



## ***St. Paul Evangelical Community Church (SPECC)***

**Worship Address** : Cerritos High School Auditorium  
12500 E. 183<sup>rd</sup> St., Cerritos, CA 90703  
(Enter at Bloomfield, across Heritage Park)

**Mailing Address** : 11428 E. Artesia Blvd. # 4 ; Artesia, CA 90701  
562-924-5051

**Website** : [www.sp-ecc.org](http://www.sp-ecc.org)

November 13, 2011

**Theme: “Sola Ecclesia,” or “No Church, no Problem”?**

**Text: Ephesians 3:20-21**

Would come to worship on the Lord’s Day if you knew it might cost you your life? This has been a real possibility for the Church from the beginning. In Jerusalem, Saul, the Pharisee launched a vicious attack against the followers of the Way. As the Gospel spread throughout the Roman Empire, persecution often followed right behind.

Those who heard the Christian message faced two decisions: (1) Should I obey Jesus as Lord? (2) Should I publicly associate with His followers? The odds were that those answered "Yes" would face the confiscation of their property, imprisonment, and even death. All of the apostles except John died because of their faith in Christ and their commitment to His Church.

At the time of the Reformation there was a controversial Latin proverb, "Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus"? (There is no salvation outside the Church.) Who do you think might have used this Proverb, the Roman Catholic Church? Martin Luther? Someone else? Do you agree with this claim? Consider a rather unorthodox doxology from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Ephesians:

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Paul places the Church side-by-side with Jesus as a way that that glory comes to God in this world. There was a time in "Western" society, when the Church was its most important institution. When the Roman Empire disintegrated, the Church kept its remains from falling total chaos. For centuries after, the Church provided the foundation upon which society was built and the glue which held it together.

Then came the Renaissance, which glorified human reason along with the Reformation which protested the beliefs and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. After that, came the Enlightenment (about 1650-1700) which made human reason into a goddess. The Church has fallen on hard times since then. It is tolerated at best; it is mocked, persecuted, and suppressed at worst.

The Scriptures give us an exalted view of the Church’s God-given place in this world. In his obsessive hatred of the Church, Saul was on his way to Damascus, to arrest the Christians there. The living and ascended Jesus interrupted his plans while he was on the way. Jesus’ words give us His own understanding of the place and purpose of the Church.



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Rather than saying "Saul, Saul, Why are you persecuting my people?" He said this: "Saul, Saul, Why are you persecuting ME?" The union between Christ and His Church is so close, that that when anyone harms a member of Christ's Church, they are harming Christ Himself.

We see in Paul's writings that he heard this message loud and clear. He would talk about the Church as Christ's Body in a way that was far more than a metaphor.

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

He does not say, "The Church is like the human anatomy—many members form one body." He says, "The many members of the human anatomy are united to function as one body—Christ [Himself] is like that." In Ephesians Paul writes that God granted Jesus authority to be the ruler over all things, "...to the Church, which is His Body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." God has ordained that the Church should be the physical presence of the King of kings and Lord of lords!

So, back to the earlier statement: "There is no salvation outside the Church." (Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus.) The saying comes from St. Cyprian, who was the bishop in Carthage, North Africa, from 249-258 AD. What he meant was this: There was no salvation from the Great Flood outside of the ark that Noah built. Likewise, there is no salvation outside of the Church. By the time of the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church taught that the Church was so much the Body of Christ, that she was the automatic dispenser of salvation through the sacraments. The sacraments gave salvation to the partakers—by themselves, in a more or less mechanical way.

The Reformers rejected this view. They insisted, according to the Scriptures, that God gives salvation to those who believe because of what Christ has done. He is the only Mediator between God and people. By grace through faith, God works directly in human hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit. However, they agreed with Cyprian—there is no salvation outside the Church.

The Reformers insisted that salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. Our faith is a gift of God's grace. Yet, Luther taught that there is no salvation outside the Church because the Gospel is not found outside the Church. It is found only inside the Church. Our faith is a gift from God, but this gift that comes through the Church. Luther taught that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone; but no one can come to faith alone or live in faith alone apart from the Body of Christ. The thief on the cross was never united to the Church, but we can hardly use him as an example for the life of faith in this world.



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As many as 95% of Americans say they believe in God. Still, Americans increasingly regard union with a visible church as optional. The leaders of a pioneering American mega-church actually concluded that as the more Christians mature, the less they need the Church! Earlier in this decade, George Barna, suggested that the era of the "organized" Church has passed. He claimed that "being" the church is a matter of individual choice and effort. People don't need the Church so much as they need the right resources for personal growth and transformation—which they can get from the internet! What happens in small groups is far more important than what may happen in the Church's minister and worship.

This kind of thinking can only grow in soil where confessing Jesus as Lord has little or no risk. Christians who live in places like Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Tunisia, Egypt, North Korea, etc., will probably have a very different take on the importance of the Church. These Christians regularly risk their lives for the mere offense of identifying themselves with Christ and His Church. Christians are fleeing from places like Iraq and Egypt because of the Islamic-inspired assault on the Church.

It is important for us to reevaluate the place of the Church in God's plan for at least two reasons: (1) Out of loyalty to our confession of Christ as Lord. (2) To remember and stand with fellow members of Christ's body who must risk everything just because they believe. The so-called "Western" world continues to turn a blind eye to the atrocities that are committed against Christians every day. We cannot. In Christ, we are one with them and they with us. On this day when we confess the necessity of the Church, let us resolve to remember those who suffer because they have dared to unit with the Body of Christ.