

# What Is the Church?

by

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# Introduction

The Lord devoted much of His teaching to the effort of preparing the minds of His disciples for the coming of the kingdom, the church. If you will go through the parables again with this in mind you will be surprised to find that they deal primarily with this subject. In these parables, and in other lessons, He discussed what the church would be like, how the members would deal with each other, the kind of responsibilities they would have, and its growth. He talks of its oneness, how to enter it, and its destiny.

Christ wants us to know what the church is and we want you to know what it is. Furthermore, you need to know what it means to the Lord and when you know that, it will mean more to you. Finally, we want to so acquaint you with the church to the point that you will want to be a member of it. If Christ built it, died for it, is saviour of it, is head of it, and is coming again for it, then you should not only want to know what it is, but how to be a member of it so that you can obey the Lord and be ready to meet Him when He comes.

Please consider these lessons in light of what the Bible teaches.

J.C. Choate

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## Lesson 1

# What Is The Church?

The Bible tells us about the church. The world today is familiar with the church in the form of the denominations of men. This can be very confusing to the average person. The question then arises: What is the church? To define the church or to find out what the church is, we will go to God's word.

In Matthew 16:18 Christ said that He would build His church. Going to Acts 2:47, the scriptures say that the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. Paul declared in Ephesians 1:22,23 that Christ was the head of the church, which was His body. The same writer said in Colossians 1:18 that Christ was the head of the body, the church.

What does all of this mean? It means simply that Christ built the church, His church, one church. That church is made up of the saved, of souls, of human beings. It is the body of Christ, the spiritual body of Christ. We read in Ephesians 4:4 that there is one body, and in 1 Corinthians 12 that this one body is made up of many members. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:27, "*Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.*"

The New Testament was originally written in the Greek language. The word church in Greek literally means "the called out". In other words, the church is made up of a group of people who have been called out of the world (Romans 1:6), people who have obeyed Christ and have been saved by Him (Hebrews 5:8,9), and added by Him to His church (Acts 2:47). Another way of putting it, those who have obeyed the Lord, that is, as a group of people, are said to be the church. That church in the

scriptures is said to be the body of Christ, which is the spiritual body of Christ, as we have already noted. Christ Himself is in heaven at the right hand of God, but in the world itself He is represented by His church, His people, His spiritual body.

To further understand what the church is, we must realize that even though it is to be found throughout the world, locally the church exists in the form of congregations and congregations are made up of individual Christians. There might be several congregations of the church in one city or in an area. Each congregation is independent, with its own meeting place, leadership, and work. Each congregation recognizes Christ as its head. The Apostle Paul referred to a group of congregations like this as the churches of Christ (Romans 16:16). All congregations together make up the one church. Although each one is independent, they all believe and practice the same thing and therefore there is unity among them.

To help us understand the church of the Bible, the way it functions, the way it works, the purpose of it, etc., God's word describes it as the kingdom of Christ or the kingdom of God (Ephesians 5:5; 1 Corinthians 4:20), the household of God (Ephesians 2:19), the church of the firstborn (Hebrews 12:23), the bride of Christ (Romans 7:1-4; Revelation 21:9; Revelation 22:17), and many other such descriptive expressions.

This church is identified as belonging to Christ. He said He would build His church (Matthew 16:18). It wears the name of Christ to honor its builder and owner. The church, the Lord's family, is said to be named after Christ (Ephesians 3:15). Christ, we are told, is its head and saviour. Paul wrote, "*For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the saviour of the body*" (Ephesians 5:23).

When we know what the church is according to the teaching of the Bible, then we know what the church is not. Believe it or not, most people do not know what the church is. Their definition of the church is just the opposite of what the scriptures say that it is. For this reason the majority are confused and frustrated, and they misunderstand the church. They talk about the church as being the church building or meeting house, a denomination, or a group of denominations, etc.

Let it be understood that the church is not a club or just a social body. It is not a church building or a physical building. The church, God's people, may meet in a meeting house, but the meeting house itself is not the church. The church is not a denomination or a group of denominations. They represent division, with the names, teachings, doctrines, and practices of men. All of this is in direct conflict with the Lord's will. In John 17 we read that Christ prayed for the unity of His people. Paul said that there should be no divisions among us (1 Corinthians 1:10). He also said, *"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple"* (Romans 16:17,18).

All of this is to say that when we know what the church is, we also know what it is not. And to know what it is, all we need to do is to go to the word of God, to the New Testament in particular, and we can read for ourselves and understand for ourselves. Go to the Bible or the New Testament yourself and see what it says. If you will, I believe you will understand and appreciate the church as never before.

Are you a member of the church of Christ? If not, you need to become a member of it. You can do so by believing in Christ, repenting of your sins, confessing Christ as the Son of God, and by being baptized. Jesus said, *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned”* (Mark 16:16). Then we read that the Lord adds the saved to His church (Acts 2:47). Isn’t that simple and easy? May God bless you as you think on these things and as you comply with His will.



## Lesson 2

# Added To The Church

The Bible tells us what the church is, and by knowing what it is, then we know what it is not. It seems that the religious world is very confused. It usually defines the church to be that which it is not.

The church is basically the called out, that is, those that Christ has called out of the world (John 17:14). When people hear Christ and obey His teaching, then He saves them and adds them to His church. Hear the words of Christ when He said, *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned”* (Mark 16:16). After the Apostles had preached Christ to a large group of people on the day of Pentecost, the record says that the hearers were cut to the heart and wanted to know what they should do. This means that they believed what they heard, they were touched, they were convicted of their sins and realized that they needed forgiveness. The record goes on to say, *“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’”* (Acts 2:38). Then what happened? We are told, *“Then those who gladly received his word were baptized: and that day about three thousand souls were added to them”* (Acts 2:41). Finally, in Acts 2:47 it says, *“...praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”*

This was the birthday of the church. It had not existed before that day. How then could these people be added to the church?

To what were they added? The scriptures tell us that the Apostles became the first members of the church. Paul said, "*And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles...*" (1 Corinthians 12:28). Speaking to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul said that they were built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. In other words, the prophets had foretold the coming of Christ and His church, the Apostles had preached God's will to them, they had obeyed it and had become members of the church, with Christ being the chief corner stone or the most important part of the foundation (Ephesus 2:20). That is why it says in Acts 2:47 that the Lord added the saved to His church. Another way of saying it is that the Lord added the saved to the Apostles, the first members of the church. Then all who obeyed the Lord after this were added to them, since they were now a part of the church.

Later, when Peter preached to another group of people, we are told, "*And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women*" (Acts 5:14). When Barnabas went to Antioch and preached, it says that much people were added unto the Lord (Acts 11:24). What is the difference in souls being added to the church and being added to the Lord? None, when you understand that the church had its beginning with the Apostles being made the first members of it. Then when the gospel was preached, and there were those who were willing to obey the Lord's will, they were saved and added to the church, with the Apostles being the church at that time. As the gospel continued to be preached, and more and more obeyed the Lord and were saved, they were added to the others that had already been saved. So the church is made up of the saved. But what about being added to the Lord? The very same thing is being said, but in different words. The scriptures teach that the church

on earth represents Christ. That being so, and since Christ no longer dwells on the earth in a physical body, he is represented by the church, which is His spiritual body. Speaking to the Lord's church at Corinth, Paul said, "*Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually*" (1 Corinthians 12:27). Again he said, "*But now indeed there are many members, yet one body*" (1 Corinthians 12:20). The church here is compared to a physical body. The physical body is made up of many members like feet, hands, nose, tongue, eyes, ears, head, etc., but still there is but one body. All the members work together, being directed by one head. The same is true with the church. There are many members, Christians, with some preaching, some teaching, some writing, some with other talents and abilities. But all are to work together in unity, being directed by one head, Christ (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22,23).

Therefore there is one body or one church and Christ is the one and only saviour. He saves only those who obey Him and He adds the saved to but one church, and that is His church. This means that one cannot join the church of our Lord. To join something depends upon one complying with some outward conditions, so that the members of the organization decide either to accept him or reject him. If it was left up to man to accept a believer or to reject one, all we would have to go by would be the individual's statement that he wanted to become a part of the church. Men would not be able to know his motives or the thoughts of his heart. Therefore, the Lord chose to decide, Himself, whether a person should be accepted or rejected. He can look into one's heart and know whether he is sincere or not. The scriptures speak of one obeying the Lord from the heart (Romans 6:17,18). When one then truly obeys the Lord, and the Lord Himself saves him, then He is the one who adds him to His

church. Obeying Christ is described as a new birth, spiritually, and so when one is saved, or is born again, then Christ adds him to the other members of His family, the church. Isn't that simple?

Are you a member of Christ's church? If so, then it means that you have obeyed the Lord, He saved you, and then He added you to His church, which is His spiritual body, and the body is made up of individuals who are saved, Christians. If you are not a member of the church of Christ it means that you are lost. How do we know? Simply because the scriptures tell us that when one is saved, then Christ will add him to His church, and He makes no mistakes.

If you are not a member of the church, we would like to encourage you to obey the Lord so you can be saved and so He can add you to His church. You can do this by hearing His word, by believing in Christ, repenting of your sins, confessing Christ as the Son of God, and by being baptized for the remission of your sins. As we have seen in this study, when you do these things, Christ will save you and add you to the church, the one and only church that we read about in the Bible.

## Lesson 3

# The Body Of Christ

There are many ways to define the church as set forth in God's word. One of its many definitions is that it is the body of Christ. In this instance, the church is compared to a physical body. It also suggests that even as Christ dwelt on the earth at one time in the flesh, that He is now represented in the world by the church which is His spiritual body.

First we will consider the church as it is compared to a physical body. Paul speaks to the church at Corinth about this very matter. He says, *"For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presenta-*

*ble parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).*

In the foregoing, the writer was speaking to the church at Corinth. Of course this was one congregation of many congregations that made up the church of that day, and each congregation consisted of a number of Christians, but to the church at Corinth, Paul said that they were like the physical body. The body is one but there are many members. There are the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hands, feet, etc. Although there are many, yet there is complete harmony and unity among them. One does not create problems because it is jealous of some other member. Rather each one takes up for the other, suffering and rejoicing together. Paul said that is the way it was with those Christians at Corinth. They were the Lord's church, His spiritual body. They were one in the body but the body, the spiritual body of Christ, is made up of many members. In those days when there were apostles, miracles, etc., he reminded them that all of the members could not be apostles. All could not be prophets, teachers, or workers of miracles. But as members, even though all could not

do these things, every member was important to the body. Every work performed by the members was necessary. Therefore, one should not be jealous of the other. Instead, each one should recognize they have a special function or work to perform, and that not one of them could say that they were not needed. The conclusion then was that they should respect each other, help one another, and work together in unity. This indeed is a beautiful description of the Lord's people.

The scriptures also reveal the fact that Christ is the head of this spiritual body, the church. Speaking of Christ, Paul says, "*And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence*" (Colossians 1:18). Speaking again of Christ, Paul writes to the church at Ephesus, "*And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all*" (Ephesians 1:22,23). As you can see, Christ is the head of the body and the body is the church. In Ephesians 4:4 he says that there is one body, but if there is one body and it is the church, then there is but one church. Again, this one body has but one head. If there was one head over many bodies, or if there was one body with many heads, then this would be unnatural according to the law of nature. The same would be true in the spiritual realm. Therefore, there is but one body, the church, and Christ is its one and only head. Christ is also said to be the saviour of the body, the church. Paul says, "*For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body*" (Ephesians 5:23). Since the body is the church and the church is the body, and there is but one body, then he is saying that Christ is the saviour of the church which is the spiritual body of Christ. Please remember that when one is saved, through

obeying the Lord, that Christ adds him to His church, His spiritual body (Acts 2:47).

All of this means that Christ was on the earth at one time in the flesh but He dwells in the world now through the church, His spiritual body. The church represents Him, lives for Him, serves Him, teaches His word, and wears His name. There was but one physical Christ and there is but one spiritual body of Christ today.

It is absurd to argue that the many man-made churches of today are a part of the body of Christ. The body is united, not divided. Christ prayed that all of His people would be one (John 17:19-23). Therefore it would be unreasonable to imagine the Lord's spiritual body, the church, divided up with many heads, names, doctrines, organizations, worships, and practices.

I would like to appeal to you in the interest of your soul that you seriously consider the one true church as set forth in God's word. If you are going to be a follower of Christ, surely you would want to obey Him and be added to His church, since salvation is in no other.

You can be a member of the body of Christ, the church, by believing in Christ, repenting of your sins, confessing Christ as the Son of God, and by being baptized for the remission of your sins. Christ Himself said that if you will believe and be baptized that you can be saved (Mark 16:16). Naturally, if you genuinely believe in Him you will do whatever He wants you to do, and when you do that, He will save you and add you to His church.



## Lesson 4

# The Bride of Christ

One of the most interesting descriptions of the church as set forth in the Bible is the fact that it is said to be the bride of Christ. In picturing the church as a bride, and especially the bride of Christ, it not only helps us to understand the oneness of the church but also the relationship that Christ has with the church, and the purity of the church.

If the church that Christ was going to build was going to be His bride, then that would make Him the bridegroom. He therefore refers to Himself as a bridegroom when explaining to the disciples of John why His disciples were not fasting. Jesus said, *"Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast"* (Matthew 9:15). In other words, Christ was with them for the time being, but He would eventually be taken from them through the death on the cross and His return to the Father in heaven. This would then bring great sorrow to them.

In Matthew 25:1-13 we read about the kingdom of heaven, or the church, being likened unto ten virgins. The record says in the words of Jesus, *"Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go*

*out to meet him!’ Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.”*

You will note that Jesus in giving this parable of the kingdom of heaven, or the church, and likened it to ten virgins. These virgins represented purity and the one bride for which Christ would eventually return. Five of them being wise and five of them being foolish, based on whether they were prepared or not, shows how that when Christ returns for His bride, the church, that all of the unfaithful members will be gathered out, to enable Him to be able to deliver up to God His bride or kingdom without spot or blemish.

We read, *“The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth”* (Matthew 13:41,42).

Paul shows the relationship of the husband and wife and Christ and His church and the similarities of the two. He says, *“For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own hus-*

*bands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:23-33).*

I think we can see clearly in these passages of scripture the idea that is being set forth. The church is the bride and Christ is the bridegroom. Christ loved His bride, the church, so much that He gave Himself for her. In return, He expects His bride to remain pure and without blemish. He has but one bride and she wears His name (Ephesians 3:15). One day He will return for her. There may be other churches but He is returning to the one that belongs to Him, to the one that wears His name. That is His bride. That is His church.

