

THE CHRISTIAN & THE CHURCH (03)

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Introduction

Psa.19:1 says, "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands." In *Psa.139* the psalmist declared, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works." (*vs.14*). In *vs.15* the psalmist said his body was "skillfully wrought" by God. Creation, its beauty, complexity, intricacy, inter-dependence, simplicity, fragility, strength and whatever else you can add, all display God's infinite, unfathomable and unsearchable wisdom, power and glory. Like the psalmist in *Psa.8*, we stand in awe of God's glorious handiwork of creation. (cf. *vs.3*).

But there is something infinitely greater than this creation that God is doing in this world. The Bible describes it as God's new creation in Christ. (*2Cor.5:17*). This new creation is His eternal purpose. (*Eph.3:11*). This new creation is and will be the showcase of His richly diverse and many sided wisdom, grace and kindness for all eternity. (*Eph.2:7; 3:10*). This new creation is the church. This new creation of the church is God's mystery that He has revealed to us in these last days.. (*Eph.3:3ff*). This mystery has not been revealed to the world. The world does not see the church as the manifold wisdom of God. The world sees the church as weak, as foolish, and as ignoble. (*1Cor.1:26*). The world despises the church. The local assemblies of the true church do not attract the world because the world sees them as narrow-minded, bigoted and hypocritical.

God, in His wisdom, has chosen not to unveil the full glory of the church in this fallen world. But there is a day coming when the perfect, infinite and indescribable glory of the church will be unveiled. This is described for us in *Rev.21*. As we saw in past studies, *Rev.21* does not describe a literal city. The new Jerusalem is the church, the bride of

Christ. (**Rev.21:9**). If you are in Christ, this is the church you are a part of. And Lord willing, this is the church we shall be studying from God's word.

Now for a quick review of our last study. Our study began with two questions : **1)** Why did you become a Christian? **2)** Why did God save you? We saw that the answer to the first question is usually futuristic. In a word, the answer is heaven. But the answer to the second question focuses on the present, a present that gradually unfolds into its future benefits and glory. The answer to the question : "*Why did God save you?*", is **"the church"**.

We then turned to **Eph.3:1-12** and saw the following : **1)** the mystery of the church that God has revealed; **2)** the church is God's eternal purpose; **3)** the church is the manifold wisdom of God. The mystery is that Jews and Gentiles are brought together into the church as "fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." (**vs.6**). Literally, we are **"together-heirs, together-members, together-partakers."**

The church is not a preaching center for the simple reason that the church is not the building in which we gather. The church is people united together in Christ. The way we habitually speak reflects what we think. We say to people, "*I have to go to church today.*" We do not ever say to people, "*I have to assemble together with my brothers & sisters in Christ*"; or, "*I have to assemble together with the church today.*" You see, church is a place we go to. Church is not a community, a body, a household to which we belong. The church is an objective entity, something outside of us, something we go to, return from and leave behind until the next Sunday.

We noted also that the prevailing individualism in society has overtaken the church. But the truth is, there is no such thing as a private Christianity. A privatized faith weakens the church. A privatized faith hinders the church's gospel witness to the world.

We need to come to grips with the fact that for the most part, God has ordained that our sanctification, that our growth in grace occurs in the communion of the saints that we belong to. If we separate ourselves from ongoing active fellowship with the communion of the saints, our growth in grace is impeded. Paul said in **Eph.3:18-19** that it is together with all the saints we will be able to comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ. **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** wrote, *“Let him who until now has had the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians praise God from the bottom of his heart. Let him thank God on his knees and declare : It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren.”*

In our last study we saw that in a real sense, the church did not begin at Pentecost. The church began in creation. The marriage of Adam and Eve was illustrating the relationship Christ would have with His church. (**Eph.5:28b-32**). Abel was the first martyr of the church. The promise in **Heb.11:39-40** is, “all these (**O.T. saints**), having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.” On that final day we will all enter into our final perfection together.

In closing we touched on **Heb.10:25** which dealt with the issue of the assembling together of the together-heirs, together-members and together-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus. There is great danger in failing to assemble. We have the consolidating responsibility to encourage one another to be faithful and to warn one another of the dangers of being unfaithful. Lord willing, we will deal with this subject in greater detail later on.

The final point we touched upon is that the Father loves the church. And the Lord Jesus Christ loves the church. If you are a Christian, you are greatly privileged and highly favored. You are beloved by the Lord. (**2Thess.2:13**). You are a part of something that

is infinitely glorious. It is my earnest prayer that the truth of the church will grip you, overwhelm you and change you.

