

CONCERNING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

Ephesians 5:22-29

by Walton Weaver

INTRODUCTION:

Paul declares in Ephesians 5:32, "This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:32). Please read the paragraph that begins at verse 22 through the end of the chapter. Though much is said in these verses about marriage, and about the church, the central point, as our text makes clear, has to do with the relation of Christ to the church. This relationship is like marriage, and the picture Paul draws here is a beautiful one indeed. Each individual member is married to Christ. See especially Rom. 7:4 and 2 Cor. 11:2-3. Since the main purpose of this paragraph is to show what Christ is to the church, that is our purpose in this article as well.

What is Christ to the church, according to these verses? The first thing that we notice is that . . .

CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE BODY, v. 23

Christ became head of the church after his ascension into heaven (Eph. 1:20-21). As head he gives direction to the members of his body (which is the church according to these verses) because he has absolute authority over it (Eph. 1:22): "Put all things under his feet ... gave him to be head over all things to the church." That is a clear and straight-forward statement. Notice the term "all things.". What else could "all things" in this statement mean but absolute authority? Any and all authority that one might have in the church is derived from him, for all things have been put under his feet, and he has been made head over everything that pertains to the church.

Each member, then, must hold fast to the head and not be moved away from him (Col. 2:19) since each one derives his/her nourishment from him as head of the body. This attachment is absolutely necessary if one is to continue in good health spiritually. Our very life as a Christian is at stake. It is also necessary so that each part of the body may grow up in him (Eph. 4:12-16).

Notice that in the same verse Paul says that . . .

CHRIST IS THE SAVIOR OF THE BODY, v. 23

Jesus came into the world to be our Savior (Matt. 1 :21). The angel announced to the shepherds in the fields, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). When presented to the Lord in Jerusalem, Simeon an aged prophet who had been promised that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ (Luke 2:26), said of him, "For my eyes have seen Your salvation, Which You have prepared before the faces of all peoples, A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel" (Luke 2:30-32). Jesus said of himself, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Lk. 19:10).

What is the "body" of which Jesus Christ is Savior? It is the church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). That is a clear statement of Scripture. There is no getting around it. If Jesus, then, is the Savior of the body, which is the church, what of those not in the body? This question may be answered by asking another question: Where does it say Christ is the Savior of those who are not in the body? The Bible says absolutely nothing about that. That would be an impossibility because it would contradict the claim that he is the Savior of the body.

But how is Christ the Savior of the body, the church? The answer to this question is found in the next point that needs to be made . . .

CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH AND GAVE HIS LIFE FOR HER, v. 25

Notice that Paul is here describing the extent to which Christ loved the church. The measure of his love for the church (how far it went) is to be seen in the supreme sacrifice he made for her, i. e., he laid down his own life for her. In anticipation of his own sacrifice for the church, Jesus taught his disciples that he would willingly make this sacrifice for them: "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" (John 10:17-18).

Jesus also taught his own disciples to love one another as he has loved them. He calls this the "new commandment" which he was giving them. They too would be required to be willing to lay down their lives for each other (John 13:34-35). Paul later would say, "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6-8).

What is the significance of Christ's death for the church? In addition to serving

as a great demonstration of his love for her, Scripture shows that it serves as the purchase price for the church (Acts 20:28; cf. I Cor. 6:19-20). Salvation from sins is sometimes described as redemption ("to buy back") and is connected with the shedding of Christ's blood (Eph. 1:7). There is power in Christ's death on the cross to draw people to him (John. 12:32) and thereby bring them into the body of Christ, the church. One who is baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12) is also baptized into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13).

What value does this place upon those for whom Christ died? People often overlook the fact that the thing purchased is of equal value with the purchase price. This being true, since Jesus gave himself for the church (Acts 20:28), the church is of equal value with the price Christ paid for her. It is true that Christ also died for the ungodly, even for the sins of the whole world (Rom. 5:6; 1 John 2:2). But his death on their behalf has not yet redeemed them. They are not yet a part of God's people, the church, the purchased of God (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:2, 23). Even though Christ died for them, they are yet in their sins, and they will be in their sins until they forsake them by turning from them through repentance and then are baptized that their sins might be forgiven (Acts 2:38). It is only then that the Lord adds them to the church (Acts 2:41, 47) and they thereby become a part of the church.

How much value does Christ put upon the church? Just keep in mind that he would not give himself in death (the price paid) for something of less value than the price he would be paying for it. He would not do this any more than we would. We do not pay more for something than we think its worth. We think the thing purchased is of equal value with the price paid for it, and so does our Lord. In this connection, we might well ask the question again: Are people saved outside the church, or without being a member of it? How much value do you now give to the church? Enough that you would die for it?

Notice also that . . .

CHRIST DIED THAT HE MIGHT SANCTIFY AND CLEANSE THE CHURCH, v. 26.

The word "that " introduces the purpose of his death, why he gave himself. "It" refers back to the word "church" and identifies the church as the thing that he loved supremely, and the thing for which he died. To "sanctify" the church is to separate or consecrate it, to set it apart unto God for sacred use. It is to make it holy for service. See Eph. 4:12 with 2:10. The church has been set apart to God and made his own special people (1 Pet. 2:9-10) – as his household, including the Gentiles (Eph. 2:19), and his own possession or heritage (Eph. 1:14). To "cleanse" is to purify or make clean. Christ sanctifies

by cleansing, and he cleanses with the . . .

Washing of Water – "With the washing of water" - both here and in Titus 3:5 "washing" evidently refers to baptism) cf. Acts 22:16 and 1 Pet. 3:21. See also "bodies washed with pure water" in Heb. 10:22.

By the Word – This phrase identifies the medium of teaching that is involved. It is, literally speaking, "in a word," or as the word is taught, that one is brought to "the washing of water," or to the waters of baptism (Matt. 28:18-19; Mark 16:15-16; cf. 1 Pet. 1:22). See John 15:3; 17:17.

Not only that, but also . . .

HE SANCTIFIED AND CLEANSED HER THAT HE MIGHT PRESENT HER TO HIMSELF A GLORIOUS CHURCH, v. 27

Present – Paul uses the word "present" to tell us what Christ wants to do in the future.

Her– the church.

Glorious – At his coming Christ expects the church as his bride to be "pure, free from sin," and he will make her so by her glorious resurrection from the dead (2 Cor. 4:14).

Without Spot - Wrinkle – To be without "spot" is to be free from moral blemish. To have no "wrinkle, or any such thing" conveys the same idea. When Christ presents the church to himself it will be "holy and without blemish." One who lives in hope of Christ's coming will keep himself pure even as he is pure (1 John 3:3). Remember, God "is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24). This is why God chose us (Eph. 1 :4) and is the reason for our having been reconciled to God (Col. 1:21-22), but we must not be moved away from the hope of the gospel if we expect Christ to present us to himself as "holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight" (Col. 1 :22-23). We are moved away from this hope when we lose connection with the head (Col. 2:19).

CONCLUSION:

This passage that we have briefly studied is a beautiful picture of Christ's relation to the church: his supreme love for it, his relation to it as head, how he sanctifies and cleanses it, and how he finally will present it to himself.

The other side: What is our love for the church? That is reflected in how much we are willing to sacrifice for it: our behavior as citizens in it (Phil. 1:27-28; 3:21), our support of its work in our efforts to help it grow and experience increase as the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-16).