McLean Bible Church
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12 TRAITS OF A BIBLICAL CHURCH – Part 17

Biblical Church

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open with me to Ephesians 1. While you're turning there, I want you to know how thankful I am to be here in person. The only thing that's a little unfortunate is I just got back from Ethiopia early this week and I brought something back with me, so I'm a little under the weather and you're probably wishing I was on the screen right now. But here I am. I have really been looking forward to being face to face with you again. I have heard all kinds of stories of God's grace on this campus specifically ever since it started.

As we come to the end of this series we've been walking through on the traits of a biblical church, I'm going to start today by testing you to see how well you've followed along with these 12 traits. So audience participation: what traits of a biblical church can we identify? We don't do church according to our thoughts or opinions or the trends in our day. We do church according to how God has defined it. Call out the ones you can remember. Who can name a biblical trait of a church?

Prayer. That's a great one to start with. The church is designed by God to be dependent on God. We ask God to do in and among us what only God can do.

Leadership. Biblical leadership includes pastors/elders/overseers. We talked about how a biblical church has a plurality of pastors/elders/overseers, as well as deacons and deaconesses who are serving in all kinds of ways in the church.

Expository preaching. Biblical preaching and teaching—I would call this the first trait of a church, because everything else flows from the preaching and teaching of the Bible. It forms us as a church.

Mission. Last week we looked at this as I was standing in the blazing sun on top of a building in Ethiopia. A little side note there: I'm usually pretty tied to a sermon manuscript on my iPad. Well, about ten minutes into that sermon, I looked at my notes and saw this message: "Emergency. Your iPad is overheating." It was done. So I had to lean on the Spirit for the rest of that sermon. But we talked about how the church exists, not just to make disciples right where we live, but to make disciples of all the nations. The local church exists for the accomplishment of global mission.

So that's four. What's another one?

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Worship. This is why we're here today and why we gather together weekly, glorifying God with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, along with prayer and study of the Word.

Giving. We give of our resources for the spread of the gospel for the building up of the church. We need to be faithful to give.

Somebody else mentioned discipleship. We grow together in Christ. We learn together and obey the Bible personally, as well as in small and large community groups. We want to encourage every part of the church to be in a place where we are learning the Bible and obeying God in our personal lives, in a large community like this, then in a small community where we can hold one another accountable.

Membership. Biblically, followers of Christ are members of churches. We read in 1 Corinthians 12 that we're like the different parts of a body. We also don't float from one church to the next—no "church hopping" or "church shopping." We commit our lives to a local church where we can grow together in Christ.

Accountability and discipline. We hold one another accountable. What we talked about that week from Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5 and Galatians 6 is that we take responsibility for helping one another grow in holiness. It's part of what it means to love people around us.

Ordinances. As a part of our worship, we regularly participate in the Lord's Supper and we celebrate salvation in baptism. Those are two visible pictures of the gospel that God has given us in the church.

Evangelism. That's the proclamation of the gospel and is the core of who we are. The church is a community of people who know Jesus and proclaim Jesus. We gather together, we sing the gospel, we preach the gospel, then we scatter from here, which is our primary evangelistic strategy as McLean Bible Church.

We hope that in a setting like this people will come to Christ. I pray that will be true even this morning, that the people who are here who do not yet know the life of Christ will find it here. But that's not our primary evangelism focus. Primarily this room filled with Spirit-filled followers of Christ will scatter around to all kinds of different workplaces and neighborhoods, proclaiming the gospel wherever they go. The gospel spreads through the church scattering.

Fellowship. Think of all the "one anothers" we find in Scripture. Love one another. Care for one another. Pray for one another. Bear with each other. This is why we want to make sure that we don't just come to church and say hello to each other, then move on with our lives. No, we're to intentionally be in community where we care for one another, serving and building each other up. We should approach both our gathering and our scattering asking, "How can I live for the good of the people around me?"

These are the 12 Traits of a Biblical Church God has given us in His Word. All of that will bring us to two of my favorite verses about the church in all the Bible: Ephesians 1:22-23. But we'll actually start

reading back in verse 15. This is a prayer that Paul prayed for the church at Ephesus. It's one of two prayers in Ephesians. First is Ephesians 1:15-23; the second one is Ephesians 3:14-21. They're both great prayers that are worthy of meditation and memorization, as they teach us a lot about how to pray for the church.

