

# **THE CHURCH**

## ***GOD'S FAMILY***



**How Did the Church Begin?  
Why Is the Church Important?  
Who Has the Authority and Rule?  
Is the Church A Building Or the People?  
Who Works Inside? What Can They Do?  
What Gift Can They Inherit?**

**By Gaston Cogdell**

## **Welcome**

***We are glad you have chosen to study the word of God and to delve into the depths of His Word. By studying His word, one can grow in knowledge and in maturity and understanding of what is required by God in living our daily lives and our journey towards heaven.***

***These lessons were written by Gaston Cogdell, a faithful Christian dedicated in his service to God and in helping children and teenagers who attend Fort Hill Christian Youth Camp, Hillsboro, Ohio.***

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***We pray you will enjoy your study of God's Word.***

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## PROLOGUE

The church of Christ is the only divine institution on earth. Its headquarters are in heaven, where Jesus sits enthroned at the right hand of God, ruling and reigning over all things. Until every enemy has been brought into subjection to Him – it is Jesus' family and kingdom . . . His Bride, His Body, His Church which He came into the world to establish and which He died to save . . . filled with His spirit and carrying on His work on earth. No one can have any personal relationship with God apart from Christ, or any personal relationship with Christ apart from His church. Christ has only one church in the Bible in the world.

**Memory Verse:** Ephesians 5:25

Other Important Passages To Read and Discuss: Matthew 16:13-19; Acts 2:36-40; I Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesian 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 4:4-6; 5:22-31; Hebrews 12:18-29; I Timothy 3:15.

The Church is the final, perfect and eternal divine order in its present earthly and embryonic stage. Those who do not enter the eternal Kingdom in this life will be shut out of it forever. The Church is an embodiment and actualization of the Word of Christ, which is an expression of the will of God, and which will endure forever (Matt. 24:35). Heaven will be the Church in its glorified and finalized state. Death will swallow up all else, but it will not devour the Church., the Body of Christ, filled with the Spirit of Christ which is transmitted to it through the Word of Christ (Jn. 6:63).

The word "church" is an English translation of the Greek word "*ekklēllia*," which means, "the called-out" or "a called-out assembly." The Church is a distinct and unique body of people, called out of the world, to belong to Him, as His very own family: separated, holy community, sanctified by the Word and through the Blood . . . "*cleansed by the washing of water by the word*" (Eph.5:27) (i.e. baptism).

The Church is perfect, and is made up of perfect people – perfect with a perfection which they have not achieved and could not achieve, but which is conferred upon them by God, through Christ. Their sins are not imputed to them, but are charged to Christ. They, therefore, are able to stand before God sinless having appropriated the perfection that Christ purchased with His blood (Rom. 4:8,11; II Cor. 5:21; Heb. 10:14; 12:23).

God, the Word of God, the Son of God, and the church of God are all indivisibly and inseparably united for time and for eternity – Jn. 1:1-13; 10:30; Jn. 17:20-23; Matt. 25:31-40; Matt. 10:40; I Cor. 6:15; I Thess. 1:1; Eph. 5:23-33. The members of the Church are one, a part of each other – Rom. 12:5; Eph. 4:25; Gal. 3:28.

The Church is referred to as "*the Kingdom*" dozens of times in the New Testament. The Word of God is called "*the seed of the Kingdom*" (Lk. 8:11). When the Church grows, it is the Word which is bringing forth that growth, as God works through it to propagate His spiritual family (Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20; I Cor. 3:6,7).

The Church is a divine spiritual organism and organization.

1. It is divine in its origin (Dan. 2:44; Matt. 16:18; Lk. 24:46; Acts 2).
2. Divine in its ownership (I Pet. 16:18; I Jn. 10:16; Acts 20:28).
3. Divine in its name (Acts 4:12; Rom. 16:16; Col. 3:17).
4. Divine in its leadership. (Eph. 1:22,23; 5:23,24; Col. 1:18).
5. Divine in its mission (Matt, 9:37,38; Jn.20:21; II Cor. 5:18-21).

6. Divine in its message. (Matt.28:18-20; Mk. 16:15,16; I Tim. 3:15; Rom. 1:16).
7. Divine in its destiny. (Matt. 25:34; Jn. 24:1-3; II Cor. 5:1-11).

The many splendorous and multi-faceted glorious creation of God called "the Church" is many things. It is called:

1. The Kingdom of God. (Matt. 16:18,19; Mk.9:1; Col. 1:13).
2. The City of God. (Heb. 12:22; Heb 11:10-16; Rev. 21:2).
3. The Temple of God. (Eph. 2:19-22; II Cor. 6:16; I Pet. 2:5).
4. The Family or Household of God. (Jn. 1:12; II Cor. 6:18; Gal. 4:5,6).
5. The Body of Christ. (Eph. 1:22,23; 5:23; Col. 1:18; I Cor. 12:12-27).
6. The Bride of Christ. (II Cor. 11:2; Rom.7:4; Rev. 19:7; 21:2; 22:17).
7. Spiritual Israel, the Covenant people. (Matt.2:6; Eph.2:12; Gal. 3:29; 6:16; Heb. 13:20).

# **GOD'S FAMILY – THE CHURCH**

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# GOD'S FAMILY, THE CHURCH

## INTRODUCTION

God has always had a family on earth, a people who have belonged to Him and related to Him in a special way, doing His will rather than their own, and making His Word and His Work, the supreme priority of their lives. These people have heard the voice of God, calling them to come out and be separate from the rest of mankind in order to enter into a union and fellowship with God as His spiritual sons and daughters. He is their God and they are His holy people – His saints, living pure and holy lives in a morally corrupt world, worshiping and serving Him in spirit and in truth, loving Him with all their might and power, and being loved and blessed by Him as only a Heavenly Father can love and bless His children.

The apostle Paul applies the words of the prophets of Israel to the Church as follows:

*"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with belief? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?"*

*"And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God and they shall be my people."*

*"Therefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons, and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (II Cor. 6:14-18).* From the beginning, it was God's desire that all men should be His children. He made man *"in His own image and after His own likeness"* (Gen. 1:27) to be a part of Himself in the physical and material realm. By sin, man severed his relationship with God and alienated himself from the source of his being. Yet God, the loving Father above, has made it possible for man to repent and come back to the divine family, and be reunited with Him and with those of *"like precious faith."* Deep within the human heart is the consciousness of this potential divine kinship. Paul quoted the ancient Greek poets to the Athenians, for they, like the prophets of Israel, spoke of man as *"the offspring of God"* (Acts 17:28).

Being a part of God's spiritual family is by far the most important thing in life, because it determines everything else, including, and most importantly, where one will spend eternity.

A part of God's family is in heaven. The Church is that part of His family which is still upon earth, as the apostle Paul said, *"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and on earth is named"* (Eph. 3:14,15). It is the Church, God's family here on earth, with which we shall concern ourselves in this series of studies.

In this series of lessons, we are studying "the" church, and not merely "a" church! The scriptures set forth a divine pattern of commandment and example for one, and only one body of "called out" people, or family of God on earth. Christ established only one Church saying, *"On this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it"* (singular) (Matt. 16:18). God adds to the Church (singular) those who are saved (Acts 2:47).

Christ is the head of and the Savior of but one body (Eph. 5:23-25). Christ has but one kingdom over which he is the head, and which is the fulfillment of all His plans, (Eph. 1:22,23, Col. 1:18). Christ has but one bride, the church (Eph. 5:32). There are

hundreds of religious bodies, or denominations in the world, which claim to be the church of Christ, but there is only one true church of Christ in the New Testament or in the world (of which Christ is the head) and which He died to save. There is only one way to be saved and added to the Lord's Church, and only one way to stay saved, and remain in that Church. Jesus said, "*Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there be that find it*" (Matt. 7:14). There is but one gate; there is but one way to heaven.

In this series of studies, we are focusing in the one true Church of the New Testament, which is the divinely given blueprint for that Church which Christ came into the world to establish, and which He now rules from on high. It's supreme law is Love . . . for God, for our brothers and sisters in Christ, and for all mankind (Matt. 22:37-40; Matt. 5:44-46; Jn. 13:34,35; Gal. 5:13,14).

Its creed is Christ (Jn. 14:6; Col. 3:11). It is "*the pillar and ground of the truth*" (1 Tim. 3:15), and is the only agency and instrumentality through which Christ carries on His divine work of redemption in the world. The Church is the temple of God, constructed of the living stones which are the Redeemed, and built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, with Jesus Christ as the Chief Corner Stone (Eph. 3:20, 1 Pet. 2:5).

The Church is the earthly manifestation and stage of development of that celestial city of God, which has the foundations not made with hand, that city of life and light, of love, joy, and peace – that heavenly city, the New Jerusalem that the apostle John saw coming down out of heaven from God (Heb. 11:10,16; Heb. 12:16; Rev. 21:2).

Christ died for the Church, and for nothing else (Eph. 5:25). Christ is the head of the Church and of nothing else (Eph. 1:22,23, Col. 1:18). Christ saves the Church, and nothing else (Eph. 5:23).

