

Christ and His Church

For believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Church is the most precious place on earth, it is the household of God (1Ti 3:15). The Church is precious because *“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her”* (Eph 5:25). In this lesson we shall consider just a few of the essential truths of Christ and His Church.

The Church is not a building, and it is not a manmade religious organization. Rather, the Church is made of repentant sinners, who, upon salvation were immediately placed into the universal body of Christ, the Church (1Co 12:12-13).

This body of believers are the Bride of Jesus Christ (2Co 11:2; Eph 5:23-32; Rev 19:7-8), spiritually born again by the Holy Spirit with Jesus Christ as head (Eph 1:22; 4:15; Col 1:18). It is Jesus, who *“has freed us from our sins by his blood⁶ and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever”* (Rev 1:5-6). Therefore, the Church is the human expression of Jesus Christ in the absence of Jesus' physical body on earth.

The Church is seen in 2 ways on earth. First, the Church universal is the worldwide Church which is made up of all believers in Christ as Lord and Saviour. *“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”*¹⁴ *For the body does not consist of one member but of many”* (1Co 12:13-14).

Second, the local Church is the smaller groupings of believers seen in many different locations around the world. Paul described local Churches in Galatians 1:1–2, *“Paul, an apostle... and all the brothers with me, to the churches in Galatia.”* We see that in the province of Galatia, Paul said there were many churches, they were localized Christian ministries and were located throughout the province. They were local churches.

While there is only one worldwide Church universal, there are many local Churches. While believers are spiritually baptized into the Church universal, they must choose which local Church congregation they are to be a member of.

“The New Testament instructs those who are part of the universal church in every generation, scattered throughout the world, to meet together regularly in local assemblies.

Such was clearly the pattern of the early church (cf. Acts 14: 23, 27; 20: 17, 28; 1 Cor. 11: 18– 20; Gal. 1: 2; 1 Thess. 1: 1). In keeping with that paradigm, the author of Hebrews offers this directive, “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb. 10: 24– 25).”

(MacArthur, John; Mayhue, Richard. Biblical Doctrine)

In the first century, following the birth of the Church at Pentecost (Acts 2), Church membership was less complex because there was typically only one local Church in a city. Plus, there were no denominations. The Church was simply the Church, with no Baptist, no Brethren, and no Methodist etc. There was only the Church universal who gathered in local Church assemblies.

The primary purpose for the Church is to glorify God the Father (Jn 17:1-6), *“to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen”* (Eph 3:21). This is achieved through Jesus Christ, in the energy of the Holy Spirit (Jn 16:12-15; 1Co 10:31; 1Pe 5:10). The Church accomplishes glory for God through worship (Jn 4:21-23; Rom 12:1; Php 3:3), through building

itself up in the faith with God's Word (2Ti 2:2, 15; 3:16-17), through fellowship and keeping the ordinances (Communion and Water Baptism) accompanied by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world (Ac 1:8) and making disciples of Jesus Christ (Mat 28:19-20).

Because the Church is Christ's body, the Church is responsible for glorifying the Father as Christ glorifies the Father. Therefore, as the body of Christ, the Church is to manifest the character of Christ and continue Christ's work on earth with a divine focus.

This simple but bold purpose of the Church gets the enemy's attention. Satan is at war with God and at war with the Church of Jesus Christ. As the apostle Paul discovered, *"again and again... Satan hindered us"* (1 Thessalonians 2:18). Satan goes to extraordinary lengths to infiltrate and damage the body of Christ. Satan skilfully introduces *"false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ."*¹⁴ *And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.*¹⁵ *So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds"* (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). Satan carefully inserts his people into

local congregations. They are often *“fierce wolves (who) will come in among you, not sparing the flock”* (Acts 20:29). They are often *“scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.”*¹⁹ *It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit”* (Jude 1:18-19). Just as the Church is precious to God, the church is also the enemy of Satan.

As the Church is assigned with such an exalted responsibility, glorying God through the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is assigned to equip the Church for the mission. The Holy Spirit produces spiritual rebirth (Jn 3:5; Tit 3:5), baptizing every true believer into Christ’s body (Act 1:5). He also imputes each believer with the righteousness of Christ (Rom 8:10; 14:17), sealing and securing an unchangeable salvation (Eph 1:13-14). Unmistakably, the Holy Spirit gives evidence of His presence in a life by *“the fruit of the Spirit, (which) is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*²³ *gentleness, self-control”* (Galatians 5:22-23).

The Holy Spirit also gifts every believer with unique giftedness to serve and build up the body (1Co 12:7-9). To protect and maintain Christ’s body, the Holy Spirit also provides believers with armour (Eph 6:10-18). With His

armour, the Holy Spirit also provides a weapon to defend the body, which the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Eph 6:17).

Therefore, the Church is equipped with everything needed to glorify God. The challenge rests with each body of believers, will they take up God's resources and accomplish their mission of glorification?

Israel and the Church

A significant part of understanding the Church, is understanding the Church's relationship with Israel. Galatians 3:28 states the equality that exists between Jew and Gentile in Christ, in the Church. *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (See also Col 3:11). God is presently at work; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, building His multicultural international Church.

Care should be taken to maintain the biblical integrity of both ethnic Israel and the Church. Attempting to amalgamate the two creates serious Bible interpretation (hermeneutical) problems. Old Testament promises, judgements, or instructions applied specifically to Israel

should never be spiritualized or allegorized, then wrongly applied to the New Testament Church or Gentile believers.

