***Biblical Analogies between Christ and the Church

Colossians 1:15-20

COL-135***

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Our subject is "Hymn in Honor of Christ," number 25 in Colossians 1:15-20.

We're going to conclude now Paul's reference to the body of Christ, the church, and the great doctrine pertaining to that. First of all, however, I want to take you back to the book of Genesis 12. A couple of people have said, "Well, you've upset us with this series on the church because you've disrupted our thinking and our viewpoint on the church growing out of Israel. You've disrupted our doing religious Jewish things. So, we see our religious Jewish things now, and we're surprised that we never noticed the fact that we were adding barnacles on the good ship grace that don't belong there – the barnacles of Judaism.

Well, all of that needs to be understood by going back here to Genesis chapter 12. The Jewish people began with a man named Abraham, whom God called for a special purpose from Ur of the Chaldeans, in the Babylonian Mesopotamian territory. And He gave this man special, national promises that would be realized by his posterity. He formed a covenant with this man, and He made it very clear that the covenant was one-sided. Abraham didn't have to do anything for God to fulfill the covenant. God was going to do it all, and He made these covenant promises. And this covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant has never been rescinded. It's not in operation today. It's on hold because they rejected their Messiah. But when Christ comes the second time, the covenant goes back into operation.

Here's where that covenant was first presented. Genesis 12:1-3: "And now the Lord said to Abram, go forth from your country, and from your relatives, and from your father's house, to the land which I'll show you. And I'll make you a great nation. I will bless you, and make your name great, and so you shall be a blessing. And I'll bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you, I will curse. And then all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Please notice the three things that God promised the Jewish people forever, and unconditionally promised them. And you'll see that this has nothing to do with the church. This covenant has nothing to do with the church.

I know a lady who has always felt that she should have her little infant children baptized. And I asked the family, "Why do you do that?" Well, they said, "So that they would have the blessings of the covenant. And right away, I knew that they were putting the barnacles that belong to Judaism on the good ship Christianity. There is no covenant in Christianity. The covenant was with Abraham and the Jewish descendants.

**The Promised Land**

First of all, you'll notice that the Jewish nation was promised the land of Israel (the land of Canaan), forever. Later, this was expanded by another covenant called the Palestinian Covenant. But the Jewish territory that the Arabs are fighting over, and want to take from Israel, belongs to the Jews rightly and forever.

**A Great Nation**

Secondly, you'll see that in these verses, God promised that they would become a great nation forever. The descendants of Abraham would become a great nation forever. This was later expanded in the royal covenant of the Davidic Covenant.

**Salvation upon all the World**

Then he promised them spiritual blessings, and that all the world would be blessed spiritually through Abraham. Galatians 3:6-9 explain what this means in that what God meant was that all the world would receive salvation through the Jewish people. And that salvation is our only relationship to the Abrahamic Covenant. So, the Jewish people were promised this spiritual enlightenment and salvation. That was later expanded with the New Covenant to the Jewish people. So, the covenant promises to Israel as a nation have not been completely fulfilled by God. And He is going to fulfill them. And the church has not become the new Israel. That's why it's so silly for people to talk about Sunday as the Christian Sabbath day. "Sabbath" means "rest," and "Sabbath" means "Saturday." And you can't play sloppy with the Word of God and with the meaning of words, or you get into very deep trouble. Why on earth do so many people (so many Christians) do what is wrong? The Word of God is clear. The reason they do it is because they mentally justify it by changing the meaning of the words of Scripture, or they justified it there are other people who do this in a large number.

We go to summer camp, and there's always a problem with sin natures because you got a lot of them. And Mr. Gitchel pointed out that both boys’ week and girls’ week, dealing with these older kids, there were crackles of electrical resistance at certain points of the Bible study class. And they were usually at the point where we were telling the kids, "The world is made up of a society that is anti-God, and you do not follow its leading. Yes, it will approve your sin, but that sin will bring you great condemnation. And the worst sin is that sin in the mind. So you go ahead and create your own dream world. And you go ahead and declare your own independence of the Word of God and the principles of the Word of God, not the least of which is to declare by protecting yourself from the instruction in the Word of God.