In Romans 7:1-4 Paul talks about the kind of physical marriage that God accepts, and then he shows spiritually that they had been married to the law, but with the coming of Christ that law had been removed, and now they were married to Christ. But let's read it for ourselves: *“Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over*

*a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another — to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.”*

Since we as Christians, as the church, are married to Christ, that is, He has saved us and we therefore belong to him, then we are the bride of Christ. But how many brides does Christ have? Just one. How can His bride be distinguished from other brides? As pointed out earlier, one way should be through the name that the bride wears. The scriptures also mentions many other marks of identification such as the birth place, age, etc., of the bride, the church. For one to become a part of some denominational church or to accept some other religion, it means that one has become a spiritual adulterer.

Once more, to show the contrast between himself and Christ, John said, *“He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease”* (John 3:29,30).

In Revelation 21:2, the holy city, new Jerusalem, the people of God, or the church, is depicted as being prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Again in Revelation 21:9 it is spoken of as the bride, the Lamb’s wife. In Revelation 22:17, we read,

*“And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.”* Once more the bride, the church, is referred to as giving the invitation to come and obey the Lord. Of course it is likewise the church, the Lord’s people, who have been given the command to take the gospel to all the world. It is therefore only natural that the bride, the church, would be inviting those who have been taught the will of the Lord to accept Christ by obeying His will and thus for themselves to be married to Christ and as the Lord’s bride, His people, to belong to Him only and one day to live with Him in heaven forevermore.

Are you married to Christ? Are you a Christian, a member of the Lord’s church? If you are not, then the scriptures say that you are lost. I would like to invite you to obey the Lord and change your relationship. The world cannot save you, but Christ can. Believe in Him, repent of your sins, confess Him as the Son of God in the presence of others, and then be baptized or buried in water that you might be saved. If you will do this, the Lord will add you to His church, which is His bride. Remember, *“the Spirit and the bride say, Come”*.

## Lesson 5

# The Household Of God

The Lord's church is described in the scriptures as being the household of God. Household suggests a house or family, a father, and children. This is true with a physical family. We read in Acts 16:15, for example, of Lydia and her household. In Acts 16:31 Paul spoke of the Jailer's house, meaning his family. In Acts 10:2 it says that Cornelius feared God with all of his house. In Acts 18:8, after Paul taught the Lord's will, we read, "*Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.*" Not only does household or house suggest a family in the physical realm, but this is also the case in the spiritual world. Paul wrote, "*Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith*" (Galatians 6:10). To the church at Ephesus, he said, "*Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit*" (Ephesians 2:19-22). In this passage of scripture Paul compares the church both to a physical family and a physical building. First of all, he explained to the church at Ephesus that they were the saints of the household of God, or the family of God. Next, he alludes to an earthly building, one that has a solid foundation and with the building itself being fitly framed together. He said the church was built along those lines. It was "*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,*

*Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone.*" Then he said that the Christians being brought together into such a building were framed together to form a temple for the Lord.

Continuing, Paul in writing to Timothy explained that the house of God was the church. He said, *"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"* (1 Timothy 3:15). The Hebrew writer said, *"...but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end"* (Hebrews 3:6). Finally, Peter declared, *"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?"* (1 Peter 4:17). In these verses of scripture, it is clearly stated that the house of God is the church, Christ is the head over His house, and finally the judgment will begin with the house of God, the family of God, or the church.

In the family of God, God is the Father. We read, *"Yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we live"* (1 Corinthians 8:6). In this family, Christians are the children. Speaking to the Galatian Christians, Paul explained, *"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"* (Galatians 3:26-29). But how does one enter God's family? How does one become a child of God? The same

as becoming a member of a physical or earthly family. It is through or by birth. In John 3:3-5 Christ explained that one must be born again to enter the Lord's kingdom, referring to the church, or God's family. He explained further that it was necessary to be born of water and of the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God. In other scripture settings we have God's preachers telling people to be baptized or to be buried in water to have their sins remitted, or washed away (Acts 8:29-39; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16). In Galatians 3:26,27 and Romans 6:3,4, we are told that one becomes a child of God when he is baptized. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 we read, "*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.*" The body that he speaks of in this case has reference to the church since Paul says in Colossians 1:18 that the body is the church.

Now in the family of God, the father and his child relationship is being stressed. God loves His children and has promised to bless them with all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3). As a Father, He also chastises or disciplines His children according to the need (Hebrews 12). As children of God we have access to the Father, and He has promised to hear and answer our prayers, if they are according to His will (1 John 2:15).

We come now to this all important question: How many families does God have? We have already seen from 1 Timothy 3:15 that the house or family of God is the church, and we are told in Ephesians 1:22,23 that the church is the body, and in Ephesians 4:4 the inspired man of God declared that there is but one body. That means that God has but one family, or in other words, there is but one church.

A lot of people are deceived when it comes to the church.



They think in terms of there being many churches. But if the church is the family of God, and there are many churches, then it would also imply that God has many families. But what do we think of people today who marry several times, and in so doing end up with several families? We don't think much of that, do we? Not only that but you can be sure that the Lord is not involved in that type of thing. Could you even imagine the Lord adding one child to one family and another child to another family? What about one wearing one name and another wearing another name, but all claiming to be children of God and having the same Father? Things like this may be taking place in today's physical world, to man's shame, but you can be sure that this is not happening in the spiritual world. There are many churches, or families, that claim to be of God but they are all of the world. They do not belong to the Lord. They do not wear His name, they are not scripturally and spiritually His children, and therefore they are not entitled to the inheritance that the Lord has promised to those who belong to Him.

In this study we have taken a look at the church as being the family of God. Perhaps in this way we can better understand what the church is, how to become a member of it, and what it means to be the one church, the one family of God.

Are you a member of the Lord's family, the church? If not, we would like to encourage you to become a member. You can be born into the Lord's family, or added to the church, by believing in Christ, by repenting of your sins, confessing Christ as the Son of God, and by being baptized. When you do that, you enter Christ, the church, the family of God, and thereby become a child of God (Romans 6:2,4; Acts 2:47; Galatians 3:26,27).

## Lesson 6

# The Sheepfold

The church is compared to many things in the scriptures. This is to help us understand what it is, its purpose in the world, and its oneness. In this study we are going to consider the church as being a sheepfold, with Jesus being the good shepherd.

In the days of Jesus the shepherd was someone who was familiar to all. He was the one who took care of the sheep. He cared for them, took them out to pasture, and protected them from wild animals. The sheepfold was also something that was very common in that time. It was a pen, or a place where the sheep were kept. This also served for their protection at night.

Let us go now to John 10:1-18 to read what Jesus said about the good shepherd and the sheepfold. He said, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them. Then Jesus said to them again, Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The*

*thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have (Gentiles) 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. Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."*

After reading that statement, surely one can see a number of specific truths that stand out concerning Christ and His church as it is compared to a shepherd and a sheepfold. We will notice some of these points. First, we'll begin by considering Jesus as the good shepherd. Jesus Himself said, "*I am the good shepherd*" (John 10:11). Isn't that plain enough? Can anyone deny that? There may have been other shepherds, but in this case, He was the one and only good shepherd. As such He had a particular job to do. A shepherd was a leader. He cared for the sheep. He was over them and protected them. He described Himself as one who was willing to lay down His life for the sheep (John 10:15). We know of course that Christ died on the cross for His sheep, for the church. Paul said that Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it (Ephesians 5:25). In Acts 20:28 we are told

that He purchased the church with His blood. This meant that He counted the sheep, the church, to be very important. In contrast to this, He speaks of the hireling as being one who does not care for the sheep. The hireling in this case is the one who is being paid to see after the sheep. Since they do not belong to him, then he will not put forth an effort to protect the sheep from the wolf. On seeing the wolf, he will flee (John 10:12). As a result, the wolf is allowed to catch them and scatter them abroad. The hireling represents anyone other than Christ who assumes leadership of the church without the authority to do so, or false preachers and teachers who do what they do only for the pay they receive for it. Then the wolf represents those who are the enemies of the church. Again, with Jesus being the good shepherd, that meant that He was the one who directed or guided the sheep. He is also spoken of as being the head of the body, the church, or the head of the church, the body (Ephesians 1:22,23; Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 5:23).

Second, Jesus speaks of Himself as being the door of the sheepfold. He says that those who try to enter some other way is a thief and a robber (John 10:7-8; John 10:1). There are multitudes of religious people today who claim that there are different churches to enter, and that there are many ways to heaven. Here Christ denies that. There is but one way, one door, through which to enter. Again Christ said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*" (John 14:6). What about those today who would try to go some other way, other than the way that the Lord has specified? That would mean that not only will they not be able to enter, but they will also be considered to be as thieves and robbers. With the church being under consideration here, keep in mind that the scriptures teach that the only way to enter Christ and His church is by obeying the

teaching of Christ. In Galatians 3:26,27; Romans 6:3,4; and 1 Corinthians 12:13 we are told that it is through baptism that one enters Christ and His church. There is no other way to enter.

Third, the sheepfold is the church. Christians have been referred to in a figurative sense as being sheep. Since Christians are to be humble and gentle like sheep then this figurative expression is used. Even Christ is referred to as the lamb of God in that He offered Himself as a sacrifice on the cross (John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:19). Christ then spoke of sending His disciples forth as lambs among wolves (Luke 10:3). He pictured the judgment as being a time when the righteous and wicked are separated as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:32). The Hebrew writer said concerning Christ and the sheep, *"Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant"* (Hebrews 13:20). The sheep here represent Christians or the church for which Christ died, and over which Christ is the great shepherd or the head. In speaking to Christians, Peter wrote, *"And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away"* (1 Peter 5:4).

Finally, Christ said clearly and distinctly, *"And there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."* What is He saying? Based on our study from the scriptures, this means that there was going to be but one church and but one head. And how many churches and heads exist today? There is but one church and one head. Oh yes, there are many man-made churches and there are many who have set themselves up as heads of different religious organizations. All of these will fail in the end. Remember that Christ said that there is but one fold, one church, and one shepherd, one saviour or one head. That's all there has ever been. That's all there

is today. That's all there ever will be. Keep in mind that if you try to go to heaven another way, you will be considered a thief and a robber and those kind of people are not destined to go to heaven. Christ built but one church, He died for that one church, is the saviour of it, is the head of it, and one day will return for it (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 5:25; Ephesians 5:23; John 14:1-3). If that is not enough to identify it, then remember that it is the one that wears His name (Ephesians 3:14,15).

Are you in the Lord's sheepfold? Do you accept Jesus as your Good Shepherd? If you are not in His fold, in His church, then I would like to encourage you to enter in while you still have the time and the opportunity. You can do this by believing in Jesus, by repenting of your sins, by confessing Christ as the Son of God, and by being baptized. When you do this the Lord will save you and add you to His church.

## Lesson 7

# The Kingdom of Christ

The Bible has much to say about the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, and the kingdom of Christ. Actually, these all have reference to the same institution and that is the church.

Of course, a kingdom was nothing new to the people who lived in the days of Christ. There had been many kingdoms, and as far as the Jews were concerned, none had been greater than the kingdom of Israel.

Daniel, the prophet, spoke of four world-wide kingdoms or empires that would precede the coming of the Lord's kingdom. The first was the Babylonian empire. Next would come the Medo-Persian kingdom, followed by the Grecian empire. Finally, there would be the Roman empire which would bring to an end the kingdoms or empires that would have world-wide domination over man. Then Daniel said, "*And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever*" (Daniel 2:44). The kings that he speaks of here were to be the kings or caesars of that fourth kingdom, the Roman empire. As we will see from Isaiah 2:2,3 and Joel 2:28,29, the Lord's kingdom was going to be established in Jerusalem during the days of the Roman caesars, at which time the Lord's Spirit would be poured out, as recorded in Acts 2. Notice that once this kingdom was established, it would never be destroyed, but it would stand forever. It should be pointed out that it would not be earthly but spiritual in nature.

Coming over to the days of John the Baptist, we read, *"In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!'"* (Matthew 3:1,2). This just meant that the kingdom was near or that it would soon be established. Christ spoke often of the kingdom. He said, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 5:3). He taught the disciples to pray, *"Your kingdom come"* (Matthew 6:10). Again, He said, *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you"* (Matthew 6:33). There are many more such statements, but the kingdom had not yet come. Even on the cross, one of the thieves who was crucified with Christ, said, *"Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom"* (Luke 23:42).

Christ said to His disciples on one occasion, *"Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power"* (Mark 9:1). This, then, helps us to get some idea of when the kingdom would be established. First, it would come during the life time of some of those who were with Christ at that time. Second, it would come with power, or with the Spirit of God. Please keep this in mind as we see this happening a little later.

In Matthew 16:18,19, after Peter and the apostles had confessed Christ as the Son of God, He responded by saying, *"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."* There are several things we need to notice here. First, Christ said that He would



build His church upon the rock, or the confession that He was the Son of God. Second, Christ said that even His death, the gates of hell, would not prevent Him from building His church. And third, the terms church and kingdom are used interchangeably, meaning that they are the same. But why would the church be called a kingdom? A kingdom suggests several things about the church. For instance, a kingdom has a king, subjects, territory, and a law. This is true of the church. We'll see this later in the church.

When we turn to Acts 2, we have the Apostles in Jerusalem, the Spirit of God was poured out on them as promised in Joel 2:28,29, and they preached to thousands of Jews who had assembled in the city to observe Pentecost, a Jewish feast day. The Apostles preached Christ. They told how He had come from heaven to earth, performed miracles to prove He was the Son of God, was crucified on the cross, was buried, and after three days and nights He came forth from the grave. Then they told how He appeared among many and then He returned to the Father in heaven to sit down at the right hand of God to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. On hearing this, they were cut to the heart and wanted to know what they should do. The record says, *"Then Peter said to them, Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 2:38). Reading on, *"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them"* (Acts 2:41). Finally, in the last verse of the chapter it says, *"...praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved"* (Acts 2:47).

Now what do we have? We have the kingdom being proph-

esied and promised. We are told that it would come in the life time of some of those who heard Christ teach that the kingdom would come with power. Then Christ promised that even death would not keep Him from building His church, which He said was the kingdom. Then in Acts 2 the power came, the gospel was preached, some three thousand souls obeyed the Lord, and He saved them and added them to the church. But was this the kingdom or the church? We know that it was the church because it says so. But we also know that it was the kingdom that had been prophesied and promised from all of the facts presented.