# LESSON 1

## GOD'S FAMILY – THE CHURCH

**Definition:** The word "church" is an English translation of the Greek word *ekklesia* which means "that which is called out: a called out assembly."

In the New Testament, it refers to that body of people who have been called out of the world by Christ through the gospel, and who have, through baptism, entered into an organic spiritual union with God in His eternal family and Kingdom, which is the Church. (I Cor. 12:12-13, Gal. 3:26-29, II Cor. 6:14-18, Rom. 9:25, Heb. 8: 10).

In the scriptures, the Church is never referred to as place, but as a congregation of people. It is a spiritual temple and building, comprised of the souls of the redeemed, a structure of divine authority and spiritual relationships based entirely upon Christ and His Word. It is a divine government under the total control of Jesus Christ, devoted completely to the carrying of His work of redemption among men until He comes again.

### **Scripture Readiness: Genesis 12:1-4**

God calls Abraham (Abram) to leave his country, and kindred, to be a pilgrim and sojourner on earth, journeying to a land that God would give to him and his family forever the promised land. Abraham obeyed and became the "*father of the faithful*" (Rom. 4:11-16, Jas. 2:21). The very opening sentence of the New Testament states that our Lord and His prototype, David, were sons of Abraham (Matt. 1:1). Thus, Abraham was the forerunner and progenitor of the *ekklesia* (Church) of God, which is comprised of those who have been called out of the world to lead holy and transformed lives in Christ Jesus, and who are fellow pilgrims with the saints of old on the road to the promised land of heaven above (Gal. 3:7, 26,27).

### **Hebrews 11:8-19**

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Israel) are depicted as types and predecessors of those who voluntarily chose to "come out of the world" and acknowledge that they are strangers on this earth, that they belong to a higher order of being than the creatures of this planet, that they are seeking the "*city which has the foundations whose builder and maker is God the Heavenly Jerusalem which is the eternal community of the redeemed of all ages.*"

### **Hebrews 12:18-29 and 13:12-14**

The earthly order, typified by the law given through Moses at Mt. Sinai is contrasted with the heavenly order – the kingdom and church of Christ, which cannot be shaken or moved, but which is permanent and eternal.

### **Matthew 16:13-20**

The first mention by name of the Church in the Bible, in which Christ states that it is founding is in the future from the time in which He was speaking; that the Church is His (My Church) belongs to Him, not to Moses, Abraham, or anyone else in the past or future, that it is the same as, and identical with "*the Kingdom*" that it is established upon the truth



of His divinity and deity which Peter had just uttered, and that it would overcome all the powers of death – *"the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."*

### **Acts 2:36-47**

The account of the actual establishment of the church of Christ in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, A.D. 33, fifty days after the crucifixion, and ten days after Christ's ascension into heaven, to be enthroned at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33), placed there to rule over all God's creation until every enemy shall be brought into submission to Him (I Cor. 15:25). Peter, whose sermon is here recorded, sets forth repentance and baptism for the remission of sins as necessary prerequisites to entrance into the Church and Kingdom of the Messiah, and as many as believed the gospel here proclaimed, were baptized (verse 41) and were added to the Church (verse 47).

The same terms and conditions of salvation and of membership in Christ's body were the same then, and are the same now, and will remain unchanged until the end of time. When we are saved through obedience to the gospel, God adds us to the Church (Acts 2:47), so that we don't simply "join the Church" as we would some human organization; God joins us to the Church when we are baptized.

In Acts 2, is fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah and Micah that *"In the last days . . . all nations will flow into the Lord's House . . . and out of Zion shall go forth and the law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem"* (Isa. 2:1-4, Mic. 4.1-4).

### **Ephesians 1:20-23**

The Church is Christ's Body (embodiment) upon earth. Christ is the head of it, the sole authority over it, and He will fulfill all His plans and purposes through it.

### **Ephesians 2:10-22**

The Church is the dwelling place, family, and spiritual temple of God, and constitutes the perfect union of man with his fellow man, whether Jew or Gentile, and of the redeemed of the human race with God.

### **Ephesians 4:4-6**

There is **one and only one** Church and Body of Christ on earth.

### **Ephesians 5:22-32**

The Church is infinitely precious to Christ. It is His Bride, and is, in fact *"His flesh and His bones,"* an incarnation and embodiment of Him on earth. He died for it and it alone, cleanses and sanctifies it and it alone, saves it (verses 23-25).

### **Revelation 21,22**

The glorified Church as the final and eternal order, the "new Jerusalem" which shall endure forever, in indescribable splendor and bliss.

## **THE SUPREME IMPORTANCE OF THE CHURCH TO GOD, TO MAN, and TO YOU AND ME!**

God paid the highest price that was ever paid, or could be paid, for the Church –

the precious blood of His only begotten son, Christ Jesus (Acts 20:28).

God loves those who are members of His Church as He loves His only begotten Son, and they are one with the Father and the Son (Jn. 17:21-26, Rom. 8:38,39, Heb. 2:11-13, I Jn. 1:3, 3:1,2).

Christ died for the Church and nothing else (Eph. 5:25). He saves the Church, which is His body, and He saves nothing else (Eph. 5:26,27).

The Church is the embodiment and incarnation of Christ – "*His flesh and His bones.*" It is a projection and extension of Jesus Christ into the world, even as Christ was an extension, projection and incarnation of God in the world (Eph. 5:29-32, Matt. 25:40, Matt. 10:40, Acts 9:4, Matt. 12:46-50, I Cor. 12:12,13).

The Old Testament records the ages-long preparations that God made for Christ and His Church, and is a preface to the New Testament. The first four books of the New Testament are about Christ: His birth, life, teachings, miracles, atoning death and resurrection. The remaining 23 books are about the church of Christ, through which Christ continues His work on earth, and which is the final, finished, perfect and eternal divine order in embryo. It is the bud of which heaven is the flower.

The terms and conditions of Church membership are identical with the terms and conditions of salvation, so that being saved and being a member of the Lord's Church are one and the same thing. We are baptized into the body, the Church (I Cor. 12:13) and baptism saves us (II Pet. 3:21). So being baptized, being saved, and becoming a member of the Church, all take place at the same moment. No one has, or can have, any personal spiritual relationship with God apart from Christ, or with Christ apart from His Church (Jn. 14:6, Jn. 15:1-10).

The Church, and the Word of Christ which it embodies, the divine truth, of which it is the pillar and support, is the only thing in this world that will survive the death and dissolution of the present cosmic order (Matt. 7:24-27, 24:35, II Pet. 3:5-13, Rev. 21:1-7). Those who are faithful members of the Lord's body will live in glory forever. Because they are God's children, they will "*inherit all things*" (Rev. 21:7; I Tim. 3:15).

Our membership in the church of Christ is by far the greatest privilege and most wonderful blessing that God had given us. At the same time, that membership in the church of Christ carries with it the most profoundly important obligations and responsibilities that man can have on this earth.

**The Church doesn't save us – Christ saves us – but we are saved by Christ because we are a part of His embodiment on earth in the Church (Eph. 5:23-26).**

# LESSON 2

## GOD'S FAMILY, THE CHURCH

### Suggested Scriptural Readings:

Matthew 16:18-20

Acts 2:37-47

Ephesians 5:22-33

Hebrews 11:8-16

Heb. 12:22-29

Revelation 21:1-7

The Bible is a book about God and His family – God's family being those people on earth at any given time who know God, who worship and serve Him as God, and who obey His Word and do His will, because they love and fear Him, and desire eternal life.

The first three chapters of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, give a very brief history of mankind from the creation to the call of Abraham. During this time, God had a people – Abel, Enoch, and Noah being specifically named in that roster of the names of the faithful in Hebrews 11. God's children differentiated themselves from the rest of mankind by believing in God and obeying His commandments. They were led by His spirit, and we are told that *"as many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the Sons of God (Rom. 8.14).*

In that time before the flood, most people were godless and wicked. Beginning with the very first man born on earth (Cain), the human race was degenerate and heedless of the Creator and His will, except for that small number who remained true and faithful, who constituted the children of God in the midst of a wicked and perverse world, who separated themselves from the immorality and depravity of the world and its peoples.

Then, the wall of separation between the family of God and the people of the world began to break down. The *"sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and they took them wives of all which they chose . . . and after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bore children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown. And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart (Gen. 6:1-6).*

There was only one man who, with his family, remained faithful to God, and that was Noah. Noah's family was God's family. God decided to destroy every single member of the corrupt human race, saving only the family of Noah, and starting over again with it.

He commanded Noah to build a great ship, the ark, to save all that was to be saved of all who lived on earth, both human beings and animals, from being drowned in the great flood by which God determined to destroy the world. This ark which Noah built, and in which was saved all that was saved of the earth, was a type and foreshadowing of the Church which Christ built, and into which all must come who are to be saved eternally.

Alas, after the flood, the human race became godless again: idolatrous, polytheistic (worshiping many gods and goddesses, instead of one true and living God), disobedient to God's Word, and immoral in their lives. But again, there was one man who, in the midst of the surrounding wickedness, remained true and faithful to the Lord – that man was Abraham.

