Since we cannot make a perfect church out of imperfect people, what does God expect out of the church? Before we get to God's expectations, I was curious to learn of one layman's ideal church. He promised to build a badly needed auditorium for the church as long as he could keep the construction plans secret until the first day it was used. The grand opening came and a huge crowd showed up. As they sat in the back, the pews rolled automatically down to the front. The process continued until all were seated. This excited the preacher so much that he was just getting warmed up at 12:00. At 12:02 a trap door opened and the preacher dropped into the basement.

Now, of course, that is probably not the most important thing God wants to see in the church. God, first and foremost, wants the church (the local body of believers) to be faithful. What does that faithfulness entail? That is the tremendous message of Colossians 2:2-7. If we can begin to get a better glimpse of the goal, we will be moving in the right direction.

PROPPOSITION: God desires a faithful church.

I. A church with courageous hearts v.2a

II. A church united in love v.2b

III. A church with spiritual insight v.2-3

IV. A church with power to resist seductive teaching v.4

V. A church with a soldier's discipline v.5

VI. A church growing in faith v.6-7a

VII. A church overflowing with gratitude
Good Morning - This is Pulpit Exchange Sunday. It's a chance to feel part of the Body.

Glad to be with you - In fact I specifically asked to come here. -

- background

- You're the reason I'm Vermont - couldn't come here so went to Barre - God had someone much better for you

- A little on our church
Seven items from the hand of Paul that mark a growing and faithful Church.

Read them.

I wanted to give this overview because it's good to see all the implications of a good church. I'm sure some of these struck home. Each of us are strong in some & others well we admit we could use some work.

Lost you leave getting idea we expect perfection out of each of us - I was reminded of a story.

A Christian preacher was in airport & he met an old friend of his - first question "How are you doing?" pastor asked. The man's response was candid - he lives in an administrative pressure cooker - experiences real world in huge doses - Said "How am I doing? Growing & learning" - Then he added "I used to say great...fantastic" every time somebody asked me that. You know, the super-positive, everything-is-terrific response. Not anymore, I am growing & I am learning - but frankly, I'm not always on top doing great!"

Growing & learning - that's the Christian Life in a nutshell - that's what the church does - that's what we all do - Nothing to be ashamed of - it's natural Jesus is Still Lord, victory is still ours - Moreover his life can be
tough & with Jesus's help we will get through & we will learn & grow.
As Paul shares his innermost desires for the church of Colossae, we get a beautiful picture of what makes the church—what marks should distinguish a living and faithful church.

I. First, a living and faithful church is one with a courageous heart & spirit. In v2 “My purpose (for all his energies) is that they may be encouraged in heart.” That word, encourage (parakaleo) is used in 2 ways. Sometimes it means “comfort” — It was such an encouragement to have you here. Sometimes to exert—to push forward—“Come on, keep it up, you can do it.”

Behind the word no matter which way it is used, is the idea of enabling a person to meet some difficult situation with confidence & gallantry. He wants them to be courageous. That no matter what the circumstance the local church will go through victorious—that each one of us will succeed to be winners in God’s sight. It is Paul’s prayer that the church may be filled with that courage which can cope with any situation.

The days after Dunkirk had to seem like one of the darkest hours for those in England. Everything seemed irrevocably lost. 47 warships sunk. 1/4 destroyers in ship yards for repairs. 40% of
Once peace destroyed, Britain was short of food, armies without arms & equipment - 50,000 vehicles left in France alone. - Then the terrible bombing of London - 
& Churchill spoke - only a few words -
Never give in. Never give in
Never, never, never.
(This is her finest hour).

The same courage Paul wanted the church to have in face of devastating false teachers.
Can we speak any less. Our Lord - let us take courage & stand firm as a church - no matter how bad it looks on the outside.

The second part of a growing and faithful church is that it is united in love. That's one of the ways that we encourage and strengthen each other. Without love our church will be of little value to Christ our Lord. Love is more important than meeting on Sunday, or Bible Study or any other activity we do - we need to see that true love marked by attitudes of giving & commitment distinguishes faithful & growing churches - when love dies the church will be close behind.

Something prompted me this week to think about everyone in the church - and a strange thought came to me -
It was as if we were all in its assembly. & several
were choosing church "teams." And I realize if I was going to choose a church team - I would choose everyone of you. I won't want to get rid of any of you. You are a great group - I believe because you care - so keep that up.

Third Paul turns to an area that should be an outgrowth of a church functioning in love and one that is filled with courage no matter what the circumstance. That the church will have spiritual insight (read 2-3). That spiritual insight revolves around the source Jesus Christ. He is the mystery of God. He is the one who was hidden but now is revealed. The key to spiritual insight is Jesus Christ - understanding the person and work - & after that applying what we learn to our present situation.

