

THE CHRISTIAN & THE CHURCH (07)

February 24, 2008.

Introduction

We come today to study the second Biblical metaphor or imagery of the church : the church is the body of Christ. Before we come to this study, there is something I need to revisit. In our third study, when we looked at *Heb.10:25* I made it clear that I will be pressing home your God-given responsibility to be faithful in attending the Lord's Day services. The concerns of the writer to the Hebrews for their deliberate forsaking the assembling together of the church were serious because of the negative eternal consequences that were a real possibility. They are relevant concerns that we must have today. At the same time I do not desire to be misunderstood in making applications to this point from the various imageries. So I want to repeat what I said in that third sermon.

Heb.10:25 is not saying that you cannot go on a vacation. The need for physical rest and refreshment is a part of what we are as human beings. How much rest you need is something you have to determine based upon your knowledge of yourself and what you can afford. Jesus became tired and needed rest. He was weary and resting Himself at Jacob's well in Samaria when He had His encounter with the Samaritan woman. (*Jn.4:6*).

We know about the miracle of Jesus calming the storm. But what was Jesus doing before the storm hit? He left all the disciples to themselves and went and fell asleep on a cushion in the stern of the boat. (*Mk.4:38; Lk.8:23*). He slept so soundly He wasn't even aware that a terrible raging storm had overtaken them and that His disciples were in a state of total panic, fearing that they would surely die. In *Mk.6:31* Jesus said to His disciples, "Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest awhile."

On the other hand, vacations do not cancel or suspend the reality of the Lord's Day and your Biblical obligations regarding the Lord's Day. How you fulfill these obligations while on vacation is something you have to work out. Whether on vacation or not, at the end of the day you will have to say with judgment day honesty that you have done all in your power to fulfill your Biblical obligations regarding the Lord's Day.

At the same time you need to be told that, vacation or not, when you are absent you are missed. If you are not missed that does not speak well of either you or the church. Members of the church need to get into the habit of calling those who are absent and letting them know that they were missed. Do not merely take note that someone was missing and you wish they were present. Do something about it. Call them and let them know that you missed them. Do you love your wife? Stupid question, right? Does your wife know that you love her? Another stupid question, right? Do you tell your wife that you love her? Well, she knows that I love her. Yes, she knows, but do you tell her? You missed so and so in church. They ought to know that you missed them. But do you tell them, *"I missed you"*?

Let me make one final point about rest. Some say, *"Pastor, I was so tired, having worked so hard all week, I took Sunday off to rest."* Here's my question : since you were so tired, what did you do on Saturday night? If you are so tired after a hard week, why not plan to get a full twelve hours sleep on Saturday night and obey the Lord on the Lord's Day? This is where you will get, *"But Pastor"* Too tired to obey the Lord on the Lord's Day but not too tired to say **"no"** to friends and relatives and tell them, *"I am tired. I need to rest. I have to be in the Lord's house on the Lord's Day."* It is a question of Biblical priorities. It is a question of *"he who loves father or mother more than Me...."*

The Body Of Christ.

We come now to study the church which is the body of Christ. I want to read to you several passages to begin : *Eph.1:18-23; 4:4, 11-12; Col.1:18-23; 1Cor.12:4-31.* (**read**). Now Brethren, there are several technical exegetical details in these passages that I will not deal with. My goal is to help you understand this metaphor of the church being the body of Christ and apply the truths discovered to our lives.

One fact is very clear from these passages : the church is Christ's body of which He is the head. The first indication of this truth is actually found in *Acts 9:4-5*. Saul is on a deadly rampage of persecution against the church. He is on his way to Damascus with the authority of the high priest to arrest Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem. While on that journey to Damascus the Lord appeared to Saul and asked him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And Saul responded, "Who are You, Lord?" And Jesus said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." Saul was persecuting the church. Yet Jesus said, "You are persecuting Me." The only reason Jesus could say that is because the church is His body.

Now let us turn our attention to the passages we read. The context of the Ephesians and Colossians passages deal with two facts side by side : **(1)** Christ's preeminence over the cosmos or creation, and, **(2)** Christ's preeminence over the church, which is His body. In *Eph.1:20* the resurrected and exalted Christ is seated at God's right hand, the place that symbolizes divine power. It is the place of power, honor, authority and sovereignty. He is the Sovereign One and "all things have been placed in subjection under His feet." (*vs.22*). Christ is exercising sovereign authority over the cosmos, over all rule and authority and power and dominion.

