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***UNITY OF THE CHURCH***

*Prayer*

Jesus, we pray that we would give us wisdom to understand your rule as the head of the church and, as members of your body, understand how we are to relate and work together for you glory.

AMEN

*The Death of Christ*

In verses 19 and 20 we read:

*according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead*

And once we hear that, our natural inclination is to ask why Jesus has to die? At first, the answer is easy, Ever since Adam and Eve's original sin, there has been sin, disease, and decay in the world, which lead to death. But wait – Jesus didn't sin, so why did he have to die? On an earthly level, it was due to conflict with church authorities and civil rulers regarding temporal power, authority, and His claims to be one with the Father. From an eternal standpoint, He died to pay the penalty for the collective sins of the entire human race – whether things done or

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undone, in thought, word, or deed. And because a man – Adam – had brought sin into the world, only a man – Jesus, the second Adam – could pay God’s just penalty – eternal death and separation from the Father. As I mentioned last week, this is the key reason that historic Christianity has required a **fully human** Jesus. Circling back to the sinless life of Jesus, only one without sin of their own could pay this penalty for others; and only God was able to keep the laws that he himself had made, knowing not only the outward appearances of the commands but the underlying reasons as well (which is why Jesus was accused by those who only knew the outward appearances of not keeping the laws, because they missed the underlying reason or purpose.) So Jesus had to be **fully divine** in order to keep the law perfectly.

*God the Glorious Father*

In verses 15 and 16, Paul commends his readers for their love of each other:

*. . . because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,*

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And this love for one another is a result of and a reflection of God's love for us, as emphasized by St. John in his first letter (1 John 4:19):

*We love because he first loved us.*

So how do we know that God loves us? Because He has called us, as we read in verse 18:

*having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,*

And the call has a result, a reward – the riches of eternal life with God.

At this point Satan may whisper in your ear "How do you know that you are called?" While many who look inward may indeed begin to believe such lies, you should not.

Earlier in the service, after confession, I said the following words:

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Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

These words have power; they are outside of you; **you hear them** and because of that they are **for you**.

In addition, you hear the readings, you stay awake and listen to the sermon, and you partake of the Lord's Supper. These, along with Baptism, are the means by which God call and elects us to be His children.

And we understand and trust this as a matter of faith, which is in and of itself a gift from God, for which we neither labored nor toiled.

*Spiritual Benefits*

Verse 17 speaks of wisdom and revelation (or insight). Let's look at what each of these may entail.

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Sophias (Σοφίας), is translated as **wisdom** and speaks of the soundness of an action or decision with regard to the application of experience, knowledge, and good judgment.

Apokalypseōs (ἀποκαλύψεως) is translated as **revelation**, as in the book by that name, and means an unveiling, uncovering, or revealing.

Now these refer not to any old subject, but specially to the person and work of Jesus. It's Paul's prayer that we deepen and strengthen our understanding of and relationship with Jesus.

The verse also speaks of a confident hope. This resonates with me, as I'm sure it does with many of you. God does indeed know what He is doing and that in His time, He will provide a new senior pastor to serve this congregation. We continue to pray and ask for the Lord's wisdom for all of those involved in the call process, not only the committee, but the voters' assembly, the pastors on the list, their families and current congregations, our district president, and our circuit visitor.

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*One*

In verses 21 and 22 Paul once again uses the head and body as an analogy to the relationship between Jesus and the church. Jesus, as recorded by John prayed (John 17:21):

*that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you,*

If we continue with the analogy of the body, what do we call it when the body is fighting itself? An auto-immune disorder! Anyone who has had one of these conditions or is close to someone who has been so afflicted knows just how debilitating they can be. And that's the same result that Jesus's body, the church, encounters when we are fighting among ourselves, whether in the local congregation, groups of congregations, or an entire denomination. Because our sights are turned inward, we may become distracted from our primary mission of being ambassadors for Christ in the fallen world.

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I pray that we would not be so distracted; that we would indeed be a unified church, **ONE** body of Christ. But we are in spiritual warfare, and just like in any war, there are casualties, battles won and battles lost, but we can have complete confidence in the outcome of the war. By His death, resurrection, and ascension, Christ has defeated Sin, Death, and the Devil once and for eternity; He is indeed Lord of all, as we read in verses 20 and 21:

*. . . seated [Christ] at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.*

AMEN