

We are Growing

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[0 : 00] If you have just tuned in to us here at St. Paul's, we just started last week journeying our way through the book of Ephesians, discovering who is the church.

And that is really the foundational, crucial question. We're looking at who we are as we look forward as a church to what God is calling us to in the next five to 10 years of our life and ministry together here to our neighbours.

Ephesians really helps us to break out of the modern concept of just this personal relationship with God that sees the church as more as a what than a who.

The church, God's called out and blessed people, is not just central to God's plans.

It is, in fact, in the book of Ephesians, at the centre of God's heart. The Bible overflows with imagery of God's affection, his love for his church, the church being the bride of Christ.

[1 : 23] The church is beautiful to God. As I said last week, the 18th century American pastor and theologian Jonathan Edwards said that the whole grand scope of scripture leads you to believe that God created all things in the material universe so that the eternal son of God might be provided with a spouse.

That is God's plan for all of history.

And in the next phase of life and ministry together, my prayer is that ultimately our affections would be awakened for who God's church is and why she exists.

As Charles Spurgeon preached, nothing in the world is dearer to God's heart than his church.

therefore being his let us belong to it that by our prayers our gifts our labours we may support and strengthen it and so in summary our plans whatever they might be for the next five to ten years are to beautify the bride of christ which is some paul's chats with so uh we journey into ephesians i've got three points uh this morning um as we move forward as a church our our our uh goal is to grow as the bride of christ so three points the first one uh blessed to grow uh we saw last week in the first bit or the first bit of ephesians one uh that god is the source of every spiritual blessing in jesus christ god has poured out his sovereign grace through the lord jesus and brought together and is bringing together his eternal family his bride his church his people and the first thing that paul does as we move into the second bit is that in verse 15 is that paul prays he gives thanks that the ephesians have in fact received every spiritual blessing in christ they're adopted they're redeemed they're forgiven they're saved they are christian and helpfully what he does in verse 15 is he gives us two markers to test whether or not we are in fact blessed that we've received those blessings he mentions faith in the lord jesus and love for all god's people they're the two tests they're the evidence when paul says i heard about these things i went ah yep those those people are in two so the first test here is faith in the lord jesus in other words it's it's what we believe is the first test faith is primary in fact in the bible it is always more important what you believe than how you live it is always more important this is crucial crucial if i stop there you'd be all it's all it'd be controversy um what makes a person a christian is first of all primarily first and foremost what they believe not how they live what they believe the belief that makes a person a christian is faith in the lord jesus specifically the lordship of jesus now this is if you like the opposite of the common view of christianity most think these days it is entirely irrelevant what you believe it's how a person lives that really matters but the bible says that what we believe is primary in fact the bible leads me to conclude that the view it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you live a good life you know uh depends on you know matters what you that that view is is illogical in fact you see because what we truly believe deep down inside us determines how we live it determines what we do with our lives it's in fact impossible to separate belief and life a christian believes that the bible is god's self-revelation to humanity and as such it is true and reliable but we don't become a christian by believing that the christian believes that obediently following jesus means a life of service and

generosity and and truthfulness and forgiveness and and a heap of other but we are not saved by a life of service and generosity and truthfulness and forgiveness a religious life of diligent obedience and doing the things the bible says and trying really hard can in fact be evidence that you have no faith in the lord jesus but in fact faith in yourself faith in your goodness faith in your ability faith in your morality to have faith in jesus christ is to admit that you can't trust in your own strength that the bible is true and reliable but you can't live a life of service and generosity and truthfulness and forgiveness you can't do any of those things but you can't live the life that god has called you to and so you finish you rest in the finished work of the lord jesus that is what it means that faith in him you see the only reason a person is a christian is because they have trusted they have believed they have rested in jesus christ not because of years of attendance at church or because of good doctrine or because of bible knowledge that's the first test the second test the second marker is love and particularly in love for all of god's people for all of god's people all of god's church so when you put these together this is filling out the first point if you like faith in jesus is primary love for all of god's people is necessary primary primary necessary faith in the lord jesus will lead to a life of love for what god loves and the implications for this are going to be explored as we go further into ephesians i'm not going to unpack it all here the the principle though is faith is primary but practice is necessary you see if you truly believe something in life if it if it you truly hold it as a as a deepest sense of value and world view something that it will shape the choices that you make but it will shape it over time it's like faith in the lord jesus is an immediate certain thing and the life it produces it gradually shifts over time so is it possible to have faith in the lord jesus and be inconsistent yes is it possible to have faith in the lord jesus and do some terrible things yes yes so what that means is that if we are ever judgmental towards a professed christian who has failed it means that in that moment

