

Study 9 – The Church: Part 1

Having looked briefly at the foundations of the Christian's personal life, we now turn to his corporate life, i.e. the Church. It should be understood that the New Testament concept of the Church is never of a building made of stone or brick occupying a prominent position in a city or town. Indeed for the first 300 years no churches were built.

PICTURES OF THE CHURCH

1. The Building of Christ – Key Theme: Foundations

In the Old Testament God introduced people to the Tabernacle (Exodus 25–27), the Tent of Meeting which was a mobile Temple. When the Israelites settled in Jerusalem a permanent Temple was built (2 Chronicles 3–5). However, the tendency, as today, was to worship the building not the Lord. In the New Testament, Jesus became the mobile Temple (NB John 1v14 'lived' literally means 'tabernacled' cf John 2v21) and since He was the forerunner, the intention was that every born again believer should individually and corporately be the spiritual Temple (1 Corinthians 3v16; 1 Corinthians 6v19; Ephesians 2v22). We are to be living stones (1 Peter 2v5) built upon Jesus as Chief Cornerstone (Matthew 21v42; Ephesians 2v20–22; 1 Peter 2v4–8).

2. The Body of Christ – Key Theme: Relationships

This is the most common picture of the Church and gives many insights into the right functioning of the Church.

- a) Its Unity – The whole Body functions according to the Head (Jesus) (Ephesians 1v22–23; 5v23; Colossians 1v18; 2v19)
- b) Its Cooperation – The whole Body is coordinated so, for example, the hand works in conjunction with the mouth or the arm etc. (1 Corinthians 12v12–31)
- c) Its Diversity – Not every member does the same thing and there are differing functions and gifts . There are lists of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12v12–31, Romans 12v6–8 and Ephesians 4v11.

3. The Bride of Christ – Key Theme: Commitment

The basis of belonging to a Body is love. This is wonderfully illustrated as we see Jesus as the Bridegroom (Matthew 9v15; John 3v27–30; 2 Corinthians 11v2) and the Church (the Body of Christ) as the Bride (Ephesians 5v25–33; Revelation 21vs9–10). It is as though we were betrothed to the Bridegroom at conversion and long for the Marriage Supper which is yet to take place (1 Thessalonians 4v13–18), but meanwhile the Bride needs to get herself ready for the Bridegroom's return (Revelation 19v7–9). God always saw Israel's relationship with other gods as adultery. Unless our commitment is one of loving the Lord Jesus with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, God views our relationship in a similar way.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

When we become Christians we are also enlisting in God's army (2 Timothy 2v3). As soon as we leave the dominion of Satan and begin living in the Kingdom of God (cf Colossians 1v13) we become aware, perhaps for the first time, of spiritual warfare (2 Corinthians 10v3–5; Ephesians 6v12). It is crucial to recognize:

a) Who the enemy is

It is Satan and his hosts who seek to deceive, defeat and control Christians (John 10v10; 1 Peter 5v8; Revelation 12v9). Satan is a fallen angel (Luke 10v18 cf. Isaiah 14v12–15; Ezekiel 28v12–19) and is NOT equal to God. The idea of an equal contest between Good and Evil is unbiblical. Satan is the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4v4) but that does NOT make him equal with God.

b) Where the enemy is

He was defeated at the Cross by Jesus (Colossians 2v15) and today he is under sentence of death (i.e. the Lake of Fire) and soon that sentence will be carried out (Revelation 20v10). He is, therefore, positionally under our feet (cf. Romans 16v20; 1 Corinthians 15v25) because we are seated with Christ in heavenly realms (Ephesians 2v6) but practically we often forget this (cf Romans 8v4–14) and allow the enemy to persuade us otherwise (cf Genesis 3).

c) How we fight the Enemy

As long as we walk in the light, Satan and his works are exposed. God has given us, not only spiritual armour (Ephesians 6v13–18) but also weapons to defeat the enemy whenever he attacks (2 Corinthians 10v4; Ephesians 6v17).

QUESTIONS

1. Name four dwelling places for God mentioned in the Bible
 - a) Exodus 25–27:
 - b) 2 Chronicles 3–5:
 - c) John 1v14:
 - d) 1 Corinthians 3v16:

2. What are the three main pictures of the Church given in the New Testament?
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
3. What does each picture of the Church teach?
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)

4. If the Church is the Bride, who is the Bridegroom?

5. What two great events should the Bride long for?
 - a) 1 Thessalonians 4v13–18
 - b) Revelation 10v7–9

6. a) Who is our enemy?
 - b) What does He seek to do? (John 10v10 & 12)
 - c) How is he defeated?

7. List the armour and weapons God has given to us (Ephesians 6v13–18)

a) b)

c) d)

e) f)

FURTHER STUDY

1. Satan's character and works are clearly shown by the names and titles given to him.
What are they?
2. Read Matthew 4v1–11 to see how Satan tries to defeat us.
3. Study the Song of Songs (NB This is a love story of the Christian (Beloved) and Christ (Lover)).
4. What other pictures of the Church are given? (e.g. John 10)