God called Abraham to separate himself from his family, friends, countrymen, and to go into a strange land into which God would lead him, and give to him and his seed forever, the promised land (Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-18). From this point onward, the Bible is the story of Abraham's family, which is God's family, and which in this age and dispensation, is the Church, His spiritual family. *"For as many of you as have been*

*baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither Jew nor Gentile for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then ye are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:2,7-29).*

It was God's plan and purpose to create a nation from the family of Abraham – a holy nation which would receive His law, do His will, and through which God would bring into the world His Son, the Savior, ruler and judge of the whole world, who would offer Himself as the final, perfect and all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins of mankind, and who would set up an eternal kingdom (the Church) which would be God's family forever.

Jesus is that *"son of Abraham"* (Matt. 1:1) who came to enlarge the borders of God's spiritual family to include all who would obey Him (Heb. 5:9). He announced that He would build His Church upon the eternal truth of His own divinity and deity, and that *"the gates of Hades"* (the powers of death and destruction) *would not prevail against it* (Matt. 16:18). The Church is *"spiritual Israel"* (Rom. 9:6; Gal. 6:15,16).

The New Testament records the establishment of that Church (Acts 2) and its spread throughout the Roman Empire in the first century: and its final triumph over every enemy and enthronement in glory with the Lamb who redeemed her with His own precious blood.

## **THE CHURCH IN PROMISE AND IN PROPHECY**

God's plans and preparations for the establishment of the Church from the foundation of the world, throughout all the ages, until the coming of Christ

Since the creation, nothing has happened in the world, or in the universe, as important as the coming of Christ and the establishment of the Church. Indeed, the Church is the beginning of a new creation, a divine and spiritual order, higher than the natural order and intended to eventually replace the natural order all together. Those who believe the gospel, repent of their sins, and are baptized into Christ and His body, the Church – receive the gift of God's divine spirit, and become *"new creatures"* and part of a new creation, which shall last forever (II Cor. 5:17; Matt. 24:35; Matt. 16:18).

The characters and events we read about in the Old Testament were types and foreshadowing of Christ and the Church, and were a part of God's preparation for sending His son into the world to redeem it from its sin and establish His divine kingdom, which is the Church.

There are dozen's of prophecies about the Church, many of them quoted by New Testament writers. One of them, which began to be fulfilled on Pentecost, is recorded in Acts, Chapter 2. It tells us of the establishment of the Church and is still being fulfilled as more and more of the nations flow into the Lord's house and the vision of world peace becomes ever more widely acclaimed throughout the earth. It is recorded in Isaiah 2:2-4 and is reiterated by Micah 4:14, which reads: *"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains and shall be called above the hills; and all nations shall flow into it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."*

God's ancient people, Israel, was a microcosm (a miniature representation, scale model, type or epitome) of the Church, so that we are told that: *"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope"* (Rom. 15:4).

Fleshly Israel was a type of spiritual Israel, the Church, and the things that happened to Israel in the physical realm were predictive of what would happen to the Church in the spiritual realm, and were meant to be instructive to us who constitute the Church (I Cor. 10:11).

Thus, we see that all history and all that happened prior to the coming of Christ and the establishment of the Church of Christ, was a token preparation for those events.

Adam, as the federal head of the physical race of mankind, was a type of Christ, the head of the new spiritual specie of the human race (Rom. 5:12-19; I Cor. 15:22, 45-49) of which the Church is comprised.

The temptation of our first parents by Satan, was a foreshadowing of the temptation of Christ by Satan, and each of us by Satan, through the three channels of lust of the flesh (fleshly desire), lust of the eye, and pride of life (Gen. 3:6; Matt. 4:1-11; I Jn. 2:16,17).

The Garden of Eden, the paradise of God, was typical of both the Church and of heaven, where man has union and fellowship with God, and communion and communication with God as His child, and access to the tree of life, which is the Word, and the Word made flesh – Christ (Gen. 3:22-24; Pro. 3:13-19; Jn. 6:54; Rev. 22:2).

Abel was a type of Christ and the blood sacrifice that he offered to God as atonement for sin was typical of Jesus' death on the cross for the sins of mankind (Gen. 4:4; Heb. 12:24).

Noah was a type of Christ and the ark that he was commanded to build according to God's strict instructions was a type of the church of Christ. As Noah saved all who were saved from the flood in the ark, so Christ saves all who are saved from eternal destruction in the Church. As only one family was saved in the ark (Noah's family) so only is one family saved in the Church – Christ's family. The apostle Peter calls the salvation of the eight souls of Noah's family by water a pre-figurement of our salvation by baptism (I Pet. 3:21).

Abraham was a type of the Christian being called to leave all in the world that is dearest to him and follow the Lord by faith in a lifetime pilgrimage to a promised land of the soul that God will give him forever (Gen. 12:1; Heb. 11:8-19). Abraham is called the *"father of all them that believe"* (Rom. 4:11). Abraham's payment of tithes to Melchizedek, (who was a type of Christ) and Melchizedek's placing of the bread and wine before Abraham is a type of our payment of tithes and offerings to Christ and His giving to us the bread and fruit of the vine representing His body and blood (Gen. 14:18-21).

Melchizedek, as we have said, was a type of Christ in that he was a High Priest forever, and his office was not based upon fleshly lineage as was the Levitical priesthood of the Mosaic Law. Also, like Christ, he was king and priest at the same time (Gen. 14:18-20; Psa. 110:4; Heb. 5:5-10; 6:20; 7:1-17).

Moses was a type of Christ in many ways, even as the children of Israel whom he led out of enslavement to Pharaoh in Egypt, were a type of the Church which Christ leads out of and saves from enslavement to sin and Satan. We are told that their passage through the Red Sea, which drowned their Egyptian pursuers, was typical of our baptism for *"all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea"* (I Cor. 10:1-12).

As we partake of Christ in the Lord's Supper (of His flesh and of His blood), so Israel on their journey to the promised land under Moses, *"Did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that*

*followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (I Cor. 10:3,4) (see also Deut. 18:15-18; Acts 3:19-24). Moses was a deliverer, mediator with God, lawgiver, and a prophet like Christ.*

The journey of Israel through the wilderness was typical of our journey through the world on the way to heaven (Heb. 3:1-19). The tabernacle and the temple, and all the worship that was conducted there were copies and shadows of the spiritual reality which is the Church, and were representative and predictive of our worship under the New Covenant (Heb. 9:1-28).

The serpent which God told the Israelites (who had been bitten by serpents) to look upon and be healed, was a foreshadowing of the lifting up of Christ and our healing of a much more terrible poison (sin) when we look upon Him in faith (Num. 21:7-9; Jn. 3:14).

The Sabbath was a type of Christian's rest in Christ and of the eternal rest in heaven (Heb. 4:1-11). In fact, all the observances of the law were typical of spiritual and heavenly realities which have now been given to us in the Church through Christ (Heb. 8:5; 10:1). The passover lamb and the Passover Feast looked forward to that far greater deliverance than those in the Church have through Christ, than Israel in Egypt had through Moses. The Passover meal has its fulfillment in the Lord's Supper, as we memorialize the fact that *"Christ, our passover, is sacrificed for us" (I Cor. 5:7).*

Canaan, the land of promise, is a type of higher Christian life, to be won by warfare against the enemies of the soul, typified by the Canaanites (Rom. 7:23; Eph. 6:12). Israel's warfare is a type of the good fight of faith which we must wage in order to lay hold on eternal life.

## **THE CHURCH IN HISTORY AND IN ETERNITY**

**The church came into being and became a part of human history on the day of Pentecost (A.D. 33), on the fiftieth day after Jesus' resurrection, and the tenth day after His ascension into Heaven.**

Jesus had told His disciples, after His resurrection from the dead, that they were to go into all the world, and unto a nations, and preach the gospel; that *"repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15,16; Lk. 24:46,47).* Those who believed the gospel and were baptized would be saved, and those who did not believe it would be damned (Mk. 16:16).

The apostles were told to remain in Jerusalem until they received *"power from on high"* – divine, miraculous power – the power to speak in languages they had not learned, to convey the Holy Spirit by the laying on of their hands, and to work miracles in the name of the resurrected Jesus. With these divine credentials, they were to go forth and convict the world of its sins, bring it to repentance and baptism in the Lord's Church, and bring an end to Satan's rule over the earth (Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:8).

The apostles and disciples, about 120 in number (Acts 1:15), did remain in Jerusalem, and on the day of Pentecost (one of three Jewish Festivals during which all male Jews were to present themselves before God at Jerusalem each year), the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the apostles with both audible and visual manifestation. The sermon of the apostle Peter is recorded in Acts 2:14-40.

The same Jews who a few weeks before had responded to Pilate's question, *"What shall I do then with Jesus who is called Christ?"* had responded with a resounding, *"Crucify him! Crucify him, His blood be upon us and upon our children" (Matt. 27:22-25); now cried out to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men, brethren what shall we do?"*

Peter had charged them with the crucifixion of the Messiah whom God had raised from the dead and set at His (on right hand to rule and reign over all the earth).

Peter told them to *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38)*. We are told *"They who glorify received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:38)*.