There Were Added.

Please turn to *Acts 2*. The day is Pentecost. The time is nine in the morning. *Vs.1* says “[the apostles] were all together in one place.” In *Acts 1:13-15* we are told that approximately **120** persons gathered together with the apostles in the upper room. There is no reason to believe that any less were gathered together on the day of Pentecost. The common belief is that on the day of Pentecost the house (*2:2*) they were gathered in was the upper room. On that day something amazing happened.

Peter says the Lord Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit upon them in keeping with the Father’s promise. (*2:33*). The Holy Spirit came upon those gathered in the house like a violent rushing wind. (*2:2*). *Vs.4* says they were all baptized in the Holy Spirit and filled with the Holy Spirit. This is in keeping with the promise made by Jesus in *Acts 1:5*. The sound of the wind was heard and people rushed to the scene of the sound. (*2:6*). The people who came were suddenly dumbfounded. They literally rushed into a miracle that was taking place. The believers who were filled with the Holy Spirit began to speak in other languages, “as the Spirit was giving them utterance.” (*2:4*).

During Pentecost Jerusalem would be filled with multiplied thousands of Jews. One estimate says that on average there would be over one hundred thousand Jews in Jerusalem from the Passover to Pentecost. Luke listed for us sixteen different countries and cities that these Jews and proselytes came from. I do not believe that Luke gave us an exhaustive list. Luke’s list draws for us a rough square that begins at the Caspian Sea and the country of modern day Georgia. From there, Luke moves south to Tehran. Parthia is modern day Tehran. Luke’s line then takes you further south through Iran and all the way to the Persian Gulf.

From there the line moves west, across to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Libya. Bear in mind that Egypt and Libya are parts of the African continent. From Libya the line moves north to Rome and finally the rough square is completed as Luke moved the line east, across to the country of Turkey. We have no idea how large an area this is but Luke understood and he said this crowd represented “every nation under heaven.” (2:5).

Luke said the gathered crowd was bewildered because each one of them was hearing the disciples speaking in their own language or dialect. The crowd recognized that something unusual was happening because these disciples were largely uneducated Galilean Jews. In the midst of all that was happening, Peter got up and began to preach the gospel. The people were convicted of their sins. In keeping with Peter’s instructions, they repented of their sins (2:38), believed in the Lord Jesus for salvation (2:44), were baptized (2:41), and added to the membership of the church in Jerusalem. (2:41, 47).

On that day approximately three thousand people were saved, baptized and added to the church. And they began to devote themselves to the four primary means of grace the Lord has provided us as the church : the apostles’ teaching; fellowship; the breaking of bread or the Lord’s Table; and the prayers. (2:42). “**The prayers**” would refer to the specific times of prayer or the prayer meetings.

You would note in this chapter that nothing was said to the people about getting saved in order to go to heaven. The primary focus was on their need for salvation in Christ. Once they submitted themselves to this, the next stage was baptizing them and bringing them into membership in the local visible expression of the church in Jerusalem. This would remain the pattern as vs.47 indicates. Luke wrote, “And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.” Peter and the apostles were preaching the gospel to them, baptizing them and bringing them into the membership of the church. But behind Peter and the apostles the Sovereign Lord was at work in keeping with His promise. What is the Lord’s promise?

The Lord declared in *Matt.16:18*, “I also say to you ..., I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” In *vs.16* Peter had made the amazing declaration about Jesus’ true identity. Peter said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus’ response to what Peter said is emphatic, authoritative and divinely majestic. To paraphrase, Jesus said, “I, the Christ, the Son of the living God, also say to you.” The promise made is rooted in the fact of who Jesus is. “My church” is also emphatic. This is not Peter’s church. Despite the heretical claims of the pope, this is not his church. This is not your church. This is not my church. This church belongs to the Christ, the Son of the living God.

His emphatic promise is : “I will build My church.” We are reminded of *Psa.127:1*, “Unless the Lord builds the house, They labor in vain who build it.” *Acts 2:47* makes it clear that “the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.” “**Adding to their number**” is literally, “**adding together**”. There is that emphasis on the word “**together**”. The verb “**adding**” points to repeated action. The same verb appears again in *Acts 5:14* with the same emphasis on repeated action. Luke wrote, “And all the more believers in the Lord ... were constantly added to their number.”

In *Acts 11:20* we are told that some of the Christians who were scattered by the persecution began to preach the gospel in Antioch. The result was that a large number of people were saved. (*vs.21*). Did they leave these people scattered to go their own way and do their own thing? NO! A church was established in Antioch. (*Acts 13:1*). Later on, under the Holy Spirit’s direction, this church would send out Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey to preach the gospel to other cities in the Roman Empire. The result is that several churches were started and established with their own elders or pastors. (*Acts 14:23*).