To bring that forward - a church with spiritual insight will not handle problems just as a business or even democracy does. - Business what gives greatest return; democracy = majority wins. Church will take problems that are before it - even very temporal problems & view perspective answers thru teaching of Jesus - how will it be affected. Actually it is even deeper than that - the end result of wisdom & knowledge is said to be hidden. That does not mean it is
beyond our reach - but rather as treasures in a mine which has already been opened and with diligent search a constant supply of precious stones may be extracted. At Colossae the false teachers no doubt spoke much about the knowledge they professed to teach. They claimed it was hidden from normal people & we had to go through them to find it.

Much like church of scientology - Ron Hubbard supposedly had this body of truth which we needed in life but that you couldn't get without many of his classes which cost between 250 & 4000 $. People would spend 10-40,000 dollars to get secret knowledge.

If Paul says "You false teachers have your wisdom hidden from ordinary people; we too have our knowledge but it is not hidden in unintelligible books; it is hidden in Christ and therefore open to all men everywhere" - the truth of Christianity is not a secret which is hidden but a secret which is revealed.

Fourth the true church will have the power to resist seductive teaching... (Read #4). The church should not be swayed from Jesus by fine-sounding arguments. Anyone can make a fine-sounding argument - the word was used of law-courts - it refers to the persuasive power of a lawyer's arguments, which could enable the criminal to escape his just punishment. Anyone can make a
Fine-sounding argument. To prove this point one at work - a person decided to argue positively for rape - how it really helps society as a whole. I can't think of a more disgusting argument - yet in listening to arguments itself - it could be very persuasive - so much so that people arguing against were at a loss for words - & led inside but not having right words - The key is not the argument for, anyone can make a fine argument - the key is the base it stands on. The tree church should have such a grasp of the truth that it is unmoved by seductive arguments.

Fifth - the fifth one I found very interesting because it is so unlike the American society we live in. The fifth mark of the growing and faithful church is that she will have a soldier's discipline. Discipline - not the high point of our society - Read vs. The 2 key words are "ORDERLY" and "FIRM" - Both words are military words - Orderly refers to rank or an ordered arrangement. The Church should be like an ordered army, with every man & woman in appointed place, ready and willing to obey the word of command. Does that sound like our culture?
Where we want to be instantly gratified - want to do our own thing & will try to fit someone else in. Does it sound like our society to do what one is told —
The second word is "firm" - refers to the strength & firmness of our faith. It pictures the Roman phalanx - a pocket of the army that stood shoulder to shoulder and was square solid & immovable against any enemy charge. So within the church there should be a disciplined order and steady steadfastness - like the order and steadfastness of a trained and disciplined army & troops.

The sixth part of a faithful and growing church is not just the firmness of faith but that it is growing in faith. Actually v.6 and 7 can be a real eye opener in this respect. Read v.6-7

We all can think back and realize the faith needed to make our stand for Jesus Christ. That tremendous - but that same faith is needed every day - as one paraphrase puts it - "Just as you trusted Christ to save you, trust him to sort out each day's problems - live in vital union with him - let your roots grow into him and draw up refreshment from him." Some people seem to believe, once I've accepted the Lord then that is it - Not so we must actively step out in faith every day.

Faith is not a blind leap in the dark - it is extending ourselves beyond what is comfortable
and well known. Once we've extended ourselves into a new area - then it becomes comfortable & well known - At that point it is easy to stay where we are - But God wants us out on the road again - that is a growing faith.

For our church - just meeting was act of faith - had no where - little music - no people ⇒ then we went in new area what about 55. ⇒ Small - but has grown then faced no teachers & need to give some break - & our faith grow - Must continue.

Personally you have challenges every day - Can go beyond in them.

⇒ We need to continue living in faith in Jesus which is stepping out - ⇒ the how comes from v17 ⇒ A close walk & communion of Jesus - Praying from heart - digging into word - serving in different areas - He builds us up & the faith that was shaky to step out is strengthened.

Ever run into a Christian who had qualities you admire - Out going witness - could go up to stranger start conversation - share with them - How? Before they started - First people asked from about Jesus. - Answered as if on step - Great I did it ⇒ Then started bringing up religious topics - If interested then need to go on - Great I did it ⇒ Then started
sharing w/ people about Jesus or church just like we do w/ health. When it came to mind we shared it. Whether it was brought up on rev. Each time their faith got stronger & they could gingerly go a little further.

The final distinguishing mark of the growing and faithful church is found in the last phrase of v.7. "It is literally a church overflowing with gratitude. It thrills me & I know it thrills you to see in the sharing time the number of times people are thankful for what is happening. Last year at the Annual meeting we asked everyone to share the highlight of the year in church. Most aren't highlight as an activity. They were thanking for care & concern of others in need, isn't that tremendous. Overflowing with thanks - we just can't keep it m - keeping it m would be like keeping Michelle quiet about the lady who shared Jesus w/ abductors.

The BEEC Beacon that came yesterday had a lead article called "Such a secret I Found". She had tons of physical problems - and as she said, "I kept concentrating on me & my problems. Then I tried Thanksgiving - we can't be too introspective."