To further prove that this was the kingdom all we have to do is to continue to read through the remainder of the New Testament and we read again and again of the kingdom being in existence. In Acts 14:22 we read where that with much tribulation they entered into the kingdom of God. In Acts 19:8 we are told that Paul, while in Ephesus, entered the synagogue, *“And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.”* Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:9 that the unrighteous cannot enter the kingdom of God. Again, Paul said, in speaking to the church at Colosse, and he included himself, *“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love”* (Colossians 1:13). The Hebrew writer stated, *“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear”* (Hebrews 12:28). So, what does this mean? It means that the kingdom was established in Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost, in approximately A.D. 33, and has been in existence ever since. But wasn't the church established at that time? Yes, and the kingdom and the church are the same. You remember that it was pointed out that a kingdom

has a king, subjects, territory, and a law. Christ is its King, children of God are its subjects, the world is its territory, and the New Testament is its law. The same is true of the church. We therefore do not have to look forward to the coming of the kingdom since it already exists, and those of us who have obeyed the Lord are citizens of it. When Christ comes again, He will not come to establish His kingdom, but to deliver it up to God (1 Corinthians 15:24).

Why is the kingdom called the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ, and the kingdom of heaven? Because it is from God, the Father in heaven, and it belongs to Christ. It is also called the body of Christ, or the church of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27; Romans 16:16).

The Lord has but one kingdom, one church. We encourage you to become a member of it.

## Lesson 8

# The Vine And The Branches

One of the major occupations or professions in Bible days was that of being a farmer, husbandman, or vineyard keeper. We are told that, "*And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard*" (Genesis 9:20). Back in 1 Kings 21 we have the story of how Ahab wanted Naboth's vineyard and Jezebel, Ahab's wife, plotted against Naboth that resulted in his death. We are told that when Ahab heard of Naboth's death he went down and took possession of his vineyard.

Jesus told the story of a householder going early in the morning to hire laborers to work in his vineyard (Matthew 20). On another occasion Jesus told of a certain man who had two sons, and how he asked them to work in his vineyard. One said that he would not, but later went. The other said that he would, but didn't. Then he wanted to know which one did the father's will. Of course they explained that it was the first one.

Vineyards and grape juice were so prevalent, and continues so to this day, that in giving the Lord's Supper, Jesus chose the fruit of the vine to represent His blood and has commanded that His followers meet each first day of the week to partake of it (Matthew 26:26,28; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29). This is to be done in remembrance of His blood, that blood that was shed that we might be saved.

With all of this in the background, perhaps we can understand a little better why Christ compared the church to the vine and its branches. Jesus said, "*I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit*

*He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. he who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples” (John 15:1-8).*

Now let us think about the various points that Christ made in the foregoing passage of scripture.

First, the Father is in heaven. He is said to be the husbandman. He owns all. He sent His Son, Jesus, into the world to represent Him.

Second, Christ declared Himself to be the true vine. There had been others to come saying that they were the Christ. There have been many since then. But Christ said that He was the true vine. A healthy vine is very strong and it has the ability to support many branches. This vine also represents the church since the church is the spiritual body of Christ. Paul said, *“And now indeed there are many members, yet one body”* (1 Corinthians 12:20). Hear this also: *“For in fact the body is not one member but many”* (1 Corinthians 12:14). But what is the body? The same writer, Paul, tells us. He says, in speaking of Christ, *“And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-*

*eminence*” (Colossians 1:18). Next question: How many bodies or churches are there? Just one, according to Ephesians 4:4. But going back to the statement that Christ made that He was the vine: How many Christs are there? Just one. If there is one Christ, and He is the vine, then there is just one vine. Not only so, but if the vine is the church, and there is but one vine, then there is but one church. How simple! How could you get more than one out of that?

Third, Christ said that His disciples were the branches. For branches to literally live in an actual vine they must dwell in the vine. If they are cut off they will die. Christ says the same is true with the spiritual vine and branches, with Him and His disciples, with the church and its members. The branches must dwell in the vine to bear fruit, and likewise with the disciples dwelling in Christ, and members dwelling in the church. But how do we enter the vine, or Christ, or the church? He says that we are cleansed through the word that He has spoken. In other words, we are able to enter Christ and His church by hearing His word and by obeying Him. Going on down to John 15:10, He said, *“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.”* He goes on to say, *“You are My friends if you do whatever I command you”* (John 15:14). But what has Christ commanded? For one thing, He has said that if we will be in Him, and if we will be baptized, that we can be saved (Mark 16:16). Then in Acts 2:47 we are told that He adds the saved to the church. Also in Romans 6:3,4 and Galatians 3:26,27 we are informed that through baptism we enter Christ. So if we are a branch, then we are in the vine, which is Christ, and if we are in Christ we are also in the church. But what are branches to do? They are to bear fruit. What if they don’t? They are cut off and cast into the fire. As

branches in the vine, as Christians and members of the church, if we bear fruit we will be purged and disciplined that we may bear more fruit. By such fruit bearing we show that we are the Lord's disciples and thereby the Father is glorified.

So there is one vine but many branches, one Christ but many disciples, one church but many members. Some have explained that the branches here represent the different denominational groups. Have you ever seen a vine that would produce grapes, tomatoes, pumpkins, squash, beans, melons, etc.? Have you ever seen a vine where all the branches opposed each other? If the branches that Christ speaks of represents the different denominational groups, then that is what you have, since these different churches produce different fruits, with different names, with each one opposing the other. Surely this was not what the Lord was teaching in the story of the vine and the branches. Instead, He was teaching the importance of the vine and the branches, the church and its members, and their relationship to one another, and the necessity of bearing good fruit.

There are those who think that they can be saved and go to heaven without being a member of any church. Of course one can't be saved in a denominational church, but one must be in Christ and His church to be saved and go to heaven. Christ saves those who obey Him and adds them to His church. If He adds the saved to His church, then it means that if one is not in that church, he is not saved. Neither can he bear the kind of fruit that the Lord requires if he is not in the vine, that is, in Christ and His church.

I hope you will continue to study these matters and I certainly want to invite you to search the scriptures to see if these things be so or not. If you find this to be the truth, and I believe you will, if you will sincerely study God's word with a desire to know

## Lesson 9

# The Temple Of God

What do you think of when you hear the word “temple”? I am sure that you are like me and you immediately think of a place of worship. Perhaps you are reminded of the temples of various religions. My mind goes to the Bible, and especially the Old Testament, where I read of the temple in Jerusalem. But there have been temples for hundreds of years, both of God and man.

The forerunner of the temple of God was the tabernacle that we read about in the book of Exodus of the Old Testament of the Bible. God spoke to Moses and instructed him in turn to speak to the children of Israel, those who had been delivered out of the land of bondage, to ask them to begin to bring offerings of gold, silver, brass, linen, goat’s hair, skins, shittim wood, oil for the lights, spices for anointing oil, and for sweet incense, onyx stones, etc., for the purpose of building a tabernacle. God then said, *“According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it”* (Exodus 25:9). The tabernacle was going to be a place to worship. It would be the dwelling place of God. There would be the outer court, the holy place, and the holy of holies. The people would come with their offerings and sacrifices and the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies once a year to speak to God on behalf of the people. God in turn would reveal to him His will for the people.

Many years later Solomon built the temple of God in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6). The tabernacle was moveable. It could be moved from place to place according to the need. But the tem-



ple in Jerusalem was a permanent structure. It was built over a period of years and was made from the finest materials. Eventually it was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and its valuable contents were carried off to Babylon (2 Kings 24:13-16). The temple was restored, or rebuilt, by Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-6). It continued over to the time of Christ and even up to A. D. 70 when it was destroyed, along with Jerusalem, by the Romans.

During the days of Christ, He visited Samaria and there He met a woman at the well where He and His disciples had gone to get water. She pointed out that the Jews worshiped in Jerusalem but the Samaritans worshiped there in a local mountain. Then we read, *“Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth”* (John 4:21-24).

When Jesus died on the cross the record says, *“Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split”* (Matthew 27:51). This signified the end of temple worship and that the law was being abolished to be replaced by a new law, the law of Christ.

But what about God’s temple today? Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:19,20, after condemning the works of the flesh and immoral practices, *“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are*

*God's.*" In 2 Corinthians 6:16-18 the same writer said to the same Christians, after pointing out the lack of wisdom in being joined to unbelievers in various relationships, "*And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.*" In these two passages we see several things. First, the writer emphasizes the fact that the Christian is now the temple of God. The Holy Spirit dwells in the Christian. On the day of Pentecost, after a large number had heard the gospel preached, some three thousand wanted to know what they should do. They were then told that they should repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). The Holy Spirit then entered into those who obeyed the Lord. This was the non-miraculous measure of the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit that all receive when they obey the gospel. Not only does the Holy Spirit dwell in the Christian, but when one obeys the truth then he enters Christ (Romans 6:3,4), and Christ comes to live in him (Colossians 1:27). And finally, God dwells in the Christian as Paul points out in 2 Corinthians 6:16. Second, in becoming a Christian, and therefore becoming the temple of God, one no longer belongs to himself but he has now been bought with a price and he belongs to the Lord. We read in Acts 20:28 that the Christian, the church, which is made up of Christians, has been purchased by the blood of Christ. Paul says that redemption comes through the blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7). That blood washes away one's sins, when he believes in the Lord enough to

obey Him, and that includes repenting of his sins, confessing Christ as the Son of God, and being baptized (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16). And third, since the Christian is the temple of God, having been bought with a price, then he or she must remain clean, pure and holy. Imagine God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit dwelling there. How dare one defile his body with strong drink, tobacco, or anything that would harm the Lord's temple. If such a person should allow sin to enter his body, and refuse to repent of it, then the Lord would surely depart from such a person. How we need to realize the seriousness of being Christians and of the importance of the Lord being with us.

Finally, if the Christian is the temple of God, where Christ and the Holy Spirit dwells, then with a group of Christians making up the church, it can be said that the church itself is the Lord's temple. Now we are not talking about a church building or a meeting house, regardless of the magnificence of it in structure, but we are referring to the church, a group of people who have been saved by Christ and who belong to Christ. The Lord dwells in that church, and with that church, because it is His church. Paul writes these words to the church at Ephesus: *"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 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, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreign-*

*ers, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:13-22).* Notice that he speaks of them as being Gentiles who were afar off, being brought to the Lord and salvation through the blood of Christ, being now the household of God, which refers to the church, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone, make up a spiritual building fitly framed together, being the holy temple of the Lord and the habitation of God through the Spirit. In other words, he is saying that Christians make up the church, the dwelling place of the Lord.

Where does the Lord dwell today? As in the past, He dwells with those, individually and collectively, who obey Him. That is the Christian, and that is the church, His church, His people. He has but one people, but one church, the one you can read about in the scripture.

Where are you? Does the Lord live in you? Are you in the church that the Lord is in? This is serious. Please look into these matters to see where you stand.

## Lesson 10

# The Seed Of The Kingdom

The kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ, and the kingdom of heaven are all identified in the scripture as being the same institution or organization and that is the church. Christ had much to say about the kingdom. He often spoke about the kingdom in parables, what we call modern day illustrations, to get His point across. In Luke 8:1 we read, *"Now it came to pass, afterward, that He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him."* In Luke 8:4-15 we are told, *"And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable: A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold. When He had said these things He cried, He who has ears to hear, let him hear! Then His disciples asked Him, saying, What does this parable mean? And He said, To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand. Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. But the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life,*

*and bring no fruit to maturity. But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience."*

This parable tells us a lot about the kingdom, or the church, in that it tells us the means that are used to produce citizens and members of the kingdom. To get this point across Jesus talks about a sower going out to sow his seed. The people that Jesus was talking to were very familiar with farming of that day. They could well identify with all of the points that Jesus made, for example, in talking about the kinds of soil in which the seed fell and the results thereof. He said of the seed that was sown, some fell by the way side. Some fell on paths or around the edge of the field. As a result there was no depth of soil for it to take root in and even if it tried to come forth birds would come along and devour it. He said that other seed fell on rocky soil in the field and when it sprang forth, not having much depth of soil or moisture, then it soon withered. Going on, He explained that some of the seed fell among thorns and the thorns sprung up and choked the new plants to death. In those days they either worked the soil with hand tools or with an animal and a crude plow. At best, they could do little more than to stir up the top soil. They couldn't reach down deep, cutting the thorns and thistles. In those areas where the thorns had been cut at the top level, it meant that they would eventually come forth again. Those seed then that were planted in such areas would finally be overcome by these thorns. That was what Jesus was talking about. But then He said that other of the seed fell on good soil and brought forth good fruit, even an hundredfold. That was not only the interesting story, but one that was true to life, and one that every farmer could identify with. Even with the change in farming in some parts of the world, but remaining basically the same in much of the world,

still with the explanation that Jesus gave, all can understand what He was talking about.

But the story of the sower had to do with literal farming. What about the spiritual application? He said that the seed in this case is the word of God, the seed of the kingdom, that which leads one to obey God and to be members of the Lord's kingdom, His church. God's word has to be planted in the hearts and minds of human beings if it is going to produce faith and bring forth fruit to the glory of God. Furthermore, the kind of seed that is planted is very important. The kind of harvest that is produced depends on the seed sown. That is true in farming. If you plant wheat, then it will produce wheat. If you plant rice, then it will bring forth rice. And so on with all other kinds of seed. Not only so, but the same seed planted by you and me, if it is planted anywhere else in the world, then it will produce the same fruit. That is also true with the word of God. If the pure word of God is planted, then it will produce Christians and members of the Lord's church. That is true here, and all other places in the world where it is planted or taught. Now if the teachings of men are mixed with the word of God, then it may produce any number of denominational churches, but this is not the kind of fruit the Lord wants. He wants only His word preached and that word only when believed and obeyed will bring forth only one kind of fruit. It will not be a mixed fruit or different denominational churches with all of their names and practices. It will produce Christians only, and all will be members of the same church or kingdom, the one that belongs to the Lord. Remember, Jesus said that the seed of this parable is the word of God.

But going on, He said that the seed that fell by the wayside is like when the word of God is preached and then the devil comes

and takes it out of their hearts. Perhaps they happened to attend a meeting where the word of God was being preached, or they came across a tract and they casually read through it, but they were not serious, did not follow up with more study, and therefore it was easy for them to get interested in other things. That is the devil at work. He doesn't want you to hear too much. He doesn't want you to get enough to get serious. He tells you that that is not important, that there is plenty of time, that there are many other things to do now. And so he leads you away, and perhaps for you never to return to God's word. Please don't let him do you that way. In other words, don't allow this lesson today to be the sowing of the seed by the wayside.

The seed that fell on the rock, and when it came forth, it withered away, is like those who hear the word of God, and joyfully receive it and obey it, but when temptations and persecutions or difficult times come their way, they fall away. They did not really count the cost. They wanted to receive, but they did not want to give. How sad. Let me tell you that Christianity is worth everything. There is nothing that can be compared to salvation and the hope of eternal life. If you have obeyed the Lord, let me encourage you to continue to study God's word that you may grow in the faith, that you may be strong and able to overcome the temptations of life and all that the world does to oppose you. Don't be satisfied with a little knowledge. Know what you believe and why you are what you are. Don't be content to accept man's word, but you go to the word of God itself and read and study it and build your faith on that. Then you cannot be easily deceived and led back into the world. We read that we must be faithful unto death to receive a crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

Then there were the seeds that fell among the thorns, and



when they came forth, they were choked to death. This is like those who hear God's word, believe it and obey it, and are even faithful to the Lord for a while, but eventually they allow the world and the pleasures of this life to lead them away from God. So many have done this. We must understand that the world and its pleasures will destroy us (1 John 2:15-17). Not only so, but the world and all things therein will pass away, but what about our souls? They will live on and we will have to answer to God one day for what we have done. Let us put first things first, now.

