

SPOTLESS AND HOLY, EPH.5:25-27

The Church You've Always wanted -#0 kickoff

◆ **Intro:** Good morning Church! I wonder if you know that the Church of God is a unique creature. I don't mean the buildings, but the community that sometimes gathers in the buildings. It's an odd phenomena. I mean on the one hand it's a body of people destined to never die, to rule angels, to walk and talk with the true God in eternity.

◆ *"But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness." 2 Peter 3:13, NIV.*

◆ On the other hand it's a group in time, on earth, with people still stained and entangled with sin, and who want wrong things, and do wrong things they don't even believe in!

◆ *"So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him." 2 Peter 3:14, NIV.*

◆ Some folks outside the church think it's all hypocritical people who pretend to be good but really aren't. That would be kind of like saying all the patients in the hospital are people who think they're healthy when they really aren't! Or like saying alcoholics go to AA because they think they're more sober than anyone else. In fact its the opposite. You go to the hospital for help because you feel sick. And we come to worship Jesus because we know we're sinful and can't kick it without help from God.

◆ **1. The Church is a place to grow into health and peace.**

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◆ *"Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 3:17, 18, NIV.*

◆ The church is like a beautiful garment. It's designer did a wonderful job but if you throw it in the corner on a hot day it may get spots and wrinkles in it, though it is made of the best fabrics money can buy. Lots of people don't come to worship God, because they have experience to spots and wrinkles: hurts, inconsistencies in leaders, and expectations that don't get met. They think of the Church like the perfect retail shop where all the clothes are unworn. But the Church is made up of fallen, broken, sinful people. Some people say the church is a crutch. I say, "Of course it is! And all human beings are broken and damaged."

◆ *"... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." Ephesians 5:25-27, NIV.*

◆ The church in a fallen world is in constant need of ironing and spot removal. The term for that is reformation. And Christ died to make that reformation possible, and to make the church spotless and clean as you heard in our text from Ephesians 5. It is God's intention to make his family a beautiful, forgiven, and ac-

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tually pure group of people. Here me. This is what God wants for you! And he will finish that someday in every believer, you can count on it!

◆**A.** In two weeks we will start a 50 Day Spiritual Adventure called *The Church You Always Longed For*. I'm excited about this. I've done at least eight different 50Day Adventures with different churches over the past 25 years and each one left lasting impressions on me (This one is new to me). The 50 Day Adventure is a time of accelerated spiritual growth in which a whole church simultaneously spends daily time with God reading the same Bible texts, using the same devotional guide (show journal). In addition to your daily time in the Word of God, Life Groups gather each week to gain insights from each other and to fellowship. (If you are not in a Life Group, would like to start one or join one, you can do so in the lobby after the service.) And finally, each weekly worship time here actually kicks off the week with the same theme. So it's a kind of three-prong approach. (We also have an adventure book available called *I Like the Church But...* if you'd like another resource.)

◆I'll give you an example of a result I experienced from a 50 Day Adventure. In 2000 the Church we were a part of went on the Adventure called *Celebrate Jesus*. One of the action steps was called *Pray with a Pencil*. It's the spiritual discipline of journaling your prayers on paper. It helps you concentrate on what you're doing and not float off with the

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wind. It also helps you realize what you're doing; talking to a person. He can talk back too and if you feel a leading you can write it down. Well, Psychologists tell us three weeks of something can form a strong habit. That was a practice I had never done, but one that I have done ever since with great benefit.

◆ My intention today is to tell you where we'll be adventuring (starting Oct. 14, with a two day warm up in your guides) so you can begin to prep for the trip, and pray over it together. Don't be overwhelmed. We'll progress one day at a time. Do be anticipating what God will do among us as we evaluate his calling here in Sunrise Church!

◆ **B.** Eight Themes of the 50 Day Adventure; Seven weeks, or 50 days. The Book of Acts chronicles the very first organized church on earth after Jesus ascended back to our Father in heaven. So I've chosen to study exclusively through the book of Acts on the weekends. Let me say a brief word about each theme:

◆ 1). The church works at being a caring family: in Acts 2 we read that over 3000 people were converted on the spot at Peters very first sermon. Can you imagine? They began sharing their wealth with each other, and giving to those in need!

◆ 2) ...captures the heart of the community: In Acts 5 the Church grew because and the apostles healed many of sick-

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ness and evil, and brought blessing with them everywhere they went! What would that be like today?