I'm going to read the first prayer, then I want to camp out on the last two verses. I want you to feel the wonder of these two verses as we think about what it means to be a church. Yes, we're on different campuses, but what does it mean for us to be the church? Part of my hope in this series on the traits of the church is that we might capture in a fresh way—and for some, maybe even for the first time—the wonder of what it means to be part of the church. The kind of community we experience in this room is so different from any other social club or setting in the universe. This is a uniquely Christ-formed community and I want us to see the wonder of what that means. Paul writes this to the church:

> *15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love*
> *toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my*
> *prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit*
> *of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 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, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness*
> *of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he*
> *worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the*
> *heavenly places, 21 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. 22 And he put*
> *all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his*
> *body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

From these two verses, I want to show you three truths that summarize all we've seen over the last six months about what it means to be the church according to the Bible. They're all over the book of Ephesians. We're going to turn to a few different places where I want you to see and feel, I hope in a fresh way, the wonder of what it means to be part of the church.

Here are the three realities for us regarding what it means to be a church family.

1. <u>We have been united together by the grace of Christ</u>.

This is what separates a church from any other kind of community in the world. We together are united by one thing: the grace of Christ. In Ephesians 1:22, Paul refers to the church as the body of Christ. This is a picture we see throughout Ephesians. We'll look at it in just a second. But I want us to pause and think about how it is possible for a group of sinners to be called "the body of Christ."

Part of Paul's purpose in this book is to say, "Together you are all a part of this body." The church at Ephesus was made up of both Jews and Gentiles together. There was actually a lot of conflict and division between them, and part of what Paul's goal was to bring them together. In Ephesians 2:14 he talks about

how Jews and Gentiles have all kinds of differences, but together they come together in the church as the body of Christ through the grace of Christ.

> *14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh*
> *the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that*
> *he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might*
> *reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.*

Paul is saying, "Together you are one body and Christ is what unites you." It's the same thing that unites us in this room. I imagine there are Jews and non-Jews in this room, but there are also people from all kinds of backgrounds, with different personalities, who live and work in different places. What unites us as church? In the beginning of Ephesians 2, Paul describes what those Christians once were. He says:

> *1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the*
> *course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work*
> *in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh,*
> *carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like*
> *the rest of mankind.*

How's that for what unites us? We were all dead in our transgressions and objects of the wrath of God. Talk about misery loves company. We were all once dead in sin. Paul says we had no spiritual life. We were spiritually dead. There aren't different levels of dead here. You're not kind of dead, more dead or less dead. He wasn't saying, "Jews, you were kind of dead; Gentiles, you were really, really dead." They were all dead, period.

I think about funerals I've been part of for family members, church members or close friends. It's a humbling thing to look at or even to carry a casket. There's a solemnity, There's a finality there. Brothers and sisters, when you think of your spiritual condition before the grace of Christ, this is the picture the Bible gives. You were dead in your sin. You were in the casket. Not sick in your sin—dead in your sin. Feel the gravity there.

We were not just dead in sin, we were also living in darkness. The Bible says we followed the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air. Second Corinthians 4:4 talks about how our eyes were blinded by the god of this world so that we could not see. Over in Ephesians 4:18, Paul talks about how we were darkened in our understanding, then in Ephesians 5:8 he literally says, "You were once darkness." It's like Jesus' words in John 3:20: "we loved the darkness and hated the light."

We were dead in sin, we were living in darkness and we were children of disobedience. Paul says, "You followed the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." Think of the picture from Genesis 3 where the serpent tempted Adam and Eve to disobey God. They succumbed to that temptation and in the words of Romans 5, we are all children of Adam. It's not just that we sinned every once in a while.

No, it's that our hearts were sin-soaked. Our very nature was disobedient toward God, even defiant toward God.

We have followed the devil, who is at work in all the evil we see around us in the world—all the immorality and deceit and strife and murder. He is the spirit who is at work in all those things. You may think, "Well, I've not murdered. I've not done this or that." That may be the danger. Our disobedience was far more subtle. It's cloaked in cultural goodness and even religious self-righteousness.