[10:52] we've forgotten the gospel judgmentalism towards another means that we've forgotten the gospel and we've started to lean in on our self faith is primary but practice is necessary what that means is that if faith is primary what it means is you trust jesus and and you trust what the bible reveals and what it's calling you life is calling you to and and and that life is calling you to you will spend a lifetime of shifting that and growing into that and what that means that if you're christian uh and you are having sex outside of marriage which the bible says you shouldn't uh or if you are being uh if you're not being generous or if you're gossiping and slandering or if you're not forgiving someone and growing in bitterness towards people you should not say ah it doesn't matter that stuff doesn't matter i am saved by faith in the lord jesus christ because faith is primary you should not say it doesn't matter instead what you should do is you should say if my life is not changing do i really have faith now i'm not saying that if you're you're continually battling sin in certain areas i'm not saying you're not christian i'm just saying that you shouldn't be sure that you have faith in the lord jesus at that point in your life that you're trusting him at that point in your life that's what i'm saying that's an area for growth that's an area to go deeper you shouldn't be confident you shouldn't be sure unless you are on a repentant growth track in that area of your life so a new life starts by faith this is what paul's doing here for us in the very first section a new life starts by faith in jesus christ and that life grows over time that life changes us to into the image of the lord jesus and paul starts here by giving thanks that the the ephesians have started that they are in christ and now he prays that they will grow grow into that and that they would grow into who they already are in christ that's the trajectory of the christian growth growing into who or who we already are i keep asking verse 17 i keep asking the god of our lord jesus christ the glorious father may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better and i pray that the eyes of your heart might be in light you see growth in the christian life is growing deeper it's growing deeper it's growing deeper it's not growing in doing it's growing in who we are as god's much-loved father the children and so therefore it is uh growing deeper knowing our glorious father in a deeper way in a more intimate way let me try and illustrate this a little bit uh when prince george was born to um uh william and kate uh in 2013 uh that baby little george was like

every other baby born he had no knowledge of his parents at all uh or if you like very little knowledge of his parents he kind of knew where the milk was that's you know uh but there's so much more to know isn't there he had virtually no knowledge of his parents and yet when he was born he was born prince george he was rich he had a title he had privileges he had unknown he had his future mapped out for him and he had absolutely no idea of that when he was born and yet it was his the moment that he was born he had no idea who his father was he had no idea who his

grandfather was and what his future was he was second in line to the throne and yet all he cares about is the milk and it will take a lot he's like 12 years later he's still growing into that he has more awareness now of who he is and that he is different and that there is a future that his life is right now from the moment he was born his future was being shaped in him getting ready for the day that he takes the throne that's the picture of the christian it's a life of knowing of growing into knowing who our father is and what that future is for us in him and that's what paul prays here that they would know the father better and for as they grow in the knowledge of the father their present life will be shaped based on their future so what is the dynamic in the christian life that will affect this growth in us now it's kind of the same for little george um he was born his future is determined and from the very get-go his life is shaped towards that future and so here's the dynamic of the christian life verse 18 the future that shapes our present i pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope hope is the dynamic of the christian life that faces that that affects our christian life now that shapes our life you see the real dynamic of the christian faith is hope verses uh 13 14 tells us that that uh that the christian and the church receives the holy spirit as a deposit from the future the holy spirit is the first installment of the future redemption of the universe coming into our life right now bringing that that redemption that hope that regeneration into our life right now shaping us now for that future it's the deposit it's the installment now in our day the word hope is not so strong it carries a sense of uncertainty well you know i hope it's true i hope it works out um in the new testament the word hope means a life shaping certainty about something that is yet to happen but you know it will now hope is not just the dynamic of the christian life it's the dynamic of the human life you can't live without hope hope is the engine room of our lives how we live the choices we make what we give our time and energy to how we handle our circumstances are all shaped by our perceived future hope is the change dynamic for the christian and the more we grow into the glorious father what happens is the more we understand the hope that we have in him that's specifically why paul uses the word here or the statement the glorious father he gives us an idea of what the hope is of what the hope is by using the term we already need to say the father of our lord jesus christ the glorious father the word glorious father the word glory there is most often in the new testament attached to the domain of god where god resides where he is our hope is with god in all of his glory and so we are being changed moment by moment into his glory now paul mentions three things about this hope that i want to uh unpack firstly we're being called into this hope verse 18 i pray the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you this is simply saying that the whole goal the whole purpose of of a christian being saved is this future hope the whole reason for salvation is future hope and the hope here is the part of the salvation plan of god in jesus christ that we've not yet received we've received all these other things in the first verses three to fourteen received all those things this is the bit that we've not yet received but we are looking forward to and as we have guaranteed received everything that's in verses three to fourteen this is guaranteed too and this hope is nothing less than life in the new heavens and the new earth in the presence of the glorious father or as romans five puts it the hope of the glory of god and it's the hope of sharing in that magnificence now the second thing about this hope that is included in paul's prayer is that it's a rich hope verse 18 i pray the eyes of your heart may be enlightened or that you may know the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people now some english translations will take holy people and say in his saints uh now holy people there is a reference to god's set apart people it's it's a reference to all christians everyone who has faith in the lord jesus it's not a special category of of christians you know like sometimes people will say like you know i would say my wife you know natalie's just a saint um and uh what they mean by that is just a remarkable person um it's true of her in two ways um both remarkable person but also in christ uh but that that's that's not the reference here holy people saints is a reference to everyone who has faith in the lord jesus christ and that means that this hope is for everyone in christ and what is for all christians is the riches of his glorious inheritance uh the the word inheritance here as it really is for in our way of thinking it is the substance of your wealth it is your entire value is is your inheritance it's what you would leave behind when you die all of it everything now what is astonishing here in this verse is that this isn't referring to the the inheritance that the christian receives it's referring to the inheritance that god receives what this is what god receives his church the plan of god to bless humanity through jesus christ and to make a new people for himself to share in his glory for all of eternity is god's inheritance that's how it's expressed here that should blow our mind let me try and illustrate it for

