

Christ Loved the Church

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References: **Ephesians 5**, Ephesians 5:32; Acts 7:38; Acts 19:32; Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 10:32; John 10:16; 1 Corinthians 3:9; 1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:21-22; Ephesians 1:22-23; Ephesians 2:14-16; 1 Timothy 3:15

Introduction to the Church

Large might be a help, I don't know, for those on Zoom it's good. The topic is: Christ loved the church, amen, and gave himself for it—Ephesians chapter 5, verse 32.

[Ephesians 5:32 NKJV]

This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Now, the next few weeks, maybe months, we're hoping to take various aspects of the Church of God, the Church of the Living God. It's called so many different things. Thank you, Roy. Today I'd like to just introduce the subject.

And I'm not sure how big this is, this screen here. I'll just take a look. I guess you can... It's not too bad. I made it fairly big so that on the screen no one would be able to complain about missing it.

Now the object is to examine various truths, because so much of Christendom is focused on other things beside the one that is the only thing that is **not** Christendom. The very thing that God is focused upon in this age in particular is the church. It's a mystery that was hidden from generations past. All through the Old Testament, after God called Abraham and Isaac and then Jacob and confirmed his promises with those forefathers, Israel became the Lord's people.

And the importance of Israel through the Old Testament can't be over-exaggerated. They were his people. But they were chosen from the foundation of the world, whereas the church, the entity of Christ, was chosen from **before** the foundation of the world. God conceived of something in eternity which he describes in a number of different ways, but he loved the church, gave himself for it. Chosen in him before the foundation of the world are

the words. Now that doesn't mean to say that God has chosen each individually before the foundation of the world. When you believe, you become part of Christ. You become part of the church, the body of Christ.

Definition of the Church

Now, the definition of the church: it's a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*, where in English we have ecclesiastical things referring to established churches perhaps. But it means a called-out company, a gathering or an assembly of persons. That's the simple meaning of the word *ekklesia*, or church. And it's used in Acts chapter 7. If you turn, you can follow some of these scriptures as we go through. It'll reward you by turning the pages yourself. Acts chapter 7 and verse 38:

[Acts 7:38 NKJV]

"This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us,

where Stephen refers to Israel as the assembly or the church in the wilderness. Simply the assembly. They were the group that were saved out of Egypt, the nation, and they were assembled before God at Sinai. That was the assembly there of Israel. It wasn't a church in the sense of today, but it was an assembly. That's what the word means: assembly. Also in Acts chapter 19, if you turn over there, there was an assembly of Ephesian citizens. Verse 32, chapter 19. And verse 32, we read:

[Acts 19:32 NKJV]

Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together.

So it was an assembly. It was a mob, really, an unruly mob that came together. And that was called an assembly, assembly of persons. So really, it just means gathering. In the case of this mob, it means a called out—literally called out—assembly. Now with that word "called out" is the associated thought of being called **to** something. You're not called out to be in for no reason; you're called out to Christ. That's what the church is: it's simply a company of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ that have been called out of the world and called to come

to Christ. Now many—every one of us that believes in the Lord Jesus that is sealed by the Holy Spirit has been called by God.

And each of our callings are different. But our call has been narrowed to one person, the Lord Jesus Christ. There's no other name under heaven given among men whereby men must be saved—one must be saved. And so that's the call. That's what the definition of the church is: those that have been called out of the world by the Holy Spirit today and come to Christ. Now, but the most common use in the New Testament, of course, is to describe a group of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, front-row scholar. This man's going to go places, I can tell you.

In the New Testament, the word church is used to describe the church. In Acts chapter 20 and verse 28, we read Paul in his farewell to the Ephesian elders. He says this:

[Acts 20:28 NKJV]

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

To shepherd the church of God, the called-out people. And then in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, we read that the Christian, the believer, is one who is called out and separated from the world. Verse 32 of 1 Corinthians chapter 10, he says:

[1 Corinthians 10:32 NKJV]

Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God,

There we find the three classes of persons on the earth today. You're either a Jew—those covenant people of God that he set aside now for a time—or a Gentile, all the other nations put together; but the church is gathered out from both Jew and Gentile to form a brand-new entity. So the church is separate from the world, separate from Judaism.