Thus, we see that the Lord's Church began with three thousand Jews who were baptized into it after they believed the gospel of the resurrected Lord and repented of their sins. Within a very short time there were about five thousand men in the church at Jerusalem. Assuming that there were five thousand women in the church and five thousand men were there, there must have been about 10,000 members in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 4:4).

What did these Jewish Christians do as members of the newly founded Church of the Messiah? Acts 2:42 says, *"They continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine, and in fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."*

From that time until now and until the end of time, this is the procedure by which souls are added to the Lords family, the Church, and by which they remain a part of that body has been and will be the same. We are added to the body of Christ by God when we hear the gospel, believe it, repent of our sins, and are baptized for the remission of our sins. We remain in the Lord's Church by *"continuing steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and in the fellowship, breaking of bread, and in prayer."*

## **THE PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH THE CONVERSION OF SAUL OF TARSUS**

It was inevitable that the old Jewish religion, the religion of the Old Testament which revolved around the law of Moses given at Sinai, would come into violent conflict with the new Jewish religion that set aside the law of Moses and replaced it with a Messiah who had been crucified at the insistence of the leaders of the Jewish community, both secular (Sanhedrin) and religious (Chief Priests, Scribes, Pharisees).

Soon, the newly established Church began to be fiercely attacked and persecuted. The leader of the persecution was a young Jewish Rabbi named Saul. Those who stoned Stephen, "the first Christian martyr" to death, laid their cloaks at the feet of Saul who was apparently supervising the whole operation (Acts 7:58). We are told that *"Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time, there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles . . . as for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and hating (dragging) men and women, committed them to prison" (Acts 8.1-3)*.

The next verse tells us, *"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the Word" (Acts 8.4)*. So, instead of putting out the fire of Christianity, the persecution of it served to spread it!

The next chapter of Acts (9th) tells how the leader of the persecution of the church was converted to Christ. A story is repeated again in Acts 22 and again in Acts 26. While Saul was on his way to Damascus, Syria to get Jewish Christians there and bring them back to Jerusalem to be tried for heresy, Jesus appeared to him and spoke to him out of a sudden heavenly light which was brighter than the sun and which blinded him.

Immediately, as he perceived that Jesus was the resurrected Messiah of Israel and Savior of mankind, Saul asked Jesus what He wanted him to do (Acts 9:6).

Jesus told him to go to Damascus, and there he would receive instructions as to what he was to do. The blinded Saul went into Damascus and waited three days for his divine instructions as to what he was to do. During this time, he neither ate nor drank, but prayed constantly. Then, Ananias, a Jewish Christian who stood high in the Jewish community at Damascus was sent by God to Saul. Ananias told Saul, *"The God of our fathers has chosen you, that you should know His will and see that just one and should hear the voice of His mouth. For you shall be His witness unto all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord"* (Acts 22:14-16).

And so it was that the leader of the Jewish persecution of the church became the great apostle to the Gentiles, who carried the gospel to the non-Jews in Asia Minor and in Europe. The last half of the Book of Acts (chapters 13-28) is simply the story of the apostle Paul's missionary journeys and final trip to Rome to stand trial before Caesar. Paul wrote half the books of the New Testament (Romans, Philemon and possibly Hebrews). The church of Christ owes more to Saul of Tarsus, who became the apostle Paul, than to anyone else who ever lived or ever will live except for the Lord Himself.

## **VICTORY – APOSTASY – REFORMATION – RESTORATION**

By the end of the first century of the Christian era, the gospel had been carried to the *"uttermost part of the earth."* Again and again, the book of Acts tells us *"how the word of God grew and multiplied,"* and *"the Word of God increased,"* and *"the Word of God grew and multiplied"*. . . so mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed" (Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:19,20). Paul told the church at Colossae that the gospel had been preached *"to every creature under heaven"* (Col. 1:23).

The Roman government tried desperately to stamp out Christianity. Wave after wave of terrible persecutions were launched against the Church by the Caesars, for century after century. Yet the Church grew, and grew, and grew! "The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church." By the year 200, Tertulian wrote to the leadership of the Roman Empire, "We are of yesterday. Yet we have filled your empire, your cities, your towns, your islands, your tribes, your camps, castles, palaces, assemblies and senate." Finally, it was obvious to the Roman Emperors that Christianity was an irresistible force. The Emperor Constantine became a nominal Christian, and in A.D. 325, issued a general exhortation to all his subjects to embrace Christianity and made Sunday the Christian day of assembly, a day of rest for the whole empire. The Emperor Theodosius (A.D. 378-395) made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire and Church membership was compulsory. Thus, Christianity became a political religion and became corrupted and paganized in many other ways. The simple worship of the New Testament Church was replaced by elaborate ceremonialism. Ministers became priests and, as in the pagan religions, were forbidden to marry. The New Testament pattern of congregational self-government, autonomy and independence was replaced by a hierarchical structure of authority – a military type "chain of command." The Bishop of Rome became the Pope and absolute dictator of the Church. The authority of the Word of God was replaced by that of the Pope and the Bishops. The Virgin Mary was elevated to the position of a goddess in the Church, so that she was called the "Queen of Heaven," and prayers were offered to her, as well as to the saints and angels. The veneration and worship of images and relics were introduced. The Lord's Supper, a memorial of the death of Christ, was turned



into the Mass – a “repetition of the death of Christ” in which it was taught that the priest performed a miracle called “Transubstantiation” that transformed the so-called “host” into the actual body and blood of Jesus as He was re-sacrificed upon the Catholic altar.

In many other ways, the authority of Christ and His Word were supplanted by the authority of sinful man. The great apostasy (falling away) from the truth, led to 1,000 years of spiritual ignorance which are called the "Dark Ages," as the "Light of the World" was eclipsed by human power and authority.

The Eastern Orthodox (Greek) Church never digressed from the scriptural pattern as far as did the Roman Catholic (Western and Latin Church). The Greek church abhorred statues and images, used only immersion for baptism, never accepted the Papacy, never practiced celibacy of the clergy, never introduced the use of mechanical instruments of music in the worship, and in many other ways, stayed closer to the Word than the Latin church. Even so, it became corrupted and paganized so that the Great Apostasy extended throughout the whole of Christendom.

Through it all, there was always a righteous remnant . . . *"Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him"* (1 Kgs. 19:18) – the little splinter groups who remained more or less faithful to the scriptures: the Albigenses, the Waldenses, the Anabaptists, the followers of John Wyclif and John Huss, and many others unknown to history.

## **THE REFORMATION AND RESTORATION MOVEMENTS**

Then came the "spark that set Europe aflame." On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther, a Catholic Priest and teacher at the University of Wittenberg Germany, nailed 95 theses challenging the authority of the Pope and the unscriptural practices of the Roman Church particularly in regard to the sale of indulgences to the door of the Catholic Church in Wittenberg. Thus began the great Protestant Reformation Movement which had as its aim the reforming of the Roman Church and a return to the Bible as the authority and standard in religion. Luther was joined by Zwingli, Calvin, Knox, the Wesley's, and other leaders. Protestantism swept Europe and became the predominant force in the settlement of the British colonies in North America.

There were two basic ideas of the Protestant Reformation Movement: (1) the supreme authority of the scriptures, and (2) the right of each individual to determine for himself what the Word of God actually says, (i.e., the equality of the priesthood of all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ). Protestantism in North America added a third important concept – the absolute separation of Church and State. On this tripod, the whole structure of civil rights and liberties of the American system is based. Thus, did Protestantism usher in the modern world with its unparalleled freedom and resultant prosperity,

Early in the 1800's and even for several decades before the beginning of the 19th century, some were observing that for all its great accomplishments, the Reformation Movement had not accomplished a restructuring of the Roman Church nor had it really cleansed Christianity of all the corruptions and aberrations from scripture that the great apostasy had brought into it from paganism. These men advocated that both Catholicism and Protestant denominationalism be bypassed completely, and that the church go back to Christ and His apostles for all authority in religion, having a "thus saith the Lord" for every teaching and practice – “speaking where the Bible speaks, and being silent where the Bible is silent." These men: James O'Kelly, Abner Jones, Elias Smiths, Thomas and

Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, and a host of others, left the respective Protestant denominations of which they were members and joined in what came to be called the "Restoration Movement" – the great movement to restore New Testament Christianity and the New Testament Church in the world; to restore the authority of Jesus Christ and His Word to preeminence in all matters of faith, doctrines, and morals.

Since the Church is called the "*church of Christ*" in the New Testament, (Rom. 16:16) and since Christ said that He would build a Church and He called it "*my Church*" (Matt.16:18), and since the Church is the "*bride of Christ*" and the bride wears her husband's name (Eph. 5:22,23), and since there "*is no other name under Heaven given among men whereby we must be saved*" *except the name of Christ (Acts 4:32)* – it follows that the name "Church of Christ" is the name that faithful congregations of the Lord's body should wear. "Church of God" is an equally scriptural name.

Since the disciples of Christ are called "Christians" in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; 26:28; I Pet. 4:16). We are convinced that "Christian" is the name by which God's people were ultimately to be called as prophesied of old (Isa. 62:2). "The gospel only will make Christians only, and only Christians of all who obey it."

