

Pictures of the Church from Ephesians

Gary Farley

Introduction

In the transitional period when a pastor leaves and before the new one comes, it seems to me to be wise to spend some time “getting back to basics” by studying what the New Testament teachers about the nature and work of the church. This morning we will look at five pictures Paul uses in his letter to the church at Ephesus to help them understand the basic nature of the church. Open your Bibles and together we will leave through his album.

Paul knew this church. 3 years. Essentially a good church.

I. The Household or Family of God—1:4-5

Among my prized pictures is one taken in central Missouri in 1891. More than 50 persons are in the picture. Represented are my grandfather Farley, his sister and five of his brothers and their families. They are not very handsome or pretty. They are common people workers of the soil. Mostly poor. Their father is not there. He had died almost 30 years before as a result of being a soldier in the Civil War. And their mother, who had been left a widow with nine children, seven of them still in her care was not there either because she had died a few weeks earlier. The father had been a Baptist minister, serving rural churches and farming to support his family. One of the sons had become a minister, too. The other children were deacons, Sunday School teachers, and church workers. One, Henry, worked on the railroad as a section gang foreman, even though he was illiterate. How? He had a good memory and an educated wife. Many is the story of how this family has helped and supported one another in times of crisis and adversity.

Coming out of this heritage, family has always been important to me. So, when I look at the picture that Paul paints of the church as the family of God, it stirs deep emotions. He speaks of how God, in his love, has adopted me to be a brother of Jesus. It is a matter of grace (2:8 and 9). I like the language here in Pickens association as we refer to one another as brothers and sisters. This is far more than a salutation. It speaks of relationship.

The idea of a local church being like a family is a powerful concept in my mind. We care. We rejoice. We bare one another's burdens. If we were, at the end of this service to move outside and have a picture taken of this congregation, it would be one of brothers and sisters in Christ. It would not show the father or the elder brother, of course. But would it, in years to come call forth memories of a vital family of God. It is my prayer and hope that this will be the case.

Being a vital, loving family is not always easy. There are reasons, good and bad, for differences. But this picture that Paul shares is a mandate that we need to work at it. There is a wonderful custom in some of the churches of the Appalachian Mts. Flower Day. Occasion for resolving, or beginning to resolve differences.

Hymn. The Family of God. The church is about being a caring fellowship.

II. Temple of God—2:19-22

Ephesus was the site of a great pagan temple to goddess Diana. Place of worship. Paul

paints a picture of the church being a living, spiritual temple. Cornerstone is Jesus. Align with him. Mt. 16 confession.

Among my pictures are some of the churches to which I have belonged and I have served as pastor. Look and recall great moments there. Let me share just one. Surgoinsville, Tn. Split. After nearly six months the deacons said that they believed that the church was ready to conduct the Lord's Supper. God's Holy Spirit was there. Healing took place.

You have a wonderful church building. A true temple to God. I love to worship here in the evenings as the light comes in through the amber windows. Wonderful music tradition. What memories to do you of God impacting you in this place. Salvation. Re-commitment. Comfort in a difficult time. Joy.

As with the picture of the family it is important that you work at making this a spiritually beautiful temple to God. Personally, your families, the whole church –God shines through in holiness and love. Your lives, our lives should give evidence of worship. We are temples, we comprise a temple.

III. The Body of Christ–4:4-6

In Paul's day the knowledge of the human body was much more rudimentary than is ours today. But they did understand that the various organs had different functions, and that the ideal was that there be a harmonious relationship among the parts. They also understood the role of blood in nourishing and cleansing the parts of the body. In his letter to the Corinthian church Paul deals with this picture of the church more extensively and there, as here, he relates it to the gifts that God has given to the church members for them to use in making the church work more effectively.

Among our treasured pictures is one of the 1987 Georgia State Championship Basketball team. Our son Daniel was the white guy among the starters. Bainbridge. Marius. Beat bigger and better teams. Molded into a unit. They were expected to repeat the following year, but came up short, largely as the result of individuals seeking glory rather than working as a team.