We have a lot of people here in our circle who protect themselves from being upset with living in society, and being pilgrims and strangers by simply not being here to hear about it. They go someplace where they can have a little emotional kick, and hear a few stories, and then feel they've been to church. That is what has brought destruction to the distinctiveness of the Christian's position in Christ as a member of the body of Christ. The covenant promises to Israel are going to be fulfilled, but it's waiting until after the church age is over. Then God goes back to Israel. Israel had a lifestyle. It was based on the Mosaic Law. We call it Judaism. The church has a lifestyle. Christians have a lifestyle. It's based on the grace of God in Christ Jesus, and we call it Christianity. That is the difference.

Now, all of us have to learn how to make Christ our Lord. At one of the campfires, that's what I dealt with – to teach the kids, first of all, how to make Him Savior, and then to teach the kids how to make Him Lord, by recognizing that they have a sin nature. And when that sin nature is resistant to the teachings of the Word of God or to the opinion of mature Christians, then you correct it by admitting that to God. And then the third thing at the campfire we taught them is that the society in which they live is their enemy. And if they are friendly with this society in which they live, mostly their peers, then the Bible says that you are an enemy of God. And I pointed out to them that the last thing the apostle Paul does at the end of the book of Romans is tell us to be innocent concerning evil. That means don't learn about it, and to be wise concerning what is good. That means to learn about it. And therefore, I told them that there are a lot of TV programs you shouldn't be watching – the filth that is spewed out portraying how terrible human beings can be. We don't need to know about that.

Now, some of those girls and some of those boys are not going to listen. And they will go in that category that we have of those over the years who are the losers. And we know them well, and we've seen them go on in their lives. They're the losers. But summer camp gave them the opportunity of a lifetime. Why should one respond positively? I don't know. Why should one go negative? I don't know. But there is something in us that some kid whose eyes will brighten, and they'll reach for the victory in Christ. Others will look like dullards, with scales over their eyes, and they'll go along with the world system.

Now, if you forget the distinctiveness of what you are as a Christian by getting the barnacles of Judaism all over you, you are going to lose your way. And this is why Satan has mixed this up, so that you will be easy pray for him. The elements pertaining to the lifestyle of Israel have no biblical basis for being attached to Christianity. Christianity is not a replacement for Israel. It's totally separate. It's a totally separate work of God to create a new spiritual body of believers. If you learn that, you're head and shoulders above Christians all over this town who will never hear that distinction made, and who will never understand the difference between Israel and the church, and these barnacles that'll choke off their lifestyle with God.

**The Uniqueness of the Church Age**

We have pointed out that there are certain characteristics of the church age. That's one of the first signs that we're different from Israel, and that the amillennialists and the post-millennialists are completely in error. Among these are the union of all believers in Christ. The Jews were never united in God. Every believer is indwelt by Jesus Christ. The believers of the Old Testament were never indwelt by God. Every Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The believers of the Old Testament were never permanently indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. All believers are their own priests. In the Old Testament, you had a special priesthood, and you had to go to them to get to God. Every Christian is an ambassador for Jesus Christ. Only the officialdom spoke for God in the Old Testament. Here, every believer now represents God. And we have a completed Bible. They only had half a Bible. They only had the 39 books of the Old Testament. We have the complete revelation of God. And finally, Christians are called to live a supernatural way of life. And that's what I mean by living as a pig or living as a prince or princess. God says, "Be holy as I am holy." Everything in us says, "No. Don't do that. Be as dirty as you can. Be as corrupt as you can. Be as compromising with the world as you can." But when you become like the boy Jesus was, with a knowledge of doctrine, and in temporal fellowship, all that stuff will turn your stomach.

There are certain biblical analogies of the distinctive relationships between Jesus Christ and the church, which were never true of Israel in the Old Testament. I'm going to go into high speed. I can't go into all the Scriptures, but I want to show you these relationships as a tie-up to this doctrine. These reveal what exists between you and Jesus Christ today. These illustrate the divine resources, furthermore, that you have as a believer in the angelic warfare today that the Jew in the Old Testament never had – power like you wouldn't believe.

**Jesus Christ as the Shepherd, and the Christians as the Sheep**

The first figure is that of Jesus Christ is the shepherd and the Christians as the sheep. John 1 describes this for us. We can't read the chapter. Do that at your leisure. But John 10:1-18 – this is part of the Scripture (the particular gospel) which was written to the church. In the Old Testament, Israel was called the sheep of His pasture (Psalms 71:4, Psalms 79:13, Psalms 103). The Psalms repeatedly refer to Israel as the sheep of God's pasture. But notice here in John 10:9, Jesus says, "I am the door. If anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved. He shall go in and out, and find pasture." Then look at John 10:16: "Christ is the door." To what" Jesus says, "I have other sheep which are not of this fold." That word refers to Israel: "I have other sheep which are not of this fold, but I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice, and they shall become one flock with one shepherd.