But we must not miss the full point in *vs.22*. Christ sovereign authority or headship is not limited to the cosmos. His headship extends over the church, which is His body. His headship over the cosmos is for the benefit of the church. This ties in to what was said in the Great Commission. Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven

and on earth.” And it is on the basis of His authority over the cosmos that He says to the church, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” (*Matt.28:18-19*).

The word “**head**” is frequently used in the O.T. to describe those who are rulers or leaders. In *Deut.28:13* the Lord told Israelites that if they obey Him carefully and faithfully, He will make them the head. In *Judges 10:18* the word “**leaders**” is used. In *Judges 11:11* the word “**elders**” is used. In *2Sam.22:44* David said the Lord kept him “as head of the nations.” The word “**head**” emphasizes a person’s priority, preeminence and supremacy which is linked to their authority to rule and to command. Christ is the head of the church, which is His body. In a word, Christ’s headship over the church is His Lordship over the church. We will be looking shortly at what “**Lordship**” means.

In *Col.1:15* Jesus is described as “the firstborn of all creation.” Jehovah Witnesses rip this statement away from its contextual usage in both Old and New Testaments and declare that it is undeniable proof that Jesus is a created being. **Peter O’Brien** wrote, *“Stripped from its context and from other Pauline statements about Christ this phrase might be understood to include Him among created things.... But the context makes it plain that the title cannot refer to Him as the first of all created beings since the immediately following words, which provide a commentary on the title, emphasize the point that He is the One by whom the whole creation came into being.”* *Vs.16* begins with the Greek word **hoti** which means “**for**” or “**because**”. This word introduces us to the explanation of what was said in *vs.15*.

When used in genealogies the word “**firstborn**” indicates temporal priority and sovereignty of rank. In *Gen.49:3-4* Jacob described Reuben as his firstborn to whom belonged preeminence. But he lost that preeminence because of his terrible sin against his father. “**Firstborn**” was also used to describe one’s special place in a father’s love. In *Exod.4:22* the Lord said, “Israel is My son, My firstborn.” This could be properly translated, “Israel is My beloved son.” As the “**firstborn**”, Christ is uniquely distinguished from all creation. He is God’s Beloved Son. He is both prior to and

supreme over creation since He is the Lord of creation. In *Heb.1:6* the angels of God are commanded to worship “**the firstborn**”. The verse says, “And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, ‘And let all the angels of God worship Him.’.”

Vs.16 points to the firstborn’s involvement in the creation of the heavens and the earth. What is interesting to note here is the expression “by Him”. This is literally “**in Him**” and reminds us of *Eph.1:4*, “He (God) chose us in Him (Christ).” The phrase “by or in Him” has the same force as in *Eph.1:4*; God’s creation, like His election, takes place “**in Christ**” and not apart from Him. (O’Brien). *Vs.17* says, “He is before all things”. This points to His preexistence and primacy over creation. The verse adds, “and in Him all things hold together” – He is the Sustainer of the universe and the unifying principle of its life. Apart from His continuous sustaining activity, all would disintegrate.

The One who has preeminence over the creation also has preeminence over the new creation. He is the head of the body, the church. (*vs.18*). We have already seen that headship points to Lordship. But there is a new point to be added here. Lordship also points to His role as the Sustainer of the body. The body must depend on Him for life and power. *Vs.18* added, “He is the beginning”. The word “**beginning**” also points to primacy, authority and sovereignty. In *Rom.8:38* the same Greek word is translated “principalities” or “**rulers**”. In *1Cor.15:24* we are told that Christ will abolish “all rule and all authority and power.” In *Eph.1:21* the word “**rule**” is used again. In *Eph.6:12* the word “**rulers**” is used.

The One who is “**the beginning**”, who has primacy, authority and sovereignty is “**the firstborn from the dead**.” The resurrection age has burst forth. How do we know? Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first fruits of those who have died and He is the guarantee of their future resurrection. (*1Cor.15:20, 23*). Firstly, Christ’s primacy was asserted in creation. Now His primacy is being asserted in resurrection. Whether old or new creation, first place belongs to Him alone.

Headship Is Lordship.