In reality, we were children of disobedience, captivated by sinful desires. Paul says we lived among them, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. He says in Romans 6 that we were slaves to sin, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature. Second Timothy 2:26 says it was like we were captive to the devil himself. We were dead in sin, living in darkness, children of disobedience, captivated by sinful desire and ultimately, we were doomed to hell. We were objects of the wrath of God—condemned, as Jesus says in John 3:18. Romans 5:10 and James 4:4 says we were enemies of God, thus the objects of eternal wrath.

So, brothers and sisters, this is what unites us. It puts each of us on the same plane. Not one of us has an advantage over the other. We are not unified because of our ethnicity or because we live in the same area or have the same socio-economic status. We're not unified because our personalities are all the same or because we have the same tastes or preferences. What unites us is that we are all desperately in need of the grace of God. That's what brings us together as a church. That's what brought us together in the first place. We were all dead in sin, living in darkness, children of disobedience, captivated by sinful desires and doomed to hell—every single one of us.

But this is the beauty of the book of Ephesians. When we get to Ephesians 2:4, it says, *"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved."* Yes! Think about what God has done as described here, then go back to Ephesians 1:3. I want you to see what Paul says here.

You know, I have so much to learn, discover and grow in to realize more about what it means to know Christ. But one thing I have learned is to speak of my conversion to Christ in passive terms. That means, I did not convert myself to Christ. I couldn't. I was dead. I was in the casket. I was in darkness. I was under wrath —and I wanted to be there. I was captivated by sinful desire. I did not convert myself to Christ. I was converted. God did a work in me that I could not do on my own. That's the whole point of Ephesians 1:3-14. Listen to this:

> *[3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, [4] even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love [5] he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, [6] to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. [7] In*

him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, [8] which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight [9] making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ [10] as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

[11] In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, [12] so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. [13] In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Praise God! Do you see what He has done? The whole Trinity is involved in this picture. We were once dead in sin, doomed to hell, but what did God do? The Father planned our salvation. He chose and predestined us; He's given salvation to us. I want to be clear, brothers and sisters. I can't explain these words. I don't wholly understand these words. I can't fathom all they mean. But the reality that Scripture teaches us here is that God has set His affections on you and me as His sons and daughters.

Jesus said to His disciples in John 15:16, *"You did not choose me, but I chose you."* Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, *"But we ought always to give thanks to God for you...because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."* Think about this. I'm guessing in this room right now there might be some people walking through some challenges, some difficulties, who might be at a low point or valley in some way. For those of you who are in Christ, I just want to remind you in a fresh way, especially when you're in a low point to pause for a second and let the words of Ephesians 1 just soak in. Before the sun was ever formed, before oceans were ever poured out on the land, before mountains were set in their place, before a star ever appeared in the sky—before any of that, God Almighty on high set His sight on your soul. From eternity past, He purposed to love you. Just be encouraged in a fresh way that the God of the universe loved you. He saw you in that casket, dead in your sin and He purposed to say, "Life."

How is that possible? How can a holy God do this? Well, I'm glad you asked. The Father planned our salvation and the Son purchased our salvation. In Jesus Christ we have redemption through His blood. The word redemption means to pay the purchase price. Especially if you're not a follower of Christ, hear this loud and clear. God loves sinners so much that He sent His Son Jesus to live the life we couldn't live—a life of perfect obedience to God, without sin.

Then, though He had no sin of His own to pay, He chose to die in our place. He died for our sin—for your sin, for my sin. Jesus took upon Himself all the wrath due us for our sin. The good news just keeps getting better, because He didn't stay dead for long. He rose from the dead. He conquered sin and the grave.

And now anyone, anywhere, including today, who turns from their sin and says, "God, I need you to forgive me of my sin," and puts their faith and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord will be forgiven of all their sin and reconciled to God for all eternity. The Son has purchased our salvation.

