

“Church Pillars”
Ephesians 1:1-2

January 13, 2007

A. Introduction

B. The First Pillar: The Will of God

1. Paul and the will of God^{A}

2. Church’s existence and the will of God^{B}

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1. relation of grace and peace to Persons of the Godhead^{C}

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D. The Third Pillar: The Peace from God

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^A 2 Corinthians 10:11, Ephesians 3:8

^B John 4:34, 1 Corinthians 12:11

^C 2 Corinthians 8:9, Hebrews 10:29, 13:20, Ephesians 4:3

^D 1 Peter 1:18-19

^E Isaiah 43:25

^F Phil 3:18, 2 Timothy 2:19

^G Isaiah 59:2, Genesis 3:12

^H Romans 5:1

^I 1 Peter 2:9

^J 1 Timothy 5:17, Acts 13:2-4, 15:28, 16:7

^K 1 Peter 1:15-16, 1:2, Galatians 5:16, Philippians 2:13

^L Romans 6:4, 2 Corinthians 5:17

A. Introduction

1. letter writing is said to have become a lost art
 - a. the telephone is so much easier
 - b. it's also so inexpensive now, even to call Korea or Japan
 - c. but, given our busy schedules we can play telephone tag
 - d. hence: e-mail and maybe letter writing is being restored
 - e. how about you; how do you read a letter?
 - (A) particularly if from a faraway friend or relation
 - (B) probably scanning it quickly for news
 - (C) then returning to read certain parts more carefully
 - (D) if it is a love letter, lingering over the greeting ... 'My dearest darling ...'
 - f. last week we read through Ephesians in its entirety
 - (A) it took somewhat over 20 minutes
 - (B) of it you probably only gleaned the highlights
 - (C) so we will return to read it more carefully
 - (D) today, let us linger over its greeting to us
2. This is our Scripture reading and text: ["Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."](#) (Ephesians 1:1-2)
3. while reading through I am sure that you saw that this letter
 - a. is concerned with the doctrine, or systematic teaching and exposition, of the church, God's people in Christ
 - b. it is easy to assign Bible references to the church as being
 - (A) to the church universal, also called the church invisible
 - (B) or to the church local, that is the church visible
 - (C) as though these two were an entirely different species

(D) but, in reality, we find

- (1) the local church represents the church universal
- (2) the church universal is composed of local churches
- (3) so the line between the two is very faint

c. now, in this greeting, there are introduced four themes

- (A) themes which return throughout the letter
- (B) themes applying to its subject the church
- (C) themes that are pillars whereby the church stands
- (D) themes applying to the church, local and universal

4. these four themes, these church pillars are

- a. The Will of God
- b. The Grace of God
- c. The Peace from God
- d. The Faithful Saints

B. First Pillar: The Will of God

1. Paul introduces the theme of the will of God

- a. particularly in reference to himself
- b. the only description of Paul we have is from an unreliable 2nd century writing called the 'Acts of Paul' as his being ... **'a man small in size, with meeting eyebrows and a rather large nose, bald-headed, bow-legged, strongly built, full of grace.'**, which, if it is true, may explain how Paul's enemies could describe him in 2 Corinthians 10:10, **"... his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible."**
- c. it seems ever to have been a wonder to Paul as well, that Jesus Christ should choose him as apostle to the Gentiles:
 - (A) over and over he refers to it as a **'grace given to me'**
 - (B) three times in Ephesians; notably, 3:8, **To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ ...**
- d. that Paul's name should appear at the head of this letter

- (A) is itself a miracle of the will of the sovereign God
 - (B) a fanatic enemy against Christ and His church
 - (C) ambitious, intelligent, able, self-righteous
 - (D) transformed into Christ's by God's sovereign will
 - (E) so that by this one time enemy of Christ
 - (1) the church spread with the proclamation of the gospel across the Graeco-Roman empire
 - (2) local churches were established to the very heart of that empire, in Caesar's own household
- e. **Martin Lloyd-Jones, the great Welsh preacher, has said this first verse summarizes the whole letter: Paul is what he is; we are who we are only by the will of God.** ^{—{2}}.