We come now to the fact that headship is Lordship. I have to say that I rearranged the order of the material to be presented here. So you will have to find your way in the notes. You are Christ's body. Christ is the head of the body. Headship points to His Lordship over His body, the church. Paul said, "we ... preach ... Christ Jesus as Lord." (*2Cor.4:5*). Your salvation is rooted in your confession that Jesus Christ is Lord. (*Rom.10:9-10*). *Phil.2:10-11* says there is a day coming when "at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." That coming day is the final judgment.

Col.2:6 says, "as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him." You received Him as Lord for your salvation. Now you must "**walk**" or conduct your life in the sphere of His Lordship, that is, under the rule and authority of His Lordship. *Col.1:10* says "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord." Your life, your conduct must balance of the scales with Christ's Lordship. For the Christian, Christ's Lordship is not theoretical. For the Christian, Christ's Lordship is the only practical reality that exists, a practical reality that must be lived out in every aspect and detail of your life.

Firstly, Lordship means Christ regulates the issues concerning your salvation. Salvation is to be found only in Him. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." (*Jn.14:6*). Peter reaffirmed the essence of this truth when he declared in *Acts 4:12*, "there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." I need to emphasize this Biblical truth. We live in a world that is regulated more and more by religious pluralism. Recently **President George Bush**, who claims to be a Christian, told the leaders in the Middle East, "*I pray to the same God you pray to.*" That's man-pleasing religious pluralism but that's not Biblical. The God revealed to us in the Bible is the only true God. (*Jn.17:3*). The Bible is very clear about

this exclusive fact : it is only in the Lord Jesus Christ that you have salvation. If you are not in Christ, you are on your way to the eternal hell.

Secondly, Lordship ties together belief in Christ and obedience to Christ. **Jn.3:36** says, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” The primary proof that you believe in Jesus is that you obey Jesus. Obedience to Christ is the proof that will separate the sheep from the goats. The wrath of God is abiding, is continually resting upon the person who does not obey Christ, waiting for that precise moment to break forth and usher you into eternal wrath in hell.

Thirdly, Lordship means He makes the rules. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said again and again, “You have heard that it was said ... but I say unto you.” (**Matt.5:21-22, 27-28, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44**). In **Jn.13:34** Jesus declared, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” You do not make the rules. I do not make the rules. Jesus alone, speaking from His Father, makes the rules.

Fourthly, Lordship means we must obey the rules. In **Lk.6:46** Jesus asked the people following Him and listening to Him, “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord’, and do not do what I say.” If He is your Lord, then you must do what He says. In **Matt.7:21** Jesus said, “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.” What is the Father’s will? The Father declared, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!” (**Matt.17:5**). Give constant heed to what He is saying. We are reminded here of what I stated about Cornelius’ attitude in hearing God’s word. We listen with a view to learn, to understand and to obey.

Fifthly, Lordship means Christ regulates your whole life. We have taken note already of **Col.2:6**, “as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.” Lordship means Jesus regulates your thinking, your reasoning, your attitudes, your choices, your

actions, your words, your priorities, your marriage, the raising of your children, your work ethic, your finances, your spirituality, your worship, your functioning in the church, the list is literally exhaustive. *“What is the Lord’s will?”* must be the ever present question in your mind.

There are several non-negotiables that pertain to Christ’s Lordship. **Firstly**, Christ’s Lordship itself is a non-negotiable. It demands, in principle, total wholehearted surrender to Him. There is no partial surrender here. Partial surrender means you have hidden sins and idols you are not willing to let go. If there is partial surrender, if there are hidden idols, the Lord will expose these things. The exposure may be done with dramatic effect. The Lord may expose your sins for all to see and then bring you to repentance and complete surrender to Him. But the Lord may also expose your sins and / or idols and, at the same time, expose your apostate heart. Beware of partial surrender to Christ as Lord. The Lord knows the deepest secrets of your heart. There is nothing hidden from His eyes. The practical outworking of this principled Lordship is a life-time experience carried out one step at a time, one day at a time.

The sin that dwells in you will resist the application of Christ’s Lordship in your life at every turn. Indwelling sin is not your master. Indwelling sin does not reign in you. (**Rom.6:12-14**). But indwelling sin will not go down meekly and quietly. It will attack, it will resist, it will fight against your application of Christ’s Lordship in your life until the day you die. In the words of Paul in **Rom.7:23**, it will wage a relentless war against you.

