THE MARKS OF A MATURING, HEALTHY CHURCH

A Healthy, Maturing Church is One Which:

- Is Christ centered, where Jesus is recognized as fully God and fully man. (John 1:1, 14) That He is the one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 2:15) Where Jesus is taught and exalted as Lord, not just Savior.
- The full gospel is central—an understanding of (a)Christ's atoning death brings full ***forgiveness*** to repentant sinners, and (b) Christ's resurrected life brings new life, empowered by Christ living in you, the hope of glory. (2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 1:27)
- Recognizes that the church is His. "I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." (Matt. 16:18)
- Understands that the church is not a place or a building, but rather a redeemed ***people***; *ecclesia,* 'called out ones.' And is understood as the (a) universal church at large, but (b) gathers in local assemblies in corporate worship.
- In which the followers of Jesus are His disciples being taught how to love as He loved, but where the Holiness of God is not compromised by the world's definition of love, that is, toleration of all sorts of sinful lifestyles. (John 13:34; Titus 2:14) As Jesus said, "Where are those who condemn you? Neither do I condemn you. Go. And from now on sin no more." (John 8:10,11)
- Where sin is defined by God and His Holy Word, not the "woke" culture painting Him only as compassionate. "You shall be Holy, for I am Holy." (1 Peter 1:16, Lev. 11:44)
- Where sinners are welcomed, loved on, preached to, converted by Christ and taught they are now called saints; the church will help them learn to live as one. (1 Cor. 1:2)
- Where transparency is modeled and encouraged; believers are learning not to live in pretense, but rather to honestly confess so Christians can "bear one another's burdens and thereby fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1-2; James 5:16) Confessing our sins to one another in order that we might be healed.
- Where the church understands Christ as the Chief Shepherd, the rightful Head of His Body; that all believers are members of that body, and are to be yielded to obeying **His marching orders** (Eph. 4:1-6), "*walking in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*." That calling being taught in the first three chapters beginning with who we are in Christ, our being before our doing. Our being "*chosen in Him..that we would be holy and blameless before Him*"; *living "to the praise of the glory of His grace*"…"*in Christ would be to the praise of His glory"* (Eph. 1:6,12)
- Living to the praise of God the Father and His Son Jesus, instead of for our own ego or self-aggrandizement.
- Where the leadership model of the church is servant leadership, not church bosses. (John 13:14)
- *And Christ as Chief Shepherd has appointed a plurality of qualified, godly men as under shepherds (elders) whose focus is to find the mind of the Lord and shepherd His people well*. (1 Peter 5:1-3) "*equipping the saints to do the work of the ministry to the building up of the body of Christ…to a mature man, till we are like Jesus in His fulness*" (Eph. 4:11-16)
- Where all true believers are encouraged to find their spiritual gift(s) and use them for the building up (edification) of other believers, "the whole body, being fitted and held

together, by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

- The maturing church understands what Paul is given to reveal to us, namely, that the church is being watched, not just by non-believers, or the government, but by spiritual being—the holy angels as well as the fallen angels—called the "*rulers and authorities in the heavenlies."*(the entire realm of spiritual beings). They are watching and learning something of what Paul calls "the manifold, or multi-faceted, or multi-colored wisdom of God, and that it is made known through the church. What is it they are learning? Ray Stedman in his treatment of this quotes Dr. Custance:

"The key to the existence of such a universe as this lies, I believe,
in the fact that God wished to show forth that aspect of His being
which the angels have never comprehended, namely His love,
without at the same time surrendering that part of His being which
they do not comprehend, namely His holiness."

- The maturing church understands that the fallen demonic realm is doing everything it can to trip us up and take us out, and if it can't destroy us, to at least make us ineffective and weak. The immature church believes it must copy the culture to make an impact. The maturing church understands God calls us to be light in the midst of darkness.
- The true church understands it is to mature into the stature of Christ BECAUSE THE TRUE CHURCH IS CHRIST'S RESURRECTED POWERFUL PRESENCE ON THIS EARTH THROUGH HIS SECOND BODY, WHAT HE STARTED OUT TO DO IN HIS FIRST… when Jesus quoted this passage from Isaiah concerning His own ministry in the Synagogue of His own hometown of Nazareth.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME,
BECAUSE HE ANNOINTED ME TO PREACH
THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR.
HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM
RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES,
AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND,
TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED,
TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR
OF THE LORD.

Jesus did not quote the second half of that last verse in Isaiah which adds

AND THE DAY OF VENGEANCE OF OUR GOD

Jesus withheld from quoting that verse because there would be this favorable time of Grace where we would be recipients of the awesome love of God in the "Favorable Year of the Lord." That favorable year, now stretched out over 2000 years is closer to running out than ever before.

- A mature church readies herself with being about her Lord's business.

Do you see the immense significance of the Church, known as the Body of Christ, and your part as a member of that Body? You have been loved with an unexplainable love, an inclusion and belonging you experience in the Triune Family of God, Father, Son and Spirit, made to drink of His Spirit, gifted by His Spirit to

Experience secondly an eternal significance, that by your gifting your life has an eternal impact in the lives of others for their eternal being.