

## Lesson Forty-Three

## THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:10-17, 3:1-11.

Scriptures to Memorize: "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word; that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me" (John 17:20-21). "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all" (Eph. 4:4-6).

45. Q. In what two general forms does the Church of Christ exist?

A. It exists as: (1) the universal or catholic Church; and (2) the local church.

46. Q. What is the universal or catholic Church?

A. The universal or catholic Church takes in all the elect of God under the New Covenant.

(1) The church universal is the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the temple of God, the household of the faith, etc. As the word "catholic" means "universal," it follows that the only true catholic Church is the Church of Christ.

(2) By "the elect of God" is meant: all obedient believers, or all who are truly in Christ. Rom. 8:1—"There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus," etc.

47. Q. What is the essential nature of the universal or catholic Church?

A. It is essentially invisible, mystical, and spiritual.

(1) It is invisible in the sense that its "citizenship" is in heaven. Phil. 3:20—"For our citizenship is in heaven," etc.

Heb. 12:23—"the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven." Rev. 13:8—"every one whose name hath not been written . . . in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain." (2) It is *mystical* in the sense that its essential construction is beyond human understanding. John 10:14—here Jesus says: "I know mine own, and mine own know me." As Christ alone can discern the thoughts and intents of the human heart, He is the only one who can distinguish the truly believing and penitent, from those whose profession is merely nominal; hence He, in His capacity as Head of the church, must determine the constituency of His body. In the Scriptures, therefore, the Lord is said to do the **adding to His own Church** (Acts 2:47); and it follows that no one but He has the prerogative of **excommunication**. Eph. 2:21, 22—"in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit." The actual construction of this "holy temple" is beyond human conception or description, and is known only to the Lord Himself; hence it can be described only by **metaphor**, such as the temple of God, the body of Christ, etc. (3) It is **spiritual**, in the sense that it is essentially holy. 1 Pet. 2:5—"Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house." Eph. 5:27—"a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

48. Q. In what concrete form is the universal Church of Christ manifested in our visible world?

A. It concretes itself upon earth in the local church.

49. Q. What is the local church?

A. It is the assembly or congregation of obedient believers in a given community.

(1) Naturally the Church universal must have some sort of a local and visible manifestation, for practical purposes. This it has in the local congregation of Christians. (2)

The local church is the assembly or congregation of the saints in a given community, who are thus united and held together by the mutual bond of union with Christ and possession of the indwelling Spirit. 1 Cor. 12:27—"Now ye are the body of Christ, and severally members thereof." 1 John 1:7—"if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another." Rom. 6:5—"if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death," etc. 2 Cor. 13:14—"the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all." (3) The local congregation exists and functions for purposes of fellowship, worship, service and evangelism. It is the concrete and practical manifestation of the Church catholic. Rom. 16:16—"the churches of Christ salute you." 1 Cor. 1:1—"unto the church of God which is at Corinth."

50. Q. What is the essential nature of the local church?

A. It is essentially visible, temporal and practical.

(1) It is the local **recruiting-station**, where aliens are convicted of sin and converted to righteousness through the preaching of the Gospel. (2) It is the spiritual **training-school**, in which the saints are nurtured in the admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). (3) It is the local **assembly** of the saints for public worship. Heb. 10:25—"not forsaking our own assembling together." 1 Cor. 11:20—"when therefore ye assemble yourselves together." (4) It is the local **household** of the faith, whose members come together on each first day of the week around the Family Table (the Lord's Table), to partake of the Family Feast of Remembrance (the Lord's Supper). See Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 10:14-21, 11:20-33, etc. (5) It is not a museum for the exhibition of sanctimonious professors of religion, but a **workshop** for the shaping and forging of imperfect Christians into vessels meet for the inheritance of the saints (Col. 1:12). See 1 Pet. 2:2, 1 Cor. 3:2, 2 Pet. 3:18.

