

TALKING POINT #19
LIVING IN THE CHURCH COMMUNITY #12: THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

THERE'S A WORLD BEYOND THESE WALLS

Ultimately, the Church is a community – a community of those who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. However, a pitfall into which many fall is thinking that the boundaries of the Church end in my local Church. Indeed, most of the papers in this series have been focused on issues facing the local Church. But, the Church is far more than just Forest Lake Baptist Church or, indeed, even the world-wide Church. The Church includes all the saints who have already reached Glory and all those yet to be born. It is important, then, that as members of Christ's body, the Church, we have an eye to the Church and World outside our own little sphere of influence.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

The Apostle Paul begins his letter to the Colossian Church with a mighty song of praise about Jesus as the Creator and Sustainer of the World and, with that cosmos-sized perspective in mind, Paul then proclaims Christ the Head of the Church, not Head of "the Churches." (Colossians 1:18). To be sure, Paul does sometimes refer to "all the Churches" when he gives instructions to particular congregations (eg. Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 7:17), but there is also a major sense in which the New Testament portrays the Church as the Worldwide Church (Ephesians 1:22; Philippians 3:6).

However, the Bible also shows another dimension beyond that of the Worldwide Church. Revelation presents a picture of Christian martyrs already before God. This has led to the terms "Church Triumphant" for the Church already in Glory and "Church Militant" for the Church still on Earth.

When we see these elements of Church life, it opens up to us a whole new sense of history and our place in the great narrative of God's plan of redemption. It leads the author of Hebrews to say, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:1-2)

NOW FOR US AT FOREST LAKE

The implication of this Biblical perspective is that we lift our eyes to see beyond our own local Church and beyond our borders. It means that we respond to the call to pray for Christians around the World and also help where we can (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). It means that we should support missionaries in their efforts to spread the Gospel (Philippians 4:14-20). It means that we take an interest in what happens around the World, such as persecution and injustice. When we support missionaries, Christian ministries or others around the World, we are participating in God's design for a universal Church that will one day culminate in a moment when "at the name of Jesus every knee will bow – in heaven and on earth and under the earth – and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:10-11).

CONCLUSION

Continue to pray for our brothers and sisters around the World, take an interest in what is going on around the World by subscribing to prayer newsletters and contribute to Christ's work abroad.

Next month, we'll complete our "Living in the Church Community" series with the "Biblical Church."