The Father planned it, the Son purchased it, then the Spirit preserves our salvation. He opens our eyes to this reality and changes our lives, then He enters our hearts—don't miss this—as a deposit and seal that guarantees our inheritance as sons and daughters of God. So Christian, you have the Spirit of God living in you Who guarantees eternal redemption.

See the purpose in all this. Why such grace and mercy? Look at what every single Person in the Trinity does in salvation:

- The Father plans our salvation—why? Ephesians 1:6, *"...to the praise of his glorious grace."*
- The Son purchases our salvation—why? Verse 12, *"So that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory."*
- The Spirit preserves our salvation—why? The end of verse 14, *"...to the praise of his glory."*

Glory to God! We were dead in sin, living in darkness, children of disobedience, captivated by sinful desire and doomed to hell. God set His affections on us. The Father planned our salvation, the Son purchased our salvation and the Spirit preserves our salvation—all for the glory of His name.

Do we realize what this means? There's an unhealthy tendency in the church to try to dramatize our conversion testimonies by talking about how bad our circumstances were before we came to Christ, about how we were addicted to drugs and engrossed in all these things. If that's your testimony, that's certainly not bad. That's your story. But what is not healthy is when other people begin to think their testimonies are boring because they didn't do all that stuff. We almost have this idea that the deeper we went into sin, the more we realize about grace—and there's a sense in which that's true.

But at the core, the reality is we are all on the same plane here. We were all dead in sin, doomed to hell—every single one of us—and by God's grace He saved us and brought us to life. You can't get any more dramatic than that. You were in a casket spiritually. Regardless of whether you were eight or 18 or 80 years old, you had nothing in you that called out to God. You were destined to be separated from Him forever. He reached out His hand into your heart, opened your eyes and transformed your life, so that now you are free from sin and alive to God forever. There is nothing boring about that. We are united together by the grace of Christ.

So now catch the implications. Going back to Ephesians 1:23, we are now the body of Christ. You see this over and over again.

- Ephesians 2:16 says that Jesus *"might reconcile us both to God in one body."*

- Ephesians 3:6: *"This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body."*
- Ephesians 4:4: *"There is one body and one Spirit."*
- 4:12: *"...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ."*
- 4:16: *"...from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."*
- 4:25: *"Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another"* in this body.
- 5:23: *"For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior."*
- 5:30: *"...because we are members of his body."*

Do you realize, Christian, that you are a member of the body of Jesus Christ? You, who deserved to be separated from God forever, in all your sin, are now part of the body of Jesus Christ. What a powerful picture of unity coming together in the church. We're now His body.

Then there are a couple other pictures here. In Ephesians 2:19-2 Paul says:

> *[19] So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, [20] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, [21] in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. [22] In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

So we're His body and we're His building. We're like a structure built together. He's not talking about a physical building, but a structure, a household—like a family. And then in the third picture, we're His bride. In Ephesians 5 we're called the bride of Christ. Do you realize how good it is to be a part of the church? We're the body of Christ, the building of Christ, the household of God and the bride of Jesus Christ.

I think about my wife, my bride, and how much joy and pleasure I find in her. I think, "This is how God describes us. This is how Jesus looks at us—as a bride whom He loves and cherishes and treasures." This is what unites us together, because none of us could be part of the body of Christ or the bride of Christ on our own. It's all by the grace of Christ.

2. <u>We have been filled with the power of Christ</u>.

This leads to the second realization about us as a church according to the Bible. We have been united together by the grace of Christ, then we've been filled with the power of Christ. I was about to say this is where it gets really good, but it's already been really good. Now it gets even better. We are His body, Ephesians 1:23 says, *"the fullness of him who fills all in all."*

That word "fullness" occurs four times in the book of Ephesians—in 1:10, 1:23, 3:19 and 4:13. We won't look at all of those, but think about this. What does it mean for the church to be the fullness of Christ—*"of him who fills all in all"*? You've got to pay close attention here. This is simple, but it is glorious. Follow the line of thought here. In the prayer before this and leading up to verse 22, Paul is saying Christ has all authority. The whole picture leading up to verse 23 is Paul giving us a glimpse of the authority of Jesus. In verse 19 he talks about *"the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ."*

Then he starts to give us the picture of Jesus. Who is Jesus? Paul says He's the risen Savior. Not only that, He's the exalted Lord. He's seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly places, far above all power and dominion. Christ is superior to everyone and everything. He is far above every title, *"every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come."* So any title that could ever be given, Jesus is over all of them. He's the risen Savior, the exalted Lord and He's the sovereign King Who reigns over all things.

