earth belongs to who? The church! All the fullness of God in Christ, and all the fullness of Christ in the church. Do you catch what Scripture is saying here? He shares His authority with us. You say, "What do you mean?" Think about it. Christ raised from the dead, Christ resurrected. Brother or sister, you will also be resurrected. He shares this with you.

"Wait, Christ exalted. What do you mean, I share in that?" Listen to Ephesians 2:6, "*God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus...*" I'm not making this stuff up; this is real. Can you believe this? It's what...Go back to 1 Corinthians 3; just go back a couple books. You go to Galatians, then 2 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians. Look at 1 Corinthians 3. This is mind-blowing, breathtaking truth. 1 Corinthians 3:21, this is another setting where there was division in the church. Paul is addressing that. Different people following different leaders. Paul says, "Forget these different leaders. Do you realize what you have?" Verse 21, 1 Corinthians 3, "*So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future - all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.*"

Brothers and sisters, do we realize this? All the fullness of Christ possessed by us as the church. Therefore, we do not believe the lie of the Adversary in our culture that the church today is weak and frail and fragile and struggling and questionable to survive. Blasphemy! We have the authority of Jesus Christ. The question is, do we realize who we are and what we have? We are not victims to sin; we are victors over sin. We are not powerless in the pagan culture that surrounds us. We have power over everything in the pagan culture that surrounds us. We are not afraid of spiritual strongholds. We demolish spiritual strongholds. We have no fear when it comes to the mission set before us, because we know...we know that we have resurrection waiting for us.

Certainly, in economic times like this, we are not worried about the future; we are confident in the future because we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies, and the stock market can do nothing to change that. Nothing. Do we realize this? All the authority in all the earth belongs to the church. Christ has said to us, "All of my resources are at your disposal for the accomplishment of your lives and your mission on this earth." We can't control the things that go on around us in our culture; we cannot control the different things that people think and do. We cannot control the culture around us, but we can control our confidence in the authority that's been entrusted to us.

The question is, do we believe these things? Do we really believe these things? Do we really believe, when we share the gospel in our culture, do we really believe, do we live like we believe? Do we speak like we believe that no matter how tall, no matter how wide, no matter how thick the walls are that our culture and people in the culture set up against the gospel, do we really believe that they come crashing down when the name of Christ is proclaimed?

### **We are now a display of the glory of Christ.**

This is the authority we have in the church, and it's for the purpose of mission. This gets into the third ramification here: United by the grace of Christ, filled with the power of Christ, and we are now a display of the glory of Christ. A display of His glory. Now, before we see this in Ephesians, just think about the Great Commission. Remember the Great Commission? "*Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations...*" "Therefore", what's that about? Don't gloss over "therefore". It may be the most important word there. What's it there for? It takes us back to verse 18. Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, in light of this, in light of the fact that I have all authority, you go and make disciples of all nations." This is the basis for what we do, and it's what Paul's talking about here.

The fullness of Him who fills everything in every way. The picture, and we see it all over Scripture. It's God and His glory filling the earth; God demonstrating His glory, filling the earth with His glory, and we see the glory of God displayed in Christ, demonstrated in Christ. John 1:14, "We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only. We've seen in Christ the glory of God." However, here's the problem: Christ is seated at the right hand of God in the heavenlies, so how is the world going to see the glory of Christ if He is at the right hand of the Father and is not on this earth?

God says, "I'm going to unite a people by my grace, and I'm going to fill them with the fullness of Christ, and they are going to be a display of my glory throughout the world." This is the picture. God's design is to use the body of His Son to show the glory of His Son to all creation. Let me show this to you, Ephesians 3. One of the...it's either the last place or second to the last place we're going to turn, I can't remember, Ephesians 3:10.