It is crucial for the church to see itself as a body or a team. Each person has things to do. Each must do his or her part. Being a church is serious work. It should be a top priority. And it means making some personal sacrifices, and sharing your gifts, and not always being the star in order to get the work of the body done.

Basic functions that must be accomplished. We have looked at fellowship and worship. In this picture the emphasis will fall on nurture.

I hope that during this time of transition that you will think seriously about how you can function more effectively and faithfully as a part of this body of Christ. You may need some repair. You may need some cleansing. Now is the time to attend to this. Be getting ready to be a part of a glorious body of Christ, a wonderful church.

IV. The Bride of Christ–5:25-27

When I was spiritually immature I read this passage to mean that I needed to boss my wife and she needed to be subservient to me. Then I discovered verse 21—it calls for mutual submission. As with the other pictures in our album this morning, the idea is that self must be subjugated to the bigger task, the work of extending the Kingdom of God. A husband and a wife need to get beyond selfishness to see that the family works. And in the church we need to get

beyond selfishness and concerns about “who is in charge here” to focus on the effectiveness of the church. Leadership in a family or in a church is not a prize to be won for self gratification. No, it is a burden to bear in seeking the success of the family and of the church.

In speaking of the church as the bride of Christ, Paul reminds us of the terrible sacrifices that Jesus made for us personally and collectively in this church. And his argument is that we should be moved by this to live pure lives and create a pure church.

Part of our Baptist tradition is carried by the covenant that many of the churches in the association have displayed on their wall. It speaks of watching over one another. It speaks of helping one another be pure and holy. Perhaps, some of us motcho types will be a little offended by being told that we are to be beautiful and be a part of the beautiful bride of a church, but recall that we started with a scripture that called the women, sons of God.

Back in a closet at the house is our wedding picture album from 39 years ago. We have changed physically, it is obvious. But I think that we have changed more significantly, spiritually. This is good. How do you view your life. Has walking with God made you a more beautiful, or more handsome person, spiritually? Perhaps, we can go on to say that the church should be like a beauty shop. It ought to be a place where we help one another to improve our inner person. Paul writes elsewhere about the fruits of the spirit These include love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Ask yourself are these qualities ones that shine forth from your life? And ask how can this church help me and others to develop these qualities in our lives.

Brides, as you know, then and now, were expected to be models of servanthood. They ministered to the family. Often they kept the family on course. Just as fellowship, worship and nurture are functions of the church, so is ministry and mission. The church must minister to those who need it. The church must have a sense of mission to extend and enlarge the Kingdom of God around the world.

V. The Army of God–6:10

You will recall that my great-grandfather was not present in the picture of my ancestors that I mentioned at the outset of this message. One of the things I hope to do soon after I arrive n heaven is to look old Rev. Elijah Newton Farley up and ask him why at more than 40 years of age, with 9 sons, already, did he volunteer at the very beginning of the Civil War to fight in the army. I can only imagine that he believed deeply in the issues.

Paul’s fifth picture of the church is that of an army. He tells of the armorment that God provides for his soldiers. We like to note that there is no protection for the back. The point is that the church must be moving forward, not retreating. One of my favorite hymns, Onward Christian Soldiers, catches this spirit. We are on a mission. We are battling Satan. We have as our task to liberate those who are enslaved by sin. Evangelism is an important function of the church.

Do you believe deeply about the issue? Do you suit up each day in your armor and wage war with Satan? Do you serve along side of your fellow worriers at this church? Do you sense the importance of cooperating with the others in this great task? We can accomplish so much more as we move out together as the church against Satan, as we cooperate in liberating his captives, as we extend the recognized reign of God.

Conclusion

We have looked at five pictures of the church. Family, Temple, Body, Bride and Army.

1. You can become a part of the album.
2. If you are in the album and did not like how you looked.
3. If you did not like how the church looked in these pictures.