And finally, there was the good seed that fell in good soil and brought forth good fruit. This represents those who have heard God's will, have obeyed the Lord, and have remained faithful to bring forth good fruit unto the honor and glory of God. Only the pure seed planted in good hearts has the potential to bring forth good fruit. The scriptures tell us that we may be known by the fruit that we bear (Matthew 7:16).

Remember, the seed, the pure word of God, tells us how to be saved, reveals but one church, Christ's church, the kind of fruit we are to bear, and gives the hope of eternal life. Please believe it and obey it so that you may be what the Lord would have you to be.

## Lesson 11

# The Parable of the Tares

Jesus often spoke in parables, giving some story to illustrate a spiritual truth. One such parable was that of the wheat and the tares. We read, *“Another parable He put forth to them, saying: The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares? He said to them, An enemy has done this. The servants said to him, Do you want us then to go and gather them up? But he said, No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn”* (Matthew 13:24-30).

A little later the disciples asked Jesus to explain the parable of the tares in the field. The record then says, *“He answered and said to them: He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and*

*gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"* (Matthew 13:37-43).

Notice that this parable or story has to do with the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom, or church, had not been established yet, but it would soon come into existence. It is spoken of as the kingdom of heaven because the kingdom would come from heaven, or from the Lord. In explaining this parable, Jesus said that the sower of the good seed was the Son of man. Christ was often referred to as the Son of man since He entered this world by being born of woman, thus taking upon Himself the likeness of man (Matthew 11:19; Luke 9:44). Then the Son of man is spoken of here as being the sower of the good seed. He sowed the seed through His servants. For instance, He commanded the Apostles to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). Again, He said that they should go and teach all nations (Matthew 28:19). But what was the good seed? Please notice that it was not just seed, some seed, but that it was the good seed. You will observe also that it was necessary for that seed to be planted in order that it might bring forth good fruit. Unplanted seed will not produce. That is why Christ commanded His people to take the gospel to all the world, even to every creature in all the world. But the good seed was the word of God. Christ said in Luke 8:11 that the seed is the word of God. Paul said in Romans 10:17 that faith comes by hearing the word of God. But what about the gospel? When the word of God is preached, then the gospel is preached. That is why Christ said that we must preach and teach it.

Next in this parable He says that the field is the world. I hasten to remind you again that Christ said that we should take the

gospel to the whole world. He wants the whole field sown with the gospel. Paul said, *"For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in who they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!"* (Romans 10:13-15). Again, Paul exhorted Timothy, *"Preach the word..."* (2 Timothy 4:2). Then he said to Timothy, *"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also"* (2 Timothy 2:1,2). As you can see, the Lord wants His word planted in the hearts of all people everywhere. Every soul is important. Therefore every soul needs to be taught God's will.

Christ said that the good seed in this parable are the children of the kingdom, or church. This means that they are the result of the good seed being planted in their hearts. We read time and time again in the book of Acts where the gospel was preached to the lost, they believed it, repented of their sins, and were baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38,41). Then we read that when they did this that the Lord saved them and added them to the church (Acts 2:47).

The tares were the children of the wicked one. The farmer in that day had a problem. In growing wheat there was a type of weed that grew in with the wheat, called a tare. This plant was very similar to the wheat. In the world today there are the children of God and then there are those who resemble in some ways God's children, but they are the children of the wicked one.

While the gospel is being taken to the world, Satan is also sending forth his workers to sow false teaching, to make disciples, to build churches, and such like. These people do good works, and they say they love the Lord. Many find it very difficult to see the difference in them and God's people. Many say they can't see the difference and want to accept them all. But there is a difference. The Lord says that we may know the difference by the fruit that they bear. Look at their teaching. Observe the way they worship. Note the churches that they are members of and the names they wear. Of course to see these differences you must know God's will. Then you can clearly see the difference in what God says and in the things that they do. But even many of them will still be debating with the Lord on the day of judgement that they are right. Christ said that in that day, *"Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"* (Matthew 7:21-23). Yes, many are deceived, and how sad to go through this life, and even to the day of judgment, before finding that out, and thus to be lost for all eternity. But these are children of the wicked one. Of course all of those who do not belong to the Lord are the children of the wicked one, both religious and non-religious.

The enemy who sowed the tares was the wicked one, that is Satan, the devil himself. At the same time, he has many servants, and preachers. They are constantly planting lies, evil thoughts, wickedness, and error in the hearts of the masses. This will result in their death (1 Corinthians 6; Galatians 5; Revelation 21:8).

Jesus goes on to say that the harvest is the end of the world. During this life time both the children of the world and the children of God go on living side by side. The same is true with the religious, both those in error and those who truly follow Christ. Then there are even those who are in the church that have become unfaithful. The Lord has not seen fit to come back to destroy them or to have His people to take vengeance on them. That does not mean however that things will go on forever as they are. Christ has promised to come back one day. He said, "*I will come again*" (John 14:3). At that time He will send His angels to gather out of His kingdom, or church, all that offend (Matthew 13:41). He will also come to take vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Finally, at that time all who offend and do iniquity, will be cast into hell and the righteous representing God's kingdom, His church, will go to live with the Lord forevermore.

How would the Lord classify you? Are you a child of the good seed or a tare? Are you a child of God or child of the wicked one? Are you a member of the Lord's kingdom, His church, or are you just a member of some church?

I want to encourage you to obey the Lord's word. Believe in the Lord, repent of your sins, confess your faith in Him and be baptized for the remission of your sins. When you do this, then He will save you and add you to His church (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38,47).

## Lesson 12

# Parables of Hidden Treasure and the Goodly Pearl

In this study we are going to consider two parables. May I remind you that a parable was a method of teaching that Jesus used in His day. It was done with some familiar earthly setting to project a spiritual truth. Both of these parables have to do with the kingdom of heaven. This kingdom came from heaven or God after Christ had died, had been buried, was resurrected, and returned to the Father in heaven. It was later referred to as both church and kingdom.

The first parable that we are going to consider is found in Matthew 13:44. It is short and to the point. Jesus said, *"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."*

Notice that He did not say that the kingdom was a treasure in the field, but like a treasure in the field. He was saying that there were some similarities between the two.

May I suggest to you that the kingdom, or church, is a treasure. It is a spiritual treasure. Although it did not exist at that time, it exists now and has been on the earth for almost two thousand years. In Matthew 16:18 Christ promised to build it. The establishment of it is recorded in Acts 2. The importance of it is seen in the fact that Christ built it. It is therefore from a divine source. Not only so, but Christ loved it so much that He died for it (Ephesians 5:25). In Acts 20:28 the writer says that Christ pur-

chased the church with His own blood. That means that it is important, and that one must be a member of it to be saved.

In this parable Christ talks about a treasure hid in a field. Maybe it had been there for a long time. Possibly the land was of no great value. This, and other reasons, may be why the treasure had been overlooked for so long, But some way, some how, this particular man stumbled on to this treasure. What kind of treasure it was, Jesus does not say. It might have been gold, silver, jewels, or some other type of wealth. For sure, it was something of great value, something that was precious and desirable. So much so was this the case, that when he found it, he hid it. He did not want to share this information with others until he had taken steps to make it his own. So immediately he went and sold all that he had in order that he might have enough to go and buy that field. He wanted the field so that the treasure of the field might then be his. He was willing to pay whatever price was necessary in order to make this possible. The point of all of this was the fact that he found the treasure, recognized the value of it, gave up all that he had to buy the field, and then purchased it for himself.

Jesus does not go on to give an explanation of this parable to point out the spiritual application, but the lessons are obvious. In a world full of religious teaching, most of which is bogus or false, it is easy for one to drift along without ever noticing the Lord's kingdom, or church. The majority pay little attention to the teaching on the church and pure New Testament Christianity. But here and there, one may be reading the scripture, hearing a sermon, going through a piece of literature, and all of a sudden it dawns on him that what is being described is the Lord's church. Finally he realizes that this church is not a man-made church, that



it is not a denomination. Rather, this is the church that he can read about in the Bible. It is the one that Christ built (Matthew 16:18). It is the one that Christ died for on the cross (Acts 20:28). It is the one that wears His name (Romans 16:16). Yes, he realizes now that this is the one true church that belongs to the Lord. Once he discovers this he wants to be a part of it, to be a member of it. He may be a great sinner, involved in all kinds of evil. He may be a member of some well known religious group. He may even be a preacher or a leader in that church. Or he might be in a thousand other situations. But that doesn't matter now. He has found the spiritual treasure that will change his life, that will save him, that will take him to heaven. Therefore, he is ready to give up any and everything to lay hold on that treasure. With that spirit, he becomes a true believer in God, Christ, and His word. He repents of his sin, giving up the things that would hinder him from obeying God. He then confesses Christ as the Son of God. Then he is baptized, buried in water, for the remission of sins to enter Christ and His church. He does what all of the converts in the book of Acts did to be saved. So the Lord saves him and adds him to His church. Now he is happy. He is at last just a Christian, a member of Christ's church, and has the hope of eternal life. Now that he is a Christian, he wants to tell all of the world about the treasure that he has found. As he looks back he wonders why he didn't find this treasure long before he did. But then he realizes that there were many hindrances. There were ignorance, prejudice, mis-information and misunderstandings about the church. Also, he was deceived about what he had. He was content and satisfied with what he had. But how thankful he is now that the Lord allowed him to live long enough for his eyes to be opened to the truth!

Come to think about it, there are many people out there who

are just like this man was. I want to encourage you to investigate the Church of Christ. Check up on us. Find out for yourself who we are and what we are. If you will, you may discover that hidden treasure that this man found. If you will do as he did, then it can also change your life for good.

The second parable that we are going to consider is similar to the one we have just gone through. Jesus said, *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it”* (Matthew 13:45,46).

In this parable we are dealing with a merchant who is already looking for a goodly pearl, a very special pearl. He knows pearls. He knows that there are many of them, that there are all kinds, with all kinds of value on them. But he is looking for that very special one. Finally, he finds such a pearl, one of great value. What does he do then? Does he just go on ignoring his discovery? Is he indifferent about it? No, to the contrary. He immediately goes into action. He goes and sells all that he has and buys it. In other words, he recognizes the value of that pearl, and he is willing to pay the price necessary to make it his own. He might have had a collection of pearls, a house, and many other things that he treasured. But he recognized that this one pearl was worth more than all else. He therefore was a wise man in purchasing that pearl of great price.

What is Jesus teaching here? He is saying that likewise the kingdom, or church, is of great value. There may be any number of people out there, and you could be one of them, who is looking for the truth of God. You may be something religiously, but you are not satisfied. You find that there is something missing. You are looking for something better. Once you find the truth,

the true church, pure Christianity, then you have made up your mind that you are going to accept it. You are ready to give up whatever it takes to obey God and be what He wants you to be. I have come across many people who have done just that. They were looking, seeking, and searching for the truth and when they found it they accepted it. It doesn't take long for one to find it when he wants to find it, when he has a receptive heart, when he loves the truth. I therefore want to encourage you to think seriously about the things that have been said in this study. Are you looking for that goodly pearl or not? If you are not looking for it, you may not find it. But if you are looking for it, that is, the pure truth of God, the one true church that you can read about in God's word, then it may just be that you are in the process of finding it right now. Think of these things and go to the scriptures and study God's word for yourself. What will you find there? You will find what you are looking for if you have your eyes open. I ask that you accept that truth and obey it and be only what the Lord would have you to be, a Christian and a member of His family, the church.

## Lesson 13

# Parables of the Mustard Seed and Leaven

Let us consider Matthew 13:31,32. Here we have a parable concerning the kingdom of heaven. A parable is an illustration or where some material object is used to make a spiritual application. Jesus was fond of this method of teaching. It was simple and helped to explain what the kingdom or church would be like once it came into the world. But listen now to the parable of the mustard seed: *“Another parable He put forth to them, saying: The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”*

Jesus was familiar with the people around Him. He knew that most of them came from the land. They knew what it was to till the soil, to make crops, to sow and reap. They were also familiar with mustard or greens. They knew that the seed from which it is grown is very small. Yet, when it is planted and comes forth, and begins to grow, then it becomes many many times larger. It might even grow as tall as a man. With its leaves or branches, it is even strong enough for birds to sit on them. Who would have thought that such a small seed would produce such a large and strong plant? Then Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven, or the church, would be like that. It would begin small but it would encompass the earth. And this is what happened.

Acts 2 tells of the beginning or establishment of the Lord's church. This was the day of Pentecost, a Jewish feast day that

would bring Jews together from all parts of the world. The Lord chose this day as the day to begin His church. There would be a large group of people there to hear His word. He had instructed the Apostles to remain in Jerusalem until they be endued with power from on high. On this day the power of the Holy Spirit was poured out on them. As a result, they began to speak in other languages so that all heard them speak in their own language. They were astonished and amazed at this, but the Apostle Peter explained that what was happening was in fulfillment of what Joel had said would come to pass.

The Apostles went on to preach the gospel to a large crowd, the good news that Jesus had died for their sins, had been buried, but after three days and nights had come forth from the grave, and that even then He was reigning in heaven as King of kings and Lord of lords. With this some were cut to the heart and wanted to know what they should do. They were told to repent of their sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then they that gladly received His word were baptized and three thousand souls were added to them and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

So with this, the church of our Lord had its beginning in Jerusalem, and it has been in existence ever since. But after its glorious beginning, the gospel was preached again and again and souls continued to obey the Lord and to be added to the church. When you read through the book of Acts you can clearly see the growth of the church taking place. Men like Paul made one missionary journey after another and thus taking the gospel and church to new horizons. The other Apostles went out in different directions, and so did many of their converts. The cause of Christ

thus swept over the country and throughout the world. Paul was able to say in Colossians 1:23 that the gospel had by then been taken to every creature under heaven. The Lord had sent forth the Apostles with the great commission to take the gospel into all the world. Starting with a dozen, in less than thirty years they had accomplished this. This was in spite of the persecution of the day, the poverty of the people, and the many obstacles that they were confronted with. Talk about growth, then that is growth! But what effect did it have on the world? It had a great impact on all people everywhere. The gospel spoke to the needs of the people. It presented solutions to their problems. It brought light to a world of darkness. As a matter of fact, it so effected the world that it has never been the same since that time. It was changed for better. The world as a whole is still in sin and lost, but where would the world be today if it had not been for the influence of Christianity during the first century, and of course since then.