you if i can elon musk is the richest person in the world his net worth apparently is worth something around 670 billion us dollars uh which is nearly a trillion australian dollars depending on what the markets did on friday um so imagine this task you get a phone call from spacex headquarters um steve uh your elon musk would love you to buy him a birthday present that's just going to blow his socks off that's your one task what do you do with that i mean how can i afford that i mean what do you do you get him what do you buy how do you buy it how do you do for someone who who's got the resources to access anything in this world what could you possibly get him where he opens us on his birthday and he is broken to tears by it and goes oh my goodness this is more valuable to me than than my stake in space x this is my most treasured possession i have no idea and so paul is referring to something here that just impossible to imagine this is the god who owns everything in the universe his worth is displayed by the grandeur of it all but that's not his inheritance the swiss alps is not his inheritance the depths of the ocean the vast is the space what is more valuable to god than everything more than the stars and the galaxies and the solar systems his church

his people and in case you're unsure of that the last verse the last sentence here it just just blows your socks off the church which is his body the fullness of him who feels everything in every way now what paul's doing here is using paradoxical language to get us to try and get us into the depth of this astounding truth the church is the fullness of him who fills the entire universe the church the church fills up christ who is the one who fills the universe in every way how can jesus who created the universe who is its head of the church who fills everything in every way be filled up by his church and so the answer to this paradox is in the metaphor of the body here the head and the body a head is incomplete without the body this astounding i know is a word too often probably but this really is astounding right this astounding wonder here calls the theologian john calvin to exclaim in his commentary on ephesians this is the highest honor of the church the church that unless he christ is united to us the son of god reckons himself in some measure imperfect or the language he meant there was not only that he is imperfect but incomplete what an encouragement for us to hear that not only he has us us as one with himself is he he is complete in all his parts or does he wish to be regarded as whole so sorry let me say what an encouragement for us to hear that not until he has us one with himself is he complete in all of his parts or does he wish to be regarded as whole he is praying here that god's people would be captivated by our value to god as one commentator wrote here the whole purpose of this prayer is that god wants us to be smitten with how rich god feels when he looks at his church now with all its faults now because he sees the beauty and the majesty of his son the glory of his son and to the degree that we understand this hope as being profoundly personal and intimate is the degree that we will exercise self-control over sin that we will grow into the life of obedience to christ that we've been called into and until we are astounded by how rich god feels when he looks at us our value to him as his holy people his church then we will not live the life that we are called to live as his people

[31 : 12] we won't have the hope the joy the satisfaction there's one t-shirt that i nearly bought recently except this i just don't agree with it but it is funny because most other most people would agree with it it's a t-shirt it's produced by a christian company of all things there's a picture of jesus there on the front of it with him arm stretched out looking down at his church and the caption is disappointment the lot of you it's often how we feel but it's not what ephesians 1 is telling us at all it's also important to emphasize that the christian hope is not just personal intimate divine love uh it is it is also a material hope um we get a glimpse of that in verse 19 where there's a quick reference when he raised christ from the dead in other words the future hope that we have uh it is an intimate personal relational physical hope as jesus christ is raised physically on the third day imperishable so is the christian that is our future that is our hope it is not a spiritual realm it's not clouds it's not harps it's not floating you see one of the remarkable differences between the christian faith and every single other religion and philosophical system in the history of humanity is this one only christianity declares that heaven comes down to restore and perfect the material world when jesus was resurrected very clearly in the gospels he walked he cooked he ate he talked he laughed he could be seen he could be touched and the christian hope therefore is not a consolation prize in that in the end our hope is a hope where suffering is undone our hope is a restoration of everything that we dream for in this life it is not a consolation prize the christian hope is a restoring a very real restoring of the material life that we are so fixated with and created to enjoy everything that we've ever wanted in life every longing every desire of the heart comes back to us physically materially a million times over in a perfected world it is glorified and god is working everything because he is

