

The Body of Christ Series

Lesson Three: How the church belongs to God and its Expectations

Biblical Text: 1 Peter 2:9-12

Introduction

Our previous lesson looked at what it means to be a member of the body of Christ and that we fit in part to the whole with one another. This lesson focuses on how the church belongs to God—thus creating expectations for God’s people.

The body of Christ, (the church) is a people, not a building, not a place; but a people. It is, however, a particular kind of people—and it is this *kind* (Gn 1:11) that makes this people most unique.

The body of Christ stands, without equal, in relationship to all other bodies, organizations, institutions, and religions. The church of Christ is the greatest and most precious body that exists on the earth today: This body serves as the manifestation of the kingdom of God.

There are four key teaching points we will cover in today’s lesson:

- The church is God’s people
- God’s people are ‘in Christ’
- Christ is in God’s people
- Expectations of God’s people

Key Teaching Point #1: The church is God’s people

1 Peter 2:9a, 10a *But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God’s OWN POSSESSION, ...10 for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD;...*

The people of God (Israel) under the Old Covenant were the chosen nation of God (Ex 19:5; Dt 26:18). The people of God under the New Covenant are the church. The church consists of those who have been delivered from the dominion of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of His beloved Son (Cl 1:13, 1 Pt 2:9).

The church belongs to God, not the people. It was God who acquired the church through His own blood (At 20:28). It is Jesus who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:19). Christ is the Head of the body, the King of the kingdom, the Shepherd of the sheep.

The triune God illustrates His possessive nature of the church through the church’s various descriptive names. With God the Father the church can be described as the church of God (At 20:28), the people of God (Hb 4:9), and the household of God (Ep 2:19). When it comes to God the Son (Jesus Christ), names such as the church of Christ (Rm 16:16), the body of Christ (1 Co 12:27), and the church of the first-born (Hb 12:23) are all scriptural reflections of the body. Even the Spirit which highlights Christ is reflected in the temple of God in which the Spirit dwells (1 Co 3:16); and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Co 13:14). The church is indeed therefore the people of God. The church does not have, as the pagans in ancient times did, a god of their choosing for the people!

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Suggested Discussion Questions:

- Why is the name, 'Church of Christ', so important to us? Should it be, why or why not?
- Are the multitude of names for the Body given in the New Testament confusing? How do we know which is the correct one and does it matter? Does the name affect where we choose to worship?

Key Teaching Point #2: God's people are 'in Christ'

Galatians 3:26-28 *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

The chosen nation of Israel (God's people) were in Abraham, and in Isaac, and in Jacob through the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jacob is renamed Israel, and Israel the man grows into Israel the nation. God promised Abram that *in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed* (Gn 12:3). {An example of being in - is *Levi still in the loins of his father* and paying tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham (Hb 7:9-10).} Abraham, and all of his descendants through the lineage of Isaac to Jacob (Israel) were known [elected] as being in Abraham. God did not choose individuals for the nation of Israel but He elected Abraham and thus those 'in Abraham' were also thus chosen.

NOW, what does that have to do with the church belonging to God?

God, in these last days, has also chosen a people! These people are 'in Christ'. Individually, Jesus the Son of God was the Chosen One (Lk 23:35), the Holy One (Jn 6:69) the Beloved Son (Mt 3:17) reconciling those 'in Him' back to God (2Co 5:17-18). Corporately those in Christ are chosen (known as the elect), holy, beloved. (Cl 3:12). We take on Christ's name(s) and identifications. This concept is known as Corporate Personality encompassing the One Individual who represents the whole. This means that the 'in Christ' passages can also be equivalent to the 'in the church' passages. Paul's letter to the Ephesians written for the purpose to exalt the church illustrates the concept of Corporate Personality in Ephesians 1:3-4.

*God... , who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places **in Christ**, 4just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.*

As mentioned in prior lessons, one is considered 'in Christ' when baptized through faith into Christ (Cl 2:11-12; Gl 3:26-27). It is God who adds to *their number*, or to *the church* (KJV) those who were being saved (At 2:47). We as individuals come to God by faith, faith obeys through repentance and baptism. Then God calls us not the Son of God but sons of God (communally). Nothing in all of this world is like this community of God's people who are in Christ.

Suggested Discussion Questions:

How does the idea of Corporate Personality affect our behavior toward one another in the Body?

Key Teaching Point #3: Christ is in God's people

John 17:23 *I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me.*

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In Corporate Representation those who belong to God are 'in Christ'; but Christ is also in God's people. He is united with this divinely created and human functioning church. As a shepherd will tend to his sheep, the Good Shepherd oversees His flock (Jn 10:3-4) AND works in partnership with the church to accomplish His purpose(s) (1 Co 3:9; 2 Co 6:1). While Christ is in God's people, He is also separate and apart not dependent on the church; although the church seen as the branch is dependent upon Him (Jn 15:5). *Christ is all, and in all* (Cl 3:11b). In other words, Christ is complete (perfect) in and of Himself, while He is **in** each of the parts.

If we take Jesus' own words to heart, He is wholly concerned and personally affected when persecution and relief takes place upon God's people. Saul realized this on his way to Damascus to imprison this new sect *belonging to the Way* (At 9:2). The post-resurrected Jesus intervenes and asks, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*" (At 9:4). Jesus is claiming that when one implements good or evil towards His family, they are doing it to Him (Mt 25:35-40; At 9:5). When the body of Christ comes together to eat the bread (*My body*) and drink the cup (*My blood*), Paul's language in 1 Corinthians suggests the body can be one and the same (1 Co 11:2, 29). In one sense therefore, the body of Christ *is* the body of Christ.

Another dimension to Christ being in God's people is Christ being in the middle of the church itself (referred to as lampstands in Revelation) (Re 1:13; 2:1). The Lord God is He who walks among the churches giving encouragement and warnings to His people. By 'being in', Jesus Christ operates as the faithful witness (Re 1:5) to reprove and discipline '*Those whom I love*' (Re 3:19). This takes us back to a prior point reminding God's people that the church is His—not ours.

With this in mind, members as well as entire congregations can disqualify themselves (1 Co 9:27, 1 Pt 2:17) from the *one body... one faith* (Ep 4:4-5).

*Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that **Jesus Christ is in you**—unless indeed you fail the test? (2 Co 13:5)*

Suggested Discussion Questions:

- Explain the importance of coming together for the Lord's Supper on a regular basis.
- How do we ensure that we do not "fail the test" as a part of the Body?

Key Teaching Point #4: Expectations of God's people

Having considered and explored the uniqueness of God's people as the body of Christ with God's people being 'in Christ' and Christ being in God's people; it only stands to reason therefore, that there would be expectations for the chosen and holy people of God. The New Testament is filled with these expectations for God's people to embrace; of which we will explore in relation to God, in relation to the body of Christ, and in relation to the world. This section is a practical application for God's people to apply. Orthopraxy follows Orthodoxy.

1 Peter 2:9b, 11-12 *...that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;... 11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.*