Yes, in the Lord's parable He was showing how His kingdom, or church, would begin with the seed of the word of God, with a dozen men in Jerusalem, but that it would grow and spread until it was felt and found throughout the whole world. That indeed is a success story.

Now let us go to Matthew 13:33 for another parable. This one is similar but still has a very definite lesson to teach. We read concerning Jesus, *"Another parable He spoke to them: The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."*

First of all, what is leaven? It is a substance or ferment that makes meal or dough rise. For example, when yeast is put in meal, flour, or dough it has a leavening influence on it and it

rises, increasing in size and makes the finished bread much lighter in texture and much more edible.

The point the Lord is making here in this parable, in relation to the kingdom, or the church, is showing its ability to influence those around it, and even the whole world. The Apostle Paul said, "*A little leaven leavens the whole lump*" (Galatians 5:9). Leaven is powerful. As sure as some is put in meal or flour then it will finally have an influence on all of it. Again, the same is true with the church and Christianity. Just the fact that it is in the world it is going to influence the world. The point should be made, however, that this doesn't mean that the whole world is going to be converted to Christ. Even Christ recognized that this would not be possible when He said that the majority would travel on the broad way, but only a few would travel on the strait and narrow way (Matthew 7:13,14). Still, Christianity has had a leavening influence on the world for good. Take a look at the countries of the world that have been influenced, in one way or the other, by the teachings of Christ. Look at even those countries that espouse some religion other than Christianity and you will see that even they have not been spared. Take a look at the people around you, and perhaps your own life, and count the ways that Christianity has had a leavening influence on you and others. If you will, you may be surprised. Of course you might not want to admit it, and you might even attribute some of these things to some other source, but if you will be honest with yourself, you will have to admit that the power of Christianity has exerted its influence even in your life. And you can be thankful that it has. Christianity has done more to help man and the world than all of the other religions put together. That being true, why not let it have even a greater influence in your life? It will do you no harm, but rather it will do you only good. It can turn your life

around and give you the kind of life that you have only dreamed of up to this point. Try it and see if it doesn't work.

The kingdom of heaven, the church of our Lord, is the greatest institution in all the world. These parables make this point. As you think about all of this, please keep in mind that the Lord is one and He has but one church and only one religion. Be not deceived by cheap imitations or by false promises. Go to the source book, the Bible, and see for yourself.



## Lesson 14

### Parable of the Marriage Feast

Now let's study a parable or a story of Jesus as He taught His disciples concerning the kingdom of heaven, or the church that would soon be established. He said, *"The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding. But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding. So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen"* (Matthew 22:2-14).

The marriage feast, as depicted in this story, was based on the kind of practice that was common in Jesus' time. There are a

number of characters and points in this setting that we want to notice.

First of all, He compares the kingdom of heaven to the preparations that the king made for the wedding of his son. The kingdom here is the church, or the bride. The emphasis in this story, however, has to do with the son and those who are invited to attend the wedding.

Second, the king would represent God and the son would have to be Christ.

Third, God made arrangements for the salvation of man. First, the Jews themselves were invited to come. They were informed about the coming of Christ through the law and prophets. All were bidden to come and partake of the good things that had been prepared for them, but they would not come. Then God sent forth others to tell them that they were bidden. This time Christ and the Apostles were sent. We know that Christ and the Apostles spent all of their early efforts in an attempt to reach the Jews. But they made light of it and would not come. Indifferent about it, they went on with their daily routines. It was said of Christ, *"He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him"* (John 1:11). Christ Himself said, *"But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life"* (John 5:40).

There were some who so violently opposed the Lord and His invitation that they persecuted the Apostles and the early church. Of course we know that even Christ Himself was crucified. Speaking of Christ, the Apostles later reminds the Jews on the day of Pentecost of what they had done. *"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your*

*midst, as you yourselves also know — Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it” (Acts 2:22-24).*

In the parable we are told that *“But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city” (Matthew 22:7).* Some understand this to mean that God responded to the wickedness of the Jews by sending the Roman armies against them and thus destroying Jerusalem, the temple, and to further dismantle the Jewish nation. For sure, God has made it plain that He will punish those who oppose Him and His people.

Fourth, the king explains to the servants that the wedding is ready but those who were invited were not worthy. God, the Father, accepts the fact now that the gospel has been preached to the Jews, but as a whole, they have refused to accept the invitation to come.

Fifth, the king now instructs the servants to go into the highways and bid as many as they can find to come to the marriage. This means that God is now sending forth His messengers or preachers to invite all to come to Him. Christ said, *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).* Again, He said to the Apostles, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the*

*end of the age*" (Matthew 28:19,20). Hear Him again, *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned"* (Mark 16:15,16). All are invited to come to Christ. That includes Jews, Gentiles, people of all nations, of all tongues, poor and rich, male and female.

Sixth, the servants went out and invited all to come, good and bad, and the wedding was furnished with guests. This means that the Lord's invitation is extended to both good and bad. Of course in order to attend the wedding or to married to Christ, they must repent of their sins and obey the Lord to be saved and to be added to the church (Acts 2:38; Acts 2:47).

Seventh, when the king came to see the guests he found one there without a wedding garment. The king was very unhappy with the man and instructed that he be cast out of the wedding. The wedding garment was very important in that time. When we accept the Lord's invitation, and obey Him, then we enter Him, spiritually, and so we put on Christ in the waters of baptism (Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:26,27). The Apostle Paul wrote, *"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts"* (Romans 13:14). To count on the robes of our own righteousness to save us, and to take us to heaven, would be a tragic mistake. We read that we are saved by the grace of God, and not of ourselves, or by the works of the law (Ephesians 2:8,9). That doesn't mean that there is nothing for us to do, because we are instructed to obey the commandments of the Lord. But it does mean that it is impossible for us to do enough good works on our own, separate and apart from obeying the Lord, to save us and to take us to heaven.

So what do we have now? We have God the King or the

Father, Christ the Son, the Bridegroom, and the servants or preachers who go out to invite the people to the wedding. Those who accepted and came properly attired, being those who obeyed the truth and put on Christ, were accepted. The ones who came improperly dressed or the ones who came depending on their own righteousness, were rejected. Elsewhere in the scriptures, it is said that those who obey the Lord are added to the church (Acts 2:47), and thus being married to Christ (Romans 7:1-4), they have become the bride of Christ (John 3:29; Revelation 21:9).

Again, there is one God, one Christ, one kingdom or church, and thus one bride. That was all there was then and that is all there is now. Anything or anybody else does not represent the Lord.

You are invited to come to Christ and His church by believing in Him, repenting of your sins, confessing Him as the Son of God, and being baptized for the remission of your sins. On doing that, the Lord will save you and add you to His church, which is His bride (Acts 2).

## Lesson 15

# Parable of the Ten Virgins

In Matthew 25:1-13 Jesus gave a parable of the ten virgins. It reads as follows: *“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him! Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us! But he answered and said, Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you. Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.”*

The kingdom of heaven here was the church. It had not been established yet, but Jesus was teaching His disciples some valuable lessons that would relate to it once it came into existence. In this particular parable the Lord was showing the importance of obeying God, and being faithful right on up to the time of His coming.

Great emphasis was placed on marriage in Christ's time.

There were many traditions and customs tied to it. There was the betrothal, and then the bridegroom would come to the bride's house, and take her to his place for the marriage celebration. The bride had bridesmaids who watch for the bridegroom, and accompanied the bride to the marriage feast, so that they might see after her needs.

In this parable Jesus said the kingdom of heaven, or church, was like ten virgins or bridesmaids. No particular importance is attached to the number. But five of them were wise and five were foolish. The five wise ones were wise because they had made adequate preparation. They had their lamps, and they had their oil, so that they might have light during the night hours. They were then prepared to wait and watch for the coming of the bridegroom. The other five virgins were said to be foolish. They took along their lamps but they did not take any extra oil so that they might have a light during the night.

The record says that the bridegroom tarried for some time. During this period both the wise and foolish virgins slumbered and slept. No doubt they were all excited about the possibility of the coming of the bridegroom, but still they were human and therefore they got tired and sleepy. Then at midnight someone cried out that the bridegroom was coming and that they should go out and meet him. The virgins then arose and trimmed the wicks of their lamps. It was then that the foolish virgins realized that they were out of oil because their lights had gone out. Not knowing what to do they turned to the wise virgins to ask for some of their oil. The wise virgins explained that if they gave them some of theirs, then there would not be enough for them. They suggested therefore that they should go to those who sold oil and buy some. They did so, but while they were gone the bridegroom

came and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage and the door was shut. Although the foolish virgins came later and knocked on the door, that it might be opened, the reply came that he did not know them.

As stated earlier, the kingdom of heaven or the church is represented here by these ten virgins. These were people who had obeyed the Lord. They were Christians. They were members of the church. They were waiting for the Lord's return. The wise ones are those who are always ready, their lights are always shining (Matthew 5:16). The foolish virgins represent those church members who have become careless and indifferent. They are there but they had not properly prepared for the Lord's return. Therefore, when He comes again, the wise will be ready to meet Him, but the foolish will not be ready, and so they will be left behind.

The bridegroom in this parable is Christ. Although in a literal marriage the ten virgins would represent the bridesmaids, but spiritually, with the ten virgins representing the church, they could also as the church represent the bride of Christ. Of course in a parable or in using figurative language, it is not always easy to make everything match up. A certain lesson may be under consideration, and the emphasis must stay on that rather than to get off on other points. Here, the main idea seems to be the preparation that is necessary for the Lord's return, and not knowing just when that hour will come to pass. But getting back to the parable, you will note that the bridegroom tarried. This carries with it the idea that Christ continues to tarry in heaven. He has promised to come back (John 14:1-3), but He has not said when He will come. No one knows when that time will be except the Father in heaven (Matthew 24:36). Peter said that one day with



the Lord is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as one day (2 Peter 3:8). We know, however, that He will come. Just because He has not come, does not mean He will not come. The thing we must do is to be sure that we have obeyed the Lord, that we are members of His church, and that we are prepared to meet Him. Christ said that we should be faithful even unto death, or even in death itself (Revelation 2:10).

The midnight call in the parable could mean the call of death or the trump of the Lord announcing the time of His coming. Paul said, *"And to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power"* (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). We also read, *"And it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment"* (Hebrews 9:27). In other words, when the Son of God returns to receive His people, His church, then all that are left will be lost for all eternity. At the judgment of God the righteous will go to be with the Lord, but the wicked, the unfaithful, will be cast into hell (Matthew 25:46). That will be the end for all such people. There will be no second chance, no grace or mercy for those who did not prepare to meet the Lord. This, then, should be a sobering thought for all of us. It should cause us to take a close look at our own life to see where we stand before God. If we are not ready to meet the Lord, then this should serve as a warning to us, and the means to encourage us to get ready. Today is the day of salvation. Now is the time to prepare. Tomorrow could be too late.

Are you a Christian? Are you a member of the Lord's king-

dom, His church? Are you a faithful child of His? If not, then you need to be. Let me encourage you to believe in Christ, to repent of your sins, to confess Him as the Son of God, and to be baptized to wash away your sins. If you will do that, the Lord will save you and add you to His church. As a Christian, and as a member of Christ's church, you will be in position to live for the Lord, be faithful to Him, and to have a home in heaven one day. What a wonderful thought! But it can come true. The Lord has done His part and now it is up to you to do your part.

## Lesson 16

# Parable of the Talents

The church of our Lord is set forth in the scriptures as a living institution. It is made up of human beings, souls that have been saved by Christ and added to His church. In the church they have duties and responsibilities to carry out according to their abilities.

Jesus gave a parable on talents and I think it would be wise to take the time to read that parable just here. Jesus said, *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord’s money. After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents beside them. His lord said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord. He also who had received two talents came and said, Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents beside them. His lord said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord. Then he who had*

*received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours. But his lord answered and said to him, You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:14-30).*

In the foregoing parable or story we have Jesus presenting another lesson concerning the kingdom, or church. Please notice that He said that the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country. He goes on to relate the full story to help the disciples to understand some of the principles and practices that would hold true in the forthcoming church. There are many lessons in this parable, but the gist of what is being taught has to do with the Lord returning to heaven, after leaving behind his disciples, Christians, with various duties and responsibilities, and then to return one day to have His people to give an account for the way they have lived and discharged their duties.

We'll not go back over this story again, but we will take the time to notice the lessons that Jesus is teaching that have to do with His church, His people. As we know from the scriptures, Jesus came into this world, lived among men doing good, was

falsely accused, crucified and buried, but after three days and nights He arose from the grave, appeared before many, and then returned to His Father in heaven to sit down at the right hand of God, to reign over His people as King of kings and Lord of lords. In so doing, He left behind His Apostles and disciples, and the church that was established shortly after His return to heaven, with the responsibility of carrying on His work. He had trained them, and had even promised to send the Holy Spirit to guide them, but this still meant that He had to put His entire confidence and trust in His servants, who were human beings and subject to mistakes. In leaving them, He entrusted the gospel to them, that of establishing the church, and spreading His cause throughout the world (Matthew 28:19,20; Acts 1:8). He thus gave the Apostles, who became the first members of the church, and all of their converts, who were added to the Apostles or the church, duties and responsibilities to carry out according to their abilities. Keep in mind that their abilities would have depended on their education, wealth, position, influence, etc., but regardless, the Lord did not require of them more than they could do. He knew each one, and He gave to one a certain responsibility, to another a lighter responsibility, and still to another even a smaller responsibility, and so He dealt with each one according to what they were able to do.

The record goes on to suggest that those who were given the greater responsibilities went on to faithfully discharge their duty to the Lord. All we have to do is to go through the New Testament and read of such great servants as Peter, Paul, John, and many others, to see how they indeed used the talents and abilities that the Lord gave them. There were many others who had less ability, and we also read of many of those in the New Testament, and they likewise used their talents and abilities

accordingly. But Jesus told of another man who did not use his talent, which perhaps was made of gold or silver, and was very valuable. He was merely content to hold on to what he had. He therefore did not deposit it so that it would at least draw interest, but he hid it and kept it until his master returned. Christ was saying that there are Christians like that. They go through life wasting their talent and ability. Oh yes, they are Christians, members of the church, and maybe they go to worship, but they do little more. Perhaps they could be teachers, preachers, elders, deacons, or work and serve in other capacities but they sit and do nothing. They only save themselves for the Lord. They do not rise to the potential that is within them. How sad. Theirs is the story of wasted talents and abilities, wasted lives.