Now, a church is not an organization, but an organism. The misuse of the word church in English, an institution or some to designate a certain area of responsibility, like the Roman Catholic Church, the Western Church, and so on—the church isn't an organization, but an organism. So it's a living unity. It's not an institution. Its origin is not from the earth; it's from heaven itself. So, the church is not an institution.

Descriptive Titles of the Church

Now, there's a number of descriptive titles in the New Testament that describe the church, what it is, under similes. It's like certain things. And so I have nine here, and this is where the overhead would come in handy for people, is these descriptive titles.

1. The Flock

First of all, the flock is described in John chapter 10 and verse 16. If you turn there with me, I'd like to just read that verse, verse 16:

[John 10:16 NKJV]

And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

So in this verse, we have a fold and we have a flock. The difference between a fold and a flock is that a fold describes what Israel was. Israel was a fold. It was surrounded by the commandments, the statutes, and judgments that separated the Jew from the rest of the world. God gave them that to make them a separate people. And he gathered them there under the law of Moses so that they would be a distinct people for himself, separate from all the peoples of the world. Whereas a flock needs a shepherd. And a flock can range. It's not confined. And so in this age of grace that we live in, we're no longer in a fold. Thank you. We're not separated from the world by laws and regulations. In matter of fact, we live in the age of grace where we can move freely through the world. But we have one gathering place, and that's our shepherd. So the idea of a flock then: both Jew and Gentile now are in the church, and we are one flock. He went in—we read that Christ was the door—he went in and he brought the sheep out of Israel, his people out of Israel, so that they would become his flock, joined with the Gentiles after his death and resurrection. So one flock. So that speaks—the flock now speaks of the tender care of a good shepherd over his people. So the church is often spoken of as a flock.

2. God's Field

Second, God's field. There in 1 Corinthians 3:9, we read:

[1 Corinthians 3:9 NKJV]

For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.

The idea here is of fruit bearing for his glory. God is glorified by the fruit that his people produce. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches." And it's the Father who is the husbandman who tends the branches, who removes branches that are unfruitful, who cleans or prunes those branches that are bearing fruit, so that they might bring more fruit for his glory. So we are God's field or vineyard, you might say, bearing fruit for him.

3. God's Building

Also, 1 Corinthians chapter—same verse, 9. He says, "You are God's field, you are also God's building." Here we have a thought that he is building living stones into a living temple. He's quarrying out these stones. Now, I was reading recently an account of someone who went into the quarry, the great quarry that's under the city of Jerusalem, where Solomon quarried out the rock for the temple. And you can go—I don't know if you can go there today to look at them, but this traveler back a number of years ago was able to go into this great cavern. Apparently, there's still boring stones from there. But what they do is they go down. When the temple was built, Solomon's temple, they would measure out the stones that they needed precisely. And they were cut out. Then they were trimmed to the exact size and smoothed and so on, and then transported and taken and put in place. That requires a lot of work. It takes a lot of planning. And so that's, I think, what we talked about. That's what God is doing today. And later on in the same chapter, Paul warns the Ephesians, "How are you building? Are you building with God or are you building for your own austerity, which will be all burnt up?"

4. The Temple of God

And that brings another thing. The church is often described as the temple of God. Verse 16 of that same chapter:

[1 Corinthians 3:16 NKJV]

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

You are the temple. He's speaking there in the plural. That is, the Corinthian church, as they met together, they met together, God was there in their very midst.

5. Habitation of God

And that brings the fifth title that we have. He said, habitation of God through the Spirit. Ephesians in chapter 2, and verse 16... 22. Connecting the previous thought, it's in verse 21:

[Ephesians 2:21-22 NKJV]

²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

That you are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. That brings together the thought that God is placing you in a particular place in the assembly, in his church. That you are a special one that has been particularly brought to this particular place for this moment of time, in order that God might dwell among us as living stones. That's a profound thought, that God now dwells in the church. There's no other place God dwells in the world today. There's no cathedral that he will come to. There's no grove of trees. There is no cave. There is no place on earth where God will dwell, except one place, and that's in the church. It has to be prepared. And that is a profound thought.