From the beginning, the Lord has clearly stated the nature of His relationship with Israel. *“For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth”* (Deu 7:6).

God has not finished with Israel, and He shall sovereignly re-engage the nation of Israel to bring to fulfilment every promise yet unfulfilled. Again, in Romans 11, Paul presents detailed information relating to Israel and Gentiles. *“I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”*²⁶ *And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, ‘The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob’;*²⁷ *“and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins”* (Rom 11:25-27. See also Daniel 9:24-26).

The New Testament uses the word Israel approximately seventy times, of which, most refer to Ethnic (The cultural group of people) Israel. These references refer to either the

nation of Israel as a whole or a group of Jewish people. Therefore, when the New Testament speaks of Israel, the normal sense of national Israel is being spoken of. The apostle Paul speaks to this matter in Romans 11:1-2 by asking and answering an all-important question. *“Has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.”* Israel has not been rejected, nor has she been superseded, replaced, or had her identity changed. The Israel that God *foreknew* by His sovereign will and power, He still holds onto. Paul continues to explain, *“so too at the present time there is a remnant (of Israel), chosen by grace”* (Rom 11:5). The immutable character of God will not change His relationship with Israel, even though Israel lives in disobedience to Him at present.

Some teachers insist that the Church has replaced Israel, with all the Old Testament blessings promised to Israel being transferred to the New Testament Church. This teaching is known as "replacement theology, or supersessionism" and it insists that the Church is the new Israel. The danger of this teaching is that the distinctions

between Israel and the Church which are taught throughout the New Testament are lost (1Co 10:32).

In Romans 9:3-5, Paul states the permanent nature of Israel's identity and her relationship to Yahweh. Paul speaks as a Jew when he says, *"my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh."* ⁴ *They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.* ⁵ *To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen."*

As the New Testament distinguishes Israel from the Church, so believers should also maintain that same distinction.

Today, a Jewish person comes to repentant faith in Christ the same as a Gentile. And upon salvation, they are both baptized into the body of Christ, the Church. Therefore, a Jewish believer is included in the Church with all Gentile believers, but this does NOT change their ethnic identity or inheritance as being an Israelite.

The unity between Jewish and Gentile believers in the Church today changes nothing of Israel's relationship to God. God keeps all His Old Testament covenant promises to Israel. The church also shares in the blessings of the new

covenant with Jewish believers (Luk 22:20; 2Co 3:3-8; Heb 8:7-13; 9:15), but this does NOT alter the existing Old Testament promises to Israel.

Headship of the Church

When God, who is the Father of all glory (Eph 1:17) exercised His great power in raising Jesus Christ from the dead, He *“seated him (Jesus) at his right hand in the heavenly places,²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come”* (Eph 1:20-21. See also Col 1:18). The Lord Jesus Christ reigns supreme over all that exists in both this present time and in the ages to come. Christ’s authority and power are beyond challenge in all spheres of physical and spiritual life. Therefore, God the Father has *“put all things under his (Jesus) feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all”* (Eph 1:22-23).

As Head of the Church, Christ reigns from His heavenly throne, administering all spheres of Church life. It is Christ, through His written Word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who builds the Church. As *“the chief Shepherd”* (1Pe

5:4) of His Church, Christ delegates earthly leadership to His under-shepherds, who we call elders. Elders serve as willing shepherds of *“the flock of God,”* not domineering over God’s people but leading as humble examples of Christ’s character (1Pe 5:2-3). Elders especially *“do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than”* themselves (Php 2:3).

Elders in the local Church have the heavy responsibility as *“the shepherds and teachers,”*¹² *to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,*¹³ *until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”* (Eph 4:11-13). That is an enormous task for Christ’s undershepherds. This is why it is important to *“obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you”* (Heb 13:17).

The Church Body

The flock of God are the people in the body of Christ. Together they live and serve to worship God, to minister to the needs of one another, and to spread the gospel message. Together, elders and all believers *“are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ”* (Eph 4:15).

The local Church congregation should seek to live the body principles outlined in 1 Corinthians 12. Identifying the gifts given by the Holy Spirit, they are to combine their energies to serve. This is because *“to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good”* (1Co 12:7). Believers in each local Church have been gifted to each other to compliment and strengthen the giftedness of each other (1Co 12:14-21). This enables *“the members (to) have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together”* (1Co 12:25-26). Humility and service are critical in Church family life to build up unity and manifest Christ. Today, as in the first century Church, *“faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love”* (1Co 13:13).

1 Peter 3:8-9 further explains some of the essential attitudes that must be turned into behaviour to protect and nurture the body of Christ. *“Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.”*

Mutual accountability and transparency between all believers (Pro 27:17; Mat 18:5-14) is the healthy Christlike character for all believers to live. This mutually open-hearted living (2Co 6:11-13) creates a loving, caring environment for biblical growth, support, and discipline (Gal 6:1-2) should a believer become trapped in sinful behaviour (Mat 18:15-17).

The local Church has the privilege and responsibility to actively express the unconditional love of God by living out the grace and mercy of God (Mat 18:33; Rom 5:5; Jam 2:12-13; Jude 1:23). May we grow in our understanding of how to live Christ in His Church, and how to speak and behave in ways that others perceive the presence of Jesus Christ as Lord. With God’s help, may we be the servants of grace in our local Church for Christ’s glory. Amen.