In the Greek, those are critical words. One fold is what Israel was, but God says, "I have other sheep." Who? Christians of the church age: And I'm going to bring them in under my blessing, and they will join Israel as one flock under a relationship to Me as the great shepherd. These other sheep are the gentiles. They will form one flock with Israel. The Jews are said to be let out of their fold into salvation, liberty, and pasture. Jews and gentiles form one flock – the new group called the church. Jesus is the door into that salvation. There is no other way to get into Him.

It is always startling the people to be reminded that you are very, very fortunate, in the course of human events, that God touched you for salvation. He tapped you for salvation. If he hadn't done that, you would be part of that broad highway that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 7 that says that most people will never find the way to that narrow gate, which is Christ, to the narrow road, which is the Lord Jesus. Christ is the good shepherd. He protects the sheep from the wolves. The wolves are nothing but hirelings.

In John 10:12-13, it points that out: "He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, beholds a wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees. And the wolf snatches him and scatters him." He flees because he is a hireling. He's not concerned about the sheep. In the church age, it has a very pertinent, particular, and very specific application. Who's your shepherd? Who's the pastor-teacher? And if he's a hiring, and if he's in it for the money, he's going to play ball with you. He's not going to offend you. He's not going to tell you the things you need to know. He's going to play on your emotions so that he can draw you in to being manipulated by his plans. He's not going to give you objective truth that comes from the mind of God recorded in Scripture. And because of that, he will desert you.

My son-in-law, Craig, who helped us in summer camp, the other day said, "I'm amazed how often pastors change churches." I said, "Yep, the statistic is two-and-a-half to three years. That's the average. And preachers are always walking on the back of their congregations to a little better church, and to a little better money, and to a little higher position. And they can do that because they're just playing on people's emotions. They're not playing on the mind to be filled with the knowledge and doctrines of the Word.

There's a very intimate relationship between Christ and His sheep. And when that relationship is active, you know your Lord, and you know what voice to listen to. And when the preacher in the pulpit gives you nonsense, that spiritual ear of yours says, "I'm not listening to God. That's not the voice of God. That's the voice of man. He is trying to con me by playing on my emotions instead of my knowledge of God's truth. John 10:4-5: "And when he puts forth all his own, He goes before them. And the sheep follow him because they know his voice. And a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him because they do not know the voice of strangers."

This is applicable to the church age because there are Christians who have a right pastor-teacher and then they forget the sound of his voice. They forget that here's the pastor-teacher (the PT) who is their channel to God's Word. So, they come over here, and they listen to some other church, and some other pastor-teacher. Usually it's because they have some other kind of a hot program going that makes them think that their emotions have been manipulated, and somehow they've been brought close to God. But the Christian who has his sins confessed, and who is open to be taught the Word of God, isn't going to be conned by some preacher because he's got a big, big, famous church and famous name.

Before the service this morning, one of our men was shocked. He had heard on a TV program of one of the most famous preachers in the Dallas area bringing people forward to be saved, and told them that this act of coming forward is God's desire and stamp that they are going to go to heaven. He phrased it in some way such that he connected coming forward as the final requirement to come into eternal life. How deceptive! But does he lack people in the congregation? No. That's because people get all excited about that, when they see those people walking down. Does he lack money? No. Does he lack chairs, cushions, or pews? No. His church will see 3,500, but he has 10,000+ members. So, how many times does he expect them to come to be fed upon the Word of God? You people who don't think there's a monstrosity out there in local churches just don't know what's going on. And this is what Jesus meant when He said, "Here's My relationship to you. It was never like this with the Jews. I am your shepherd, and you are My sheep. And I work through the intermediary of a pastor-teacher. And when you're under His care, and you're under the right one, and he's doing his job of feeding you, which is what a pastor (a shepherd) does – feeding you, so that you're not a bunch of scrawny weak little sheep who can be fooled by any con artist on TV. Then you will have a relationship to God that will be very close.

