

## Glorying God *In The Church* (Ephesians 3:21)

*“Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”*

Paul had just described the church as God’s *eternal purpose* and the means by which God’s wisdom was made manifest to the *principalities and powers* (Eph. 3:10, 11). Through the preaching of the gospel, *all men*, including Jews and Gentiles, would be able to “*see what is the fellowship of the mystery*” (Eph. 3:9). Saints would have the opportunity to be *strengthened by the Spirit*, have *Christ dwell in their hearts by faith*, be *rooted and grounded in love*, know the *love of Christ that passes knowledge*, and be *filled with the fullness of God* (Eph. 3:15-19). It is only fitting that Ephesians 3 end with the words, “*unto Him be glory in the church!*”

### The Local Church: Glorifying God *Locally*

The book of Ephesians sometimes speaks of the church in the *universal* sense, and sometimes in the *local* sense. For example, the letter is addressed to the *saints which are at Ephesus* (Eph. 1:1). The has reference to the *church* that was *at Ephesus* (see Acts 20:17; Rev. 2:1). However, “church” is used in the universal sense in Ephesians 1:22, 23. Paul wrote:

*22: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,*

*23: Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*

The “church” in this passage is the “body” of Christ. It includes all of the saved of all of the earth. The apostle does not here use the word “church” in the *local* sense, but in the *universal* sense. In this universal sense each saint holds a personal relationship to Christ who is his *head* (cp. Eph. 5:23). The universal church has no earthly organization. It has no organization at all except for Christ as its head. Churches of men often have earthly headquarters with annual conventions. The church that belongs to Christ has neither. The presence of Bible teaching specifying the organization of the **local** church, coupled with the absence of Bible teaching

authorizing other types of organization, should move every saint to be highly critical of all human efforts to organize the church upon any other basis.

### **The Church *Functional***

Similar to the contrast between verses 1 and 22-23 of Ephesians 1 is the contrast between verses 4 and 11 of Ephesians 4. Ephesians 4:4 states that there is *one body*. Paul had already taught that the **body is the church** (Eph. 1:22-23), and he would say this again in Ephesians 5:23. Ephesians 4:4 cannot be using the word church in the *local* sense, for the Bible speaks of the *churches of Asia*, of which, Ephesus was only one (1 Cor. 16:19). There is only one church in the universal sense. However, there are a plurality of local churches ("*churches of Galatia*" – Galatians 1:2; "*churches of Judea*" – Galatians 1:22).

Obviously, Ephesians 4:4 is using the word *body* (church) in the universal sense, but look at the transition that occurs by the time we get to verses 11-16. Ephesians 4:12 and 16 use the word "body" in reference to the members of the local church – those who function together. Verse 11 identifies the "gifts" that Jesus gave as those that *perfected* the saints in order for them to function as God designed. Paul said,

*"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers."*

Those listed are *apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers*. 1 Corinthians 12:28 says:

27: *Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.*  
28: *And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.*

Both passages, Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Corinthians 12:28, speak of certain functions that were assigned in the church. One might argue that, since the work of the apostles was as broad as *all the world*, they were set in the church *universal*. But what about *elders* and *teachers*? The scope of the elders' oversight is limited to the **local church – the flock that is among**

**them** (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2). There are no elders in the universal church. This tells us that a seamless transition occurs between Ephesians 4:4 and somewhere in 4:11, so that the emphasis shifts away from the *universal* church to the *local* church. In the realm of the collective function of God's people, God has ordained the local church as his approved organization. The local church, not the universal church, or some sub-organization of the universal church, is entrusted with performing the works described in Ephesians 4:12. God is glorified when the local church does the work that He assigned it. Men do love their pet religious organizations, but **God is not glorified through them.** *"Unto Him be glory in the church!"*

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