

☞ Images of the Church

Review: **How can you best enjoy church? Expect; Exalt; Encourage; Employ**

As believers we are now part of God's Church. What exactly is the Church?

☞ **Ekklesia = the called out ones; a meeting or assembly.** As followers of Christ, we are the church, the called-out ones who assemble together at least every week.

☞ **"I am part of the Church, which is God's primary means of accomplishing His purposes on Earth."**

In Ephesians Paul talks a lot about the Church. In fact, each chapter paints a different picture describing the church. A little background: Ephesus is where handkerchiefs touched by Paul were used to heal people. This is where the seven sons of Sceva got beat up by a demonized man and many sorcerers got saved and burned their scrolls to the tune of around \$5 million in today's dollars. Also, Paul's influence in winning the city caused the silversmith, Demetrius, to start a riot since the shrine-making business was being threatened. Paul assigned Timothy to oversee the church in Ephesus. This letter to the Ephesians was written by Paul, probably from Rome while he was in prison around 63 AD. In this letter, Paul deals a lot with God's overall plan for the church and the world. In each of the six chapters of Ephesians we find a different picture of the church...

1. ☞ **The Body of Christ, 1:15-23**

The image of the church as the body of Christ is used several times throughout the New Testament. This paints a picture of believers being the hands and feet of Christ; doing what he would do and going where he would go. Paul actually refers to the Church as Christ's body twice in Ephesians, but the main point in chapter 1 is that the body is governed by ☞ the head. Just as our minds direct our bodies, so **Christ, as the head, directs his body.**

v. 22 *Christ is head* – far above all other authorities. He has the right to command; he's in control.

Colossians 1:18

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

☞ *All things under his feet* – **absolute authority**

Paul talks about this body of Christ again in chapter 4 and emphasizes that we are
☞ unified and growing, **4:1-16**

1 Corinthians 12:12

...though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.

In Ephesians 1 the emphasis was on the leadership and authority of Christ. In chapter 4 the emphasis is on the unity of the body. A body that doesn't function in unity is at least uncoordinated and at worst handicapped or paralyzed.

☞ v. 3 **make every effort to keep unity**

--Billy Graham... *Church-goers are like coals in a fire. When they cling together, they keep the flame aglow; when they separate, they die out.*

--C. S. Lewis... *The New Testament does not envision solitary religion; some kind of regular assembly for worship and instruction is everywhere taken for granted in the Epistles. So we must be regular practicing members of the church. Of course we differ in temperament. Some find it more natural to approach God in solitude; but we must go to church as well. For the church is not a human society of people united by their natural affinities, but the body of Christ, in which all members, however different must share the common life, complementing and helping one another precisely by their differences.*

We need the diversity in the body and Paul discusses that at length in 1 Corinthians 12. But we need unity as well. It takes effort, but it is worth it. It takes commitment, but it is worth it. Speaking of commitment, I think it is helpful to ask yourself these kinds of questions: What would my church be like if every member behaved just like me? Would it be friendly? Would it be full every week? Would it be financially supported? Would it be spirit-filled? Would it be faithfully serving? If your example would make the church weak, perhaps it's time to up your commitment. And, if you have to admit your commitment and behavior need improvement, then Paul has some advice for you.

v. 13 *become mature...* v. 14 *no longer infants*

☞ In other words, **grow up!** A child that doesn't grow and mature is not normal. Babies and kids are supposed to grow up. So it is with the body of Christ.

2. ☞ **The Temple of God, 2:11-22**

In the Old Testament, the temple was the place where the priests gave offerings and sacrifices. It's where they met with God and God displayed his glory. In the New **☞** Testament, we are that temple. We give ourselves to God. **God lives in us. God is glorified in us.**

v. 20 *Jesus is cornerstone*

1 Corinthians 3:11

...no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

v. 21-22 *in which God lives by his Spirit*

God lives in us. We are his temple; his house. He has complete access to every room. We **☞** want to keep things clean and tidy for him. **We always welcome him home!**

--Andrew Murray... *Come and say: "I give myself absolutely to God, to let Him work in me to will and to do of His good pleasure, as He has promised to do."*

3. **☞** The Family of God, 3:14-21

Galatians 6:10

as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God...