This little section of John points out some very significant things. Christ came to the sheepfold as Savior, and He came through the legitimacy of the door of His salvation provision for us on the cross. John 10:1-2: "Truly, truly I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep." The door to enter as a representative of the shepherd of God was dying on the cross for our sins. All other Messiahs are false claimants.

Then notice the second thing. Christ is the true shepherd, and the sheep respond to Him alone because they recognize Him. John 10:3-5, "To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of a stranger."

Notice also that Christ is the door out of the fold of divine condemnation into the flock of salvation and security. John 10:7: "Jesus therefore said to them, 'Truly, truly I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.'" Also note that salvation and spiritual food for the Christian life are provided by the Shepherd. Jesus Christ. He intercedes; He defends; and, He provides doctrine. All other Saviors are false shepherds who give not their lives for the sheep. These are hirelings, as we have just read. The hireling is there for the pay. The hireling is there for the benefits to himself. But when you have a true shepherd like Jesus Christ, He gives His all, even to death. And when you have a true shepherd, on a pastor-teacher level, representing that Savior, he's not in there for the money, or for the fame, or for anything else. He's there to give it all for the sheep. It's not because it's so much fun. It's not because it's easy. But it is because he is very seriously concerned about the accountability that will be his at the Judgment Seat of Christ. And I guarantee you that there are going to be Christians everywhere who are going to stand in that circle, and they're going to look across at the pastor-teacher who robbed them of their lives of spiritual productivity, because he played the game of the politician, to gain favor for advantage instead of putting the Christians downwind of themselves so that they could smell themselves the way God smells them spiritually. Then they have a chance to be something.

Today, there's only one flock, and it includes Jews and gentiles, who then cease being Jews; they cease being gentiles; and, they become Christians. This whole figure stresses Christ's shepherding care and the helplessness of the sheep during the church age. Sheep are helpless. And if there's nobody guiding them and nobody feeding them, they're going to get in deep trouble. That's the business of the shepherd: feeding. That's what a local church is all about: feeding. It is not having an entertainment evening, and not having a fun program for youth. It's feeding on the Word of God. And that means that somebody has to know it. And somebody has to have the ability to teach it.

**Christ is the Vine, and the Christians are the Branches**

The second figure to show you the distinctiveness between Israel and the church is the one where Christ is the vine, and the Christians are the branches. John 15:1-17. This figure was addressed to the believers of the church age in the upper room discourse the night before Christ was crucified. That upper room discourse is recorded for us in John 13–17, and it looks to the conditions that will exist after the death; the resurrection; and, the ascension of Jesus Christ, and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. It was a preview of what life was going to be like under Christianity. John 13–17, the upper room discourse in the gospel of John, is directly applicable to Christians only. You cannot read this portion of the Word of God, and in any way connect it to the Jews. You would have to be very untrue to the Word.

Israel in the Old Testament was described as God's vineyard. We can't read the Scriptures. You'll find them. Isaiah 5:1-7, Jeremiah 2:21, and Luke 20:9-16 all describe Israel as God's vineyard. That is the background of John 15:1, when Jesus says, "I am the true vine." Well, who was the false vine? Israel. Israel was untrue to God, the Vine Keeper. And Jesus is contrasting Himself to Israel. Christ, as the true vine, will be fruitful; while Israel, as a false vine, will not be. All Jews today go to hell, because they reject Jesus Christ as Savior. They're not on the true vine. Do they have religious life? They have plenty of it. But it's all false. And Jesus said, "Now listen carefully," in that upper room discourse. He got to John 14:6, and He says, "No man comes unto the Father but by Me." And the Jews who reject that, and anybody else who rejects it, is not going to heaven. It is the Lord Jesus who is the source of our fruitfulness in divine good production. But the believer has to meet the condition for that fruitfulness which is abiding in Christ.

This chapter speaks about abiding in the vine. That doesn't mean being attached to it. It Christ does not flow through it – temporal fellowship. There are Christians who are in the vine – they're alive, but they're spiritually inactive, because the life of Christ does not flow through them. A Jew would not have even dared to dream about being related in some way so that the life of God flow through him. But that's the case with you.

So, when we decide to act like pigs, don't tell us that you're as good as the Lord Jesus Christ, or as good as a faithful Christian should be, because you're not. The life of Christ is not flowing through you at that point in time. Jesus is the true vine. Israel is the false vine. And it is the Lord Himself Who is the source of all the divine good production that you have.

