

January 17, 2016

## *Jesus and his Church*

*"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world...all of us lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts...But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions...For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

Ephesians 2:1-10

As we have already noted, we have been saved by God's grace poured out on us in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We do not merit this gift of salvation; we did not and cannot earn this gift. Our salvation is a gift from God. Because we have been saved we enjoy several benefits which the Father wants us to fully understand and enjoy.

First, we become children of God. Unlike the Israelites who were God's chosen people, we are adopted children; not a nation but a family. Second, as a part of that family we are added to the body of Christ, his church of which he is both Savior and Head. And finally, we become part of a temple in which God now dwells composed of all believers.

In adding us to the family of God, the church, Jesus incorporates us into a living organism which is his functional existence in this world. The body or church is literally the proxy for Jesus in the world. Everything the body does and everything it says reflects on Jesus whose body it is.

In adding us to his body Jesus is not asking that we go to church, but that we become church. As a part of a living, breathing organism we have important functions to fulfill. We are the "hands and feet," the "mouth and ears" of Christ's living body. If we are to find a closer relationship with the Father it will be through this living body. If we are to reach the lost with the good news of God's salvation in Jesus it will be through this living body. If we are to offer life changing service to those around us who are struggling, it will be through this Living body of Christ, which is his church. (Romans 12, I Corinthians 12)

This picture of a living, functioning body of believers working as one to carry on the work of the Master is very different from the "go to church, sit in pews, follow a set of prescribed practices and then go home" model which we presently call church. In the body that Jesus calls, every believer has important and necessary functions, every believer is essential to the success of the whole, and the whole body of believers functions as one. The church as Jesus' living body is always active, always at work.

This picture of church as a living organism, literally the functioning body of Christ, is very different than the construct of church that we presently hold. Our present construct of church is organizational in every way. Leadership, programming, purpose and function are much more reflective of an organization like the Anaconda Country Club than reflective of Jesus. In the organizational construct of church we join or place membership, we look to human leadership to set direction and meet our needs and we tend to be only as involved as is good for us.

The living organism that is the church that God designed stands in sharp contrast to what we have come to call "church". Church as a living body demands so much more from us and provides so much more to us. The church is God's design demands our entire surrender to the head, who is Christ and our willingness to give our all in service to his body. This living church is also much more

responsive to us and our needs, because we are an active and important part of the functional body. It is through this living church that we come to know the Father and his Son at the deepest and most personal levels.