

The New Testament Church

Part 4: Portraits of the Church

Ephesians 1:20-23; Colossians 1:13-14

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** It's not simple or easy to live a full and responsible life. We have many complex relationships and duties that demand our effort, skill, resources (e.g., money) and perhaps most importantly our time (employees/employers, citizens, husband/wife, parent, son/daughter, etc.).
2. Christians are similar as the New Testament describes our many roles and responsibilities:
 - A. Disciples who must learn of Christ and follow His footsteps (Acts 11:26).
 - B. Saints who are set apart from evil and consecrated to following God's word (1 Cor. 1:2).
 - C. Priests who are charged with offering ourselves and our bodies as living, spiritual sacrifices to God through Christ Jesus (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rom. 12:1-2).
 - D. Bondservants who must subdue our will in interest of the will of our Master in heaven (Rom. 1:1).
 - E. Believers who walk by faith and trust in Christ for the unseen blessings of hope (Acts 5:14).
3. Each of these words paints its own portrait of the Christian and depicts the variety of relationships and roles they accept as men and women in Christ.
4. **3** The church is an assembly of people who have answered the call of the gospel to come out of the world and live separately from sin (2 Cor. 6:17; **1 Pet. 2:9-10**: "*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.*").
 - A. Christians have consecrated themselves (set apart) to God as a peculiar people zealous of good works (Titus 2:11-14: the Lord has purified "...for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.>").
 - B. Their names have been written in heaven and their lives reflect the qualities of the God who called them by the gospel (**Heb. 12:22-23**: names are "...registered in heaven"; **Col. 3:1-2**: "...raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.>").
5. Our lives as Christians move in many directions as we work out these many relationships.
 - A. **4** The Lord pictured those relationships in a variety of figures.
 - B. By examining the portraits of Christians in the NT we can better understand our privileges, blessings and duties as a child of God.

II. DISCUSSION:

1. **5** The Body: **Eph. 1:22-23**: "*And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*"
 - A. Three key passages discuss the church as a body (**Rom. 12:4-8**; **1 Cor. 12:12-31**; **Eph. 4:11-16**).
 - (1) The reference is to the human body, consisting of its head and diverse members.
 - (2) The emphasis is on Christ as the head, the church (in its *universal* sense) as the body, and each individual Christian as a member of the body.

B. Two aspects of the body:

- (1) **Head:** When Jesus ascended into heaven to the right hand of God, the Father “...gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” (Eph. 1:22-23)
 - (a) This passage reveals four important concepts:
 - (i) The church is Christ’s body,
 - (ii) Christ controls the body (church),
 - (iii) The church is subject to Christ,
 - (iv) Christ and His church are inseparable; i.e., you cannot talk about Christ without talking about His church and you cannot discuss the church without talking about Christ (very important concept we’ll discuss more thoroughly in future lessons).
 - (b) Man’s body follows the direction of its head and the church follows the direction of Christ; just as man’s body is inseparable from his head, the church (body) is inseparable from its head (Christ).
 - (i) Neither is the church a monstrosity with two heads—one on earth and one in heaven (Roman Catholicism).
 - (ii) Neither is the church a monstrosity with one head and many bodies (Protestant denominationalism).
 - (iii) The church is singular in nature, there is but “one body” (Eph. 4:4) which submits itself only to Christ “in everything” (Eph. 5:24).
 - (c) Paul stated this specifically in **Ephesians 5:23-24**: “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.”
 - (i) The church is not a “loose cannon”; but it is tightly controlled; its activities are patterned after the divine plan set forth by its divine Head.
 - (ii) The true church revealed in the NT is not what its members want it to be, but what Christ designed it to be! (e.g., Presbyterians voting to accept homosexuals.)
 - (iii) The “church” does not legislate its doctrine, it follows “the doctrine of Christ” (2 Jn. 9).
 - (iv) When the church is what its members want it to be only confusion is the result! (e.g., 33,000+ denominations)
 - (v) The true church revealed in the NT submits to Christ “in everything” (Eph. 5:24).
- (2) **Members:** The church, a body, consists of many members just as man’s body has many members: eyes, ears, nose, legs, feet, arms, hands, etc.—all of which are vital to the body’s many functions (**1 Cor. 12:14**: “For the body is not one member, but many.”).
 - (a) The body, the church, functions only when each member recognizes and performs its own role and respects the role of other members (**Rom. 12:4**: “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function,”).
 - (b) No member may be jealous of another; the foot does not reject its role in the body because it is not the hand; and so it is with the ears toward the eyes and so on (‘turf toe’).
 - (c) The body works precisely because its many members fulfill their given roles cooperatively! **1 Cor. 12:15-20** (Harmony, don’t even have to think about it! e.g., coordination, balance.)