I can guarantee you what was accomplished in in this enterprise of two weeks of summer camp was a supernatural enterprise. It was a prayer-bathed enterprise. It was a prayer-surrounded enterprise. It was calling upon the angels of God to surround us constantly, and to be at our right hand in everything we did. And we didn't just know that doctrine. We were constantly calling on God for the angels to do their work, and for us to be supported by that kind of power.

Now every believer on that campground (every person on that staff) – it was very impressive to see all those people standing together for that picture. All those of us who kept our noses clean in temporal fellowship had the power of God and the mind of God working in our behalf. So, we knew how to do things, and we got it done right. Those who weren't got off into Goony land.

In this figure, this is a permanent union with Christ between the branch and the vine. This is a great reality. This is communion with Christ – fellowship, but it has to be maintained. Union with Jesus Christ, or maintaining union with Him eternally is not a human responsibility. That eternal union was created by the baptism of the Holy Spirit at the point of your salvation (1 Corinthians 12:13). This is why you can't lose your salvation. That eternal union was created by God.

However, abiding in Christ – John 15:4-5: "Abide in Me, and I in you, as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine. You are the branches. He who abides in Me (in temporal fellowship with me), and I in him, he bears much fruit. For apart from Me, you can do nothing." Unbroken fellowship in time – that is your business. Eternal fellowship – that's God's business. And it is up to you to keep going back to God and saying, "Here I am. Among my friends, I'm often known as El Stupidoso, and I've stepped out of line, and I want to confess. And I've shown how my sin nature can throttle the best that is in me and the best potential in me." And you make it right. That is the human responsibility. And when that happens, that's when you're abiding in the vine. Now the power and the life is flowing through it.

This chapter John 15 gives us the results of abiding in Christ. Verse 2: There will be discipline for spiritual growth and production of divine good. John 15:2, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away. And every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit." Because some people do not understand the consistency of the doctrine of salvation – that once you're saved, it's an act of God, and cannot be undone, they take this verse and apply it to losing your salvation. What this is applying to is losing your potential of Christian service: "Every branch in Me who does not bear fruit, because you're out of fellowship with the vine, He takes away." And over the years, we know of all those fruitful people who, when they were in the Word of God, and they were receptive, and they knew the basic principle of the Christian life: live and let live. Stop trying to walk around and pretending that everybody's perfect as you are, because, thank God they're not. And you keep your eyes on the Lord, and keep the fellowship of life flowing. If that doesn't happen, He will jerk you out. And they are no more. And the Demas people are all around us. Was Demas sent to the lake of fire? “No,” Paul says, "he deserted me. We were in a spiritual warfare enterprise. He loved Thessalonica so much. He liked the nightlife he night. He liked the afternoon life. He liked the morning life. He just liked the good life. And he left me. He's a deserter, and he left me in the midst of the battle." That's the worst kind of desertion.

Every branch in me that does not bear fruit – things had started getting out of whack with Demas's spiritual life, and suddenly, he was taken away. And the worst part about it is that Demas thought he made the decision. He thought, "I'm not going to be on this team anymore." You didn't think that. God pulled him off. That's why he decided that. He was broken off from Christian service, not from salvation. But those believers who are faithful to their branch-and-vine relationship, it says that He prunes them. He sharpens them so that you're even more effective. In the process of that, you may make some hard times.

Summer camp would be very difficult for me if I wasn't surrounded by a bunch of people who are very tolerant of my judgment calls when they're maybe not on right on target, or even my uncertainty of how to call something. But their confidence is not in me. Their confidence is in the Lord. And so they live and let live, and they let God do His business, and they proceed to do their work.

Another result, when you are abiding in Christ, is in John 15:7, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you." If you stay in prevailing prayer; keeping that confession; and, maintaining the abiding position, you're not going to ask for things you shouldn't ask for. You'll have abiding prayer. You'll ask for the things that should be asked for. In John 15:11, you'll have great personal emotion of Holy Spirit joy: "These things I have spoken to you about abiding in Christ, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." What better thing could you ask for than having the happiness of God? God has never been unhappy. God has always been happy. God is infinitely happy. And He says that that's what I'm going to put in you. You're not going to have to fake it like the charismatics do. You're not going to have to draw it up from the emotional contamination of your sin nature. You're going to find that you're walking with God, and there's an enormous deep satisfaction and a great joy. Right in the middle of the battle sometimes when you're getting pounded, there's the great joy. That's for people who are in fellowship.