This is an awesome thought. Right now, everything going on in the United States—everything going on in the world—Jesus is King over everything that's going on in everywhere. Kim Jong Un in North Korea is not king. Jesus is King over him. He holds Kim Jong Un in the palm of His hand. Same thing with Donald Trump. Same thing with every world leader. He is sovereign over everything going on in Ethiopia, where we just were. Jesus has all authority over everything.

What's interesting here though is in Ephesians 1:23, Paul does not say that Jesus is head over the church. We know He is head of the church and Lord over us—that's part of the imagery,. But that's not what Paul is emphasizing here. In verses 22-23, Paul says God put all things under Jesus' feet and gave Him, as Head over all things, to the church. The language here is about something God is giving to the church. God has given all authority to Christ, then He has given Christ to whom? To the church. Christ is a gift to the church.

This is amazing. Follow this. Christ has all authority, then the church has the fullness of Christ. Christ fills us. *Pleroo* is the word there, meaning to fill something completely. The church has the fullness of Christ. It's the same thing Paul says later in Colossians 2:9-10: *"For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority."* So we as the church possess all of Christ.

If you put those two together then you will realize what this means. Brothers and sisters in Christ, if Jesus Christ has all authority and the church is filled with the fullness of Christ, then all the authority in all the earth belongs to whom? To the church. Are you catching this? Jesus has all authority and He shares that with us. But what does that mean? Think about it. All that Jesus has we share in. We share in His

resurrection and are seated with Jesus in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). He has given us His life, His eternal life, His resurrection life. Everything Christ has is ours.

I mentioned my bride earlier. Heather graduated from college before I did, which meant the last year before we were married I was still in college. She was out of college and had gotten a job teaching and was making money. She had an income, but I was still in college and had no income. I was eating a lot of Ramen noodles for every single meal. After that year, we stood together at the front of that church on that day to unite our lives together. There were so many wonderful things I received that day—most importantly, I received a beautiful and godly wife. But do you know what else I received on that day? Income. It was awesome. In one minute I had no cash flow. I said two words and I then had cash flow. I didn't have to do anything. I didn't have to teach little snot-nosed kids. Simply by the fact that my life was united with hers, everything that belonged to her now belonged to me—just like that.

This is what I want you to see. In a much, much greater way, we're united with Jesus Christ. And everything He has—His righteousness, His holiness, His redemption, His power and authority—belongs to us. This is breathtaking when you think about it. Contrary to the popular ideas in our culture—and maybe, sadly, even in the church—the church is not weak. The church is not frail, fragile, stagnant or struggling. The church has the fullness of Jesus Christ and it's time for us as the church to realize the fullness of who we are and what we have in Christ.

We have nothing to fear. Those of you who are held captive to fear in all kinds of ways—you don't have anything to fear. We have the fullness of Jesus Christ. We are not powerless before sin. We have power over sin. We do not shrink back from challenges in mission here and around the world. We face them boldly, because we know how this story is going to end. Our Leader is head over all and He has said, "My resources, everything I have, is at your disposal in your life together in the church." We say this every week when we commission one another to go out with the Great Commission. Jesus said, *"All authority in heaven and earth is given to me."* Paul is saying in Ephesians 1:22-23 that God has now given all of Jesus' authority as a gift to the church, which leads to our third realization.

3. <u>We are now a display of the glory of Christ</u>.

We've been united by the grace of Christ, we've been filled with the power of Christ, now we are a display of the glory of Christ. This is the church. See the connection here between the authority of Christ and the Great Commission: *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations."* Because Jesus has all authority and it's been given to the church, we go out and proclaim this risen Savior, exalted Lord and sovereign King over all. The purpose of the church, according to Ephesians 1:23, is to fill the earth with His glory.

