



“Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen,” Ephesians 3:21.

Education

Lesson Aim: To emphasize the fact that the believer covenants to strive for the advancement of his church

L448. Date: April 1976. **Text:** Ephesians 3:8-21.

Topic: Church Covenant; Education.

Covenant: “We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit . . . to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge, holiness, and comfort . . .”

The Church Covenant contains this statement, “We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit . . . to strive for the advancement of this church, in knowledge, holiness, and comfort.” That commitment lies behind today's study of Ephesians 3:8-21.

Growth and fruit are indications. God never intended His church merely to “hold her own.” He meant for her to advance. That is why He commanded her to “go” and to “make disciples,” Matthew 28:18-20. That is why He added to her day by day those who were being saved (Acts 2:27). The living church is a ministering church.

The church is important to God. He instituted the church. He has preserved the church through the generations. He adds to the church. He has commissioned His church for world evangelism. He intends to be glorified through the church. The church should be important to Christians as she is to God.

When one joins a Baptist church, he enters into a solemn covenant to strive for the advancement of his church. “Strive” means “to try very hard; to make a great effort; to give strenuous and earnest exertion.” What would happen in your church, if you did all in your power to increase her knowledge of God, her holiness of conduct, and her comfort of spirit? That

is what each church member has covenanted to do.

Today's study reviews the attitude of the Apostle Paul toward the church in Ephesus. Ask God to speak to you through it that the same attitude may become yours.

I. REACH UNBELIEVERS

The mission of the church is to reach people for Christ, to build them up in Christ, and to send them out for Christ. All three phases should be going on at the same time. Woe to the church that gets caught up in only part of the mission and neglects the other. She thereby fails in her mission.

Who is worthy of the privilege of taking the matchless gospel to others? No one. Paul magnified the dignity of his apostolic office, but he always felt unworthy to fill it. "I am less than the least of all saints," he confessed. He felt not that he was least of saints, but less than least. Do you feel that way?

An old Puritan is reported to have said, "I do not quarrel with Paul's language, but I do dispute his right to push me out of my place. Less than least is my place." It is a grace (an unmerited privilege) to be a witness for Jesus.

Each Christian has the opportunity of announcing good news to people who have not heard. The message is "the unsearchable (untrackable, inexplorable, too vast to be measured) riches of Christ." It is the riches of His grace by which forgiveness is provided. It is the vastness of His power by which the believer is kept. It is the indescribable glory by which his inheritance is garnished. The gospel is good news indeed!

You can share in the blessing of evangelizing the unsaved about you. You are capable! God placed the offices in His church (Ephesians 4:11) to help qualify you to serve. Give yourself to the blessed ministry of getting out the gospel.

II. TEACH DOCTRINE

Evangelism is important, but the work of the church includes more than soul-winning. Ephesians 3:8, 9, 11, 12 set forth four great doctrines which all believers should know.

A. The person of Christ (verse 8). — The gospel is "the good news of the wealth of Christ which is beyond searching out." Who is Christ? Whence came His wealth? What is the good news concerning Him? Those questions

relate to the doctrine of the person of Christ. The church is to teach that Jesus, the Christ, is the eternal God made manifest in human flesh. She is to teach concerning His pre-existence, His incarnation, His vicarious suffering, His victorious intercession, His continuing intercession, and His soon return. She has no greater message than that concerning Jesus, the Christ.

B. The purpose of God (verse 9). — God's work among men was long a “mystery.” It is not any longer. In Jesus Christ the mystery became an open fact. It is that all men, regardless of race or generation or region, may become members of the family of God through faith in Jesus as personal Saviour. It is God's purpose that “all men” may see and understand that truth. That is why He commissioned believers to go into all the world to get the gospel into the hearing of every human.

C. The sovereignty of God (verse 11). — God's way of redemption was laid in eternity; it was executed in time. “Before God created Calvary's hill, He planned Calvary's cross.” He is working “according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord,” verse 11. Your salvation and life of service are included in God's plan. Give your best to Him who has chosen you, called you, saved you, and commissioned you.

D. The access to God (verse 12). — In Christ Jesus our Lord “we have boldness and access with confidence” into the presence of God Himself. That is what is involved in the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer.” Imagine being able to come directly into the presence of God and having freedom to speak to Him! That is what Jesus has done for each who has trusted Him as Saviour.

III. INSTRUCT ANGELS

Ephesians 3:10-13 is a surprising passage. It says that the church has the privilege of instructing “the principalities and powers in heavenly places” concerning the things of God. That angelic beings are concerned about the salvation of men is made clear in I Peter 1:12, “... **which things the angels desire to look into.**” They marvel and glorify God as they see His wisdom in redeeming men by the death of His Son, joining diverse men in a perfect unity in His churches, and using men for the task of world evangelism. That means that God is glorified in heaven, by the angels, when you and your church are active in soul-winning.

The angels had seen many wonderful works of God. They had witnessed the creation of the universe. They had seen God light the sun and place the planets in their orbits. When they saw His work of redemption, they must have marvelled more than at any of His other works, for there they

saw the greatest exhibition of His wisdom and grace.

IV. PRACTICE PRAYER

Prayer is the secret of power. He who is deeply interested in the things of God will find himself drawn to a life of prayer. The Apostle Paul illustrated the importance of intercessory prayer — prayer in behalf of others — by his prayers for the Ephesian believers (Ephesians 3:14).