The clear Biblical norm is that people who were being saved were added to the membership of an already existing church or a new church was established. *Acts 14* shows us that churches were planted and established under the oversight of the apostles

before elders were ordained among them. Now in the time that remains, I want to deal with three points.

Firstly, the church. The Greek word that is translated “church” is *ekklesia*. The literal meaning is “a called out group of people.” In the N.T. it is used to describe the gathered community of God’s people assembled for worship. The gathered community of God’s people could assemble for worship in a building like ours, in a house, by a river, in an open field or under a tree. The focus is not on the place where they gather even though it is Biblical to use a name and / or place to identify the gathered church. The focus is on the people and the purpose for their gathering together. The purpose is the worship of the true and living God through the four primary means of grace the Lord gave to the church. In this gathering together the Lord is worshiped and the members of the church are built up, encouraged, strengthened, corrected and given training in righteousness. (cf. *2Tim.3:16-17*).

Christians are a “called” people. In *Rom.8:29-30* Paul said the Christian is foreknown or fore-loved, predestined, called, justified and will be glorified. God did the primary calling which is described in theology as “effectual calling”. In *Acts 2:39* we find this statement in Peter’s evangelistic sermon, “as many as the Lord God will call to Himself.” In *Gal.1:15* Paul wrote, “But when God, who set me apart even from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace.” *1Pet.1:15* says, “but like the Holy One who called you.” In *1Pet.2:9* we are told that God called us “out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

How did God call us? God called us through the preaching of the gospel. The Lord Jesus described His ministry with these words, “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” (*Lk.5:32*). In *2Thess.2:14* Paul said to the Thessalonian Christians that God called them through the gospel. In *1Cor.1:23-24* Paul wrote, “we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

As Christians we are called to a particular identity. We are “the church of the living God” (*1Tim.3:15*) who “serve the living and true God.” (*1Thess.1:9*). Our identification is inseparably tied to the living and true God. We are called to a peculiar moral character. *1Cor.1:2* says we are “saints by calling”. This can be also translated, “called to be saints” or “called to be holy.” *2Tim.1:9* says God “saved us and called us with a holy calling” or “called us to a holy life.” In *Eph.4:1* we are exhorted to live in a manner worthy of our calling.

As the church we are a spiritual house devoted to the worship of God. In *1Pet.2:5* we read, “you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ.” Peter’s statements are loaded with O.T. worship imageries. This is not the time to develop them. I just want to set before you the key points. The word “**you**” is plural. The church is not pictured as isolated stones scattered over a field. The church is pictured collectively as forming a great spiritual house. In building a house, the stones or bricks are placed in permanent union with one another. Peter describes us as “**living stones**” who are placed in permanent union with one another. **Cranfield** wrote, “*The Scriptures know nothing of an individual piety that is out of touch with the living body of God’s people.*”

Peter’s “**spiritual sacrifices**” are expressions of worship by those who are redeemed in Christ, offered in gratitude and self-surrender. In *Rom.12:1* Paul wrote, “I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.” Paul’s exhortation is rooted in the O.T. imagery of the sacrificial offering to God of the animals on the altar as an act of worship. The “mercies of God” are the gospel mercies we have received from God that constitute our salvation in Christ. Your body represents all that you are as a person. Your worship of God demands that you present your entire being to God as a living and holy sacrifice. *Eph.5:2* that Christ “gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.”

Heb.13:15 says, “Through [Christ] then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.” Why do we say, “*Let us worship the Lord with our tithes and offerings*”? In *Phil.4:18* Paul describe giving as “a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.”

Brethren, let the truth grip your heart : God saved you in order to make you a part of His church. Every imagery of the church in the Bible militates against the practice of isolationist individualism among Christians. For far too many the beginning and end of community and fellowship is gathering for worship on the Lord’s Day. The truth is, our gathering together on the Lord’s Day for worship must be the highest expression of community and fellowship that was fostered in the previous six days. This gathering together on the Lord’s Day must be the climax of the previous six days and the event that ushers us into the next six days.

If this community and fellowship in Christ was not fostered in the previous six days, we are just a ragtag disconnected group of people gathered for worship on the Lord’s Day pretending to be what we are not. We cannot expect the Holy Spirit to build in our midst what we are not actively seeking to build through gospel fellowship and gospel witness.