The Fort Hill Christian Youth Camp in a part of the ongoing work of members of the Church of Christ to restore the authority of Christ and His Word to its proper place of preeminence in the Church and in the world.

## **THE GLORIOUS FUTURE OF THE CHURCH IN TIME AND ETERNITY**

The prophets of Israel foresaw a time when the knowledge of the Lord and of His Word would cover the earth "*as the waters cover the sea*" (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14). Daniel said that the stone cut out of the mountain without hands which struck the great image and broke it into pieces, which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream, was the kingdom God, would set up on earth in the days of the fourth world empire after the Babylonian (i.e. the Roman Empire), and that it would grow until it became a great mountain that "*filled the whole earth*" (Dan. 2:35-44). Obviously, that kingdom of God which filled the whole earth in Daniel's prophecy, was the kingdom and the church of Christ.

Concerning Christ and His spiritual kingdom, Isaiah said, "*Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom . . .*" (Isa. 9:7).

Jesus said that His kingdom "*the kingdom of heaven, was like a mustard seed, which was the smallest of all seeds, but which grew into the largest plant in the garden*" (Matt. 13:32).

The leaders of the Restoration Movement looked upon it as the forerunner of a glorious age of spiritual enlightenment and triumph of the gospel over all the earth. For forty years, the main publication to which they all contributed was titled The Millennial Harbinger, for they regarded the restoration of the New Testament Church as the beginning of the Millennium.

Alexander Campbell wrote, "The first step towards the introduction of this glorious age is to dissipate the darkness which covers the people and hides their eyes from the Son; the quickening, renewing, animating Son of Mercy. We expect no new son, no new revelation of the Spirit, no other than the same gospel and the same religion, only that it shall be disinterred from the rubbish of the dark ages and made to assume its former simplicity, sublimity, and majesty . . . Much is to be done before flesh shall enjoy the

salvation of God . . . The mighty agent, or rather the successful means of this most desirable revolution, will be the Ancient Gospel." (The Millennial Harbinger, Vol. I, page 5, 1830).

Just as the Protestant Reformation Movement received a powerful stimulus from the invention of the printing press in 1456 by Johann Gutenberg, the first production of the new process being the printed Bible, so the Restoration Movement has in our century been given the wings of light by the invention of mass media of communication so that the gospel can now be preached to virtually every soul on earth simultaneously and instantaneously.

For most of this past century, the glacier of Communism covered nearly half the peoples of the earth. That glacier smothered and destroyed most of the spiritual weeds, the rank and superstitions and false religions, which before Communism, had held the Euro-Asiatic peoples in captivity. Now that the glacier of communism is melting and receding, a vast field of evangelistic activity is opened to us as untold billions of souls await the bringing of the "good news."

Surely, we are on the threshold of undreamed of growth of the family of God on earth . . . if we go and labor in the fields which are *"white unto the harvest."*

Under any circumstances, the glorious destiny of the Lord's Church and family in eternity is secure. In the very first mention of the Church as the Church in the Bible, Jesus called it His own, and said that the forces of death would not prevail against it. In other words, it would triumph over the powers of death and hell (Matt. 16:18). It is the final, perfect, and eternal divine order in its earthly embryonic form. If one does not become a part of that order here, he cannot do so hereafter.

The apostle John saw *"the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as bride adorned for her husband"* (Rev. 21:2). This eternal and divine city is the one which Abraham and the patriarchs of old were seeking, *"For he looked for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God"* (Heb. 1:10). This city is identified as the Church in the next chapter of Hebrews which tells us, *"But ye are come unto Mt. Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect"* (Heb. 12:22,23).

# LESSON 3

## GOD'S FAMILY, THE CHURCH

**The church as the kingdom of God. God's spiritual government over His creation. A structure of divine authority and spiritual relationships. The organization of the church.**

### THE CHURCH AS THE KINGDOM OF GOD

One of the many differences between the church of Christ and other religious groups is that the church of Christ believes that the Bible teaches that the Church is the kingdom of God, that God's kingdom has been established for almost 2,000 years since the establishment of the Church on the Day of Pentecost (A.D.33) and we can be citizens in that divine and heavenly kingdom right now. Almost all other religious groups teach that the kingdom of God is yet to come on earth, and still pray that part of the Lord's Prayer which petitions God, "*Thy kingdom come.*"

Many religious groups believe that Christ will return to earth and set up an earthly kingdom, with headquarters in Jerusalem, thus ushering in the millennial age foretold in Revelation 20:1-6. This teaching contradicts many very plain passages in the Bible.

While Jesus did tell His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount that they should pray for the coming of God's kingdom (Matt. 6:10), He told them later in His ministry that the kingdom of God would come with power during their lifetime . . . or at least while some who were listening to Him were still alive. He said, "*Verily I say unto you, that there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power*" (Mk. 9:1, Lk. 9:27). That it did come with power on the Day of Pentecost after Christ's resurrection is attested to by Acts, Chapter 2. In fact, the apostles were told to wait in Jerusalem for that heavenly power (Lk. 24:49). Those who pray for the kingdom of God to come either are ignorant of or disbelieve Jesus' emphatic statement that it would come during the lifetime of some of His listeners when He was on earth.

The theme and subject of the Bible is "The kingdom of God." The kingdom being the spiritual apparatus and structure of authority by which God Almighty governs His creation. Divine government was overthrown in the Garden of Eden when man rebelled against God's authority and disobeyed His commandment. The church is the re-establishment of God's government over all mankind through Christ and the gospel. Those who believe God and His Word, who accept the authority and Word of Christ as the authority and Word of God and obey it, are accepted by God as His people, His children, and members of His family.

During the forty days between His resurrection from the dead and His ascension into heaven, Jesus met with His apostles repeatedly conferring with them and giving them instructions concerning the Church and kingdom which was to be established in a very few days at Jerusalem. "*He showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God* (Acts 1:3).

Peter in his sermon on Pentecost made the climax of his proclamation to the Jews that God had fulfilled His promise to David by raising up Christ and seating Him on His throne at His right hand in heaven (Acts 2:29-36).

From Pentecost onward, the kingdom is spoken of as an accomplished fact. No

longer is it "at hand" – it is here! Again and again, Jesus the King is spoken of as ruling and reigning at the right hand of God on high. Paul says, *"Then comes the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet . . . for He has put all things under His feet"* (1 Cor. 15:24-28). The saints and faithful brethren at Colossae were told that they had been *"delivered from the power of darkness and had been translated into the kingdom of His dear Son"* (Col. 1:13).

The writer of Hebrews calls the church the kingdom – *"a kingdom which cannot be shaken,"* and says that we have received it (Heb. 12:23-29). The apostle John said, *"I, John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ,"* meaning that he was in the kingdom with them – almost 2,000 years ago! Obviously, John and those to whom he wrote, could not have been companions in the kingdom if the kingdom had not yet been established!

The very first time that Jesus ever mentioned the church, He called it the kingdom, and said that He would give Peter the keys to it (Matt. 16:18). It would, of course, have been absurd for Jesus to give the apostle Peter the keys to open the gates of something that would not have even come into existence for thousands of years after Peter was dead – which is what those claim who teach that the kingdom of God has not yet been established upon earth.

Jesus told his little band of disciples, *"Fear not, little flock; for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"* (Lk. 12:32). Yet most religious bodies today teach that all this little flock died without ever having received the kingdom.

The theme and subject of Jesus' preaching was the kingdom of God, the rule of heaven over the earth. Like John the Baptist who prepared the way for Him, Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven was at hand (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). We are told that *"Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom"* (Matt. 4:23; 9:35). In His discourses, He set forth the laws of His kingdom. He began the Sermon on the Mount by announcing that the kingdom would belong not to the proud and arrogant, but to the poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3). Most of His parables had to do with different aspects of the kingdom, such as the ten parables set forth in Matthew Chapters 13 and 25. He said, *"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come"* (Matt. 24:14). He said that He was sent into the world to preach the kingdom of God (Lk. 4:43). The message of the Old Testament is, "The kingdom is coming." The message of the New Testament is, "The kingdom is here!"

God had promised David that He would establish His kingdom through him, through his seed and family (II Sam. 7:12-17). God said, *"I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish forever, and build up thy throne to all generations . . . also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth . . . Once I have sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established forever as the moon and as a faithful witness in heaven"* (Psa. 89:3,4, 27-29, 35-37). Isaiah spoke repeatedly of the eternal government that God would establish upon earth through the house and seed of David, as did also the other prophets of Israel (Isa. 9:6,7; 11:1, 10; Jer. 22:29; 23:5,6; 33:20,21; Amos 9:11,12, Mic. 5:2,4; Zech. 3:8,9; 6:12,13, 9:10). Zechariah said, *"In that day . . . the house of David shall be as God . . . In that day there shall be a fountain opened up to the House of David . . . for sin and for uncleanness"* (Zech. 12:8; 13:1).

It is startling and significant that the very opening statement of the New Testament

is, *"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David"* (Matt. 1:1).

The angel Gabriel told Mary that she would bring forth a son and call his name "Jesus." The angel said, *"He shall be great, and shall be called the son of the Highest. and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David and He shall reign over the House of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end"* (Lk. 1:30-33).