Of course as the story goes, the master eventually returned, and so will Christ come again. He has promised that He will come again (John 14:1-3). When Jesus returned to the Father in heaven there were two men that appeared, evidently angels, but they said, "*Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven*" (Acts 1:11). Yes, Jesus will come again one day. We don't know when. It could be today, tomorrow, next year or whenever, but He will come. That means that we have now to live for Him, to serve Him, and to prepare as Christians and as His church, to meet Him and to give a good account of the duties and responsibilities that He has given us to perform.

We are told that on His return He will bless those who have been faithful to Him by using their talents and abilities, and reward them with eternal life. On the other hand, those who have been lazy and unfruitful He will reject and cast them out for pun-

ishment. Speaking of such people, we read, *“And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life”* (Matthew 25:46). But you might wonder if we will have to wait for the Lord’s return in order to have some of the rewards of our faithfulness. Let me assure you that as Christians we are also rewarded in this life as we use our talents and abilities in service to the Lord. At the same time, those who fail to serve Him will suffer definite consequences.

You will notice that the one talent man tried to excuse himself on the basis that his master was a hard man and therefore was over demanding. The master explained that if he really felt that way about him, then he should have put forth an even greater effort to use his talent. There are those who think the Lord’s way is too hard. They want to do things their way. But the Lord is full of grace and mercy to all of those who will believe in Him and obey Him. Those who love Him and are faithful to Him unto death will have nothing to fear. Those who have rejected Him, or who have failed to do the work that He has given them to do, then they are the ones who have reason to fear Him.

God has but one kingdom, or church, and it is only there that you can serve Him. Please don’t waste your life and lose your soul. Believe and obey the Lord and He will save you and add you to the church where you can use your talents and abilities according to His will.

## Lesson 17

# Parable of the Last Judgment

Jesus gave numerous parables or stories based on earthly things to present spiritual lessons. Many of these had to do with the kingdom of heaven, or the church, as it was generally called after its establishment. There was going to be but one church, so all of the Lord's parables concerning the kingdom had to do with this church, the church of Christ.

The parable that we are going to consider at this time has to do with the kingdom and the last judgment. Christ said, *"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me. Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You? And the King will answer and say to them, Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me. Then He will also say to those on the left hand, Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared*



*for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me. Then they also will answer Him, saying, Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You? Then He will answer them, saying, Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me. And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:31-46).*

In this story please keep in mind that the final day of judgment is under consideration, with all nations being there, with the sheep representing the righteous, the church, with the goats representing the wicked, the lost, and with Christ being the judge, separating the righteous from the unrighteous, and passing final judgment on them according to the way they lived. This was going to be final, and with the righteous going into everlasting life and with the wicked being cast into everlasting punishment. This day has not taken place yet, but it will some day. The Hebrew writer declared, *“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment”* (Hebrews 9:27). Paul said, *“So then each of us shall give account of himself to God”* (Romans 14:12). Again he said, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad”* (2 Corinthians 5:10). In speaking to the people of Athens, Paul said, *“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead”*

(Acts 17:30,31). Christ Himself said, *“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day”* (John 12:48). So, even though the Lord points to the judgment in the form of a parable, still it is something that will surely take place one day.

The time of the judgment will depend on the coming of Christ, and we do not know what day that will be. Peter said, *“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up”* (2 Peter 3:10). Concerning this time, Christ said, *“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth — those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation”* (John 5:28,29). Paul wrote, *“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord”* (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17). He goes on to write to the same Christians, *“...the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power”* (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

In this story the sheep represent the righteous, Christians, the church. Christ was often referred to as the lamb of God that was

offered as a sacrifice on the cross for the sins of the world (1 Peter 1:18-21). Christ is pictured as the good shepherd, and His people, sheep, and His church, the one sheepfold (John 10:1-18). Sheep are gentle and easy to handle. They obey their master's voice. They are good followers. Thus, in the judgment, the Lord, the good shepherd, will divide the sheep from the goats. That is, the King, Christ, will divide His people from among the people of the world, that they might now inherit that eternal kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. This again was the church that had been spoken of in prophecy as being a kingdom that would never be destroyed but that it would stand forever (Daniel 2:44). Christ then explains to them why they had received such an honor.

He said that when He was hungry, they had given Him meat, when He was thirsty, they had given Him drink, when He was naked, they had clothed Him, when He was sick, they had visited Him, etc. They wanted to know when they had done these things to Him. He explained that when they had so done with the least of His brethren, then they had done it unto Him. In other words, when they had shown love to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, when they had helped one another, when they had practiced pure Christianity, then this was service rendered unto Him. Therefore they were being rewarded with eternal life because they belonged to Him and they had been faithful to Him.

Going on, He turned to those on his left hand, the goats. Goats are animals that are difficult to deal with. They are always getting into trouble. Their disposition is a mischievous one. Therefore the Lord chose goats to represent the wicked. He said to them, "*Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Matthew 25:41). Then

He explains to them why He was rejecting them. He said that when He was hungry, they did not feed Him, when He was thirsty, they gave Him no drink, when He was a stranger, they did not take Him in, when He was naked, they did not clothe Him, when He was sick, they did not visit Him. Then they wanted to know when they had so failed to respond to His needs. He explained that when they had not cared for the least of those among them, then they had also failed to respond to Him. Therefore, they were sent away to everlasting destruction. Even though it might have seemed little, still it was a great crime against their fellowman, and Christ Himself.

A parable is based on something that is true, something that can happen, and will happen. Therefore, as sure as you and I are living, one day the Lord will return and the judgment will take place. Will we be ready to meet the Lord? Will we be found in the right place, in the church? Will we be prepared to meet Him? What will He say to us? Remember, Christ said of that day, *“Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”* (Matthew 7:21-23).

If you are not a Christian, not a member of the Lord's church, then I would like to urge you to obey the Lord while you still have the time and the opportunity (Mark 16:16). In doing so, Christ will save you and add you to His church (Acts 2:47). As such, you can be faithful to the Lord, and one day receive the crown of life that He has promised (Revelation 2:10).

## Lesson 18

# The Seven Churches of Asia

I am sure that you are familiar with the fact that the Bible has much to say about the Lord's church. Some are confused when it talks about there being but one body or church (Ephesians 4:4; Colossians 1:18), and yet they are able to read of many churches — like the church at Corinth, the church at Ephesus, the Jerusalem church, the church at Colosse, etc. But the thing that is really confusing to these people is that they can read about the seven churches of Asia in the first three chapters of the book of Revelation of the New Testament. How can there be but one church and many churches at the same time? Does the scripture contradict itself? We'll see.

Others find no problem with the idea of one church, and many churches, since there are many churches in the world today. They simply try to justify the one by the other.

If you will go back to Acts 2 and read through that chapter, you will discover that it records the establishing of the Lord's church there in Jerusalem almost two thousand years ago. It had been prophesied (Isaiah 2:2,3; Joel 2:28,29; Daniel 2:44), and it had been promised (Mark 9:1; Matthew 16:18,19). Now it was being established. It was composed of the Apostles, first of all, since the Lord miraculously set them into the church, or made them the first members (1 Corinthians 4:9). Next, those who obeyed the gospel that the Apostles preached on that day were saved, and the Lord added them to the church, that is, to the Apostles who had been made the first members. Since that time, all others who have obeyed the Lord have been saved and added

to the church, or added to all of the other members. It is like adding family members. Each time a new child is born into a family, that child is added to the other members of the family (John 3:3-5).

But with the gospel being taken to other cities and other parts of the world, as the Lord had commanded (Matthew 28:19,20), and as more and more obeyed the Lord, then the church was planted in many new cities. In each city, like Ephesus, it was referred to as being the church at Ephesus, and so on with all the other places. Another word for church is congregation. In other words, the church is made up of many congregations. Christ promised to build only one church (Matthew 16:18) and that is all He ever built — just one church. The church at Jerusalem did not belong to Jerusalem or to any man. It belonged to the Lord and therefore it was the church of Christ at Jerusalem. The same was true with the church at Ephesus, the church at Corinth, etc. Paul referred to such congregations as the churches of Christ (Romans 16:16). All of them were alike because all of them were churches of Christ. All of them, therefore, fellowshiped each other.

Now we come to the seven churches of Asia. How can they be explained? Weren't they located in different places? Yes, but this is a good example of what we have already talked about. These were simply seven different congregations of the one church, Christ's church. There were many other churches or congregations in Asia, but these seemed to have been singled out to represent all of the congregations in Asia of that day. The Apostle John was inspired to speak to them, and thus to deliver the Lord's message to them. This was written down, and then preserved for us as a part of the New Testament. In Revelation 1:4 we begin to read, "*John, to the seven churches which are in*

*Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Revelation 1:4-6).*

John says that he heard “*behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, and, What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea. Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edge sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches” (Revelation 1:10-20).*

Then in Revelation 2 and 3 the Lord begins to speak to each of these seven churches. He first commends them for any good points that they may have had, and then He proceeds to point out their weaknesses and failures. They are then asked to repent of their sins and to obey God so that they might be eternally saved. But as churches or congregations, keep in mind that they were all one, all belonged to the Lord, and He spoke to them as being His; all wore His name, all had faults, all had needs, and all were exhorted to repent and obey God.

The seven churches of Asia do not represent seven different denominational groups. There was no such thing in those days as a denominational church as we have today. These churches or congregations were the same as the one established in Jerusalem. Not only so, but from that day down to this, there has never been but one true church. The church of Christ today is to be found throughout the world. There are many congregations in many lands but together they are the one church that Christ promised to build, the same church that existed in the first century. Christ is the builder, He is the saviour of it, the head of it, and it wears His name. The Bible is its only guide in religious matters. Its government, worship, and work are patterned after the one we read about in the New Testament.

We want to encourage you and all others to be members of this one church. We are not talking about our church, because we don't have a church. We are not referring to some denominational or man-made church, because they represent division, and therefore stand condemned before God. Rather, we are talking about the church of Christ, the one and only church of the Bible.

You can become a member, just like the people did in the days of the Apostles. They believed in Christ, they repented of



their sins, they confessed Christ as the Son of God, and they were baptized for the remission of their sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). When they did this the Lord saved them and added them to His church (Acts 2:41,47). When you do the same, then Christ will also save you and add you to that same church, His church. Isn't that wonderful? If you are going to be a member of some church, then why not be a member of Christ's church? Don't settle for anything less than the best. Don't settle for anything less than the truth. If you are going to be religious, then determine that you are going to be right. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, and there is no way to heaven except through Him (John 14:6).

## Lesson 19

# According to the Pattern

When we go to the Bible we are reminded again and again that it contains God's word, that God has spoken, and that all scriptures have been given by the inspiration of God (Hebrews 1:1,2; 2 Timothy 3:16,17). Such is to say that God has said what He wants to say and He wants us to do exactly that.

To illustrate the importance of carrying out God's will, consider Noah and the ark. The world was so wicked that God decided that He would destroy man from the face of the earth by sending a flood. But He saw that Noah and his family were righteous people and so He spoke to Noah and commanded him to build an ark for himself and his family and for all who would enter the ark and for a specified number of animals. God then gave him a pattern for building the ark. He gave him all of the dimensions, the kind of wood that was to be used, and all of the other details. He also informed him concerning the number of animals that he was to take along. Now Noah might have had some ideas of his own about all of this. In that case, do you suppose God would have been pleased? The record said though, *"Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did"* (Genesis 6:22). That means that Noah was faithful in carrying out God's instructions. God was therefore pleased, and thus saved him and his family from the flood, while all other human beings were swallowed up by it.

God's people, Israel, was in bondage down in Egypt. They continued to cry out for Him to deliver them. Their request was heard and so God sent Moses to them. After a period of time they

were brought forth to freedom. Then God gave Moses and the Israelites His law. He also spoke to Moses and instructed him concerning the building of the tabernacle, a place for worship, and a place for him to dwell and to communicate with His people. God gave specific instructions on how this tabernacle was to be built. He told him the dimensions, the kind of materials that were to be used, etc. In Hebrews 8:5 the record says that Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: *"See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."* Also read Exodus 25. What did God mean by this? He meant that He wanted His tabernacle built according to His plan.

How did Moses understand this? He accepted the fact that it was to be build according to God's wishes and not according the wishes of man. But suppose Moses had deviated some from the pattern or plan? Would God have been pleased? Certainly not. He wanted it done His way or else He would have given Moses the freedom to build it the way he wanted to do it. Surely we can see that point.

Coming over to the New Testament period, we have the Lord giving the gospel or the good news of salvation. He commanded the Apostles to take His message into all the world (Mark 16:15,16). Paul said that the gospel in fact was the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 5:1-4). He then said that for one to be saved he must believe in Christ, repent of his sins, and be baptized, thus picturing the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection in his obedience (Romans 6:3,4; Romans 6:17,18). To the Galatians, Paul stated that he had preached that one pure gospel to them, but should he come now and preach another gospel, or should an angel come and preach another gospel, then

the curse of the Lord would be upon him (Galatians 1:7-9). That means that only one gospel was preached and that only that one gospel has the power to save (Romans 1:16,17).

Next, look at the church as set forth in the scriptures. We are told who built it, where it began, when it began, what is was, who the head was, who the saviour was, its organization, terms of membership, and the kind of worship and work it was to engage in. This sounds like a pattern, doesn't it? If the ark and the tabernacle had to be built by a pattern, then why not the church? And indeed the Lord gave a pattern for it and it is to be clearly found in His word. But what is a pattern? Surely we know by now what it is. It is simply a plan, a form, a model, a guide, a design, or an example. Tailors follow a pattern either on paper or in their mind. A builder follows a set of blue prints. A cook uses a recipe. And on and on we could go. But the idea is that God has revealed to us in His word how He wants us to do certain things, how to establish the church where we are and what it should be like. When we follow that pattern, or we do the things that He has asked us to do, then we become what He would have us to be, and we become the church that we can read about in the scriptures.

Look around you. Do you see a church anywhere that looks like the church that we read about in the scriptures? There are many churches but perhaps most of them, or all of the ones you know about, are denominational and man-made. They don't even resemble the church that we read about in the Bible. They are known by man-made names, have men over them and teach many things that are contrary to the scriptures. But you might want to know what difference it makes. It makes all the difference in the world. If we expect to please the Lord we are going

to have to do what He wants us to do. Look again at Noah and the ark and Moses and the tabernacle. Suppose they had felt that they could go on and do things their way. Do you think for a second that the Lord would have been pleased with that? My friends, we have a pattern for the church set forth in the scriptures and we are to follow it in every detail. If we do not, then we will be in trouble. One day we will have to try to explain to the Lord why we did not follow His pattern. That won't sound so good then. We can tell ourselves it is all right, but it will be different then.