2. that the church exists is a miracle of the will of Triune God
- a. it originated in the plan and purpose of God in eternity
 - (A) this plan was carried out in history by the Son: "Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work." (John 4:34)
 - (B) this plan is now being fulfilled in the church by the Spirit: "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills." (1 Corinthians 12:11)
 - b. the church universal exists by the will of God
 - (A) Satan had apparent victories, but Satan did not win
 - (1) when Adam and Eve succumbed to temptation
 - (2) when Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Gideon, David and many others were led astray from the right
 - (3) and even when Jesus was crucified by wicked men
 - (B) for in all these things
 - (1) God was moving relentlessly to fulfill His purpose
 - (2) through that death of Jesus on the cross that both
 - (3) those of the old testament through faith in the Christ revealed to them in types and figures
 - (4) and we of the new testament through faith in the finished work now made clear and proclaimed
 - (5) should together form God's own special people, to the praise of His glory
 - c. but local churches, this church among them, also exists by the miracle of the will of God
 - (A) Satan may have had his apparent victories
 - (1) some led astray from doing the truth

- (2) some become discouraged
- (3) some weary in well-doing
- (B) yet persisting, persevering through the will of God
 - (1) despite the attacks of the evil one
 - (2) despite the discouraging words as 'you should close the church down; Aurora's too hard a field' that have been spoken to us and to others
- (C) this church persists by God's will
 - (1) through God's 'small' miracles along the way
 - (2) of men, women, children touched by God, some now spread far and wide, serving Christ
 - (3) of children's ministries we have had
 - (a) humanly speaking, with limited resources,
 - (b) divinely speaking, empowered by God

3. the first pillar is that the church exists by the will of God

C. Second Pillar: The Grace of God

1. at first sight it appears in looking at 'grace and peace'
 - a. that grace is related to the Person of God the Father
 - b. that peace is related to the Person of God the Son
 - c. for there are Bible verses that make these associations
 - (A) yet, not uniformly so in all Scripture,
 - (B) for we find grace spoken of in reference to
 - (1) the Son: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9)
 - (2) and to the 'Spirit of grace' in Hebrews 10:29
 - (C) and also respecting peace, spoken of in reference to
 - (1) the Father: "Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord," (Hebrews 13:20)
 - (2) and the Holy Spirit: speaking of "... the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:3)

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d. grace and peace here originate from both Father and Son

2. Grace

a. one writer has said, 'the theme of grace is at the core of the great plan of salvation' ⁻⁽³⁾ and 'grace oozes' from Paul's pen; I like that so descriptive phrase: 'grace oozes'

b. grace is something for which there can be no repayment

(A) "knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold ... but with precious blood, ... of Christ." (1 Peter 1:18-19)

(B) God's grace was at the price of His beloved Son

(C) for Him, what repayment can there possibly be?

(D) God's grace extends to us a gift, one in which we have utterly no right nor share, but only to accept it

3. in the same fashion, that fact of the existence of the church

a. has been determined by the will of God in His perfect plan

b. so the means of its existence is found solely in His grace

c. this was foreshadowed in the OT types and figures

(A) the differences in the sin offering were not prescribed on account of the severity of the sin

(B) but rather differed

(1) according to whether the sin was by the nation as a whole, by a leader, or by an individual

(2) and, according to one's means

(C) and, without dwelling on the symbolism of these, it shows what God has stated: "I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, And I will not remember your sins." (Isaiah 43:25)

d. so the church exists because of God's grace exercised individually and severally on the true believers who comprise the church of the living God

e. because by His grace we have been saved from sin

4. also, it is a grace, a privilege, to be part of the church of God

- a. to become a member of this church is a grace, a privilege
 - (A) this is something that is not lightly dispensed
 - (B) a person is interviewed concerning their experience of salvation and their walk with the Lord Jesus Christ
 - (C) yet, despite all the care, we cannot discern the heart
 - (D) hypocrites find their way into the local church whose “walk {makes them} enemies of the cross of Christ” (Philippians 3:18), whose life belies their profession
 - (E) the true local church is not made up of those who are on its roll but only those who are God’s children
- b. and God knows to whom the privilege belongs: in speaking of the local church Paul said, “Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.’” (2 Timothy 2:19)

5. God’s grace in election and salvation is the second pillar

D. Third Pillar: The Peace from God

1. What is peace?

- a. in our Bible class discussions on Titus we included
 - (A) freedom from conflict
 - (B) reconciliation of warring parties, of us to God
 - (C) and the wholeness of being of the OT ‘sholom’
- b. peace is not to be thought of merely in negatives
- c. but in the positive, new relationship created in Christ
- d. this theme, too, pervades this letter to the Ephesians
- e. so we will be learning more about peace in weeks to come

2. part of understanding peace is understanding sin

- a. sin separates
- b. this is to be found in the stated doctrines of Scripture: “But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.”