The prophet Daniel, interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream, said that it meant that in the days of the fourth world empire after the Babylonian, *"the God of Heaven shall set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever"* (Dan. 2:44). The Babylonian Empire was succeeded by the Medo-Persians, and the Medo-Persians by the Greeks, and the Greeks by the Romans – so the prophecy was that in the days of the Roman Empire, God would establish His eternal divine kingdom on earth. Luke tells us that the reason that Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem when Jesus was born was because *"a decree went out from Augustus Caesar that all the world should be taxed"* (Lk. 2:1). So Jesus made his appearance in the world and the Church was established and the kingdom of Christ was set up on earth, in the days of the fourth world empire after Nebuchadnezzar, just as Daniel had foretold. Daniel had a vision of the coming kingdom of Christ. He said, *"I saw in the night visions and behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom that all people, nations, and languages should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed . . . But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever . . . And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him"* (Dan. 7:13,14,18,27).

That Jesus Christ is that Son of mankind whom Daniel saw in his vision, being given an everlasting kingdom, a divine government over all peoples, everywhere and for all time and eternity, and that the Church is that government and kingdom, and that Jesus is now reigning over that kingdom, enthroned at the right hand of God on High, is made abundantly clear by numerous emphatic statements in the New Testament, beginning with Jesus' pronouncement after His resurrection, *"All authority has been given unto me, in heaven and on earth . . ."* (Matt. 28:18).

Paul sums it all up when he says that God has *"raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come: And has put all things under His feet, and has made Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him is, who fills all in all"* (Eph. 1:20-23).

That God rules His creation through Christ, and that Christ will rule it through His people, His flock, His church, His kingdom, which He is calling out of the world unto Himself right now, through the gospel, is taught repeatedly in the New Testament. *"If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him . . ."* (II Tim. 2:12). *"To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my, Father in His throne"* (Rev. 3:21). Concerning that eternal city the New Jerusalem, the center of power and authority for God's final and eternal and perfect order which is identified as the Church in its glorified state by the writer of Hebrews, we read: *"And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve*

*Him: and they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light; and they shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 22:3-5).*

## **THE ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH ON EARTH**

All collective human endeavors, in order to be successful, must have organization. Organization requires leadership, supervision, oversight, authority, and responsibility. There are three divinely ordained organizations or institutions in human society (1) the home, (2) the Church, (3) the State. Each of which is a structure of authority and relationships. The head of the home is the husband and father; the head of the state is the leader designated as such in each country, and the head of the Church is Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:22,23; 5:23-33; Col.1:13-19).

There is a plain, simple pattern of church organization and authority through which Christ rules His church, set forth in the New Testament. Each local congregation is independent, autonomous (self-governing) and organizationally separate from all other congregations. Each congregation governs itself, according to the commandments and divinely given examples set forth in the New Testament . . . by Jesus Christ through His apostles, through a body of overseers (bishops, elders) who are appointed in keeping with certain strict qualifications set forth in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. All true New Testament churches have the same form of church government and organization, unless they do not yet have men who are qualified for the eldership – in which case they are in the process of developing such men because there is one and only one pattern of church organization and government set forth in the New Testament. Organizationally, the New Testament Church exists only as a local congregation. There can be no organization larger than or other than the local congregation which constitutes the Church – umbrella of ecclesiastical authority over more than one congregation.

It is interesting to note that in all ages and dispensations, God has ruled His people through a body of men called "elders" – the word "elder" meaning "older." The words "elder" and "senator" mean the same thing, semantically and linguistically – the Roman Senate being the supreme ruling Council of the ancient Roman Republic made up of "old men – seniors" and giving its name through the centuries, to the highest ruling body in secular society in almost a countries of the Western world. In the Patriarchal Age, we know that God ruled His people Israel through elders, because when God appeared to Moses at the burning bush, he told him to go down to Egypt *"and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them . . . "* (Ex. 3:16). We are then told, *"And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel, and Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses"* (Ex. 4.29).

At the very beginning of the Mosaic Dispensation, God instructed Moses to pick seventy elders of Israel, and take them with him and Aaron up into Mt. Sinai, (Ex. 24:1), and later God instructed Moses to pick seventy men of the elders of Israel to take with him into the tabernacle, and there confer with God, and hear him as He spoke to Moses, and to be set apart as a special body to *"bear the burden of the people"* with Moses and to receive the Spirit of God, as Moses had received it. (Num. 11:16,17). Ancient Jewish historical writings refer to this as the founding of the Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish ruling body over the centuries . . . also called "The Elders of Zion."

At the very outset of the Christian Dispensation, elders were appointed in every

congregation of the Lord's Church (Acts 16:4; 20:17; Tit. 1: 5; Phil. 1:1). Even though the twelve apostles were headquartered in Jerusalem, still, elders were appointed in the Church there, and when the great council was called, as recorded in Acts 15 to decide the profoundly important doctrinal questions concerning the church and the Christian religion, the elders shared with the apostles in the decision-making process, and co-signed with the apostles, the decree that went out to the Church at Antioch, Syria, Cilicia, and everywhere (Acts 15:23).

Not only has God governed His people through elders throughout time, but there is evidence that He will continue to do so throughout eternity, When the apostle John was taken up into heaven to behold the throne of God, he saw around the throne a body of twenty-four elders with crowns of gold upon their heads. These thrones and crowns and their proximity to God's throne above could well mean that there will be a body of elders ruling over God's eternal order. We can say then that God always has and probably always will govern His people through a ruling body called the "elders."

Let it be repeated here that there is no organization of the Lord's church larger than or other than the local congregation with its elders, deacons and ministers – the deacons being those appointed to a subsidiary office of the Church as servants who fulfill the qualifications set forth in I Timothy 3:8-13. The ministers are, of course, the evangelists who work under the oversight of the elders in each local congregation.

The elders (also called bishops, overseers and shepherds) of the Lord's Church have only executive and administrative authority over the Church as a local body. All legislative authority is vested in Christ and His Word. It is the elders responsibility to see that the law of Christ is applied and implemented and that the Word, the gospel, is preached and proclaimed without addition, subtraction, or emendation or change of any kind. It is their job to keep order and discipline in the flock of God, and to see that the flock is fed and in every way taken care of.

There is always a plurality of elders in each congregation, and no elder has any greater authority than any other. In fact, no elder has any authority at all as an individual. It is the Eldership that possesses authority, and each individual elder is under the authority of the Eldership just the same as is any other member of the congregation. If any member of the congregation has any authority as an individual, whether he be an elder, deacon, teacher, or whomever, it is because the Eldership has delegated that authority to him. For example, one person might be put in charge of the teaching program, another of the personal work program, another of song-leading, another in charge of the upkeep of building and grounds. The authority that the Eldership delegates, it can withdraw.

In addition to the scriptures already alluded to, it is recommended that the following be read: Acts 20:17, 28; Rom. 12:8; I Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:7,17, 20,24; I Pet. 5:1-7; Phil. 1:1,11; Jn. 1:1,11; I Jn. 1:1; Jer. 23:4.

The great apostasy, or falling away from the truth, that took place within the Church, resulting finally in the emergence of "one man rule" and the converting of the Church into an absolute spiritual dictatorship with the Pope of Rome putting himself in the place of the Word of God, took place because the New Testament pattern of congregational self-government under a plurality. Elders drawn from the membership of the local congregation was replaced by a man-made pyramid of corporate authority. It all started with the replacement of the God-given system in which a plurality of Bishops ruled one congregation, by a man-made system of church government in which a plurality of congregations were ruled by one Bishop – and finally the whole church was ruled by one Bishop.

The church of Christ is comprised of all the congregations of true New Testament



Christians which are on earth, bound together as one body in and under Christ the head – filled with His spirit, carrying on His work, proclaiming His Word, and united by the bonds of a common faith, love, and fellowship.

The church of Christ has no earthly headquarters. Its headquarters are in heaven. From each local congregation, the reins of control and authority reach up to the throne of Jesus Christ, seated at the right hand of God above. No single individual or group of individuals can ever gain control of the church of the Lord, compartmentalized as it is into thousands of completely separate and independent bodies of believers. Each body governs itself through its own elders and is answerable to no other authority except Christ.

For many reasons, is most important that the simple New Testament pattern of church government be adhered to. Quite obviously, any church which does not adhere to it is NOT a New Testament church . . . the divine, spiritual order we read about in the Bible.

Finally, it is most important to point out that Jesus Christ established and reigns over a heavenly kingdom which is *"not of this world"* – a totally non-political divine order which is completely separated from the governments of this world.

Jesus told Pilate, *"My kingdom is not of this world"* (Jn. 18:36), and he had previously said when asked if it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar – *"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God, the things that are God's"* (Matt. 22:21). This clearly draws a line of separation between God's kingdom and Caesar's.

All the governments of this earth, without exception are, have been and will be, founded upon force and violence upon military and police power (i.e., coercion). The kingdom and church of Christ, which is the kingdom and church of God, is founded upon the Word, upon truth, upon Christ who is the Word and truth (Jn. 1:1; 14:6), upon faith, hope, and love, and freedom. *"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* (Jn. 8.32). *"Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty"* (II Cor. 3:17).