God has given us a pattern on how to worship. There are different ways to worship. Some worship out of ignorance (Acts 17), and others worship according to the doctrines and commandments of men (Matthew 15:9). But God wants us to worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). That just means that He wants us to worship according as He has stated in His word. That would mean that He wants us to worship on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), by gathering with the saints (Hebrews 10:25), to study (2 Timothy 2:15), to pray (Acts 2:42), to sing (Ephesians 5:19), to partake of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-29), and to give liberally of our means (1 Corinthians 16:1,2). Now compare this pattern of worship with the way others worship. If you will, then you will notice a remarkable difference. Now whose way is right? The wise man said in the long ago, "*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death*" (Proverbs 14:12).

I want to remind you of the fact that we are told in the scriptures that we are not to add to God's word or to subtract from it. Hear it for yourself. The Apostle John wrote, "*For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If*

*anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18,19). James tells us that we are to be doers of the word (James 1:22). He also said that if we would continue in the perfect law of liberty, the New Testament, then we would be blessed (James 1:25). John recorded these words by Jesus: “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (Revelation 22:14).*

Are you following God’s pattern on the church, and all other things that He has spoken? If not, you are on dangerous ground. Let me encourage you to return to God’s word for all that you believe and do in the name of religion. Do it God’s way and then you will be right.

## Lesson 20

# Misunderstandings of the Church

The church of our Lord is set forth in God's word in a very clear manner. It tells us all that God wanted us to know about it. Furthermore, He had no desire whatsoever to confuse us or to mislead us. Rather, He wants us to know His will, and since He has spoken of the church, then He wants us to know what the church is, the purpose of it, etc. And yet, it seems that the majority throughout the world are confused, mixed up, and completely misunderstand the church. But why is this so? A lot of it is based on ignorance, that is, so many people have never gone to the scriptures to see what the Bible says about the church. When they speak about the church, they simply repeat what others have said about it, but they don't really know. Others have been deceived about the church. Maybe they are honest and sincere about it, but they have been misled. Still others have a lot of prejudice against the church. They don't like the church of Christ and what it stands for, so they stubbornly go on their way.

Speaking of misunderstanding the church, let us take the next few minutes to consider some of these misunderstandings, and see if we can help some of you who are sincerely interested in knowing God's will on this subject.

There are those who do not know what the church is. Some think that it is a church building. Others define it as a denomination or a group of denominations. The scriptures reveal the fact that the church is made up of saved people. We read that Christ adds the saved to the church (Acts 2:47). There is but one church, and it belongs to Christ, since He purchased it with His

blood (Acts 20:28). It existed hundreds of years before denominationalism came into existence. Then we are told that Christ prayed that we might all be one (John 17:20-23), not all divided up into different religious bodies (Romans 16:17,18).

Some think that we teach that the church saves. Of course it is not a matter of what we teach, because that is not important. It is important to know what the Bible teaches. The scriptures do teach the importance of being a member of the church. It says that Christ is the saviour of the church. Paul wrote, *"For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body"* (Ephesians 5:23). Then in Colossians 1:18 we are told that the body is the church, and in Ephesians 1:22,23 He says that the church is the body. That means that if Christ is the saviour of the body, and the body is the church, then He is the saviour of the church. In Ephesians 5:25 it says that Christ gave Himself for the church, and in Acts 20:28 we read that Christ purchased the church with His blood. Now the scriptures do not teach that the church is the saviour, but they do teach that Christ is the saviour of the church, and that means that we must be members of the church to be saved. Let me remind you again that Christ adds the saved to the church (Acts 2:47), and so the church is made up of the saved. If one is saved, then he is a member of the church. If that be true, and it is, then it stands to reason that if one is not in the church, then he is not saved.

While we are on that, let us go on to say a word about the fact that many of these same people teach that the church is not important, that one church is as good as another, etc. For sure, that is a misunderstanding of what the Bible teaches. As just pointed out, the church was so important to the Lord that He was



willing to die for it, that He purchased it with His own precious blood. Surely He would not have done that if it was not important. As far as churches are concerned, one denominational church might be as good as another, but all the churches in the world cannot measure up to the church of our Lord as set forth in the Bible. We are sorry that we have to say so much about the church, but when most people misunderstand it, and say so many things about the church that are false, then we must try to set the record straight, and show what the Bible teaches on this subject. Even then it will be up to you to decide what you will do about it. We only ask that you be honest with yourself, and with what the scriptures say about the church. If you will do that, then everything will be all right.

There are those who misunderstand the name of the church. They say that the name isn't important. Where did they get that? They didn't get it from God's word. It says just the opposite. Listen to it: "*Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12). Question: Who is the writer talking about here? He is talking about Christ. What is he saying about Christ? He is saying that it is in His name only that one can be saved. How does this involve the church? Because Christ built the church, and therefore it belongs to Him (Matthew 16:18). That being true, then the church wears His name (Romans 16:16), and the members of the church, as individuals, wear His name since they are known as Christians (Acts 11:26). Paul wrote concerning Christ and His church, "*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named*" (Ephesians 3:14,15). Paul says here that the Lord's family wears His name. What is the family? It is the house of God, or church (1 Timothy 3:15). As members of

the church we are the children of God (1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:26,27). Therefore the name is very important. The names of men, such as used by denominational churches, will not save but they will cause those who use them to be lost. Please take note of this.

Some understand that the church teaches that if their family members died without becoming members of the church of Christ they will be lost. I want to remind you again that it is not a matter of what the church teaches, because the church is simply made up of human beings who have obeyed the Lord, but the thing that is important is to find out what the Bible teaches. As far as the Bible goes, it teaches that we must be in the church to be saved, or that if we are saved, the Lord has added us to the church (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 20:28). But when it comes to your relatives and my relatives, there is no need to speculate on whether they will be saved or whether they will be lost. It is not for us to say. They have lived their lives and now they have gone to meet the Lord. Regardless of His judgment, it will be just and honorable. Now when it comes to us, we are still living, and we will have to answer to God for our own souls. It is not a matter, therefore, of what our relatives did, but if we know what the Bible teaches, then we must obey God rather than man.

Others talk about joining the church as they would join a club. Please understand that the church is a divine institution. It is Christ who makes the final decision as to whether He will add one to His church or not. That decision is based on whether one has obeyed God from the heart or not. You see, man cannot look upon one's heart to see his motives, but Christ can, and therefore, He is the one who does the adding, if there is to be any adding done (Acts 2:47). Man will accept another on the basis of one's

outward acts, and therefore if it was possible to join the church, then the church might be filled with sinners. But such is not the case. One might turn against the Lord after being added to the church, but at least at the time that he is added it has to be on the basis that he has complied with the Lord's terms of pardon, and it is the Lord, and the Lord only, that does the adding. One might therefore join a denomination, but he cannot join Christ's church.

We could go on and on with many other misunderstandings of the church, but the thing to remember is that to clear up any and all misunderstandings, all you need to do is to go to the Bible and let God explain the matter to you. If you sincerely want to know the truth, then you'll be able to know the truth on that subject. If you refuse to accept God's word, then no amount of explanation would satisfy you.

I am confident that you have a good heart, and you want to know God's will. Please continue to study about the church and the Lord's way. I hope you will, and I pray that you'll want to be a member of it. We read that "*And the Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely*" (Revelation 22:17).

## Lesson 21

# Questions About the Church

One of the most talked about subjects in Christianity is the church. Some would conclude that we talk about it too much, but we are forced to discuss the church for several reasons. To begin with, there is so much error taught on this subject that we are compelled to discuss it, both for the purpose of pointing out the error, and then to present the truth. Next, people in general need to be taught that the church is important, and we can hardly be saved and go to heaven separate and apart from it. Then of course, as pointed out at the beginning, people are always interested in the church, and many questions are asked about it that need to be answered. For sure, we don't want to put more emphasis on the church than the Bible puts on it, but neither do we want to put less emphasis on the church than the Bible puts on it. We want to teach exactly what the Bible says about the church.

Therefore in this particular study we are going to consider a number of questions about the church. It may be that one or more of these questions would be the very ones that you wanted to ask. Our purpose will be, not only to bring up these topics, but to give a scriptural answer to each one.

Why is it that the church of Christ claims to be the only church? We are not just making a lot of claims. We go to the Bible to show what it teaches on this subject. That is the whole problem. Most people do not go to the scriptures to see what is taught. They grow up among the different denominational churches, and they assume that they are all of God, when they are

not. The Bible shows that the Lord's kingdom, or His church, was prophesied by such men as Isaiah, Joel, and Daniel (Isaiah 2:2,3; Daniel 2:44). They told where it would be established, when it would be established, and how it would come into existence. John came saying that it was near at hand (Matthew 3:2). Christ said it would come with power in the life time of some of the disciples that were with Him (Mark 9:1). He promised also to build His church, or kingdom, and that even His death would not prevent Him from doing this (Matthew 16:18,19). In Acts 2 the record shows that the prophecies were fulfilled and the promises kept. This was in Jerusalem, in approximately A.D.33, when the Apostles preached the gospel and some three thousand believed and were baptized and were added to the church. In Ephesians 5:23-27 we are told that Christ died for the church, that He is the saviour of it, that He is the head of it, and that He will return for it one day. That is the only church that we read about in the Bible. When we obey the Lord He saves us and adds us to that one church. As far as the scriptures are concerned, there is no other church. If there are other churches, they do not belong to the Lord, and if they do not belong to the Lord, then whose churches are they? Would you want to be a member of a church like that?

Why is the Church of Christ always condemning the other churches? This question is asked as though the Lord's church is just like all of the other churches, but it is not. As pointed out earlier, the Lord's church is the one that Christ built, the one that belongs to Him, the one that He has promised to save. He did not establish these other churches, such as the Catholic and Protestant groups. All of these came into existence hundreds of years after Christ established His church. We read in Ephesians 4:4 that there is but one body and then in Colossians 1:18 we are

told the body is the church. That being true, there is no room for other churches. Of course the impression is left that we want to find fault with other churches and exalt our church, that we are mean and ugly and unfair in dealing with the denominational churches. That might be true, if the Church of Christ was just a denominational church but that is not the case. Neither is it our church. We don't have a church. We are members of Christ's church. But we are not trying to be ugly and unfair in dealing with the denominational churches. We are simply trying to point out what the Bible says. Christ spoke plainly to the Jews of His day who claimed to be following the law, when in reality, they were following the traditions and commandments of men. He therefore condemned them, calling them fools, hypocrites, and blind. He also condemns those today who would cause division, in that He prayed that we might all be one (John 17:20-23). Paul exhorts the brethren to condemn division. He said, *"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple"* (Romans 16:17,18).

Must one be a member of the Church of Christ to be saved and go to heaven? Let me ask you, did Noah and his family have to be in the ark to be saved from the flood? The church is a type of the ark. God used the ark to save the righteous in the long ago. Likewise, Christ uses the church to save His people today. Christ built the church and He is therefore the saviour of it (Ephesians 5:23). That means that if He is the saviour of the church, then we must be members of it to be saved. If He is the saviour of the church, then how could one be saved separate and apart from the church, or outside the church? Does that mean that the church

saves? No. Christ saves the church. The church is not the saviour, but Christ is, and therefore we must be in the church to be saved. But sometimes we hear someone say that he is saved, but that he is not a member of any church, and that would include the Church of Christ. For such a person to make such a statement means that he is unfamiliar with what the Bible says, because the Bible teaches that Christ saves, and when He saves one He adds that person to His church (Acts 2:47). That means that it would be impossible to be saved, and yet not be a member of the Lord's church. It is true that he can't be saved by being a member of one or more denominational churches, but to be saved he must be a member of Christ's church.

How then can one become a member of the Church of Christ? That is simple. When you go to the Book of Acts there are numerous cases of conversion listed there to show you exactly how that is done. Then in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, as well as in the various letters throughout the New Testament, there are many statements indicating the terms of salvation or pardon, and what puts one into Christ and His church. In John 3:3-5 Christ taught that it would be necessary to be born again to enter His kingdom, or church. That involves the Spirit, which means that we are taught by the Spirit, that is, through the word of the Spirit as revealed in God's word. Peter said, *"Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever"* (1 Peter 1:22,23). That means that once the pure word is heard or read, and is received in the heart, that it begets or produces faith, and that faith leads one to go on to the next step that is involved in this birth. Christ said that one must be born of

water to enter the kingdom of God or the church. But how can one be born of water? There is just one way, and that is to go into the water and then to come out of it as the Lord has commanded. In so doing, then one has been born of water. But does that kind of thing sound familiar to you? It does if you are familiar with the scripture. For instance, in Acts 8 we have the story of the conversion of the man from Ethiopia. Philip preached Christ to him, and he became a believer. Then he recognized that it was necessary to be baptized, and when they came to a certain water, he asked if he could do that. On confessing his faith in Christ both went down into the water and Philip baptized him. Then they both came up out of the water. What happened? This man was born of water and of the Spirit, and therefore, entered the kingdom, or church. In Acts 2, the Apostles preached to a large number of people in Jerusalem. We are told that they believed in Christ and were baptized, and that Christ added the saved to the church. In Romans 6:3,4 and Galatians 3:26,27 it says that we are baptized into Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 we are told that we are baptized into the body of Christ, which is the Church of Christ. So the scriptures clearly teach that one must believe in God and Christ, repent of his sins, confess Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized for the remission of sins. When one does this the Lord saves him and adds him to His church, but not until he has done that according to His will.

I trust that some of your questions have been answered about the church. There are many others, but at least I hope this will help.



## Lesson 22

# The Falling Away of the Church

Church history is a most interesting subject, and when studied, with the true facts at hand, it can be very revealing. It also helps us to better understand our present day situation.

Daniel prophesied in the long ago that God would set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed but that it would stand forever (Daniel 2:44). He spoke of a spiritual kingdom, and that kingdom was established in Jerusalem in A.D.33, according to Acts 2, and on up to this very day it has continued to exist. Not only so, but it will live on for all time and for all eternity.

The church did fall away, as Paul predicted that it would even in his day, but a remnant continued to exist in some part of the world even during that period. How do we know? We don't have to have a detailed record of it, as far as man's records are concerned, or as church history is concerned, but we have the promise of God himself that the kingdom or church would never be destroyed, but that it would stand forever. That should be good enough for all of us. If God didn't keep His promise, then it doesn't matter about the church anyway.

The Lord's church has always had enemies, even as the Lord Himself had enemies. The external enemies of the church have always been limited as to what they could do. Their persecution of the church, for instance, has helped it to grow and spread more than to destroy it. The real danger has always come from within. The unfaithful members, those who crave the power and the glory of men, are the ones who present the greatest challenge to the church for survival.

The church had a glorious beginning in Jerusalem in A.D.33, and from there spread over the rest of the world within a matter of some thirty years (Acts 2; Colossians 1:23). The Apostle Paul was one of those who helped to so successfully spread the cause of Christ. But even in his day, he could already see some disturbing things in the church that could eventually result in an apostasy, unless it was stamped out. He therefore sounded out several warnings with the hope that this would be sufficient to make the necessary corrections. Let me hasten to say that the problem was not in the Lord's plan for the church, or the arrangement or organization that He had given for the church, but the problem was with some of the members who were not willing to conform their lives and teaching to the Lord's way.