- (d) No member may reject another; there must be no schism (division) in the body and each member cares for every other member; when one member suffers, all suffer; when one member is honored, all rejoice! 1 Cor. 12:21-26
 - (e) The body functions properly because of its diversity; a variety of talents enables the church to meet all essential needs.
 - (i) For example, in the first century, if a man was an apostle, a prophet or had another “spiritual gift” (e.g., speaking in tongues), they performed that work.
 - (ii) We shouldn’t be jealous of another’s talents or accomplishments and God forbid we should criticize the work of others who are less gifted.
 - (iii) Those who can teach—let them teach; those that can preach—let them preach; those that can lead singing—let them lead singing (**Rom. 12:6-8**: “*Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; 7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; 8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.*”).
 - (f) The goal of the body: **Eph. 4:12**: “*for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,*”
 - (i) Only when properly equipped we can perform the “work of ministering” and the “building up of the body of Christ.”
 - (ii) This process strengthens each member and increases the spirituality of all “*till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ — 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*” (Eph. 4:13-16)
 - (g) Thus, the church is a “body,” a unit subject to Christ.
 - (i) Members submit to His will, are fitly framed and knit together with other members, and by their gifts strengthen and fortify the whole.
 - (ii) They are members one of another, love one another (Rom. 13:8), edify one another (Rom. 14:19), comfort one another (1 Thess. 4:18), admonish one another (Rom. 15:4), serve one another (Gal. 5:13), bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2), forgive one another (Eph. 4:32), etc.
2. **6 The Kingdom: Col. 1:13-14**: “*He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.*”
- A. Serious Bible students know that “kingdom” and “church” are not always synonymous ideas and do not in all cases denote exactly the same thing.
 - B. However, good Bible students also recognize that “kingdom” does in many instances describe people known as the “church.”
 - (1) The verses just read are but one example; here Christians are described as a “kingdom” redeemed “*through His blood.*”

- (2) Colossians 1:13-14 is parallel to Acts 20:28 where Paul speaks of “the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”
- (3) In these cases, “kingdom” and “church” are employed in the same sense—all the saved ones “in Christ.”

