

CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

Clovis Cook

I count it all joy to have been asked to participate in the projection and development of this great theme, which undoubtedly is as great a theme, if not the greatest, that could have been chosen for such an occasion. I have already noticed that it is going to be difficult to eliminate some overlapping in the discussion of this theme. But indeed, I think it will be well to keep our pure minds stirred up by way of remembrance concerning some of the vital truths that we must learn and teach in the development of this theme. And since the church had one beginning place and the prophecies concerning this great institution all go back to the same place and to the same time, it will be necessary, no doubt, for many of us to go back and use these prophecies once and again. And so tonight, I will not attempt to deviate from the prepared script that I have for this occasion, and I beg you to bear with me while we do our best to unfold our particular part of this theme, namely Christ and the Church, or Christ and His Church.

It was a sad and sorrowful day when our first parents had to leave Eden, but they left not as those who have no hope, for God made provision for their restoration long before their transgressions. Paul says, "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (I Thes. 2:13). "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph. 1:4). "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (II Tim. 1:9). So you see, before Adam and Eve transgressed the law of God, and were driven out of the Garden of Eden, the infinite mind of the Creator had already made arrangement for their return. They left their earthly paradise with the promise from God that the seed of the woman would bruise the tempter's head, Genesis 3:14, 15. After approximately 4,000 years, the mystery of this promise began to unfold when He who later called Himself the Bread of Life, as we read in John the sixth chapter, was born in the city of Bethlehem, which means the "house of bread". This was no accident but was the beginning of the fulfillment of Genesis 3. In Matthew 1:21, "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins. Verse 23 says, "... and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." In Isaiah 7:14, "Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign, Behold; a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel." In this case the natural laws pertaining to biological birth were suspended and bypassed, as Mary brought forth the son of God incarnate. He was called the Saviour of mankind. Indeed, the plan begins to unfold and the mystery made known. Only one incident marks the child's life from His birth to His baptism at about the age of thirty. It was the trip to Jerusalem which He made with His parents when He was about twelve years of age (Luke 2).

During the three and one-half years of His personal ministry, He preached the gospel of the coming kingdom. He preached principles that perhaps could not be enforced at the time, but He certainly intended that they be enforced when the kingdom came, and so He preached the gospel in prospect. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build my church;...." He used a term here which is translated from the Greek word "ekklesia". It is from "ek" (out of),

and "klesis" (a calling). Hence, the "called out". The calling is through the gospel; "... Whereunto He called you by our gospel,..." said the apostle Paul (II Thes. 2:14). But someone may say, "Called out of what?" Let the Bible answer. "That ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light..." (I Pet. 2:9). Two things must be considered, in view of what we have established. (1) "The Holy Ghost is signifying that the way into the holiest of all, (which is a type of heaven) was not made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing:" (Heb. 9:8). Now the Law, which was a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, finished its work when Christ died on the Cross. As long as the Jewish tabernacle stood, as long as the veil separated the holy from the most holy place this promise and this mystery could not be made known or made manifest. (2) So we read again, at the death of Jesus the first tabernacle was destroyed (Matt. 27:51) then the way into heaven could be made manifest, clear or known on the day of Pentecost. Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (John 1:51). This began to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the Church was established. It also fulfilled Jacob's dream in Gen. 28:12, when the Bible says: "And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending upon it." So you see even in dreams, promise, revelation, and prophecy this great institution called the Church, which I spell with a capital "C" became known; as did even the mystery of salvation of which the prophets inquired (I Pet. 1:10).

The Church Is His Body

Now, since we are studying the relationship that exists between Christ and the Church, it is well that we develop this thought concerning the Church and the body of Christ. As is recorded in Col. 1:18 and Eph. 1:22, 23 Christ is the head of the Church. "And hath put all things under His feet and gave Him to be head over all things of the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all and all." Now, I read that to impress upon your mind, that whatever relationship exists between this physical body and the head, the same exists between Christ and the Church. You know, many times we are asked when filling out certain types of official papers to answer the question: "Where is the headquarters of the Church of Christ?" Sometimes we answer it by saying, "In heaven." To them, it is more or less a joke but actually it is the truth. Because the Head of the Church is in heaven. He sits at God's right hand and this is where the seat of authority is and from whence it comes, that is, from the Head. And since there is one body, there is also one Head. It would be very unusual to see two bodies walking around taking instructions and orders from one particular head. In the spiritual realm, people do not think that it is anything unusual to claim that Christ is head of the many religious bodies that exist in this land and country. But it would be as unusual to claim and affirm such in the spiritual realm as it would be to think it unusual in the natural realm. In other words, we know, that the apostle here is reasoning from the natural to the spiritual and whatever is true in the natural we must affirm the same to be true in the spiritual, or else the illustration loses its effectiveness. Christ is the Head, and there is one Head, one body and one Church.