One of the best things is John 15:16: lasting spiritual fruit, and divine good production. Oh God, how great to have a life that is not squandered, that is not wasted, but that stands before God, Who never forgets our labors of love, and rewards us for all of our eternity – rewards that enrich us beyond our fondest dreams. John 15:16: "You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My Name, He may give it to you." Great joy; great production.

This figure speaks of Christ's strength and life being imparted to the church-age believer. That strength and that power was never given to a Jew. It was never promised. He had no access to it. Israel and the church are two different things. Without this power, nothing could be done to bring glory to God. Your fruitfulness as a believer is the most important factor in God's plan and purpose for the church age. God wants you to be fruitful. You cannot be fruitful if you are not abiding in temporal fellowship with Him. He wants you to be fruitful. If you are not fruitful, what's the result? That means that His work is not being done. If you are not fruitful in spiritual enterprises, then God's work is not being done. You can be very fruitful in your sin nature, even under a religious context, but God's work is not being done. And if God's work is not being done through you, then you are not being rewarded.

So, put it another way. The name of the Christian life is to store treasures in heaven, and have great eternal rewards when you get there. That's what the Christian life is all about. If you are earning rewards, that's because you're abiding in Christ, and you're being spiritually fruitful, and you're producing divine good works. Plenty of other people run summer camps, but when it's over, they have not produced divine good works. They produce some human good works, but there's nothing lasting. Our enterprise of two weeks produced divine good works that are going to last for all eternity.

Christ is calling out certain of us, certain witnesses to His body, to serve in various ways. It is the ministry of the church saints which is now completing the body of Christ. Ephesians 4:12-19 says that the church is completed by our service: As a vine and a branch partake of one common life, producing fruit, so also do Christ and the church."

**Christ is the Cornerstone, and the Church is the Building**

A third analogy is that Christ is the chief cornerstone and Christians are the building structured on that cornerstone. This is described for us in Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Peter 2:4-5, and 1 Corinthians 3:16. It tells us that we are a temple. Each of us is a living stone being built into a structure – a building in which God Himself will dwell. Now, is this different from Israel? Israel had a temple (Exodus 25:8), but the church *is* the temple (Ephesians 2:21).

Isn't it odd how people will go to some great cathedral and consider that a holy place? They wouldn't do certain things. They would act in a certain way religiously, but they get outside, and they live like the devil, as if they were no longer in the presence of the temple of God. Those Christians are not realizing that they are the temple, and that what they do, and what they think – that's what has to be kept holy in order to respect the temple of God.

The church universal is where God is now living on this earth. This temple has been purified and made holy through salvation and through the merits of Christ in temporal fellowship. This gym at this moment is a very holy place. When this service is over, and the last Christian walks out, and the lights are turned off, and the doors are locked, it becomes nothing, because all the holiness associated with this place is in you believers. When the last believer has walked out, the holiness goes with it.

Christ is the stone. To the gentiles, He is the smiting stone in their final judgment (Daniel 2:34, Psalms 2:7-9, Isaiah 63:1-6, Revelation 19:5). All those Scriptures tell us that the gentiles are going to find God coming down and crushing them.

I find it rather amusing to realize that socialism, once it lost communism, socialism had to find a new home. The new home of socialism is the environmental movement. The environmental wackos are the leading socialists now in the world today. And all the idiots have now gathered from the various nations of the world in the United Nations in New York City to have a great conference. And one of the first proclamations they made was a great victory. They have recounted people, and found that there are less people now than there were previously. And they're overjoyed at it. The whole place is applauding – fewer people. And some guy from some place (I think called Skunk Hollow in Asia) got up and said that the world is now at the critical point. If we do not stop and protect the world (the earth) now, it'll get beyond the point of no return.

Now, what is going to take God's creation, and take it beyond the point of no return? It's not going to be, as the vice president of the United States says, the internal combustion engine of the auto – the most dangerous element of the environment today. And those of you that go around here driving these big lima bean limousine-like cars, you should know that you're not in very good favor with these gentlemen in the United Nations. Do you think that the automobile is going to destroy God's earth? That the ozone hole, which there really is no hole, and you can't stop the ozone because the sun makes it. It makes it by the billions of however you measure ozone. And you can't stop it. You'd have to shield the sun.