6. The Body of Christ

Six, sometimes the church is referred to as a body—quite often, as a matter of fact, the body of Christ. Ephesians chapter 1, verse 22 and 23:

[Ephesians 1:22-23 NKJV]

²² And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

The completion of him. I don't know what that verse means, how the church is able to complete Christ. Now, the first "not good" of the Bible is Adam. Adam was created first. But God said, "It's not good that man should be alone. I'll make a helper comparable to him. I will make." Well, God is putting this bride, this body of Christ, the very body—thank you—the

fullness of him who fills all in all. Profound. Another profound thought. There's many profound thoughts with the church.

It's through the body that we express ourselves. I speak with my tongue, I gesture with my hands, I walk to the platform with my feet, I stand before you in my body, and I'm expressing myself. And that's how we do it. Through our bodies, that's how we are able to express ourselves in the world, the world of material, the material world. In the same sense, in this world, the way that Christ expresses himself is through his body, which we are—the body of Christ, the church, which is his body. God expresses himself no other way than through the church today. Now, the Holy Spirit may, in some ways, but Christ through this church. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Who was Saul persecuting? He was persecuting the church, was he not?

7. One New Man

So, number seven. We have to move on very quickly. Ephesians chapter 2, verse 15. There's a new man, a new creation here. And this gathers some thoughts of earlier where God separated the Jew from the Gentile. But now in Christ, he has created a new man, a new body made up of both Jew and Gentile. Verse 15, he's abolished in his flesh the enmity. That is the law:

[Ephesians 2:14-16 NKJV]

¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

those commandments, those statutes, those judgments, those laws that were given by Moses to the children of Israel, they were ordinances that separated the Jew from the Gentile. In Christ, that has been all broken down. He is the end of the law for righteousness to those who believe in him. And so he's created in himself one new man, broken down that middle wall of partition, it talks about in verse 14, and from the two, thus making peace, and that he might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

8. The House of God

Eight. The—often known as the—sometimes known as the house of God. First Timothy chapter 3, verse 16. Our brother Joe Reese had been giving us some teaching on that very thing, how we ought to behave in the house of God. Now the reference here to the house of God is not the reference to the temple of God. It has to do with what we would call the household of God. That is the picture of a family. The father is the head, the mother, they are the matriarch, the patriarch, and then there's the children, then there's the servants, and so on. And that's a household. That's what is referred to here, the responsibilities in the household. And it refers to in chapter—as Paul is writing to Timothy in verse 15 of chapter 3, he says:

[1 Timothy 3:15 NKJV]

but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

How you ought to behave. And he gives instructions, first of all, to men, to women, then order in the church, the appointment of elders and deacons. And also included with that, of course, is discipline. So the idea of the house of God, how we ought to behave in the house of God, speaks about order and discipline.

9. The Bride of Christ

The last one today, and there are a couple of others that are more minor as how the church is viewed, is it the Bride of Christ. This is the most beautiful one. This is a picture—that's this view of the church has the thought of—now is, and the servants of God of the old, they're going to be brought into the kingdom. They're going to fellowship with the King around his court, but the church takes a special place, a special place next to Christ himself in the kingdom of God. There will be administrations and so on, but there will be one bride—the bride of Christ.

This mystery now, as Paul talks about it, God calling out this people for a bride for his name. How privileged we are, brothers and sisters, to become part of this company that will share the closest relationship to God the Father through the Son for all eternity. And it won't change. It's not going to change into some type of amorphous all sort of believers going off

into eternity. No, that relationship will remain forever. It speaks of relationship, it speaks of companionship, and it speaks of affection—the bride. And it also speaks of choice—chosen.

God has chosen a bride. Will you be part of that bride? That's your choice to become part. Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. There will be more to follow in the coming weeks. Hopefully we'll be able to get it up on the screen here, we'll be able to solve the problem. Let's pray.

Closing Prayer

Father, we thank you for your great grace to us. And what you have planned for us, Lord, is beyond our comprehension. That the glories of eternity, the joy of your heart, paradise conceived in your heart and applied to your bride—oh, Father, how we thank you for your grace to us. We thank you now. We pray, Lord, you'd bless refreshments and our time of fellowship together. In Jesus' name, amen.