Circulation

In connection with this thought, I would like to advance an argument based upon circulation. Follow me closely. Much of the reasoning on the relationship of Christ to His Church is based upon the structure of the physical body. The apostle Paul is doing some reasoning in this particular way. Let us notice: "So we being many are one body in Christ, and every one

members one of another" (Rom. 12:5). To be in Christ is to be in the body, to be in the body is to be in the Church because things that equal the same thing are equal to each other. Now then, this body is made up of many members. The messages received from the intellect, the thinking part of man, the control center, operates the members of this body. The message comes from the intellect which can be dictated to the members of this body, which might say, "move the right hand," and you can do that; or "move the left hand," and you can do that; or "move both hands at the same time," and you can do that. These messages are created and formulated in the intellect and of course, they are sent out through the nerve system to the members of this body and the members function and move in accordance with the message received from the head. The church is like that, for Paul is reasoning from the natural to the spiritual and we have no right to take orders from anything except the head, the spiritual intellect of the Church. But let us notice. In John 1:4, "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men." As the life is in Him, and the life is the light of men, if you are not in Him, you are not where life is, neither are you in the light. John says in I John 1:7 "But 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 cleanseth us from all sin." The Bible says, "The life is in Him." To be in Christ and to be in the body and to be in the Church is to be where the life is. If you are not in Christ, you have no life and if you have no life you are not the light of men, as John affirms.

The circulation of the body is necessary to the life of each member of the body. It is said that the lungs receive the air, purify it, take the oxygen and place it in the blood stream. When we eat food it is taken into the system and digested and the vitamins and minerals of that food are also placed into the blood stream. There is that little blood pump called the heart that works continually for you even while you sleep, circulating this blood which is the life that flows out to all parts of the body. Therefore the vitamins and minerals received from the food we eat and the oxygen put into the blood by the lungs give strength to the muscles in the body, and permits the members of this physical body to operate and to obey orders when they are given by the intellect or the mind. Now, I will admit, that there is a lot about this that I do not understand. Neither does medical science know all there is to know about it but they have found out some very valuable things about it in recent years. The Apostle Paul must have known something about it; and so did Jesus and John a long time ago when they began to develop this thought as we have been doing at this particular time.

Sever a member from the body and it cannot live; cut off this arm and it cannot live. Why? Because it is severed from the body. But there are people today, who have tried to affirm that you do not have to be identified or connected with the body to have spiritual life. Now I am talking about a local visible body composed of real human beings. I am not talking about some invisible, intangible body in the sky. I am talking about a visible body, which we will talk more about a little later on. Cut off the arm from the physical body and it will die because of the lack of circulation. In the spiritual body we have that circulation. We are members one of another, the apostle Paul said, and so when you separate me from you I cannot live because through excision you cut off spiritual circulation. That is what Jesus is talking about in John 1:4. Notice again. It is not possible to have connection with the body and have no membership in the body. Christian life is the life of the body, and the body is the Church of Christ. The Head controls the body for the seat of intelligence is situated there. All messages and impulses received by the body come from the very core of the system where the messages and impulses originate. Notice. In Col. 3:16, the apostle Paul said, "Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Did you know tonight when

you were mixing and mingling your friendly and brotherly voices in the rendition of these gospel songs, that you were just simply sharing one with another spiritual life because we are all members of the body and all members one of another? That is what we did tonight. The same can be said of us when we eat the Lord's Supper together. So, I say that it is necessary to have affiliation with a local congregation lest you be cut off from the body and die for a lack of circulation. But let us look again.