C. What does the “kingdom” reveal about the church, the people of God? Three aspects:

- (1) **King:** Kingdoms are monarchies, they are ruled by “kings,” and citizens are subject to the royal authority; monarchs rule with absolute power!
 - (a) The “kingdom of God,” the “kingdom of His dear Son” or the “kingdom of Christ and God” is the domain of Christians who honor the sovereignty of Jesus and submit to “the King of kings and Lord of lords” (Acts 8:12; Col. 1:13; Eph. 5:5; Rev. 1:5; 17:14).
 - (b) God raised Jesus to His right hand, exalted Him above all rule and power and authority, and crowned Him “both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).
 - (c) Thus, Jesus possesses “all authority in heaven and on earth” and His will reigns supreme (Acts 2:33-36; Eph. 1:20-23; Matt. 28:18).
 - (d) It is a kingdom “not of this world” (Jn. 18:36); very important not to make the mistake of the apostles (Acts 1:6) or premillennialist (Lk. 17:20-21; **Rom. 14:17:** “for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”).
- (2) **Citizens:** In a broad sense all of mankind is subject to Christ, even to “the uttermost parts of the earth” (Acts 1:8), but the redeemed subjects of the spiritual kingdom are they who have come “to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven” (Heb. 12:22-23).
 - (a) They have received a “kingdom which cannot be shaken” (Heb. 12:28); a “kingdom which shall never be destroyed...shall stand forever” (Dan. 2:44).
 - (b) It is a “kingdom...not of this world” (Jn. 18:36), hence, our “citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20) and we “seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” (Col. 3:1-2)
 - (c) Citizens of Christ’s kingdom are “born again...of water and the Spirit” (Jn. 3:3-5); we have obeyed “the truth through the Spirit” and have “been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever” (1 Pet. 1:22-23); citizens of the kingdom are “a new creation” “in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:17) who by faith have “put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27) by being “baptized into His death” arising to “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3-4).
- (3) **7 Realm:** Jesus detailed this re-creative process in one of His parables; the parable of the sower and the seed (Lk. 8:4-15).
 - (a) The kingdom of heaven is like “a sower [who] went out to sow his seed”; “some fell by the wayside...some fell on rock...some fell among thorns...and others fell on good ground” (Lk. 8:5-8)
 - (b) “The seed is the word of God.” (Lk. 8:11); or “the word of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:19) and the fertile soil is one “with a noble and good heart,” “who, having heard the word...keep it and bear fruit with patience” (Lk. 8:15); the fruit borne is “some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (Matt. 13:23).
 - (c) This parable vividly illustrates the realm of the King’s rule is the hearts of men; where the Lord’s truths, His ideas, and His will are rooted and in control.

- (d) This rule does not come with observation (Lk. 17:20); no brass bands, no marching armies, no clanging swords, nor the pounding of horses' hooves—but with the silent, secret working of eternal principles in the receptive hearts of spiritually-minded people (Lk. 8:4-15; Matt. 13:3-9, 18-23; Lk. 17:20-21).
- (e) It comes when the seed, “the word of God” (Lk. 8:11); germinates, sprouts, blossoms and bears the fruit of righteousness, purity, holiness, and love (**Phil. 1:9-11**: “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, 10 that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, 11 being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”; Gal. 5:22-23).
- (f) Saints, holy men and women of God, were added to the “church” and delivered “out of darkness and translated...into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (1 Cor. 1:2; Col. 1:1, 13).
- (g) Men and women who switch allegiance, who reject the authority of darkness and sin and submit to the royal law of love, who out of love keep the commands of God’s heavenly king—these become a “royal priesthood,” “a holy nation,” “His own special people,” “the people of God” (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

3. **8 The Temple: 1 Cor. 3:16-17**: “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.”

- A. The “temple” figure draws from the Old Testament, where the tabernacle and Solomon’s temple foreshadowed a spiritual dwelling place of God through the Spirit.
 - (1) The tabernacle and the temple were the places of divine service: where the holy priesthood entered to present offerings to God and the glory of God appeared once a year on the day of atonement.
 - (2) Both were sacred dwelling places for God (Ex. 40; 2 Chron. 7).
- B. Peter alludes to this in his descriptions of Christians as a “holy priesthood” designed “to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Pet. 2:5).
 - (1) Christ is “a living stone” who was “rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God...precious” and was made the “chief corner stone” (1 Pet. 2:4-6).
 - (2) Christians are “living stones” who are “built up to be a spiritual house”; they are a “priesthood” to offer divine services and a “spiritual house” in whom God dwells (1 Pet. 2:3-11).
- C. The apostle Paul wrote the Ephesians about the “foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.” (Eph. 2:20)
 - (1) Christians are built on this sure foundation—“being fitted together” and “grows into a holy temple in the Lord.”
 - (2) They “are...built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (**Eph. 2:19-22**: “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”).
- D. **9** The church as God’s temple means three things:

- (1) Christians are stones built on Christ, the foundation of truth revealed by the holy apostles and prophets.
- (2) Christians are a spiritual house that is sacred and holy—separated from all defilement and dedicated to God.
- (3) Christians are a dwelling place of God, signifying fellowship with and reconciled to God by the gospel; outside the church men have no fellowship with God and cannot enjoy the blessings of Christ (Eph. 1:3; **Eph. 1:22-23**: “*And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*”).