The responsibility to build this union of community and fellowship in Christ is yours. You are commanded to be continually encouraging one another and build up one another. (*1Thess.5:11*). You cannot look at the person next to you. We are always waiting for others to make the first move. We are always waiting on others to call first. It is always and will always be your responsibility to make the first move to building the bridges of community and fellowship in Christ.

The question here is not who is seeking out your fellowship. The question is whose fellowship you are seeking. The question here is not who is building you up and encouraging you. The question is who you are building up and encouraging. The question is not who is praying for you. The question is who you are praying for. The

question is not who is having you over for a meal and spiritual fellowship. The question is who you are having over for a meal and spiritual fellowship. The responsibility God has given rests with you. You have to carry out that responsibility.

So let us take what we have been doing to another level over the next six days. Once again, choose your six people to call. Call one person per day and do two things : **1)** say something to edify that person, something that will encourage, something that will build; **2)** share with that person a prayer request and ask that person to share a prayer request with you.

This brings us to the **second** point I want to deal with. The Lord has called us to the work of evangelism. He commanded us in *Matt.28:18-20* to go and make disciples. *Rom.10:17* says, "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." And the question is asked in *vs.14*, "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?" To this we may add : how will they hear without a witness, without someone telling them about Christ?

But behind our gospel witness and winning the lost to Christ stands our sovereign God. He is the One who must open the sinner's heart. (*Acts 16:14*). He is the One who must make the sinner spiritually alive so that he could see his sin and the wrath of God coming upon him. (cf. *Eph.2:4-5*). He is the One who must save sinners and add them to His church. (*Acts 2:47; 2Tim.1:9; Tit.3:5*). And so, Brethren, as we bear witness to the gospel corporately and individually, we must earnestly labor in prayer that God will open hearts and save sinners and add them to His church.

Evangelistic praying must be a very important part of your prayer life. Paul declared concerning his brethren according to the flesh, "my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation." (*Rom.10:1*). Evangelistic praying must be rooted in a passion for the lost and the confidence that God will answer prayer for the lost. The Lord Jesus has won the war for the salvation of His elect. The elect will be saved. The

promise of *Jn.6:37* will be fulfilled. Jesus said, “All that the Father gives to Me will come to Me.” Christ will build His church without fail. This is the final picture.

You and I are living in the day to day picture in which Christ is building His church in territory occupied by forces antagonistic to His kingdom. The stark reality is that evangelism is the field in which the primary day to day spiritual battles are raging. This battle is not being fought against flesh and blood but against the world forces of darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (cf. *Eph.6:12*). Satan and his hosts of demons are busy fighting against and resisting every evangelistic witness that is being made. Evangelism puts you right in the middle of enemy territory and the enemy’s battles being waged against the church. We need to labor in prayer with earnestness and perseverance that the Lord will open hearts, that the Lord will save, that the Lord will continue to plunder Satan’s kingdom and darkness and wickedness.

I want to urge you again to get the book, “**Warfare Witness**” and the accompanying ministry manual entitled, “**Community Houses of Prayer : reaching others for Christ through strategic prayer**”, and read and study them individually and in small groups. Start community houses for evangelistic praying.

We come now to the **third** point I want to deal with today. In *Acts 2*, who is the Jesus Peter presented to the Jews as he preached to them? Peter declared in *vs.36*, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ – this Jesus whom you crucified.” Who is this Jesus? He is Lord and Christ. This Lordship Peter spoke about is His redemptive (soteriological) Lordship. This redemptive Lordship was something that was bestowed upon Him by His Father after He accomplished our salvation by His incarnation, life on earth, death, burial and resurrection. Paul unfolded this truth for us in *Phil.2:5-11*.

Paul said “God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow ... and every tongue will confess Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” In

Eph.1:20-21 Paul said God raised Jesus “from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.” In **Matt.28:18** Jesus declared, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth”, given to Him by His Father.

Lordship points to Jesus’ glorious and majestic exaltation and His sovereign authority. Lordship is the touchstone of our salvation in Christ. Peter preached to the Jews, Jesus is Lord. Peter preached to the Gentiles gathered in Cornelius’ home, Jesus is Lord. (**Acts 10:36**). Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “We .. preach ... Christ Jesus as Lord.” (**2Cor.4:5**). Paul wrote to the Romans, “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” (**Rom.10:9**).

When you come to Jesus for salvation, you come to the Lord Jesus Christ. Whether you call Him Jesus or Christ or Lord, it makes no difference. He is Lord. Lordship gives Him the priority in your life. Lordship means He is first in every single aspect and detail of your life. He has the priority over you. He has the prior claim on your love. He has the prior claim on your allegiance. He has the prior claim on your commitment. He has the prior claim on your choices. He has the prior claim on your obedience.