The Jewish religion of New Testament days followed the custom of standing to pray (Mark 11:25; Luke 18:11, 13). A kneeling posture denoted special solemnity or unusual urgency in prayer (Luke 22:41; Acts 7:60). It is most essential that the church move forward in spiritual growth and ministry. Paul felt that urgency so strongly that he passed by the custom of standing, and fell upon his knees before the heavenly Father to pray for the Ephesian church. Are you often on your knees before the Father in prayer for your church? There is hardly a more important subject for prayer. Devote yourself to daily intercession for individual members and the corporate body of your church. God will promote the power of your church in answer to your prayers.

Prayer for the church is one great way that you can “strive for the advancement” of your congregation. Pray for your pastor; call his name before God. Pray for the church officers. Pray for the church faculty. Call each by name. Pray one by one for members of the church whose name you can call or whose circumstances you know. A praying church is a growing, ministering, God-honoring church. Whatever other service you render to the Lord, your most effective will be to pray.

V. LIVE WITH CHRIST

For Christ to “dwell in your hearts by faith” is the great privilege of the Christian (verse 17). Believers in a church are joined into the body of Christ. Unity must characterize the relationships of the members of the body. How can diverse people enjoy such unity? Christ creates the unity by indwelling and controlling each member of the body.

The body of a man is made up of many different members. Each member is shaped differently and has a function which differs from that of every other member. They all work in harmony, however, because each is indwelt by the one spirit which gives life to the body.

The church, as the body of Christ, enjoys unity because of the presence of the indwelling Christ who gives life to the body and controls the functions

of her members. It is as Paul said, **“... Christ liveth in me: and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me,”** Galatians 2:20.

An appreciation of the significance of the life of Christ in the believer will come only as one is “strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man,” verse 16. Christ dwells among believing men to carry on His work of redemption and restoration. His indwelling is comprehended only by faith. No person can know nor appreciate His indwelling by unaided human reason. He must be taught it by the Holy Spirit. As a believer is taught that truth by the Spirit, he becomes spiritually strong and increases in faith. Ask God to teach you the meaning of Christ's living in your heart.

VI. KNOW GOD'S LOVE

Let Christians keep on growing. Let them know the reality of the indwelling of Christ. Let them be taught by the Holy Spirit of God. That way, they will become “rooted and grounded in love” and become able as saints “to know (by experience) the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge,” verses 17-19.

In the family of God, love is the source of vital life, the controller of all motives, the force which creates and maintains unity, and “the bond of perfectness,” Colossians 3:14. It is no wonder that Paul spoke of it as the knowledge transcending love of Christ. In such love, the Christian is to be “rooted and grounded,” verse 17.

“Only by being located in the center of the love will we see it reaching, infinitely in every direction. All these reaches of the divine love Paul sums up by naming the breadth of the love, extending to all people; its length, through all time; its heights, to the very presence of the Supreme God; its depth, to the lowest condition of human need” — W. O. Carver. God's love is so tremendous that one can never fully comprehend it. It always “passeth knowledge.” One of the wonders of grace is a believer's opportunity to keep on learning of God's love.

VII. SHARE GOD'S FULNESS

The goal of the Christian is that he “might be filled with all the fulness of God,” verse 19. Consider that goal in the light of Colossians 1:9, 10. God's fulness is available to each believer. God's intention is that each Christian will receive His fulness. He can be “filled with all the fulness of God”!

Each believer has already once-for-all received God's fulness (John 1:16). The believer is already living in such vital union with God that His fulness is as available to Him as it was to the incarnate Christ (Colossians 2:9, 10). Impute that fact to yourself by an act of faith (Romans 6:11), and begin to live a life “filled (controlled and empowered) with the fulness (total deity) of God.”

VIII. SHOW GOD'S GLORY

What a beautiful doxology is expressed in Ephesians 3:20, 21. (1) It magnifies God's power — “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think,” (2) It presents God's immanence — “according to the power that (already) worketh in us.” (3) It declares God's sovereignty — “unto him be glory.” (4) It identifies God's body upon earth — “in the church.” (5) It identifies God's Son — “by Jesus Christ.” (6) It specifies God's immensity — “throughout all ages, world without end.” (7) It settles God's worth to receive such recognition and glory — “Amen!” Memorize that wonderful doxology of praise, and recite it often when you think of God.

In manifesting God's glory through a worthy walk and faithful service, the Christian is reaching the highest glory of his life. The reason that one is saved is that “we should be to the praise of His glory,” Ephesians 1:12. He who “loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father” deserves “glory and dominion for ever and ever” from the redeemed ones.

Look back over the lesson comments, reviewing the headings of each major division. The lesson aim is “to emphasize that the believer covenants to strive for the advancement of the church.” The way the church advances is to reach unbelievers, teach doctrine, instruct angels, practice prayer, live with awareness of the indwelling Christ, enjoy the personal experience of God's love, share God's fulness (control and power), and show forth God's glory. Is that what is happening in your life and in your church? Is that what will happen in your life and church as a result of the study? Learn the lesson well — so well that you put it into practice.

At the end of each day, ask yourself, “What have I done for Jesus today that will bring glory to God through my church?” God will bring opportunities to willing hearts. You can daily honor God through your church.

Questions

1. Why is it not enough for a church to “hold her own”?
2. How does a church advance?
3. How can your church reach unbelievers?
4. How can your church teach more effectively?
5. What areas need teaching emphasis in your church?
6. How can you become more of a person of prayer?
7. How can you know the reality of the indwelling Christ?
8. How can you know God's love?
9. How can you help show God's glory through His church?
10. How can you render better service to God through your church?