**Lesson 15 - THE CHURCH (Ephesians)**

**Intro: Background on Ephesians**

* 1. It is clear from the rather indirect, impersonal style of the letter, and the reference to Paul's "having heard of their faith" (1:15), and them of his ministry (3:1,2), that Paul and the recipients in Ephesus have never met. This is not an ordinary pastoral epistle written to a specific church or group of churches with specific needs.
	2. Words translated "at Ephesus" are missing from the earliest manuscripts, so perhaps it was a more general essay or letter intended as a circular letter to the churches in a wider region, probably Asia Minor.
	3. Major theme: The glory of the church, as the society which embodies the purpose of God made plain in Christ.
	4. The setting is one in which the Gentile mission work has prospered and Gentiles were streaming into the church, boasting of their supposed independence of Judaism and Israel, and becoming intolerant of their Jewish brothers. They needed a reminder of the Jewish roots of the church without being made to feel that they were either inferior or superior.
	5. Written while Paul was imprisoned in Rome, A.D. 60-61, around the same time as Colossians. It has many similarities to Colossians in thought and in the fact that Tychicus delivered both.

**A. Historical/Biblical background**: Progressive development of the People of God

1. The covenant made with Abraham first established his offspring (“seed”) as God's chosen people (Gen. 12:1-Deut. 7:6-8)
2. Prophets were sent throughout Israel's history to remind them of their call and mission as His chosen ones. Jesus referred to God’s actions in history in the form of a parable (in Matt 21:33-46, Mark 12:1-12 and Luke 20:9-18), the parable of the wicked tenants, saying few listened or responded in being the blessing they were intended to be.
3. Finally, God sent Jesus. He announces God's verdict on his chosen ones who had failed to fulfill His purpose (Luke 20:16; \*Matt. 21:43; \*Acts 3:19-26). If they did not repent they would be set aside and others called to take their place.
4. A new covenant community is born as most of Israel rejected their Messiah (Acts 2:36-41; Gal. 3:29, 4:28). Yet not all were set aside
5. Ephesians reveals that this was part of God’s plan all along – the Mystery of God’s will (Eph. 2:14-3:15) – Jew and Gentiles together are God’s chosen people!

Her destiny is the same as that given to Abraham, "blessed to be a blessing...all nations of the world will bless themselves."

**B. What is the Church**, the new covenant community, born out of the old

**1. People…**

1. Chosen by God, just as the first community, not on the basis of our righteousness, abilities, value for our potential kingdom contributions, but out of love (Eph. 1:3-8,11-12) by His grace (Eph. 2:4-9)
2. God took the initiative in establishing us as a covenant community, and our fruitfulness, likewise totally depends on Him (Eph.2:8-9). From beginning to end the church is a demonstration of God's grace (Jn. 15:16).

2. **With a Mission:** the same as Israel’s

1. **Blessed to be a blessing**... (Acts 3:25-26; Matt.12:15-21; Luke 4:18; Jn. 14:12). Jesus passed His mission and ministry on to his disciples - they were to do exactly what he was doing in setting captives free, bringing abundant life to people. Just as Israel had been called to demonstrate what a people could be like, as God dwelt in the midst of them, thus wooing them to Him, the church was and is called to demonstrate the Kingdom of God to those who are in the world. (Eph. 2:19-22).
2. **Through walking as Jesus walked:** We do it by modeling the lifestyle of Jesus. (Jn. 13:12-17)
* Servanthood (Also 1 Jn. 3:16-18)
* Purity (Eph. 4:17-32)
1. Motivated by love (Jn. 15:12-13)

Example: A few years ago I met a YWAM missionary in Greece who had been imprisoned for sharing his faith, along with two Greek nationals. He spent several months in prison, and was finally released through the efforts of the U.S. embassy. He came home, but decided he had to go back for the sake of his Christian brothers, some of whom had become Christians through his work. He faced 3-10 years in prison. (1 John 3:16-18)

1. **A Redemptive Agency in Our World:** When we live as God has called us to live, we do make a difference in the world (Eph. 3:10-11).
2. We are the temple of God (Eph. 2:22) - a dwelling for God's Spirit.
3. Royal priests (1 Pet.2:9-12) - we are to intercede for the world.
4. Ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20). He's given us the ministry of reconciliation
5. Co-workers with God (1 Cor. 3:9)
6. The Body of Christ with gifts given to build up one another in faith until we reach maturity (Eph. 4:11-13)
7. Distributors of God's compassion: You have to be blind and have no heart not to see the needs of the world around us. Many *feel* compassion, but few *act* with compassion. We are to help relieve the pain people are in, whether emotional, physical, or spiritual - hunger, loneliness, hurts of the past, spiritual death (Matt. 25:34-40).