(Isaiah 59:2)

c. it is also to be found in the empirical evidence of Scripture:

(A) in Adam's response to being confronted with his sin, he "... said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.'" (Genesis 3:12)

(B) excusing himself by blaming God for the gift of woman

(C) excusing himself by blaming the woman given to him

(D) in one little sentence demonstrating

(1) how sin separates us from God

(2) how sin separates us from each other

d. then as page after page of Scripture are turned, the sad story goes on with murder, cheating, anger, and hatred

3. Peace is a pillar of God's church

a. the separation from God and from each other

b. has first been dealt with so that the possibility of union into one body, the church, could take place

c. a unity, a peace, only possible where there is unanimity on the deity of the Person of Jesus Christ and efficacy of the work of Christ

d. for, as we shall see, He, Jesus Christ is our peace

e. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," (Romans 5:1)

f. Praise God! for us the war that started with Adam is over!

4. Peace is the third pillar upon which the church rests

E. Fourth Pillar: The Faithful Saints

1. now, this is a pillar we are inclined to discount

a. because we know ourselves

(A) our faults, our foibles, our failures

(B) we seem to spend a lot of our time in Romans 7

(C) dwelling upon the wretchedness of our old nature

- b. we spend more time on the sin we have been saved from
- c. than rejoicing with Peter that *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light"* (1 Peter 2:9)
- d. we shall find Ephesians to be an antidote to such thinking
- e. that, by the power of God through His Holy Spirit
- f. we as His children are able to maintain two residences
 - (A) as saints in Ephesus, as it were,
 - (B) and as faithful in Christ Jesus

2. As Saints in Ephesus – or Aurora, or Newmarket, or King City

- a. we should not belittle the co-operative nature of the new relationship that exists between God and His children – it is not meant that all activity in this relationship be God/s and that our part be purely passive
- b. church governance shows this co-operative relationship
 - (A) it is co-operative in that God has appointed elders to rule over his church, as we found in our Bible class in 1 Timothy 5:17, *"The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching."*
 - (B) the book of Acts provides varied examples
 - (1) with the Holy Spirit giving orders as in 13:2-4, *"While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went ..."*
 - (2) by deliberation and consideration of the Scripture by the apostles and elders as in 15:28, *"For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials:"*
 - (3) by overruling the apostles' normal decision making process as in 16:7, *"and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them"*
- c. and in like manner we see that sanctification is co-operative
 - (A) man's responsibility is shown in a number of ways, but most clearly in that holiness is commanded: *"but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behaviour; because it is*

written, 'you shall be holy, for I am holy.'" (1 Peter 1:15-16)

(B) while also it is God's, especially the Holy Spirit's, work, "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ ..." (1 Peter 1:2)

(C) with this co-operation evident in such passages as

(1) "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." (Galatians 5:16)

(2) and, "for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." (Philippians 2:13) says Paul, in talking about the outworking of our salvation into the way we live

d. so part of this pillar of the church, of being faithful saints

(A) is living a purified, cleansed, holy life

(B) as a testimony to God in the midst of your world

(C) not with a 'holier than thou' attitude

(D) but in humble dependence upon the work of God

3. As Faithful Ones in Christ

a. the second residence of faithful saints

(A) is that of being in Christ, of union with Christ

(B) which is a theme not only of the letter to Ephesus

(C) but, as someone has counted, over 160 times in Paul's epistles are found the phrases 'in Christ' and 'in Him'

b. and the word faithful, though it can mean steadfast or trustworthy, is probably better understood in this context to be full of faith, or believing; of being in Christ by faith

c. the second residence of those who comprise the church is that abiding in Christ by faith

d. the pillar that supports the local church

(A) is NOT that it consists of

(1) reformed people' eg., completing the 12 steps

(2) religious people; eg., talking in spiritual fashion

(3) well-intentioned people; eg., trying to live piously

(B) but a people regenerate by Holy Spirit to be in Christ

(C) united with Christ, who 'have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so' they ' too might walk in newness of life.' (Romans 6:4)

e. so when those around see the church as people who are "... in Christ, ... a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." (2 Corinthians 5:17 NAS) – as faithful saints – then this is the solid, fourth pillar to God's people, the church

F. Conclusion – may we leave here this morning with a vision of what this church can be through these four pillars, through us, to the praise of God's glory.

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2. From sermon, 'Snapshots of Ephesians' by Rev. Chris Vogel – Kerux sermon #7119
3. *ibid.*