4. **10** The Household of God: **1 Tim. 3:14-15**: “*These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; 15 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.*”

A. “House” may mean a dwelling place or a family relationship.

- (1) Jesus spoke figuratively of a dwelling place in the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:24-27) and Peter wrote about a “spiritual house” as a dwelling place built upon Christ (**1 Pet. 2:4-5**: “...you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”).
- (2) Some of these “house” or “household” references describe a family relationship (Acts 16:31: jailor’s entire “household” obeyed the gospel; Acts 18:8: same was true of Crispus “the ruler of the synagogue” in Corinth).

B. In this figure, God’s house is His family and Christ is “a son over His house; whose house are we, if we hold fast our boldness and the glorying of our hope firm unto the end” (Heb. 3:6); **Eph. 2:19**: “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”

C. Three aspects of God’s family:

- (1) **Father**: God’s household, the church, enjoys fellowship with God their Father and, as a result of this relationship, may address Him in prayer (Matt. 6:9: “Our Father who art in heaven”). In answer he provides our needs (Matt. 6:33; Heb. 4:14-16), gives us comfort (**2 Cor. 1:3**: “...the Father of mercies and God of all comfort”), disciplines us (Heb. 12:4-11) and assures us of an inheritance (Rom. 8:17).
- (2) **Children**: The beauty of a child’s status in God’s family is that he/she is there by adoption.
 - (a) All men are slaves of sin (Rom. 6:6) until Christ rescues us from bondage.
 - (b) Trusting in the Lord we become sons of God by faith when we are baptized into Christ and His death (Gal. 3:26-27; Rom. 6:3-4).
 - (c) Adopted children are the most special children of all, because they all are chosen; and as children of God we become “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17).
- (3) **Brothers/Sisters**: Our family relationship with God and Christ brings responsibilities toward other children of God who are our brothers and sisters “in Christ.”
 - (a) Christians are indeed their brother’s keeper!
 - (b) We are to convert others from the error of their ways (Jas. 5:19-20), restore him when overtaken in a trespass (Gal. 6:1), bear one another’s unbearable burdens (Gal. 6:2), forgive him (Eph. 4:32), and reprove, rebuke, and exhort him (2 Tim. 4:2-3).

- (c) In short, we are to love our brothers and sisters, be kindly affectionate toward them (Rom. 13:8; 12:10), feed them if they're hungry, clothe them when they're naked, and give them a drink when they're thirsty (Matt. 25:31-40).
- (d) The church, God's family, will reverence and respect God as their heavenly Father, seek His help, accept His teaching, guidance and discipline, and love and care for their fellow brothers and sisters; their family.

5. **II The Vineyard of the Lord: Matt. 21:28-31:** *"But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.' 29 He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went. 30 Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father? They said to Him, 'The first.'"*

A. Notice four aspects of this portrait of Christians:

- (1) Divine call: "go work"
- (2) Divine relationship: "Son"
- (3) Divine time: "today"
- (4) Divine place: "in my vineyard"

B. Hence, the place of labor is the Lord's vineyard, the church (**Eph. 3:21:** *"to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."*).

C. We'll go into specifics later, but in general we are to "bear fruit" in the Lord's vineyard (Jn. 15:1-8).

- (1) If we do not bear fruit we are "cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned." (Jn. 15:6-7; cf. **Rom. 7:4:** *"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."*)
- (2) And if we bear fruit we "abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." (Jn. 15:7-8)
- (3) Regardless of our length of service as a laborer in the vineyard, we will all receive the reward if we perform the labor (Matt. 20:8-16).

2 Tim 4:6-8: *"For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."*

1 Pet. 1:3-5: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."*

III. CONCLUSION:

- 1. Pictures are worth a thousand words!
- 2. Jesus knew the power of visual images and provoked the hearts of thousands by the simplicity and imagery of parables.

☛ The body of Christ

- ☛ *The kingdom of God (heaven)*
- ☛ *The temple of God*
- ☛ *The household of God*
- ☛ *The vineyard of the Lord*

3. Hopefully by examining these portraits of the Christian we can better understand the relationships and duties of Christians toward God.

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