It is in defeat that the reality test regarding Christ’s Lordship in your life comes into focus. Do you remain in defeat? Do you remain wallowing in the mud? (cf. **2Pet.2:22**). Do you remain in the pig-pen? (cf. **Lk.15:18-20**). Or do you get up, leave the mud, leave the pig-pen, draw out your sword to keep fighting and keep walking on with your eyes fixed on Jesus? If Christ is your Lord, you will keep on fighting the good fight until the fight is finished, you will keep on running the race until the race is finished, you will

persevere in keeping the faith until the Lord tells you well done good and faithful servant. (cf. *2Tim.4:7*; *Matt.25:21*).

Secondly, Christ's word is non-negotiable. There is no room for debating with Christ's commands. There is really no room for, "*well, let's talk about this.*" Our responsibility is to come to a proper understanding and application of His word with a view to obeying it. An improper understanding and application will lead you into error and lead you astray. We have no authority to change Christ's word. (*Rev.22:18-19*). We have no authority to water-down or dilute His word. (*2Cor.2:17*; *4:2*). Where Christ has spoken dogmatically, we must take a dogmatic stand and speak dogmatically. Where Christ has not spoken dogmatically, we must not take a dogmatic stand and we must not speak dogmatically. Where Christ gives liberty, we must give liberty. When we apply Christ's word, we must diligently seek to do so with the wisdom that comes from above because, more than often, the situations we face come with complexities that are nothing like the ideals we wish they were.

Thirdly, obeying Christ's word is a non-negotiable. We have already seen *Lk.6:46* and *Matt.7:21* and their applications. Jesus said in *Matt.10:34*, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on this earth; I did not come to bring peace but a sword." Time and again, obeying Christ will bring a crisis into your life. Obeying Christ will bring you into conflict with the status quo. Obeying Christ will bring you into conflict with people in every sphere of your life. You will have to make choices that they will not agree with. Obeying Christ may bring you face to face with loss, pain, unexpected anger, and hate. For many around this world obeying Christ brings them face to face with death. The Lordship of Christ means that obeying Him is a non-negotiable, even if it means the cross of death.

King Saul discovered that obedience to God's word takes precedence over and is more important than worship. Saul excused his disobedience to God's word by saying, "the people spared the best of the sheep and oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord." (*1Sam.15:15*). Samuel's response was, "Why ... did you not obey the voice of the

Lord?” (vs.19). In vs.22 Samuel declared, “Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.” Obedience must lead us into the worship of God. Change the order and you are wrong.

I ask you this morning, you who claim to belong to the body of Christ : have you thought through the implications of what it means that Christ is your head and Lord?

Headship : Sustenance & Dependence.

Headship points to Christ’s sustenance of the body and the total dependence of the body upon Him. This points us to the imagery of the vine and branches. Please turn to *Jn.15:1-11*. (read). Jesus’ imagery here is rooted in the grape vine, one that would be very familiar to the disciples. I had the privilege to visit a vineyard and so I have a practical conception of this imagery. The grape vine has many branches. The branches derive their life from the vine. Each branch is not a self-contained entity and so could not live independent of the vine. For a branch to remain alive and productive, it has to remain in constant union with the vine. This puts it into union with the other branches in the vine. The branches belong to the vine and draw their life, food, strength, and productivity from the vine.

The only purpose for the branches was that of bearing fruit. The branches were not there for their beauty, greenery, or many leaves. They were there for one purpose – to bear fruit. If a branch showed signs of being unfruitful, the farmer would cut it off from the vine. These branches would dry up and then they would be gathered and burned. The branches in the vine tended to produce a lot of unproductive growth. The farmer wanted maximum fruitfulness. So he would prune the fruit bearing branches from everything that would hinder its maximum fruitfulness.

In this metaphor before us Jesus is dealing with two issues : **(1)** He is dealing with that which is seen, the branches, the visible church, and, **(2)** He is dealing with the relationship He sustains with the members of the church and the relationship they sustain with Him. At the heart of this metaphor we find an emphasis on unity in the midst of plurality. The branches exist on the vine individually but without individualism.

Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches.” (*vs.5*). But He is no ordinary vine. He is not one vine among many. He declared, “I am the vine, the true one.” (*vs.1*). There is emphatic exclusivity here. There is only one true vine in this world. All others are false. As the vine, Jesus is the primary part of the church. He is the life and foundation of the church. He sustains the church. The church is totally dependent upon Him for its existence, its life, its strength, its fruitfulness. In *Phil.4:13* Paul said, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” I can do all things through Him who is continually infusing strength into me. In *Jn.15:5* Jesus declared, “apart from Me you can do nothing.” Apart from Me you do not have the power to do even one thing. Apart from Me you do not have the ability to accomplish even the least thing.

As a Christian, your life before God and fruitfulness is totally dependent on the Lord Jesus Christ and your abiding in Christ. What does it mean to abide in Christ? There is nothing mystical about abiding in Christ as some try to make it seem. Take note of *vss.9-10*. (**read**). What does it mean to abide in Christ? To abide in Christ is to obey Christ. Your obedience to Christ points to your dependence on Him. Your obedience to Christ means you are feeding on His word and it is the means by which He sustains you and gives you the strength to do His will, to become fruitful, to glorify His Father and to prove that you are His disciples. There is no mysticism here!!

In the grape vine there will be branches that show many outward signs of being real branches. But the real test that will eventually reveal their true nature is that of fruitfulness. When the farmer discerns that a branch will be fruitless, he cuts it off from the vine. In the church there are those who show many outward signs of being a Christian. But the real test of the genuineness of their faith in Christ is fruitfulness, a

fruitfulness that is rooted in their obedience to Christ. Jesus said, “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He (the Father) takes away.” (*vs.2*).

In *Jn.15* this fruitfulness is two-fold. *Firstly*, it is a fruitfulness of spiritual and moral character. *Secondly*, it is a fruitfulness of winning others to Christ. It is a fruitfulness that is marked by increase. *Vs.5* says, “he bears much fruit.” *Vs.8* says, “you bear much fruit.” Bearing much fruit is linked to two issues : *firstly*, the fruitful branch must be pruned. (*vs.2*). Pruning is the Father taking action to discipline you by means of His word and by means of scourging. (*Heb.12:6*).

Secondly, bearing much fruit is linked to the Father removing fruitless branches from the vine. Fruitless branches are a hindrance to the growth of the other branches and their increasing fruitfulness. When the Father removes fruitless disgruntled members from His visible church, He has one goal in mind : the growth of that church and its increasing fruitfulness. Intertwined with this is your growth as a Christian and your increasing fruitfulness.

As a branch in the true Vine, the Lordship of Christ sets before you one primary point : glorifying the Father by bearing much fruit. The first application is bearing the fruit of spiritual and moral character as described for us in *Gal.5:22-23*. Paul wrote, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” The second application is bearing the fruit of converts to Christ. Jesus said, “I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit.” (*Jn.15:16*). Note the “go” in this verse. It is the “go” that is related to evangelism and missions.

Brethren, your sincere heart’s desire must be to glorify the Father by bearing much fruit. In keeping with this desire to glorify the Father by bearing much fruit, you must pray that the Father will prune you. You must pray that the Father will show you your sins so that you can repent of them and turn away from them and turn to righteous acts that will glorify Him. You must pray that the Father will give you the humility to have your sins

pointed out by others. You must pray that when you are stubborn that the Father will, in love, scourge you. You must pray that in scourging you, He must also deal with you mercifully.

The Lord of the church promised, "I will build My church." (*Matt.16:18*). He said, "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold, I must bring them also." (*Jn.10:16*). He has given you the privilege to be a part of this building process. He said, "I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit." (*Jn.15:16*). You must pray that you will bear the fruit of converts to Christ. Root your prayers in this declaration. Say to the Lord, "*Lord, you said you chose me and appointed me to go and bear fruit. I am asking you to give me the Father-glorifying privilege of bearing the fruit of converts to You.*"

In closing, If you are not saved, I want to say to you : The Lord Jesus Christ is your only hope of salvation. He alone came to save sinners. He alone died to pay the penalty for your sins. He alone forgives sins. The salvation He offers you is eternal life. There will be no withdrawing of this gift of eternal life and there will be no end to this eternal life. But the opposite of this eternal life is the eternal flames of hell. Turn to the Lord Jesus today and let Him save you. Do not delay and gamble with the eternal welfare of your soul. There is no salvation after death. There is no salvation when you stand in the judgment. Hell is eternal and there will be no escape from hell. In *Lk.16:26* the man in hell was told that he cannot leave. Turn to Christ and turn today.