◆3) ...welcomes all people; In Acts 10 Peter preached to and converted a Roman household of gentiles(untouchables) and the Holy Spirit descended on them just like the Jewish believers! No way! Way.

◆4) ...empowers the individual: In Acts 18, Paul's friends Aquila and Priscilla help teach Apollos deeper Christian truth and he becomes quite an asset to the Church.

◆5) ...models integrity; In Acts 4-5 Church members get involved in a shady deal, try to cover it up and it costs them their lives, and people learn they need to practice what they preach! Kind of a negative example for sure.

◆6) ...serves a broken world: In Acts 16 God calls Paul to Macedonia in a dream of a man begging for help. And a woman's household is converted in the historic city of Philippi. Greco-Roman towns far from Palestine.

◆7) ...encounters the Living God: In Acts 4 the believers pray for boldness to endure suffering and power to do the miraculous and God says "Yes"! Wait, can God do that?

◆8) ...anticipates a great future. This is really the last two days of the Adventure and will be pretty fitting I think as we move into Advent, another Advent-ure!

◆These are all very healthy things. Our leadership in Sunrise has been pondering our vision (do you know what it currently is; it

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has to do with what we are aiming at in the immediate future) and as a part of that we've been wanting to write down some stated values we hold as a unique church body. All of these make good values! Could some of them be what we want to be known for?

◆ Our job of course will be to observe the example of the first church and be asking what God wants to develop in us here at Sunrise. Ok, let me share some action steps.

◆ **2. Action steps of the 50 Day adventure:** Action steps are a term for what I would call spiritual disciplines; practices that grow your faith life. In the course of our 50 days we'll run into five of them.

◆ A. Learn to listen like Jesus; Beggars, prostitutes, lepers, taxmen; Jesus heard them all, seemed to perceive their needs, and had time for them. This christian practice is about really being aware of peoples lives around us.

◆ B. attract others by saying good things about the church; this is about making God look good, because he is good and came to make life abundant! Its the positive side of the Third Commandment to not take the name of God in vain. Now were actually blessing God's reputation!

◆ C. connect with people outside your circles: I believe that inside most people are innately lonely. They are waiting to find out they are loved. We need a heart to go and find them.

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- ◆D. *help others become what God wants for them*: fallen humans like us are like diamonds not yet polished; of inestimable worth to our Creator, but in need of discovery and shaping of the gifts he's given each of us.
- ◆E. *get rid of personal garbage for a unpolluted church*; one huge part of that polishing requires removal of sin and repentance of wrong. This is a regular Christian habit that we do well to keep practicing our whole lives. The Holy Spirit can and will show us this.
- ◆So now you have a tasty sample of what we'll buckle down and meditate on starting in two weeks, Oct.14 up through Thanksgiving. I hope you will join in and make the most of it because you will get as much as you put in. Are you ready for a season of growth pondering the Church You Always Longed For?
- ◆**Conclusion:**
- ◆That title "The Church You Always Longed For" suggests implicitly that the Church has growing to do, and that it is not yet what God has in mind or in store. We are kind of asking, "What makes a great church?" There are of course varying answers. Some say it's the show, and that it should thrill me and entertain me. I'll never forget two lines that stopped me up short in the past. One was by a friend of mine, a guitar teacher I was witnessing to, who told me he was going to attend Willow Creeks Christmas service. I was excited to hear it and I said that was great, thinking it would help him meet Jesus in a serious way!

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He said, "Yeah, they put on a great show. I've been many times." I thought to myself, "But that's not the point! That's all you come away with?" The other line was by Barbara Walters at the end of 20/20 broadcast. You may recall it's a television newsmagazine that digs into different topics, tries to explore things and expose truth. At the end of one broadcast Walters said, "Well we hope we have entertained you for a little while." I was shocked in that moment. I had never thought of discovery, and learning, or pondering things of perceived importance as entertainment. As a Christian I have always thought of discovering truth and being informed as having a deep purpose, as being for the betterment of humanity, for progress and developing as responsible human creatures, etc. Is entertainment what marks a good program? And what is it that marks a good Church? Is it an entertaining show that pumps you up, or is something greater or maybe deeper supposed to be going on? I tell you something greater is supposed to be going on that may or may not include high energy; the discovery and interaction with the God of us all! The Church is to be the place where God shows up and leads us to more than we are now. That's why Christ came. That's why he died for us. That's why we love him and praise him.

◆"But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make

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every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him....Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen" 2Pet 3:13-18