We're His fullness. God is displaying the fullness of Jesus through us. Throughout Scripture we see that God desires to fill the earth with His glory. When Jesus was on the earth, He was a demonstration of the glory of God. *"We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth"* (John 14). So God showed His glory fully through Jesus in the flesh. But then Jesus left. He's not on the earth right now. He ascended into heaven and is at the Father's right hand. How is God going to display the glory of Christ in the world when Christ is at His right hand?

God brings a people together by His grace, fills them with His fullness and by the power of Christ they display the character, love, power, mercy and the glory of Christ to the world around them. God's design is to use the body of His Son to show the glory of His Son to all creation. Do you realize what we're a part of? We're a part of this divine plan to show the world the fullness of Christ in our community with one another.

Turn to another passage, Ephesians 3:10. This is breathtaking. We'll start in verse eight just to get the context"

> *8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, 10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.*

Did you hear that? God intends, through the church, through our community with each other, to display His wisdom. What does that mean? It means His plan of salvation—His glory in the salvation of sinners. It's like we saw earlier. The Father planned, the Son purchased, the Spirit preserves—all for His glory. God's intent is to display His wisdom, His plan of salvation, His glory to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. Those are words that are used in Scripture to describe angelic beings. This includes heavenly angels. One author said, "God is educating angels by the means of the church."

But it's not just heavenly angels. Look at Ephesians 6:12: *"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."* Think about this—it will take your breath away when you do. God is saying, "Not just to the angels in heaven, but to the very demons of hell, I'm going to show them My glory."

How is God going to show His glory in the supernatural realm? God says, "I'm going to take David Platt and Justin Orr and Saul Barket and Mary Beth Alford and Anthony Guillapon and Rudy Fenner and Jennifer Bittenbender and Ben Munios and Katy Ess and Tim Smith and Matt Broderick and all these brothers and sisters in Loudon County—I'm going to take all of them in their spiritual deadness, objects of My wrath—and I'm going to transform them into objects of My affection. I'm going to bring them to life

and cleanse them of all their sin. I'm going to raise them up and seat them with Christ in the heavenlies where they're going to reign with Him. And for all of eternity, their lives will be a pronouncement to the hosts of heaven and to the devils of hell that God is glorious, gracious, merciful and worthy of the praise of all the peoples of the earth. This is what God is doing that we're a part of. God says in His design, "Look at the church and you will see My Son. This is His body."

This is why, brothers and sisters, it is critical that we commit ourselves to the church and to being the church according to God's design. You might think, "Well, can't I display God's glory on my own?" Yes, there's a sense in which we're all intended to display the glory of God in every facet of our lives. But the clear message of Ephesians 1:22-23 is that God's glory is most clearly displayed, not through you or me, but through us. It's not through you or me kind of hopping in and jumping around and doing life on our own. It's displayed through us experiencing Christ-centered community together through His body, the fullness of Him Who fills everything in every way.

God holds up the church, saying to heaven and hell, "This is the glory of My Son. Look how I chose her to be His church, how I care for her, how I teach her, how I suffered for her, how I died for her, how I rose for her and I'm now reigning for her. Look how I've called and justified and cleansed her. See how I will keep her and glorify her and satisfy her forever with Myself."

Paul Tripp said:

> Your life is much bigger than a good job, an understanding spouse and good kids. It's 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 wants you to be a part of it.

That's what it means to be a part of His church: to be a part of this master plan of God to rescue men and women from their sin and transform their lives. God is redeeming people for His glory. This is why we want to be the church God has called and created and commanded us to be. It's not just coming and sitting in a seat. We want to experience the fullness of Christ—not just in our lives, not just in our families, but in our family together in the church. We're united by His grace, filled with His power and living week after week after week as a display of His glory, wherever God may lead us.

Let's pray.

O God, in a fresh way right now, I am overwhelmed by the wonder of what it means to be a part of Your body, part of this specific body. So thank You for the grace that unites us in this room. Thank You for filling us with all the fullness of Christ. Help us to live in that, individually and together as a church, and in the process, please use us as a display of Your glory in this community, that others might know Your love, grace and mercy, that others might be brought from death to life through our community with each other.

Please use us, form us, make us the church You want us to be, that we might be a display of Your glory to more and more and more people. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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