



TRUTH

“... thy word is truth” (John 17:17)

September 2020

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JESUS AND THE CHURCH

As we speak about “the church,” we are referring to the church about which we read in the Bible. Biblically speaking, “the church” is not a material structure, but is comprised of those people whom God has called out of the world into the light of His dear Son. The Greek word for “church” means an assembly.

In the New Testament, at times it simply is called “the church” (Ephesians 1:22,23). In other cases, it is described as “the church of God” (1 Corinthians). We also read that it is identified as “the church of the living God” (1 Timothy 3:15), the family/“house of God” (1 Timothy 3:15), “the body” of the Christ (Colossians 1:18,24), “the kingdom” of God’s Son (Colossians 1:13), or “the temple of God” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

What is the relationship between the Christ and His church? Consider these Scriptural truths about it:

- Jesus was its **Promiser**. About one year before His death, Jesus proclaimed, “*And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it*” (Matthew 16:18). The Master kept His promise, as He always does. In the book of Acts and elsewhere, we read that Jesus’ church already existed in the first century (Acts 8:1,3).

- Jesus was its **Builder**. We return to the message of Matthew 16:18, where we find that Jesus is the one who said “*I will build my church.*” Does it really matter who built the church? It matters to the Lord! The Bible says, “*Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it*” (Psalm 127:1). If the Lord did not plant it, it will be uprooted (Matthew 15:13).

- Jesus was its **Purchaser**. He bought the church, so it is His. Paul reminded and exhorted church elders with these words: “*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood*” (Acts 20:28). Jesus’ blood was the redemption price of the church!

- Jesus is its **Foundation**. It is written, “*For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is*

laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11).

- Jesus is its **Head**. Referring to the Christ, Paul wrote, “*And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence*” (Colossians 1:18). According to God’s plan, the church has one head — Jesus. He does not share His headship with anyone, as He alone is to have preeminence in all things. God’s decree is for the church to be subject to the Christ (Ephesians 5:24).

- Jesus is its **Savior**. Read what the Bible says: “*For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body*” (Ephesians 5:23). As we have noted already, the church and the body are the same, so to say that Jesus is the Savior of the body is the same as saying He is the Savior of the church. “But I thought Jesus died for everyone.” He did, and the Bible speaks of Him being “*Savior of the world*” (1 John 4:14). To say He is the world’s Savior shows us that He makes it *possible* for all people to be saved. The *reality*, however, is that only those who become members of His church by believing and obeying the gospel can claim rightfully that the blood of Jesus has washed away their sins. The saved are in the Christ, which is the same thing as being in His church/kingdom (Colossians 1:13,14).

- Jesus **loves** it. Yes, our Lord loves all people, but He had/has a special love for His church: “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her*” (Ephesians 5:25). Such Bible statements make it plain that the church is important to the Lord!

- Jesus has **only one** church. He promised to build one (Matthew 16:18), He purchased one (Acts 20:28), He is the head of one (Ephesians 5:23), He is the Savior of one (Ephesians 5:23), and He has but one church which He claims as His own. The Bible says there is one body/church (Ephesians 4:4).

Planned before the creation of the world, the church of the Christ is special . . . really special! The picture the Bible gives of the relationship between Jesus and the church is so clear. One day He will deliver it up to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24).

-- Roger D. Campbell

ISAAC WAS A BLESSED MAN

Make no mistake about it: every person who lives or did live on the earth is important to the God of heaven. There are no exceptions to that truth. He values each person and loves each one unconditionally.

In the Scriptures, though, it is undeniable that some individuals have a lot more said about them than others. Some were part of the chosen seed line of the Christ, while the great majority were not.

When the Jewish people spoke of their “fathers,” they often had reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. Out of those three, the one about whom the least is written in the Scriptures is Isaac. Yet, the picture of his life that we see in the Bible shows a man who was blessed.