The principle of an absolute separation of Church and State is one of the most basic of all New Testament doctrines.

# LESSON 4

## THE CHURCH AS A SPIRITUAL COMMUNION OF FAITH, FELLOWSHIP, WORSHIP AND LOVE

(John 17:13-26)

In the previous lesson, we have focused primarily upon the Church as a structure of divine authority, law, and truth; the moral government and spiritual kingdom of God on earth and among men. In this lesson, we shall focus upon the church as a structure and context of loving relationships between man and God, and between man and his fellow members of the Lord's family.

Truth cuts, divides, and separates. Love mends, heals, unites and integrates. Divine truth and divine love are each necessary to the family of God. God has mingled truth and love together in a mysterious and special way in the bringing into being, and sustaining of His family "*God is love*" (1 Jn. 4.8). Christ is truth. He said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. . .*" (Jn. 14.6).

Truth separates and sets us apart from the world, as a special people belonging to God; having a completely different relationship to God and to each other than does the rest of mankind. Love unites us to God and to each other in God's holy family so that God, Christ, and the Church are indivisibly and inseparably ONE, for time and eternity. We are commanded to "*speak the truth in Love*" (Eph. 4.15). Truth is hard and inflexible. Love is soft and yielding.

In His prayer in the upper room in Jerusalem, He prayed just before He went to the cross. Jesus said to the Father of His disciples, "*I have given them thy word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world*" (Jn. 17.14). He repeated again, "*They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world*" (verse 16). What is it that took and takes Jesus' disciples out of the world? It was and is the Word of God that Jesus has delivered to His disciples!

He said, "*Sanctify them through my truth: Thy word is truth*" (Jn. 17.17). To "sanctify" means to "set apart," "dedicate and consecrate" to the use and service of God. So when we receive the Word of God, we are drawn AWAY from the world and TOWARD God. When we obey that Word, we become ONE. God, in Christ, spiritually united with them so that we become a part of God and He is a part of us.

Jesus went on to pray and say, "*Neither pray for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word, That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me, And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me*" (Jn. 17.20-23).

As we read and re-read these words, we are awed by what they say. They say that, through receiving the Word which God has given to us through Christ, we are severed from the world and its dark destiny, and are lifted up to a status and a glory to a relationship with the Father, like Christ Himself. God's love and grace manifested through Christ, lifts us to the level of divine beings, so that we are united with God in Christ, so that we achieve a oneness with them and with each other which is, as has been stated, indivisible and inseparable!

In this wondrous prayer, Jesus explicitly states that He is not praying for the world,

but for His disciples, the Church which is a part of Him and which glorifies Him and the Father: *"For I have given unto them thy words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them"* (Jn. 17.8-10).

Not only was Jesus praying for His apostles, but for all of us who, through the ages, receive the Word and believe on Him through the words which the apostles have given to us, which Christ gave to them, and which God gave to Christ. He said, *"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word"* (Jn. 17.20). In other words, Jesus was praying for you and me, there in the upper room, on the eve of His crucifixion!

He concludes His prayer by saying, *"And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it, that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in thee and I in them"* (Jn. 17.26).

Of course, God loves the whole world so much that He sent His only begotten Son into the world to die on the cross, *"that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (Jn. 3:16). But God loves His own family with a different kind of love. They are a part of Him. All that He has, He will ultimately give to them for *"He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be His God and he shall be my son"* (Rev. 21:7). *"Behold what love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God, and so we are the reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Him"* (I Jn. 3:1 – RSP).

Just as a farmer loves all the creatures on his farm and cares for them, making sure they have plenty to eat and protection from harm, so does God love all His creation. But just as the farmer loves his own children with a special love – infinitely higher, deeper, broader more intense than the love with which he loves anything else, so does God love His family.

## **LOVE, LOVE, LOVE**

Above all other things, the church of God is the embodiment of love, because *"God is love,"* (Jn. 4.8), and the church like Christ, is an embodiment of God (Jn. 14:23). Love is the very essence of God's nature and the first fruit of His spirit (Gal. 5:22; I Jn. 4:7-16). Love is the greatest commandment (Matt. 22:36-40). Love is the "Royal Law" of God – the law which fulfills all other laws and without which no other law is of any ultimate value or any other virtue of any importance (Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8; I Cor. 13:1-3,13). God's grace by which we are saved is but an expression of God's love (Eph. 2:8). A divine love which originates with God and is reflected by us back to Him and out to our fellow man. The scriptures teach that our love for God is a response to and an expression/reflection of His love for us. *"We love Him because He first loved us"* (I Jn. 4:19). No person can love God and not also love his brother who God has within him. In other words, it is ridiculous to say we love God in heaven and not love him on earth, for He dwells within His people on earth (II Cor. 6:16; Rom. 8:9-14).

*"If a man says he loves God' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment have we from Him, That he who loves God love his brother also"* (I Jn. 4.20,21).

There is much argument among theologians and commentators as to just what is Satan's identifying mark on men at a certain period in history spoken of in Revelation 13:16-18 – the "*Mark of the beast.*" But while there maybe endless disagreement about what might be the "**Mark of the beast,**" there is no controversy at all, nor any disagreement about, what is the identifying mark of Christ – the "Mark of the Lamb," everywhere and at all times. Jesus said, "*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love for one another (Jn. 13:34,35).*"

What is love and how shall we define it? In the 13th chapter of I Corinthians, we have a divinely given exposition of what love is and what it does. Let us read and discuss it for it expresses in one word what God's Family, the Church, is all about: I Corinthians 13: "*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*"

## **THE CHURCH AS A HOLY PRIESTHOOD AND SPIRITUAL TEMPLE**

When people speak of the church, they are usually referring to a building constructed of brick, stone, or wood; a house of worship. In the New Testament, however, the Church is never a physical structure made of earthly materials, but is always a spiritual structure comprised of the souls of the redeemed, the dwelling place of God. Similarly, when people speak of a priest or of the priesthood, they are usually thinking of a man or group of men dressed in special clothing, designated as clergy, who are to be addressed using special titles of respect or reverence, such as "Father" or "Reverend." These priests pose as special intermediaries between God and mankind and are supposed to possess special spiritual powers and prerogatives which the laity (non-priests) do not possess.

In the New Testament, a faithful members of the Lord's Family are elevated to the status and office of the priesthood and are equally able to approach the throne of God through the great High Priest, Jesus Christ. These priests of the New Dispensation of Jesus Christ wear a special clothing, but it is a spiritual clothing. They are "*clothed with Christ,*" having put Him on in baptism (Gal. 3:26-29) and are clothed with the robes of righteousness (Rev. 19:8; Eph. 5:26,27; Rev. 7:9,14) . . . not their righteousness, but Christ's (II Cor. 5:21). They have a special mark by which they are known as the priests of the new order – the love of Christ in their hearts and lives for each other (Jn. 13:35,36).

Christ strictly forbade priests to take any titles or to elevate themselves one above the other in any way (Matt. 23:8,9; Matt. 20:25-28).

As priests of the most high God, we are all able to go into the throne-room of God, through the "*new and living way*" (Heb. 10:19,20) which is Christ Jesus. No one, but NO ONE can go to God except through the High Priest, Jesus Christ (Jn.14:6). He is our High Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec (Heb. 7:17-21; Psa.110:4).

One entire book of the New Testament, Hebrews, is devoted primarily to the subject of the priesthood of all the members of God's family, and the Most High priesthood of Christ, replacing the Levitical priesthood of the Old Covenant through which the children of Israel worshiped God. In fact, it was this change of the priesthood which necessitated and brought about the change of the law for *"the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law"* (Heb. 7:12). (See also: Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14,15; 5:1,10; 6:20, all of the 7th Chapter, 8:1,3; 9:7,11,25; 13:11; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

The apostle Peter combines the concepts of priesthood and temple in referring to the Church as a body of rulers/worshippers within whom God makes His habitation and through whom He works. *"Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ . . . ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light"* (I Pet. 2:5,9).

Again and again, we are told in the gospel that we who belong to Christ constitute a living temple, made of living stones, as a habitation for the living God. (See I Cor. 3:16,17; II Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:10-22; Rev. 3:12; 21:22).

All acceptable worship of God must be *"in spirit and in truth"* (Jn. 4:24); that is, it must be conducted in the right spirit of holiness, reverence, and obedience to God, and in accord with the teachings of His Word, which is the truth (Jn. 17:17). It must be directed by the Holy Spirit, through the Word.

The family of God meets each first day of the week to commemorate the Lord's death and resurrection in the Lord's Supper, to sing, pray, study God's Word, hear it preached, and to give as each one has been prospered, for the carrying on of the Lord's work. This is in keeping with the commandments and examples that we have been given in the New Testament. The Church also meets at other times during the week as a rule, as designated by its Elders.

Christians are commanded *"not forsake the assembling of themselves together"* (Heb. 10:25). Jesus promised, *"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them"* (Matt. 18:20). The Church established on Pentecost met everyday (Acts 2:46). The Jews, under the law, were commanded to set aside one whole day, every week, for the worship of God and service to Him. This was the Sabbath (Ex. 20:8). Jesus went to the synagogue every Sabbath and participated in the worship of God there (Lk. 4:16).