The Church: A Saving Institution

In Eph. 5:23, "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of church; and He is the saviour of the body." So I am going to affirm that the Church of God's saving institution. There are a lot of people in the world today that will say you can be saved out of the Church just as easily as you can be saved in the Church. Some people claim that the Church cannot save you, that it is not a saving institution, that you can be a member of the body of Christ without being a member of the Church: You can be saved without being a member of the Church for the Church does nothing for you in reality. But that if you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour and you just live the best you know how that you will be saved as well as those who claim to be members of the Church. The argument goes like this. Suppose that I would tell you that I purchased a house back in Springfield, Missouri. Now suppose that I would go ahead in describing that house and I would say to you, "However, when it rains in Springfield it rains just as hard on the inside as it does on the outside. When the wind blows, it blows just as hard on the inside as it does on the outside; and of course, when it snows and sleet and all of these things happen, why just as much lands on the inside as does on the outside." Well, now you are beginning to wonder what kind of protection this house would furnish, are you not? Well, let us transfer it to the spiritual side for the sake of comparison. If I claim to be a member of an institution that furnishes no more protection for me than that kind of house, then I would go along with the idea that the Church cannot do much for anybody. But I know you are ready to say, "Listen, if I lived in a house like that, I would move." That is exactly what I would do. If I were a member of a religious institution that could afford no more protection than that I would move. I would be looking for one that could furnish me some protection. I would be looking for one that could save me, indeed, that is what Paul affirms in Ephesians 5. He said, "He is the Saviour of the body." What body? We have already proven that the body is the Church and that things that equal the same things equal each other from Col. 1:18 and Eph. 1:20-23. To be in Christ is to be in the body, to be in the body is to be in the Church, because they all equal the same thing, therefore, "He is the Saviour of the body ..." means that same thing as to say, "He is he Saviour of the Church." It follows that since the body and the Church are the same thing, and since to be in the body means to be in the Church all who are not in the body or the Church and have no connection with it can lay no scriptural claim to salvation.

The Vine and the Branches

"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide me. I am the vine, ye are the branches; He that abideth in me, *and I in him*, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye do nothing" (John 15:4, 5). Whatever relationship exists between the vine and branches, I am ready to affirm the same exists between Christ and the Church. But let us go a little further. The relation! that exists here between the branches and the vine is the same (exists between the body and its members, that is, the spiritual be of Christ and its members. There must be a continuous connect) to provide a constant flow of life and energy between the vine a the branches and the body and its members, because the branch could not live and produce fruit if they did not abide in the vine, there is not a

continuous flow of the life-giving substances that a brought through the root system from the fertility of the soil an dispensed equitably to every branch, that branch could not bear fruit. The same is true with each of us; if we lose our connection with the vine, then we are simply rendered fruitless.

The Church as The Bride of Christ

The Church is the bride of Christ. "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin unto Christ" (II Cor. 11:2). "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). Verses 9 and 10 show that the bride, the Lamb's wife, is the Church that John saw coming down out of heaven from God. "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled" (John 3:29). I affirm that the Church is the bride and Christ is the bridegroom.

Does the husband spell his wife's name with a little 'c'? From the beginning we learn that when a man would leave his father and mother and would cleave unto his wife they became one flesh.

The Vine and the Branches

"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fn itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches; He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye do nothing" (John 15:4, 5). Whatever relationship exists between the vine and branches, I am ready to affirm the same exists between Christ and the Church. But let us go a little further. The relation! that exists here between the branches and the vine is the same (exists between the body and its members, that is, the spiritual be of Christ and its members. There must be a continuous connect) to provide a constant flow of life and energy between the vine a the branches and the body and its members, because the branch could not live and produce fruit if they did not abide in the vine, there is not a continuous flow of the life-giving substances that a brought through the root system from the fertility of the soil an dispensed equitably to every branch, that branch could not bear fruit. The same is true with each of us; if we lose our connection with the vine, then we are simply rendered fruitless.

The Church as The Bride of Christ

The Church is the bride of Christ. "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin unto Christ" (II Cor. 11:2). "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). Verses 9 and 10 show that the bride, the Lamb's wife, is the Church that John saw coming down out of heaven from God. "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled" (John 3:29). I affirm that the Church is the bride and Christ is the bridegroom.

Does the husband spell his wife's name with a little 'c'? From the beginning we learn that when a man would leave his father and mother and would cleave unto his wife they became one flesh. There can be no closer relationship between anything than the relationship that exists between husband and wife. The Apostle Paul affirms that the same relationship exists between Christ and the Church. He says, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church" (Eph.