He loved you first and gave His life to save you. (**Eph.5:25**). Now you must love Him with first love (cf. **Rev.2:4**) and love Him with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength. (cf. **Mk.12:30**). His choices showed His commitment to you. **2Cor.8:9** says, “though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor.” **Phil.2:6** says, “although He existed in the form of God, He did not regard equality with a thing to be grasped.” Now your choices must show your commitment to Him. Now your choices must show you are seeking first His righteous rule and reign in your life. (cf. **Matt.6:33**).

Although He was the Son of God, for your sake He learned obedience (*Heb.5:8*) and He perfectly obeyed His Father, accomplishing all that the Father gave Him to do. (*Jn.17:4*). His death on the cross was the ultimate demonstration of His humble obedience to His Father. (*Phil.2:8*). Lordship means Jesus has a prior claim on your obedience. Lordship means you must obey Him first and foremost (cf. *Lk.6:46*). He must be always first in your heart. He must be always first on your list. He must be always first in your line.

Yet how often when we face choices and we know the right thing to do, we tell Jesus, *“Lord, please step aside, this comes first.”* How often when we deal with people and we know the right thing to do, we tell Jesus, *“Lord, please step aside, this person comes first.”* How often when we face cultural issues and we know the right thing to do, we tell Jesus, *“Lord, please step aside, this comes first.”* How often we classify things in our lives as an exception, as urgent, as unusually important, as the once-in-a-lifetime thing that does not normally happen to us and we say to Jesus, *“Lord, please step aside, this comes first.”*

Jesus said, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.” (*Matt.10:37*). The comparable passage is *Lk.14:26*. The assumption in these two passages is that the highest expressions of love you would find on this earth are between parents and children and vice versa, between brothers and sisters, and between husbands and wives. Jesus has come to you claiming a place in your affection that is higher than your affection for those nearest and dearest to you. No mere man has the right to claim a love from you higher than you can have for the nearest and dearest people in your life. This claim has important implications for understanding the person of Jesus. He was no mere man. He is the Lord and Christ with the prior claims on your life.

What does Jesus mean by “not worthy of Me”? The word **“worthy”** means to balance the scales. It came to mean to be deserving of something. **“Not worthy”** means you are not balancing the scales with Jesus, in His love for you and in the choices He made because of you. What does it mean that a person is not worthy of Jesus or not deserving

of Jesus? The answer is found in the explicit comparable declaration in *Lk.14:26*. Jesus said, “he cannot be My disciple.” The word “**cannot**” points to impossibility. If you love father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter and / or spouse more than Jesus, you cannot be His disciple. If you are not Jesus’ disciple, then you are not a Christian.

In *Matt.10:38* Jesus took matters to another level. He said, “he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.” In *Lk.14:27* Jesus said, “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” The cross is described as the most horrible form of execution ever devised by man. Those who were executed by means of the cross were also forced to carry their own cross to their place of execution. In the time of Jesus, when you saw a man carrying a cross, you knew that man was going to die.

The cross symbolizes the fact that when you became a Christian you died with Christ. Paul said in *Gal.2:20*, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” Having already died with Christ, if you are faced with the practical reality and choice of having to lay down your life for Him, you will do so readily and willingly.

The point Jesus is making is this : if you love your own life more than you love Jesus, you cannot be His disciple. He gave His life for you in order to save you. You must be willing to give your life for Him, for His name and for His glory. I told you in the past that a cross stands at the entrance of the door into salvation in Christ. Your death sentence awaits you at the door of entrance into salvation in Christ. Pick up the cross and the door will open for you.

Is Jesus your Lord? Or is Jesus your Lord until something you determine to be more important comes along? The practical application of Christ’s Lordship over you is not to be determined by your whims and fancies. The practical application of Christ’s Lordship over you is not to be determined by events, people, and choices. The practical

application of Christ's Lordship over you is not to be determined by health or sickness, by blessings or curses, by prayers answered or not answered. Jesus warned in *Matt.7:21*, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but He who does the will of My Father who is in heaven."

Lordship is not something you say, that you pay lip-service to. Christ's Lordship must be the controlling, ruling, guiding, decision-making principle of your life as a Christian. Christ cannot be a part-time Lord in your life. Christ cannot be Lord over when only when it is convenient. The principle is simple : it is either He is Lord over you, body, soul and spirit, or He is not Lord at all.