Mother Teresa: "I am here as a member of Christ's body to be a distributor of the Lord's compassion."

1. Forgiving as He forgave: Love in the world is a very conditional thing. It lasts only as long as your tolerance of the other's weaknesses and faults. "I'll love you if..." or "I love you because..."
2. Mediators of God's love. God's love is without condition and there is no limit to His forgiveness. He calls us to love the same way. Part of our ministry of reconciliation is to bring and give forgiveness. (2 Cor. 5:19-21). Our effectiveness is not so much in what we say as in what we do (1 Jn. 3:18 - love in deed and action). We are to love people, reaching out to those without love.

**Example:** Mike Green a young musician started going to one of our local adolescent detention centers to play music for the inmates, and try and build friendships. Not so much what happened in each encounter, but he noticed as the weeks wore on: “They see you there week after week. They feel that no one in the world loves them, so the fact that you keep coming begins to touch them.”

* Reach out to the lost and estranged (Luke 14:12-24)
* Speaking into people's lives re: God's purpose and will for each life
1. **Embodiment of God's Justice**: Working to change the system so that justice can be done, being involved in issues where the poor are being exploited, when a few benefit at the expense of many (Amos 4:1; 8:4-6; 5:24)

**Question: What are some examples of Christians being Agents of justice in our society? What are some justice issues not being addressed that the church could speak into?**

If we don't act who will? Who else today cares to get involved in another's plight if there is no personal gain? We must proclaim God's will in these matters too, regardless of whether we win or lose – some have lost heart in the abortion, pornography, homosexual battles because the tide of culture runs so strongly against biblical values.

We need to encourage each other to speak out and act.

**One example**: Englishman Dr. Dixon, ranked as one of the top 20 most influential thinkers alive today in a 2005 Global Executive Survey, addressed a YWAM Global Leaders Gathering in London. When asked his position on homosexual marriage he replied that he was committed to stamping out injustice, inequality and stigma in any guise.

Yet, he said, he shared a deep concern not only with fellow Christians, but with Jews, Muslims, Hindus, most traditional African religious leaders, and many of his Chinese friends, Christian or not.

“As we look at the whole sweep of human history, every society and every culture has been built on one key value: the importance of children, the result of the union of one man and one woman. If the gay community wants to use the word ‘marriage’ for same sex unions then we will have to find another word for man-woman unions. But let’s be clear we are talking about something different. That’s not antagonism towards a particular group; it’s just a statement of fact.’’

On euthanasia, Patrick added: “I don’t want to live in society where every 75-year old woman feels she has to do the decent thing and call that nice young doctor with his little syringe into her bedroom and say goodbye to her friends. I don’t want to live in a society where the elderly are dishonoured and discriminated against. I’m for

compassion and understanding. I’m for human dignity.”

Some frontiers we have been slow to get involved in (i.e. Environmental issues, etc.) We have to constantly hear what the Lord is saying re: transforming our communitites, culture, the world and be activists.

1. **Reconcilers:** reconcilingpeople to each other
	1. Within the church there is no room for distinctions between rich and poor, the "respectable" and the "undesirable," racial distinctions. The good news is that we are "one in Christ" (Eph. 2:11-19; Gal. 3:26-28)
	2. This is the "mystery of His will" (1:9) - that all things are united in Christ. No more barriers between people. When the world sees that the church is united, it is more likely to see us as a reconciling people, a place where they can find help too.

The church is the reversal of what happened at the tower of Babel. As Christ is truly worshipped, people are brought together.

1. **Our Head is Christ** (Eph. 1:22-23, 4:15-16)

What does it mean? Authority, yes. But also that we are to have the mind of Christ, having His priorities, seeing things through his eyes, valuing the things He values, taking our orders from Him. We need to let Him fill us completely so that we know His will, hear His voice, sense the leading of His Spirit in our lives, stand in the face of evil (Eph. 5:1,15-18, 6:10-18, 3:16-21)

**7. A People of Hope**

While seeking to be God's people in this world and making a difference here, we know that this is not all there is, and we look forward to receiving what is to come (Eph. 1:13-14). Until then we seek to be available for God to work through us, His body, to be a redemptive influence and bring transformation to His world. (Rom 15:13).