For further instructions concerning our worship under the New Covenant, see Acts 2:42; Matt. 26:26-30; I Cor. 11:20-30; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:2; II Cor. 9:7; Psa. 96:9; Matt. 4:10.

There are only two rites or symbolic rituals in the Christian religion: (1) Baptism (2) The Lord's Supper. In both of them the Christian symbolically and spiritually participates in the death of Christ and is united with Christ in His death (Rom. 6:3,4; I Cor. 11:26).

# LESSON 5

## THE CHURCH

### AS THE EMBODIMENT OF CHRIST UPON EARTH

**Memory:**

John 14:20

John 17:14-23

Ephesians 1:20-23

Ephesians 2:16

Ephesians 3:17-21

Ephesians 4:4-6

Ephesians 5:23-33

Colossians 1:18-27

Colossians 2:19

Revelation 3:20

The marvel and mystery of the incarnation of God in Christ is matched by the marvel and mystery of the incarnation of Christ in His Church. That Christ is in His Church, that it is His body (embodiment), an incarnation or enfleshment of Himself, is taught again and again in the scriptures. Just as Christ is one with the Father, so is the Church one with the Son, and is an extension and projection of Jesus Christ upon earth. He is the head, we are the body. Just as we do everything that we do through our bodies and through the members of our bodies, so does Christ do all that He does in the physical realm through His Body and its members, the Church, and those who are members of His Church.

The Church is called "Christ" in I Corinthians 12:12. In verse 13, we are told that all who are a part of Christ or members of His body have been baptized into it (Him). This tells us how we become a part of Christ and/or His body. It is by baptism, the birth of water and the spirit, which is referred to as the means of our incorporation into Christ and His Church, time after time (Jn. 3:3-5; Rom. 6:34; Gal. 3:26-29).

Israel of old, which was a prototype and preview of the Church, the new and spiritual Israel of God (Gal. 6:16; 3:29; Heb. 8:8) was frequently referred to as a vine, and as the bride or wife of God (Hos. 10: 1; Psa. 80:8-19; Isa. 5:1-7; Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 19:10 and Judg. 2:17; 8:27; Psa. 106:39; Ezek. 6:9; 20:30; 23:35; Hos. 4:12; 5:4; 9:1). So is the Church referred to frequently as the bride of Christ and, therefore, one with Him. In John 15:1-8, Christ calls Himself the vine, and this figure of speech fits in perfectly with the Church being Himself, and the members of the Church being members therefore of Christ who is embodied by the Church, and branches of the true vine/church.

From all this, we learn that the Church is a divine spiritual organism, carrying on the work of Jesus Christ in the world. In fact, the Church is Christ, working in the world for the destruction of the kingdom of Satan for the sowing of the seed of the divine kingdom; for the seeking and saving of the lost; the bearing of testimony to the truth; for the preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God (I Jn. 3:8; Lk. 8:11; II Tim. 4:2; Lk. 19:10; Jn. 18:37; Luke 4:43).

On numerous occasions, Jesus made it plain that His family, the Church, was to be equated with Himself, so that whatever is done to any member of the Church is done to Christ Himself. In the parable of the Last Judgement (Matt. 25:31-46), Jesus made the basis for eternal salvation or damnation the treatment one had given to His brethren (i.e., members of His family, the Church). He said to the saved that they could enter into the joys of everlasting life because they had given Him food and drink, friendship and shelter, clothes and visitation in prison. When the saved confessed ignorance as to when they had done all these things for the Lord, he said, *"Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me"* (Matt. 25:40). The damned were separated from the Lord forever, and were cast into the lake of everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels, precisely because they failed to render

succor and assistance to the brethren of Christ (Matt. 25:45).

And who precisely, are the brethren of Christ to whom help and aid of all kinds must be given if we are to be saved? Jesus makes this clear in Matthew 12:46-50. He says, *"While He (Jesus) yet talked to the people, behold, His mother and His brethren stood outside, asking to speak to Him. But He replied to the man who told him, who is my mother, and who are my brothers? And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother."*

So we see that those who obey the Word of God, are the family of Christ and no one else. The Word of God is the gospel of Christ (Heb. 1:1; I Pet. 1:25).

Saul of Tarsus, who after his conversion became the apostle Paul, was the leader of the Jewish persecution of the Church of the Lord. He was *"breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord"* and was on his way to Damascus, Syria Jerusalem for with letters from the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem to arrest and bring Jesus to trial and imprisonment all Jewish members of the Church of Christ in Damascus. Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus road and said to him, *"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:4)*. In other words, Jesus considered Saul's persecution of the Church as persecution of Himself. Jesus and His family, the Church, are ONE – One entity with God, the Father. In Hebrews 2:11-13 we read: *"For both he that sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all one, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto thee."*

Jesus said that after His resurrection His disciples would know that He was united with the Father – a part of God – and that He, Christ, was a part of and united with His disciples, and His disciples were a part of Him. *"In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you "* (Jn. 14:20).

The doctrine of the indwelling Christ is so important that no one who does not have God in Christ living within himself can be said to belong to Christ. We are told, *"You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom. 8.9)*. That *"Christ is in us"* is the *"hope of glory" (Col. 1:27)*.

There is only one absolutely necessary prerequisite, only one indispensable requirement to our having the divine life and to our having God and Christ within us, and that is that we obey the Word of Christ, the gospel of Christ, which is the Word of God. Jesus said, *"If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me" (Jn. 14.23,24)*.

We are told, *"He became the author of eternal salvation to all them who obey Him" (Heb. 5:9)*.

*"All who keep His commandments abide in Him, and He in them And by this we know that He abides in us, by the spirit which He has given us" (I Jn. 3:24)*.

*"Whoever keeps His word, in him truly love for God is perfected By this we may be sure that we are in Him" (I Jn. 2:5)*.

## **THE CHURCH AS A SINLESS AND PERFECT BODY**

Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, is sinless and perfect. He is a High Priest who is *"holy, blameless, unstained, separated from: sinners, exalted above the heavens"* (Heb. 7:26). He is our great High Priest, who has, in every respect, been tempted as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). He *"committed no sin"* (I Pet. 2:22). He was a lamb *"without blemish or spot"* (I Pet. 1:18). Is the sinless High Priest, the head of a priesthood which is deeply stained with sin? Is the Church, the embodiment of a perfect and sinless Savior and Lord, itself a flawed and imperfect body? No, of course not. Such could not be. If the head is perfect, the body has to be! And it is – perfect with a perfection which is bestowed upon it – a perfection which could never be achieved by it, but which God confers upon it and gives to it, by His grace.

*"For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are sanctified"* (Heb. 10:14). *"In Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."*

The all-important statement in the above passage is *"not counting their trespasses against them."* *"For our sake, He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God"* (II Cor. 5:18-21).

Our sins are not imputed (charged) to us if we are in the body of Christ. They are charged to Christ, who is our sin-bearer. Our sins are covered by the blood of the Lamb, who made full atonement and propitiation for them on the cross (Rom. 4:7,8; I Jn. 2:2; 4:10).

John says, *"If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin"* (I Jn. 1:7). The Greek word for "cleanses" here is *"katharidzai"* which means "to remove," and is used here in the present tense, meaning that the cleansing and removing of our sin is continuous. In verse 5 we are told, *"God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all."* Therefore, to *"walk in the light"* is to walk in God . . . to ever move and have our being *"in Him."* And how do we know that we are in God and therefore *"in the light?"* *"Whosoever keeps His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him"* (I Jn. 2:5). So, as long as we are in obedience to God's Word, we are walking in the light, and the blood of Christ cleanses, and keeps on cleansing us from all sin.

The body of Christ, the Church, is constantly and completely cleansed of its sin, and perfected by the blood of Jesus. It is for that reason, a perfect and sinless body, just as its head is perfect and sinless. Its sins are not imputed to it, but to its head and Savior.

## **THE GLORIOUS INHERITANCE OF THE SAINTS IN LIGHT**

The members of the Lord's family and Church are called *"saints"* throughout the scriptures. In his letter to the *"saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colossae"* (Col, 1:2), Paul entreats them and us to give *"thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins"* (Col. 1:12,13).

The scriptures teach that the family of God will inherit all things, eternal life, our place in heaven, the dominion, power, and glory that will be given to God's children, will



be given to them because they are God's children, and for no other reason. In other words, heaven will be our home, not because of what we do, but because of who we are. Our eternal destiny will be decided on the basis of our identity. What we do here on earth, establishes that identity as members of the divine family – heirs of God, fellow-heirs with Christ of the indescribable glory and power of the world to come.

*"The spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer, that we may also be glorified together" (Rom. 8:16,17).*

*"All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (I Cor. 3:21-23).*

*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By His great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you . . . " (I Pet. 1:3,4).*

*"Everyone who has forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold and shall inherit everlasting life" (Matt. 19:29).*

*"Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34).*

*"He who overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be His God, and he shall be my Son" (Rev. 21:7).*

### **PLEASE NOTE:**

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