Look at this; look at this picture, just...this is one of those take your breath away verses. You ready? Ephesians 3:10, listen to this. God's design, His intent, that's what verse 10 says, follow along. *"God's intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms..."* Now, think about this one with me. Through the church, the manifold wisdom of God...so this is God's intent, what He's going to do through the church. He's going to take His manifold wisdom. What is that? That is the revelation of His glory in the salvation of sinners, wisdom of the cross, wisdom...seems like foolishness to man, but this is the plan that God's going to bring from His plan for salvation, Son purchasing salvation, the Spirit preserving it. Bringing Jews and Gentiles together. This mystery of salvation united by the grace of Christ, all that we've talked about. God's going to display His glory in the salvation of sinners through the church, the manifold wisdom of God.

Now, who is He showing His wisdom off to? The manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. Now, we've talked about this. These are words that refer in the New Testament to angelic beings in the heavenly realms, both good and bad. So, don't miss this. Think good, heavenly angels, angels in heaven, God is going to display His wisdom and His glory to angels in heaven in what He does in creating the church.

One author said, "God is educating the angels by the means of the church," and it's exactly what the New Testament teaches. 1 Peter 1, "Angels long to look into these sorts of things." Luke 15, "One sinner repents, there is rejoicing in heaven." They see the glory of God in the salvation of sinners. They long to see it.

God's displaying His glory, but not just on the good side of things here. One more place to turn, Ephesians 6:12, you have to see it. Paul uses this phrase in Ephesians 6:12, *"Our struggle,"* he says, *"is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."* So, what God is doing in the church is not just to show angels His glory but to display His glory before the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Catch this. God has designed His intent. It's to take David Platt and A.T. Scott and Rosie Durham, Sheryl Turner and Nan Priest, Jimmy Rogers, and to take them in the depth of their sin, objects of the wrath of God, and to reach down His hand of grace into each one of our lives and to open our eyes to salvation and to raise us up, victorious over sin, and to seat us with Christ in the heavenly realms, so that for all of eternity, their lives will be a pronouncement to angels in heaven and demons in hell that God is great, and He is gracious, and He is merciful, and He is wise, and He is worthy.

Do we realize what we're a part of? One author said,

Your life is much bigger than a good job, an understanding spouse and good kids. It is bigger than beautiful gardens, nice vacations, and fashionable clothes. In reality you are part of something immense, something that began before you were born and will continue after you die. God is rescuing fallen humanity, transporting them into His kingdom and progressively shaping them into His likeness, and He has called you to be a part of it.

This is what it means to be a part of the church. We're a part of God's grand, redemptive design to show His glory in the world.

God is saying, "Look at the church, and you will see my Son. Look at the church, and you will see my Son." This is why we can't go at Christianity alone; we cannot cave in to the individualism of American culture and the church because, you think, "Well, I can glorify Christ on my own", and yes, we're supposed to glorify God with everything we do, but listen to what Ephesians 1:22 and 23 is saying. The fullness of the glory of Christ is displayed, not in you and you and you and you, but in us, in a body together. This is where the glory of Christ is displayed. So, for the sake of the glory of Christ, leave, abandon self-centered, self-dependent Christianity and give yourself to a body of Christ.

Don't...when we realize these things, we realize that being a part of the church is so much deeper than sitting next to somebody in an auditorium and going to a class with some other people. I fear that that's what we've created the church to be in the process under God. Everything Ephesians 1:22 and 23 is teaching us. We are a community of people. That's why we're talking about what it means to be a covenant community, what it means to be covenanted together, united by the grace of Christ, filled with the power of Christ and displaying the glory of Christ.

This is why, in the days to come, we are going to dive into Scripture and really look at what it means to commit our lives to one another, based on Scripture, in no way with the purpose of adding burdensome yokes upon each other, in no way. United by the grace of Christ, committed to loving each other for the glory of Christ.

## **The Reason for Covenant in Community ...**

The reason for covenant in community is because we want to celebrate His grace, we want to demonstrate His power, and we long to communicate His glory clearly to all the world.

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