So, who's going to bring the earth beyond a point of no return? You know. Once the tribulation gets going, and those plagues of God come down, it's going to turn the seawater to blood; it's going to turn the freshwater to blood; and, a third of the sun is going to be blocked out, and is that ever going to do something? The whole series of things that God is going to do are hitting the environment. And you see God saying, "How do you like that, boys? Let me show you another one, socialists," because the socialists are determined to control the lives of people, to protect the earth.

Well, the Lord Jesus Christ is going to be the smiting stone to the final judgment of all those who are building the kingdom of man upon this earth. To Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ is described as a stumbling stone. It was the rock of offense to them. They tripped over Christ, and they destroyed themselves (Isaiah 8:14-15, 1 Corinthians 1:23, 1 Peter 2:8). To the church the Lord Jesus Christ is the foundation stone (1 Corinthians 3:11), and as the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20-27. 1 Peter 2:4-5), He is the structure – that cornerstone upon which the spiritual building of the church is being erected.

Christ was the stone who was rejected by the builders of Judaism: the Jews. The Jews were warned in the Old Testament that they were going to do that. They were going to reject their cornerstone of the kingdom that God was going to build through in fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. Psalms 1:18-24, Acts 4:11, and Matthew 21:40-44 describe Christ as the rejected stone of the builders.

**The Church as a Building**

Here are some important features of the church as a building. Each stone is a Christian. He's a living stone because He has a living human spirit (1 Peter 2:5). That's salvation. Secondly, Christ is the chief cornerstone of the church building (Ephesians 2:20-22, 1 Corinthians 3:11, 1 Peter 2:6). The church is a building. It is a habitation of God through the Holy Spirit. And I think we should read Ephesians 2:22: "In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." In another place (1 Corinthians 6:19), the apostle Paul says, "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit." This relationship between Christ, the chief Cornerstone, and we Christians as a building, should sober us in how we live our lives, and how we act toward the moral code, and how we act toward that which is an offense to the sensibilities of Christ-like people, and what is undermining to the reputation of Jesus Christ. This figure conveys the thought of our interdependence on one another as believers.

When we tore down the duplex, all they had to do was take that machine with that big grader (that big arm in front of it), and smash one corner. And I stood there and watched, and when that corner was weakened, the whole roof started fluttering like a bird, trying to fly away, and then collapsed. A building is weakened, and it's on the way to collapse when it has defective members in it. And when you have a defective stone in the body of Christ, then you have a defective building. Now, in the church universal (the body of Christ), that can never be true, because our perfection is in Christ, produced by Christ. But on the local level, you can have imperfect members who will be destructive to the Lord's work. The whole building rests upon Christ as cornerstone. But if you are a defective stone, because you're out of temporal fellowship (the Jew never knew what it was to have fellowship with God on that basis, with so much riding on Him personally), then the work of the local church will be wounded, and you'll find yourself a Demas, and we will have to put over your name "deserter," or at least "Absent WithOut Leave."

I don't know if Demas ever came to his senses. I hope so. I hope, like the Prodigal Son, that he finally realized: "You know, I'm a prince. What am I doing out here with these pigs?" And turned around, and got back on track. That's even more important than straying – getting back on track. This building is a holy temple of God in the church age. And God Himself dwells in it permanently.

So here are three magnificent illustrations of what it is to be a member of the body of Christ, and to be a member of the church. And each one of these make it very clear that nothing like this was ever true of Israel. Christ is the Shepherd, and Christians are the sheep. Christ is the vine. Each Christian is a branch in the vine. Christ is the cornerstone, and each Christian a living stone in the temple that he is being built.

I have not nearly begun to convey to you the significance of just these three illustrations, and these three analogies, and there are four more. These are so fraught with such deep and significant meaning, it'll take you to begin to think and relate them to your life. It's up to you to realize that either Christ is your shepherd, and you are His sheep, and you listen to the voice of your true pastor-teacher, or you're not. It is up to you decide that you are in the vine, Christ Jesus. And the life of that vine is flowing through you. It's up to you to decide that you're in temporal fellowship. Don't lie to yourself about that. That's exactly what Satan would like you to do. It is up to you to decide whether your life is being built on Christ the cornerstone, and that you are a quality stone, and not a defective member that is potentially disruptive and destructive to the efficiency and the effectiveness of the testimony of the local body. These are analogies that the Jew was never given because he never had the power of God to carry them through. He was a loser from the beginning. You are a winner before you've even stepped up to the plate. Dear God, our father, we thank you.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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