Isaac’s life was not without its trials. Isaac once brought troubles on himself by telling a king that Rebekah was his sister. In truth, she was Isaac’s wife, not his sister. Later in his life, Isaac endured the pain of seeing deception and hatred sour the relationship between his sons. He also endured the pain of having a son (Jacob) gone from home for twenty years. Yes, Isaac was acquainted with unpleasant experiences in life. Still, he was a blessed man.

Isaac was blessed to have parents who walked by faith. His parents were more than religious people. They chose to be servants of and live for the Most High God. What a blessing for Isaac to have a dad and mom who walked by faith. His father, Abraham, is identified as “the *father of all those who believe*” (Romans 4:11), and his mother, Sarah, trusted in God (1 Peter 3:5,6), counted the Almighty as faithful, and died in faith (Hebrews 11:11,13). If you and I have been blessed to have family members who showed us God-pleasing faith, we need to be thankful for them.

Isaac was blessed to be exposed to what it means to worship Jehovah. Do you recall the question which Isaac asked Abraham when they were en route to the place where Isaac was to be offered as a sacrifice? He asked his daddy, “*Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?*” (Genesis 22:7). Isaac’s question made it clear that he understood that worshipping the Lord involved animal sacrifices. Someone had taught him that, either by word, or action, or both. If someone taught us about how to worship the God of heaven according to His will, we are greatly blessed, too. Do not take it for granted: not everyone has such knowledge.

Isaac was blessed to have his mother in his life for thirty-seven years and his father for seventy-five years. Some kids never have a biological parent in their lives. Some have only one parent of any type.

Whatever period of time you had or continue to have with your parents, be grateful for it. We are in debt to them and so blessed by them in many ways.

Isaac was blessed to have a beautiful wife (Genesis 26:7). Every husband should “*rejoice with the wife*” of his life (Proverbs 5:18), and he needs to think of her as the most beautiful person in the world. And, he needs to recognize that the inward, spiritual beauty of her heart is of greater importance than outward beauty (1 Peter 3:4).

Isaac was blessed to have children. Not all married couples desire to have children, and some who long to have them are unable to produce them. In Isaac’s case, he and Rebekah were the parents of two sons, Esau and Jacob. The Bible says, “*Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD. The fruit of the womb is a reward*” (Psalm 127:3). Yes, kids are a blessing. We should thank our good God for them.

Isaac was blessed to have many material possessions. One year when Isaac sowed seed, it produced “*a hundredfold; and the LORD blessed him. The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous,*” possessing flocks, herds, and servants (Genesis 26:12-14). Let us never forget that our Creator is the Source of our blessings (Acts 17:24,25). Whether our material things are few or many, we need to express our thanks to our heavenly Father.

Isaac was blessed to learn how to make choices by faith. In general, his life was lived by faith. He recognized that he was a stranger and pilgrim on the earth, and he died in faith (Hebrews 11:9,13). If you have matured to the point that you walk by faith like Isaac did (2 Corinthians 5:7), you are truly blessed.

Isaac was blessed to be an heir of God’s promises. Just as the Lord had promised Isaac’s father and later Isaac’s son after him, so He promised Isaac to give his offspring the land of Canaan. He also promised that the Seed would come through him. With the eye of faith, Isaac embraced those promises and saw the fulfilment of those promises after his death (Hebrews 11:9,13). Christians are heirs of a great promise, too, the promise of eternal life (Titus 1:2).

Isaac was blessed to have God prepare a city for him (Hebrews 11:9,16). What about God’s children under the new covenant? We have a heavenly inheritance waiting for us, one that is incorruptible, undefiled, and does not fade away (1 Peter 1:3,4).

Isaac truly was a blessed man. Each of us also is a blessed person. Are we truly thankful for our blessings, and are we using them for God’s glory?

-- Roger D. Campbell

BE CAREFUL: CHRISTIANS CAN BECOME CHRONIC CRITICIZERS

Those who love the Lord want what is best for His family. They want it to be as effective as possible in carrying out its God-given work. They also want it to have the very best worship possible.