51. Q. In what visible form did the Church of Christ have its beginning?

**A. The Church of Christ had its beginning in the local church at Jerusalem.**

(1) This local church, established on the day of Pentecost, A. D. 30, was the first church of Christ in the world. Acts 8:1—"the church which was in Jerusalem." (2) As time went on, local churches sprang up and flourished in Antioch, Iconium, Derbe, Lystra, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, Rome, etc., in fact, in every community where the Gospel was preached. (3) Thus the Church universal, beginning from Jerusalem, increased and spread over the entire known world of apostolic times. The history of its rise and spread is related in the book of Acts of Apostles.

**52. Q. Was this first church, the church in Jerusalem, a Greek Catholic Church?**

**A. No; for that was three centuries before the beginning of the Greek Catholic (Orthodox) Church.**

The history of the church in Jerusalem extended over the period from A. D. 30 to 70. The Greek Church did not come into existence until after the Council of Nicea, which was held in the year 325.

**53. Q. Was this first church, the church in Jerusalem, a Roman Catholic Church?**

**A. No; for that was some six or seven centuries before the actual beginning of the Roman Church.**

Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. II, traces the rise of the medieval Roman Hierarchy clearly (1) from the first Christian congregations in which the ministry of bishop (overseer) and that of presbyter (elder) was one and the same (Acts 20:17-35); (2) to the gradual separation of the bishopric from the eldership, and the recognition of a ruling bishop in each local church; (3) to the recognition of the primacy of the metropolitan bishops; (4) to the establishment

of the distinction between "clergy" and "laity"; (5) to the assertion of the claim of primacy over all other bishops by the Bishop of Rome. The union of church and state began to take shape with the Nicean Council, A. D. 325. The able and aggressive Leo (flourished about A. D. 450) was the most vigorous in pressing the claim of the primacy of the Roman bishopric. As early as A. D. 425, the Emperor Valentinian III had decreed that all the bishops of the West should obey the Bishop of Rome. In A. D. 533 the Emperor Justinian, by imperial edict, proclaimed the Bishop of Rome the Head of the whole Church. The introduction of Latin worship capped this hierarchical development, about A. D. 666. However, the dogma of Papal Infallibility (*ex cathedra*) was not decreed until the Vatican Council of 1870.

54. Q. Was this first church, the church in Jerusalem, a Protestant Church?

A. No; for that was some fourteen or fifteen centuries before the origin of Protestantism.

Protestantism had its beginnings in the work of such men as John Wyclif (1324-1384); John Huss (1369-1415); Savonarola (1452-1498); Martin Luther (1483-1546); John Knox (1505-1572); John Calvin (1509-1564); Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531); Philip Melancthon (1497-1560), etc. The greatest of the later Reformers were John Wesley, George Fox, and Roger Williams.

55. Q. What, then, was this first church, the church in Jerusalem?

A. It was a church of Christ.

(1) It was Christ's church, the church of Christ, in Jerusalem. (2) Similarly, all local churches in apostolic times were called "churches of Christ." Rom. 16:16—"all the churches of Christ salute you."

56. Q. Was this first church, the church in Jerusalem, a

denomination? Or, was it affiliated with any denomination?

A. No; it was undenominational, non-sectarian; for there were no denominations in apostolic times.

(1) It was just the church, Christ's church, Christ's body, in Jerusalem—nothing more, nothing less. (2) The word **denomination** means **division**, literally. There were no denominations in apostolic times, in the modern sense of the term. (3) The present-day denominational order is a human addition to the true Church of Christ, and is the consequence of human apostasy, human theology, and human authority.

57. Q. What, then, is the Church revealed and described in the New Testament Scriptures?

A. The Church described in the New Testament Scriptures is the Church of Christ.

It should be made so clear that your pupils will never forget it, that the Church of Christ was in existence long before there was such a thing as the Greek Catholic Church, or the Roman Catholic Church, or a Protestant Church, etc. It should be explained also, at this point, that the objective of the Restoration Movement is to reproduce the Church of Christ, in all its essential and permanent features, as revealed in the New Testament Scriptures.