smitten with his church he's in love with his church and he's longing to be with his church to embrace her to walk with her to laugh with her to enjoy her in perfect unity and that's why paul wants us to know the third thing including this prayer that our hope is a confident hope because of the power of god to bring it about not because our ability to keep in step with it but because of the power of god paul prays the eyes of her heart might be light and so that we might know his incomparably great power for us who believe and he says that power a bit further down is the same power as the mighty strength exerted when he raised christ from the dead it's the power that seated jesus at the right hand of the heavenly realms far above all rule and authority power and dominion where where god placed everything under his feet which what that means is that jesus was resurrected triumphant placed in the position of power which means that he rules everything in the spiritual realm in the physical realm

and it's the power that he was appointed to to be head over everything for the church what that means is that the power that jesus is exerting in ruling everything in heaven and on earth and under the earth is to bring the church to its inheritance every power he's exerting is for you that you might receive your inheritance god is bringing his power to bear on absolutely everything in history for his people to be his inheritance he's exerting his sovereignty over everything in your life and my life that we might get our hope that he might get his church so how do we grow in hope let me just really quickly this one i could just expand upon more and more but let me try to be quick real quick um how do we grow in the exact same way as paul is doing here for the ephesians pray this prayer pray that god may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you might know him better and pray that the eyes of your heart might be enlightened pray this prayer for yourself pray it every single day pray for the spirit of god who has been given to you from the future and giving you a foretaste of the future that this spirit will give you wisdom revelation that will open up to you your hope pray for the eyes of your heart to be enlightened that you might see and you might taste of the lord is good of all the things that paul could have prayed for in in in in in the new testament in his letters this is the one thing that he keeps praying for that you would know your father better he could have prayed for their poverty and release from prison and for safety but he prays that they would know their father better because in knowing him they know their hope so pray and then direct your gaze to christ um let me just he's praying for a spirit of revelation and we get that is specifically in god's revelation what he has revealed to us in his word let me tell you as someone um i don't just have to fight i've got adhd and i don't have to fight my adhd every day with medication i've got to fight my spiritual adhd every day and we've all got spiritual adhd every single day so easily distracted i've got glory in front of me in the scriptures waiting to be unpacked waiting to be seen and i'm oh there's a bird oh hang on a bit my calendar oh that email oh youtube oh funny thing i've just seen let me just forward that to immediate trivialities and glories distracting me from real glory my eyes are gazed and fixed on the temporary and distracting me the way to grow as a christian is by fixing our eyes on christ and away from sin

you don't defeat sin by fixing your eyes on it you defeat sin by fixing your eyes on christ we kill hope by fixing our gaze on our temporary riches because what we fix our eyes on is what we give our hearts to meditate on christ and your hope regularly in the scriptures fix your eyes there and ask god to exert his power it's a spiritual exercise ask god to exert all of his mighty power so that you will not just say fixed gazed in his revelation but that when you are! you will see glory fight for your hope when you read a passage of the bible ask god ask yourself how how would i be different if i truly believe this to be true and the knowledge will come the wisdom will come a vision of glory will come not always not immediately but it will come pray this prayer here for yourself constantly gaze on god in his word with jesus at the center because that's ultimately the power that will melt your heart it will build your hope in the gospel is when you see jesus if i might view it like this when you pray that prayer for yourself view it as jesus praying this prayer for you now he didn't actually use these words but he did a very similar thing in john 17 jesus prayed that the father would call us to himself he prayed that we would be his valued treasure and that we would have his power and that god would exert his power to bring him to himself and for and here's the thing for us to get all of that for us for for john 17 to be fulfilled for for for this prayer to be fulfilled for the ephesians jesus had to be rejected so that we could be called he had to be cast out so that we could be called he had to be treated as worthless so that we could be god's inheritance he had to be broken by god's power so that by god's power we could have life and brought to our hope hebrews 12 says for the joy that set was set before him he endured the cross the joy when jesus looked to his future he saw joy what

was that joy us us coming to life and hope through his death and his despair having his church with him for all of eternity his bride that was his joy that was his joy he did that for us so gaze in on god in his word pray that you would know the glorious father that light would break into your heart that you would be overwhelmed by his love and the future hope that he has in store for you as of