Examining ourselves is a biblical concept (2 Corinthians 13:5). Self-evaluation, when coupled with an honest and humble spirit, has great potential to help us grow by making adjustments. Sometimes tweaking things means we are attempting to go from good to better. At other times, making changes means we need to remove some faulty approach or mentality.

The Lord charges us to hold fast to what is good and abhor what is evil (Romans 12:9). He tells us to test the spirits that we hear (1 John 4:1). In order to do those things, we have to analyze matters and messages according to God's standard of good/right. No child of God or local church has the right to run away from the duty to make decisions based on what God has revealed. At the same time, it is not wrong to point out when we or others are not acting or teaching in harmony with the Scriptures (Ephesians 5:11).

As you and I observe what takes place in the work, worship, and communication of the church, it is possible to become a chronic criticizer. Yes, there is such a thing as "constructive criticism," where a person with the best interest of the people/activities involved offers their viewpoint about how matters can be improved. There also is such a thing as being a person who constantly criticizes everything and everyone with a spirit that is less than uplifting. If we are not careful, we can become negative, cannot-see-anything-good-in anyone, chronic criticizers.

How can we improve our worship experience? If you mean that things seem to be a bit chaotic or do not flow well, we certainly understand the concern to do all things decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40). If you mean that some song lyrics sound more like Calvinism than they do the Christ, you have a point, because it is just as wrong to teach falsely in a song (Colossians 3:16) as it is to teach falsely in a sermon.

It seems to me, however, when the idea of "improving" our worship is considered, more often than not it involves subjective matters. At times, I and others struggle with the temptation to be a constant criticizer of others, especially those who lead in worship. Does that touch a chord with anyone else?

Consider some criticisms that are made about our collective singing in our worship assemblies. One says, "The singing today was so *slow*," while someone else opines, "The singing was way too *fast* today." Question: What does the Bible say about the proper tempo of a spiritual song? Nothing.

"Why did he lead that song which has an alto lead in the chorus when we do not have any 'strong' alto singers?" Question: What does the New Testament say about singing with four-part harmony? Zilch.

"He is not a bad song leader, but his voice is not very pleasant to listen to." Question: What do the Scriptures say about a song leader's voice? Nothing.

"Our song leaders are great people, but they need to smile more." Question: What does the new covenant say about the facial expressions of brothers who lead us in praising God in song? Not a thing.

"He has a good voice, but a lot of times his hand movements do not match the time of the songs." Question: What does the Bible say about appropriate hand movements while leading a song? Zero.

What did you notice about all of those criticisms that we just mentioned? Each one involves a personal preference, a subjective approach. Not one of them is based on "Thus says the Lord."

We could make the same observations about how we critique those brothers who lead prayers or present lessons. "His prayer was so *long*" versus "Why are his prayers always so *short*?" What does the Bible say about God's viewpoint on the best length for a public prayer? Nothing. The Levites prayed "a long one" (Nehemiah 9:5-38), while the early disciples prayed "a short one" (Acts 1:24,25).

"Before he ever gets to the microphone to lead a prayer, I already feel a sense of frustration because I know he basically will say the exact things in his prayer that he prays in each prayer." What does the Bible say about repetition in prayer? Vain repetition is a no-no (Matthew 6:7), but Jesus prayed the same thing in three consecutive instances (Matthew 26:44). It looks like I should be careful when I express my opinion about "too much repetition" in prayer.

Remember, worship is a **participation** activity. Just sitting or standing in an assembly is not worship. It becomes worship for *me* when *I* am paying homage to God. Remember, worship is a **personal** activity. I personally engage in it. Remember, worship is a **pondering** activity. I need to focus on the meaning of His Supper and every word offered in prayer, every word sung, and every word spoken from God's Book.

Let us be careful about expressing ideas that are purely subjective rather than Scripture-based. And, let us be on guard against becoming chronic criticizers. If the main thing I take away from my worship experience is my memory of what I think others did not do well, that sounds a lot like a certain Pharisee (Luke 18:11). If so, something is amiss . . . inside me.