5:32). There is no closer union than this. The same is true of Christ and the Church, that is true of the bride and the bridegroom.

The Church Universal

As to the idea of the universal or corporate Church, I would like to offer this for your consideration. The word 'corporate' just simply means united or combined. I simply agree with Brother Davis, who preceded me tonight, that the corporate Church is made up of local congregations. The reason I say this is because of the following. Notice carefully. After the Church was established, elders or bishops became associated with local Churches. An example of this was the elders at Ephesus, who were called by Paul to meet him at Miletus (Acts 20:17). Elders at Jerusalem are mentioned in Acts 15, where the Bible says they came down to the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.

Now we have elders connected with local congregations, and the local congregations are specified by the town in which these congregations were established. Their rule or authority is centered in one congregation and not the so-called corporate or universal church. If when an individual is baptized, he is baptized into the Church universal, and after years of maturing and developing, he becomes qualified for the eldership, could the universal Church ordain him? If so, would he be an elder at large? There is no such thing taught in the New Testament scriptures. Every elder or bishop that you read about in the New Testament scriptures was connected or affiliated with local congregations. So you see, as has already been affirmed, the corporate or universal Church is made up of local congregations which go forth serving in that capacity in the work that was ascribed to the Church which could not be done by a universal or corporate Church. The reason we are impressing this upon your minds is because of some of the things that have been taught recently relative to this matter. And that is that we should magnify Christ and the Church should be spelled with a little 'c'. In other words, it has to take second place and the Church really is not of much importance because you could go just anywhere and worship as you see fit if you do not have to be affiliated with a local Church to do so. In support of this idea the passage of scripture found in Matt. 18:20 is quoted: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." And so they say it really doesn't make any difference whether you are affiliated with any local congregation or not as long as you come together with two or three people in the name of the Lord. They think they will be all right because the Lord says, "... there am I in the midst of them."

I have been writing articles for three weekly newspapers in the vicinity of Springfield, Missouri and we have been stirring up the people because we have been preaching the plain truth concerning the Church of our Lord. Almost without exception, the objection to what we say and have said in these articles is that we do not believe that any time two or three people come together in a religious sense, supposedly by the authority of Christ, or in His name, that it constitutes the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that two or three people from different denominations or whatever the case might be might come together and they could claim that they have come together in the name of the Lord, drawing nigh unto Him with their mouth and honouring Him with their lips, and yet their hearts be far from him. I am not ready to admit that such people could constitute the Church as we have defined the Church tonight.

This might be something for you to think about. If you will go back to Matt. 18:20 and observe closer the context, you will find that this is a rule that Jesus was laying down before the Church was ever established. The Church comes into play here because this is the third step in correcting the difference that existed between individuals. But the admonition is that when such is the case that you must come together quietly, that is, you must meet with this individual and discuss this thing

with him alone. If he will not hear you, then take one or two with you. One or two with him would make either three or four. Jesus goes ahead and says that when two or three agree on something here on earth that it shall be agreed in heaven. After these things are established by the mouths of two or three witnesses, they will be established in heaven for whatsoever is bound on earth is already bound or shall be bound in heaven. This is prospective teaching and I say today that we would be well within our rights to settle these sort of difficulties and disturbances by the cardinal rule laid down by Jesus in Matthew 18, because it does have something to do with the Church. Though the teaching seems to be prospective, to make verse 20 apply to anything other than the matter under consideration from verses 17 through 19 is to lift the verse out of its context and misapply it.

Paul left Titus in Crete that he should ordain elders in every city (Titus 1:5). Not ordain elders for every city, but in every city, that is, in every Church in every city. Elders are connected with local congregations and have no right to act as such beyond that limitation. The new converts on the day of Pentecost arranged themselves into many groups, breaking bread from house to house (Acts 2:42). There is an abundance of historical proof that the early Christians placed much emphasis on their weekly meetings. Some historians have said that in a society consisting of as many Christians as there were in Jerusalem that they undoubtedly had several meeting places. These meeting places later became to be known as the Churches of Christ. These are local congregations and these are groups of individuals that are carrying out the work of the Lord in the name of the Church.

Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons from AD. 177 to 202, uttered the famous victim that "where the Church is (meaning the visible body with its clergy and sacraments) there is the spirit of God, and where the spirit of God is, there is the Church. To be cut off from the visible Church is to be cut off .from Christ." I believe that with all my heart. I believe that where the spirit of Christ is found, you will find the Lord's people. They constitute the Church when they come together in an assembly. There can be nothing larger, there can be nothing better, there can be nothing greater, more powerful, or more forceful than a group of people who constitute the local Church. If every visible congregation in the land were cut off tonight and only this group of people right here were left; it could do everything that the Church was ever commissioned to do every first day of the week, and every time that the Church convenes for the purpose of edification or for whatever the purpose it might come together.

So you see, the relationship that exists between Christ and the Church is great indeed. Whenever you establish the relationship between the head and body, the vine and the branches, the bride and the bridegroom, you have established the same relationship that exists between Christ and the Church. What does Christ mean to the Church? He is all in all (Eph. 1:23). What does the Church mean to Christ? It is His saving institution that was spoken of soon after Adam and Eve departed their paradise home in the garden of Eden for the prophecy made there was that one day the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent. It can be done today, my dear brethren, through the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, simply through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

You know, we are a select group of people. On one occasion Jesus said to the apostles, "... greater works than these shall he do; because I go to my Father" (John 14:12). In other words, He was talking about the performing of miracles, raising the dead, healing of the blind, causing the dumb tongue to speak and deaf ear to hear. Jesus told His apostles, you can do these works that ye have seen me do and greater works than these also. What were the greater works he referred to, that the apostles would be able to do? Preaching the gospel in fact and the

forgiveness of sins. (Acts 13:38) That is greater than raising the dead. That is greater than healing the sick. That is greater than causing the blind to see, the dumb tongue to speak, the deaf ear to hear. Why? Because this is an avenue through which people can be saved, and this was the purpose of the Church in the beginning. The temporal measure of healing the sick would soon pass away, but the efficacy of the blood of Jesus Christ, which can be reached only in the Church, will never pass away. It is the greatest opportunity that was ever presented to anybody to live in the sunlight dispensation of time when more light has been shed on the Lord's saving institution, and the fulfillment of all these prophecies that have gone before concerning Christ and the Church than ever before.

In conclusion tonight, I ask you, "Are you a member of that institution?" It is the Lord's saving institution. The institutions of men will pass away, but the Bible says this institution "... shall never be destroyed: ... and it shall stand for ever." (Dan 2:44) You may eliminate a few members here and there and you may reduce it in many ways in various places, but you will never annihilate it. You will never completely do away with it because Daniel says, "... it shall never be destroyed." If you would like to be a member of an institution like that tonight, we are going to give you a chance to do so. You will do that simply by hearing the gospel, which you have heard tonight. You will do that simply by believing that gospel for Jesus said, "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." (John 8:24) You will do that tonight by simply repenting of your sins, turning away from those things that are wrong, leaving them behind, and addressing yourself to the great things that lie before you. By confessing Jesus Christ before men, and then finally, by being baptized for the remission of sins as the Bible hath concluded, and that will put you into the kingdom of God, and you will be added to the Church that we read about in the Bible. If you live a godly, consecrated Christian life until death claims you, heaven will be your home. Could you ask for anything more than that? Remember, what it costs the Lord to bring this kind of institution into existence. It cost Him His life. He had to leave the glory world, where he claimed equality with God. It meant that he would come to earth and take on the form of a servant (Phil. 2:5-7). But when He was through with all of this, in John 17, He said to His Father in His prayer, "I have finished the work Thou gavest me to do." He was ready to be taken back and given the glory that He had with God before the world was. So the Lord did not fail in His responsibility. He came here to set up this institution, and did it. He worked for three and half years, preaching the gospel prospectively, the principles of which would later be enforced and preached by all of us even in our day. It cost Him absence from God the Father while He did His work here on earth, but one day in essence, He said, Father, I want it back. I have finished the work. It is all over. And one day on the Galilean hills, He ascended, and left a few men standing there looking and wondering where He went. But the clouds received Him out of their sight with the promise that He would come back one day.

If you are in this audience tonight and you are not a member of the Church, you could not have the hope that those have who are members of the Church. Because the Church is composed of the Lord's saved people. If you have embraced the principles of the gospel, and if you have become a member of the Lord's saving institution, if you have let that spiritual life flow through your veins, if you have done all you can to make the church what it should be, you have done all things well and He will say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." If you have not, you will be cast into outer darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.