Paul met with the elders of the church at Ephesus on the isle of Miletus, and among other things, he said to them, *"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. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking adverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears"* (Acts 20:28-31). Notice that Paul was speaking to the overseers, or the elders, of a congregation of the Lord's church at Ephesus, that he had sent for, according to Acts 20:17. He identified the church as being that one that Christ had purchased with His own blood. He points out that after his departure there would be grievous wolves, or false teachers, that would come among them, and they would deceive many of the members. He said that there would be those from within the church that would arise, speaking false

things, and leading away some of the members. Finally, he asked them to remember that he had warned them day and night with tears for three years. So Paul, as a preacher, an Apostle, and one who was guided by the Holy Spirit, was speaking concerning things that represented a real threat to the people of God.

Paul wrote the young preacher, Timothy, *"Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth"* (1 Timothy 4:1-3). He also said on another occasion, *"I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables"* (2 Timothy 4:1-4). As you can see, the falling away would come, not as a result of the enemy coming in and killing out the members of the church, but as a result of the members turning away from the truth to false teaching.

Going on to man's record of church history, we are told that many of the Lord's people fell away as a result of departing from God's plan in the organization of the church. In other words, the church is made up of many congregations. God's plan is for each congregation to have its own elders and deacons, and that each

congregation is to be independent of all other congregations. They would all recognize Christ as their head, and would have fellowship with each other, and could even cooperate in various good works, but not even one congregation should control another congregation or rule over several congregations of the whole church. And yet, history tells us that this was where the falling away occurred. In some of the congregations one of the elders began to dictate to the other elders, and the other elders and members gave in to him. Then eventually the chief elder of one congregation began to dictate to the elders and members of other congregations in his area. This meant that he had a lot of power. It was left up to him as to what would be taught and done. Finally, with numerous chief elders being over congregations in many different areas, this led to the day that one of these chief elders assumed authority or dictatorship over all other chief elders and congregations. History says that in 606 A.D. that the first Universal Bishop or Elder was appointed Head or Pope of the church. This then was the apostate church that had developed out of the Lord's church. All of this did not happen over night, but it gradually happened. Perhaps many did not even realize what was happening. But after more than 500 years the church that dominated the world was far from the church that had its beginning in Jerusalem. But what about the faithful Church of Christ? What happened to it? It continued to exist somewhere in the world, or perhaps in many places throughout the world, but it was overshadowed for several hundred years by this apostate church.

While the Lord's church continued down through the hundreds of years that followed, church history focuses its attention on that apostate church. From 606 A.D. to the 1500's, history calls this period of time the Dark Ages. It was a dark period of time because the apostate church controlled the Bible and the

spiritual world as far as so-called Christianity was concerned. But that apostate church divided eventually into the Roman and Greek factions. Then both continued over a long period of time with the Roman church being the stronger of the two.

In the 1500's Martin Luther came along and challenged the Roman church concerning some of its practices. He was excommunicated, and this resulted in his going on with his preaching and teaching. And a Protestant or denominational church came out of his work. Other men of that time and in years following rose up to teach what they believed to be the truth, and this brought about more Protestant or denominational churches. Because they came out of the Roman church they brought many of their teachings with them, and new churches have continued to be established up to this time, and this is where we find the religious world today — deeply involved in religious division, that which turns people from God instead of to Him.

But what about the Church of Christ? It has continued faithful to the Lord on up to this time. In the last one or two hundred years the church has grown tremendously, and is now to be found throughout the world. We, as the Lord's people, are again putting forth a serious effort to take the gospel to every creature under heaven. Our plea is for all people to return to God's word for the one true church, to be Christians only, and to be members of the Church of Christ — not Romans, Greeks, Protestants, or denominationalists, but the one true family of God. It is the Lord's way, the only way.

## Lesson 23

# The Church Restored

After the Lord's church was established in Jerusalem in A.D. 33, according to Acts 2, it began to spread to other parts of the world. Soon the church was known everywhere. It would continue like this for some four or five hundred years. But all was not well. Paul warned in his day that eventually there would be a falling away (1 Timothy 4:1,2). There would be persecution, false teachings, etc., hurled against the Lord's people, but the greatest threat would come from within the church. Not all would fall away, but many would.

Church history tells us that the falling away of many of the Lord's people was the result of leaders within various congregations assuming the role of being a dictator over them. This eventually led to the ruling elders or chief bishops to select one from among themselves to be the Universal Bishop. We are told that this came to pass by 606 A.D. Naturally, this was contrary to the Lord's will. He organized the church so that it would not have a dictator or earthly head, but rather each congregation would have a plurality of elders and deacons (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1). His plan also called for each congregation to be independent of all the others. That meant that if one congregation, or even if many of them, drifted away from the Lord that it would be possible for the others to continue faithful. This is what happened in this case. Although many of the congregations did go into apostasy, those that remained faithful continued to be the Lord's church with the responsibility of carrying on God's work.

Going on with church history, we are told that eventually the

apostate church divided over several issues and this meant that there were now two apostate churches, the Roman church and the Greek church. By 1500 A. D. some changes began to take place. Martin Luther rose up against the Roman church, but this resulted in him being excommunicated. Instead of giving in, he went on to preach and teach what he thought was right. Others were encouraged by this and did likewise. This led to a Protestant Movement representing many denominational groups or churches.

While all of this was going on, the true Church of Christ was also going on as it had been from the time it had been established. In more recent years, perhaps the last two hundred years, the Church of Christ has become more and more active. It is not a part of any of these other movements or groups. Instead, it has been preaching, and continues to preach, that all of these people should return to God's word for the truth about the church and all other matters that pertain to religion. In other words, we should not be Protestants or denominationalists; we should not be Roman or Greek churches; but we should be Christians only and members of the Church of Christ, the one and only church that we read about in the Bible.

As we have already said, the church of our Lord has always existed somewhere in the world from the day it was established even up to this day. Not only so, but it will always exist from now on for the rest of time and for all eternity. The prophet Daniel said this in Daniel 2:44, that is, it would never be destroyed but that it would stand forever. Just suppose the church did not exist today as it did in the first century, and of course there are places in the world where it does not exist. In that case, all we have to do would be to return to the pattern of the church as

set forth in the New Testament, and follow the instructions there, and we can restore the church so that it will be just exactly as it was in the beginning.

What do you do if you have a building destroyed and you want to rebuild it so it will be identical to the one you had? You get the original blueprints and you build it accordingly. What do you do if you have a set of laws you want to return to? You go back to the law book, and set things in motion so that they can be returned to acceptance with the proper authority to support them. The restoration of something is nothing new. Why can't we restore pure New Testament Christianity to the whole world? We can if we love the Lord and we desire to have Christianity and the church as they originally existed.

The key to all of this is that of returning to the scriptures for all of the things that we say and do in the name of religion. Just the fact that we have the so-called Christian world divided into many denominations and sects is an indication of our need to return. If all would do that, then all would believe the same thing, all would obey the same gospel, all would be added to the same church, all would wear the same name, all would worship alike, all would be engaged in the same work, and all would be able to go to the same heaven. God's word will not divide us, but it will unite us. The scriptures speak of unity, but man talks about division. The word of God condemns division, but man tries to justify it.

There should be but one church in all this world and that should be Christ's church. I am not saying that we should force all people to be members of it. But if we read of only one church in the Bible, the one that Christ promised to build (Matthew 16:18), and the one that wears His name (Romans 16:16), and all



who believe in God and Christ obey His will, and therefore all are saved and added to the Lord's church, then that will result in there being but one church in this world.

Again, the scriptures tells us that Christ built the church (Matthew 16:18), that it was built in Jerusalem in about A.D. 33 (Acts 2), that the Lord adds the saved to the church (Acts 2:47), that Christ died for the church (Ephesians 5:25), to purchase it with His blood (Acts 20:28), that Christ is the saviour of the church (Ephesians 5:23), that He is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18), that there is but one church (Ephesians 4:4), and that the church wears the name of Christ (Romans 16:16). Also, the scriptures reveal the terms of entrance into the church, belief and baptism (Mark 16:16), the way to worship (John 4:24), and that the members are known as Christians (Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16). And finally, it gives the government of the church, with Christ as head (Ephesians 1:22,23), with elders and deacons (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1), and the work that it is to do, that is, to preach the gospel to the whole world (Mark 16:15). Now when we, or any group of people, follow the Lord's teaching, then we are going to become the Church of Christ. When the teachings of man are followed, the result will be that they will become a denominational church. Which had you rather be? A member of Christ's church or a member of some man's church?

All of this means that if you or I, or anyone else, is tired of denominationalism and man-made churches, then we can always go back to the scriptures and restore the church and pure New Testament Christianity. The Lord wants us to do this. If we know what the Bible teaches, then how can we do any less?

Let me assure you that the Church of Christ has been restored to the world as a whole. You can find it wherever you go. If you

have any doubts about that, then visit with the Church of Christ in your area and then go to the scriptures and compare the two. If the church of our Lord is not in your area, you can help to establish it there. It begins with you. If you will believe in the Lord and obey His will He will save you and add you to His church. That means that you are then a member. Next, find a relative, friend, or maybe a group, and teach them God's will. If you can encourage one or more to obey Christ, that means that the Lord will save them, and add them to you, the only other member of the church in the place where you live, and that means that the church is growing. What then? Just keep teaching your friends, family members, etc. and maybe more will obey the Lord. That is all there is to it.

## Lesson 24

# What Think Ye of the Church?

Jesus often asked questions to make a point or to stop the mouth of His critics. We have such an occasion as this in Matthew 22:41-46, where the record says, *“While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He? They said to Him, The Son of David. He said to them, How then does David in the Spirit call Him Lord, saying, The Lord said to my Lord, sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool? If David then calls Him Lord, how is He his Son? And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.”* The Pharisees were a religious sect of that day that claimed to follow the law. Christ knew that they did not believe in Him as the Son of God, and He knew the kind of answer that they would give. When He asked them what they thought of Him, and whose son He was, they replied that He was the Son of David. Of course that was a very evasive answer, a general statement, because all Jews were said to be the sons of David. But Christ proceeded to ask some other questions. He wanted to know why it was that David in Spirit, or being inspired of God, called Him Lord. Would David call a physical son Lord? But if David called Christ Lord, then it naturally followed that Christ was greater than David, and therefore the Son of God. That was too much for the Pharisees, and they remained quiet after that.

On another occasion Christ asked His apostles what the world thought of Him, and then he wanted to know what they, the Apostles, thought. This setting is to be found in Matthew 16:13-19. We read, *“When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea*

*Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? So they said, Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. He said to them, But who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered and said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus answered and said to him, Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

Here we have Jesus wanting to know what the world thought of Him. He was told that the world was divided. Some thought that He was one prophet and some thought that He was another. Then Christ turned to the Apostles, those who had been with him, who had heard His teaching, who had seen His miracles, and He wanted to know what they thought. They all agreed in the words of Peter, that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Christ was pleased with this and declared that He would build His church upon this confession that He was the Son of God, and that He did. He could not very well build His church on John the Baptist or one of the prophets, but He could build the church, the kingdom, on the fact that He was the Son of God. Paul said later that Christ is the sure foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11). Peter described Christ as being the chief corner stone in God's spiritual house, the church. The church of our Lord rests upon Christ as the rock to this very day. That is why it continues to stand, and will go on standing for all time and eternity. We can therefore have full confidence in Christ and His church.

In Acts 9 we have the story of the conversion of Saul, later called Paul. Saul was a Jew, a Pharisee, educated at the feet of Gamaliel, and a man who was very zealous for the law. He lived in the early days of Christianity and evidently saw Christians and the church as representing a threat to Judaism. The record then tells us, *"As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison"* (Acts 8:3). But going on to Acts 9:1-9, we read, *"Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? And he said, Who are You, Lord? Then the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads. So he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what do You want me to do? Then the Lord said to him, Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do. And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank."* The record goes on to tell how the Lord asked Ananias to go to him and in Acts 22:16 we read that Ananias said to Saul, *"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."* Saul did so, and immediately begin to preach Christ. Later, he said of those days, *"Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of*

*Jesus of Nazareth*" (Acts 26:9). He said to Timothy that he obtained mercy because he did what he did in persecuting the church in ignorance and unbelief (1 Timothy 1:13). Of course we know that Paul, as he was called later, went on to be a great Apostle, preacher, and missionary for the Lord's cause. He spent the rest of his life preaching the gospel and planting the church that he once tried to destroy.

Going back to the time that the Lord appeared to Saul, you will remember that Saul wanted to know who He was, and Christ explained, *"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."* But who had Saul persecuted up to this time? He had been persecuting Christians and the record says that he made havoc of the church. In Galatians 1:13 Paul said that he persecuted the church of God and wasted it in those days. So we would conclude from this that when Saul persecuted Christians and the church, that he was persecuting Christ. To oppose one was to oppose the other. That tells us how close Christ and the church are. Then we are told that the church is the body of Christ, that is, the spiritual body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27). Christ is the saviour of the body and the head of it (Ephesians 5:23).

There are people today who, like Saul, persecute the church of our Lord. They oppose it, speak out against it. But according to what we have just seen, to oppose the Lord's church is the same as opposing Christ. Some have said that they are for Christ, but not for the church. That is an impossibility. Others have said that they are saved but not members of the church. Again, this is impossible. When one is saved, Christ adds him to His church. If one is not a member of the Lord's church, then that means that he is not saved.

What do you think of the church? What think you of Christ? The salvation of your soul depends on what you think of Christ and whether you are a member of His church. To accept one is to accept the other. To reject one is to reject the other. You must believe in Christ and obey His will to be saved. Christ said, *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned”* (Mark 16:16). But how does faith come? By hearing the word of God, Paul says in Romans 10:17. Christ said that the things written in His word have been written that we might believe that He is the Son of God, and that we might be saved through His name (John 20:30,31). When we believe in Him we will obey Him, and we will do the things that He wants us to do. That includes repenting of our sins, confessing Him as the Son of God, and being baptized (Luke 13:3; Matthew 10:32; Acts 2:38). When we do that He saves us and adds us to His church (Acts 2:47). I want to encourage you to accept both Christ and His church. Only then can you be what the Lord wants you to be. You may have seen things in Christians, and in the church, that offend you. But remember that the divine side of the church is perfect, but the human side, Christians and members of the church, may not always be what they should be. Don't allow the imperfection of some member, of some congregation, of the church to keep you from obeying the Lord. Your salvation will depend on what you do in relation to Christ and His church.