Romans 8:15-16

you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." **16** The Spirit himself testifies with **☞** our spirit that **we are God's children. (He's our father.)**

The topic of family invokes various responses from people depending on upbringing. But I want you to understand that we are children of the Most High God! We are part of the most royal family. God is our father and he loves us deeply. He's a good, good Father.

☞ In Deuteronomy 1:31 the Jews were **carried by the Lord** as a father carries his son. In Proverbs 3:12 the Lord **disciplines** those he loves, as a father disciplines his son. In 1 Thessalonians 2:11 Paul says he dealt with the church there like a father deals with his children; **encouraging, comforting, urging.**

4. **☞** The Bride of Christ, 5:22-33

Now here's a picture of the love the Lord has for us.

☞ **John 3:29**

The bride belongs to the bridegroom.

When the love in a relationship is strong, this belonging is a good thing. We belong to the Lord. He provides for us and protects us like a good husband. Like a happily man, he looks forward to getting together with his bride. He wants a close, intimate relationship with us. Now, men are flawed and there is no such thing as perfect husband. But Christ is ☞ that perfect one. **His love and leadership for us are exactly right!**

☞ v. 22 **submit**; v. 33 **respect**. That's our response to him. When we truly understand how much he loves us and wants the best for us, these things become easy. It's easy to follow someone who always makes the right decisions. It's easy to respect and submit to someone who always has my best interests in mind. That's who Jesus is!

v. 25 *gave himself up for the church...* v. 27 *to make her radiant, without stain, wrinkle or blemish*

In good relationships, we bring out the best in each other. Jesus sacrificed everything for ☞ us. He brings more to the table than we ever could, so **he brings out the best in us** as we submit to his leadership.

5. ☞ **The Army of God, 6:10-18**

v. 12 *struggle not against flesh & blood*, but **against** rulers, authorities, powers in this dark ☞ world, **spiritual forces of evil** in the heavenly realms.

We talked about the way the enemy works just recently. We are at war with him.

2 Corinthians 10:2-5

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up ☞ against the knowledge of God, and we **take captive every thought** to make it obedient to Christ. (*the battle is primarily in our minds; in our way of thinking*)

v. 13 *put on the full armor of God...* v. 14 *stand firm then*

☞ belt of **truth**; breastplate of **righteousness**; the gospel of **peace**; shield of **faith**; helmet of **salvation**; sword of the spirit, which is **the word of God**.

--Watchman Nee... *Two thrones are at war. God is claiming the earth for his dominion, and Satan is seeking to usurp that authority of God. The Church is called to displace Satan from his present realm and to make Christ Head over all.*

v. 18 *pray in the spirit; be alert; always keep on praying for all the saints*

Stephen Brown explains that when a group of thoroughbred horses face attack, they stand in a circle facing each other and, with their back legs, kick out at the enemy. Donkeys do just the opposite; they face the enemy and kick each other! How often the church does just that -- ignoring the real enemy while we attack fellow believers.

☞ We are the army of God, **standing together, side by side** against a spiritual enemy.

--C. Neil Strait... *The church is a force for good in a world bombarded with evil. It is a force for love in a world buried with hatred. It is a force for peace in a world torn with violence.*

As followers of Christ, we are the church, the called-out ones.

☞ **We are the Body** under his headship, unified and growing.

We are a Temple inhabited by God.

We are a Family carried and encouraged by our Father.

We are a Bride loved and purified by Christ.

We are an Army battling in the heavenlies.

-- Ernest Southcott... *The holiest moment of the church service is the moment when God's people, strengthened by preaching and sacrament, go out of the church door into the*

☞ *world to be the church. **We don't just go to church; we are the church.***

--James S. Hewett

I think that I shall never see; a church that's all it ought to be;

A church whose members never stray; beyond the straight and narrow way;

A church that has no empty pews; whose pastor never has the blues;

A church whose elders always speak; and none is proud and all are meek.

Such perfect churches there may be; but none of them are known to me.

But still, we'll work and pray and plan; to make our own the best we can.

Let's be the church! Before you go, share with someone which image of the Church means the most to you right now. Let's encourage and spur each other on.