-- Roger D. Campbell

Matthew 28:18-20 — “THE GREAT COMMISSION”

Last month we looked at “The Limited Commission,” the Christ’s charge to the apostles to preach temporarily only to the Jews (Matthew 10:5-7). Now we want to consider what often is called “The Great Commission.”

In Matthew 28:18-20, it is written:

(18) And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (19) Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.

That message has a different “feel” to it than “The Limited Commission” did. The scope of the Matthew 28 charge is greater. Not identical words, but the same basic thrust from the mouth of the Master is found in Mark 16:15,16 and Luke 24:46,47. Those two passages complete “The Great Commission.”

Originally the charge of “The Great Commission” was given to eleven disciples as Jesus spoke to them on a mountain in Galilee (Matthew 28:16). As we study beyond the book of Matthew to the end of the new covenant message, it is clear that the task of getting our Lord’s message “out” to people applied to more than eleven apostles. It also applied to Matthias, Paul, Stephen, Philip, and other first-century disciples (Acts 8:4). It applies to Christians in every generation.

When we consider the totality of the Great Commission, the concept of “all” stands out. Consider:

All **authority** – This commission has the authority of Jesus behind it. He proclaimed that all authority has been given to Him (Matthew 28:18). He is the One through whom God speaks to mankind (Hebrews 1:2). He is the Lord of lords and King of kings (Revelation 17:14). When Jesus speaks, His followers must listen!

All **nations** – The Christ said to make disciples of/teach all nations (Matthew 28:19). None is to be left out. The Greek word for “nations” is “ethnos,” which sounds like our English word “ethnic.” The call is not simply to preach to people in every country, but to reach each ethnic group. The Lord God does not discriminate against any race or group of people. He opens the door of His kingdom to folks of every background. Those who love Him take the same approach when they spread the gospel to lost folks.

All **places** – The Master charged His followers to go “*into all the world*” to proclaim the gospel (Mark 16:15). Anything short of that is not getting the full job done. We need modern-day saints to have the

spirit of Isaiah and say, “*Here am I; send me*” (Isaiah 6:8). Modern technology makes it possible in some cases to communicate the gospel from long distance. Yet, nothing takes the place of or is better than “boots on the ground,” person-to-person teaching. Effective communication requires that people be able to understand what is being said. We dare not take the approach of, “If anyone wants to hear God’s gospel, they can learn English.” Yes, we need to be prepared to use the English language as *a* medium for teaching, but the responsibility falls on our shoulders to get the gospel into the languages employed all over the world, not expect all the world to learn English.

All **people** – Our Savior wants “every creature,” meaning every human, to hear the gospel (Mark 16:15). What an awesome task! It is a privilege to be part of the greatest teaching team in the world, but the labor required to get the gospel to every single one of the earth’s more than seven and one-half billion souls is enormous. Let us pray for the Lord to send forth laborers into His harvest (Matthew 9:36-38).

All **that Jesus commanded** – As we go out to teach/make disciples and baptize into the name of the Godhead those who receive the gospel, we are to instruct them to “*observe all things*” that the Christ commanded (Matthew 28:20). Again, we are back to the authority of Jesus. He “calls the shots.” Anyone who is not ready to submit fully to what Jesus commands is not ready to follow Jesus, period. There is teaching that must be done before one is converted (Mark 16:15), and there is teaching that must continue following conversion. A portion of what Jesus taught/commanded is what He said when He was on the earth; the other portion of His teaching is what He communicated through His apostles and other inspired disciples (Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 14:37).

All **time** – The duration of the Great Commission is identified as “*to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20). As long as the world stands, that commission will be in effect. If the world is still in existence two years or two million years from now, the major mission of the Messiah’s followers will be the same: proclaim the gospel to every person in every place. It alone is God’s power to salvation (Romans 1:16).

If you and I love the Lord, then His Great Commission means everything to us. Think about it.

-- Roger D. Campbell

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