58. Q. What, then, is the truth catholic Church?

A. The true catholic or universal Church is the Church of Christ.

Hence the absurdity of a so-called "Roman Catholic" Church. How could the true catholic Church be "Roman" and "catholic" at the same time? If it is truly catholic, it cannot have any distinguishing or **denominational** aspects, such as "Greek," "Roman," "Anglican," "Lutheran," "Episcopalian," etc. The true catholic Church, the Church of Christ, is neither Roman, nor Greek, nor Anglican, nor

Protestant, nor denominational in any sense of the term. It is the **body of Christ**, which takes in all the elect of God under the New Covenant.

59. Q. Can we today belong to the Church of Christ without belonging to a denomination?

A. Certainly. We can belong to the Church of Christ by complying with the requirements, enjoined upon us by the Apostles themselves as necessary to salvation and union with Christ; and by continuing steadfastly in all the essentials of Christian worship and living as revealed in the New Testament Scriptures.

(1) The terms of admission into the Church of Christ are: belief in Christ, repentance from sin, confession of Christ, and baptism into Christ. See Mark 16:15-16; Matt. 28:18-20; Heb. 11:6; John 14:1; Acts 16:31; Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30; Acts 26:18; Matt. 10:32-33; Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 8:36-39; Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12; Gal. 3:26-27; John 3:3-5, etc. (2) When we comply with the divine requirements laid down in the apostles' teaching as necessary to induct us into Christ, we are then in the **Church of Christ**. That is, the means by which we are inducted into Christ, also induct us into His body, the Church. For, according to New Testament teaching, all who are in Christ are in His body or Church, and vice versa. They are **Christians** therefore, nothing more, nothing else; and should continue steadfastly in all the essentials of Christian worship and living (Acts 2:42, Gal. 5:22-23). (3) To belong to a denomination, they must **add** to these scriptural requirements. They must affiliate with a human organization, submit to a man-made creed, adopt practices of human origin, and wear a human and **distinguishing** name. But this is not necessary. It is even more than unnecessary—it is **antiscip-tural**. See Eph. 4:4-6; John 17:20-21; 1 Cor. 1:10, 3:1-3, etc.

60. Q. What great lesson should we learn from these truths?

A. The lesson that we should be Christians only, and thus avoid contributing to the sin of denominationalism.

(1) We should be Christians—not the **only** Christians, but **Christians** only. (2) We should take the New Testament Scriptures as our only guide in Christian faith, worship and practice. (3) We should “continue steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). (4) We should exemplify in our lives the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). (5) Thus “adorning the doctrine of God our Savior in all things” (Tit. 2:10), we should leave the first principles of Christ and press on unto perfection (Heb. 6:1). This is God’s plan for us. May we live in harmony with it, and thus attain “the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:11). (6) The notion one often hears expressed that denominationalism is “legitimate,” “unavoidable,” or even “God-designed,” is absolutely without warrant in Scripture. On the contrary partyism is declared, by the Apostle Paul, to be evidence of carnality (1 Cor. 1:10-17, 3:1-8). “Factions, divisions, parties,” etc., are listed in Scripture among “the works of the flesh”: by no stretch of the imagination could these rightfully be categorized under the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:19-24). Denominationalism is of human authority strictly: it has its roots in human speculative theology. It arose, of course, from the successive efforts of churchmen to find their way out of the morass of medieval hierarchism, dogmatism, and superstition, back to the purity of New Testament teaching and practice. In our day it is maintained almost entirely by the power of tradition. To love a denomination as such, that is, because of the tradition it embodies, is sectism pure and simple. Moreover, it is the



direct antithesis of our Lord's own prayer for the unity of His people (John 17:20-21).

### REVIEW EXAMINATION OVER LESSON FORTY-THREE

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47. Q. What is the essential nature of the universal or catholic Church?
48. Q. In what concrete form is the universal Church of Christ manifested in our visible world?
49. Q. What is the local church?
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53. Q. Was this first church, the church in Jerusalem, a Roman Catholic Church?
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