

CONCERNING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

by Walton Weaver

In Ephesians 5:32 Paul says, “This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:32, NASB). In the context, although he has been saying much about marriage (Eph. 5:22-33), from this statement Paul shows that the central point has had more to do with the relation of the church to Christ and Christ’s relation to the church. In many ways the relation between Christ and the church is like marriage, and the picture Paul draws here is a beautiful one indeed. Each individual member of the Lord’s church is married to Christ, as Paul shows elsewhere (see Rom. 7:4 and 2 Cor. 11:2-3).

There is much said here about the church’s relation to Christ, but much is also said about what Christ is to the church, and that is our concern at this time. What is Christ to the Church, according to these verses?

CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE BODY

The first thing that is said in these verses about Christ’s relation to the church is that he is the head of it. “For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church” (v. 23). Earlier in this same book Paul has show that Christ became head after his ascension into heaven (Eph. 1:20-23).

As head Christ gives direction to the members of his body, the church, because he has absolute authority over it. “And he put all things in subjection under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church” (Eph. 1:22). Because Christ is head, each member must hold fast to him as head and not be moved away from him (Col. 2:19). One may be moved away from Christ by following after “philosophy and vain deception,” as was to be the case with the Colossians if they did not continue to hold on to their faith in Christ (Col. 2:6ff.).

As head Christ also provides nourishment to each member, so that each may grow up in him (Eph. 4:12-16). After naming the various gifts God has given to men (v. 11) so that all the saints may be brought to the point of maturity and thereby equipped to do the work of ministry and the building up of the body of Christ (v. 12), Paul shows that God’s desire and plan is that all the saints may “grow up in all aspects in Him, who is the head, even Christ” (Eph. 4:15). The whole body is fitted and held together by Christ who is the head, and it experiences growth as each member shares in the work for the building up of itself in love (v. 16).

CHRIST IS THE SAVIOR OF THE BODY

Not only is Christ the head of the body, the church, but as the last part of Ephesians 5:23 affirms, he is also “the Savior of the body.” This should not surprise us because He came into the world to be Savior. See the announcement made beforehand, and that made at the time of his

birth: “And she shall bear a son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). “For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk. 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 (Lk. 2:26), said of him, “For my eyes have seen Thy salvation, Which Thou has prepared in the presence of all peoples, A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, and the glory of Thy people Israel” (vv. 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).

But what is the “body” of which Christ is Savior? Paul says it is the church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). But if Christ is the Savior of the body, the church, what of those not in the body? Where does it say Christ is the Savior of those not in the body? This is an important question in light of the common view that it is not necessary for one to be a member of the church in order to be saved. It is often contended that we ought to preach Christ and not the church, that Christ saves and not the church. It is true that the church does not save, but we cannot preach Christ and not preach the church for that would be to preach Christ the head but not the body over which he rules, or Christ the Savior without preaching about what it is that he saves, i. e., the body, which is the church. The church is not the Savior, but the church is the saved; the church is that of which Christ is the Savior. He is the Savior of the body, the church. That being the case, then we ask again: What of those not in the body, the church? Are they saved?

How is Christ the Savior of the body, the church? The answer to this question is found in out next point—

CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH AND GAVE HIS LIFE FOR IT

The second part of Ephesians 5:25 says that husbands are to love their wives “just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it.” If one asks, then, *to what extent* did Christ love the church, the answer lies in the supreme sacrifice he made for it, i. e., he laid down his own life for it. In anticipation of his own sacrifice for the church, Jesus taught his disciples that *he would willingly make this sacrifice* for them (Jn. 10:17-18). But he also taught them that for them to practice the “new commandment” which he was giving them, *they too would be required to be willing to do the same for each other* (Jn. 13:34-35).

Paul later would say, “*For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.* For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would 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*? For one thing, as just seen, it served as *a great demonstration of his love for it.* But there is more. Scripture also shows that Christ’s death also serves as *the purchase price for the church* (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 6:19-20).

What *value* do these things place upon the church? The thing purchased is of equal value with the purchase price. Since Jesus gave *himself*, the church is of equal value with Christ. Because Jesus purchased the church *with his own blood* the church is equal in value with his blood (Acts 20:28). Saved outside the church, or without being a member of it? Then saved without the blood of Christ!!

CHRIST DIED THAT HE MIGHT SANCTIFY AND CLEANSE THE CHURCH

According to Ephesians 5:26, Christ gave himself for the church for two reasons: “that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her . . .” The word “THAT” introduces the purpose of his death, why he gave himself. The word “HER” identifies the thing that he loved supremely, and the thing he died for, i. e., “the church” of v. 25.

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. To “cleanse” is to purify or make clean. Christ sanctifies by cleansing, and he cleanses, first, “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). Compare “bodies washed with pure water” in Heb. 10:22.

But, secondly, he cleanses “by the word”—thus, in sanctifying by cleansing, the medium of teaching 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.

THAT HE MIGHT PRESENT IT TO HIMSELF A GLORIOUS CHURCH

In Ephesians 5:27 Paul tells us what Christ wants to do for the church which he has sanctified and cleansed. He wants to present the church to himself “in all her glory.” His plan is that the church shall remain clean and pure. At his coming Christ expects the church as his bride to be “pure, free from sin,” and he will make it so by her glorious resurrection from the dead (2 Cor. 4:14). 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 Jn. 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). Is this not why God chose us (Eph. 1:4), and is this not the reason for our having been reconciled to God (Col. 1:21-22)? We must not be moved away from the hope of the gospel if we expect Christ to present us to himself as “holy and blameless and beyond reproach” (Col. 1:22-23). We are moved away from this hope when we lose connection with the head (Col. 2:19).

CONCLUSION

This is a beautiful picture of Christ's relation to the church: his supreme love for her, his relation to her as head, how he sanctifies and cleanses her, and how he finally will present her to himself. The other side: What is our love for Christ and for his church? That is reflected in how much we are willing to sacrifice for them. Let us examine our behavior as citizens in relation to Christ and his kingdom (Phil. 1:27-28; 3:21), and our support of the work of the church in our efforts to help it grow and experience increase as the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-16).