

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of September 2016

(added progressively after each Sunday)

Delivered Sunday 4 September 2016

Back to Basics:

Justification by (through) Faith (a)
acknowledgement to Stuart Olyott (#12 back-to-basics)

Paul begins his letter to the Church in Rome, this way:

¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God – ² the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ³ regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, ⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. ⁵ Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. ⁶ And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

⁷ To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people:

*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
(NIV)*

Then, in Romans 1:16,17 the apostle Paul, referring to God's promised gospel, regarding His Son (Jesus Christ), says,

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.' (NIV)

Paul is not ashamed of this gospel: It is full of God's power (the Greek carries the meaning where in today's language, we might say it's 'dynamite'). This gospel saves all people who believe, showing how we are able to be put 'right with God'. For as Paul goes on to make abundantly clear we are not in any way 'right with God' normally. Paul's main point is that the gospel he preaches, first to the Jew and then the Gentile, shows how we 'fallen' humans can be made 'right with God' through the means of faith.

This main point, Justification by Faith, IS the gospel of which Paul is not ashamed. It is vitally important to all true Christians, especially today, where the prophesied 'other gospels' are so pervasive.

In the early years of the Reformation, where Justification by Faith was being understood it was recognised that the mark (article) of a standing or falling church was this central doctrine.

Many, perhaps most, Churches today calling themselves Christian would fail this mark. Here is a simple test if you are a visitor to a Church: look at the hymns; listen to the prayers; note the choice of readings; and meditate on the preaching. A Church may have many faults but if it shows forth Justification by Faith as its understanding of the true gospel then it is a Christian Church. But if a Church even with many strong points – including great emphasis on doing all things in the Name of Christ – yet does not clearly champion Justification by Faith. It is not a true Christian Church.

Justification by faith when shown forth clearly, answers the most important question for us all:

How can a guilty sinner, like me, be righteous before God?

Not How can a sad person, like me be made happy.

Not How can a mixed up person, like me be put straight.

Not How can a person who has let things get hold of him be delivered from them.

But how can someone who is guilty, having offended God; failed to keep his word; broken God's laws while all the time knowing that God is holy and pure and fearfully just. How can a person like me be righteous before God? That is, 'put right' with God.

ONLY, the message in the Bible that answers this, is THE gospel. Any other message (gospel), even though it may use the Name of Christ 100s and 100s of times is NOT the gospel.

There are three straightforward points to be made:

1. Justification is a declaration. Something I am said to be. It is not a process that is done to me.

Consider Deuteronomy 25:1 Two men have a quarrel and come to court.

¹ "If there is a dispute between men, and they come to court, that the judges may judge them, and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked, (NKJV)

If there is no crime, the judge declares the accused innocent (he is justified). The judge does not make him innocent only declares it. It is what someone is said to be.

2. This is straight forward when applied to a court BUT there is a problem in our relationship with God. We are guilty:

Rom 3:23 ²³ *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

God is holy, pure and just! How can this righteous Lord declare a sinner innocent? How can the holy God declare a sinner righteous (justified).

That is the problem!

This is the answer: IMPUTATION.

Justification is a DECLARATION made possible by IMPUTATION.

(a shareholder in a company would be familiar with imputation. He may receive from time to time, as the result of the company's activities, a share of the profits by a 'dividend'. The company would already have paid tax on those profits, but some countries will allow that some or all of the tax paid by the company be attributed to the shareholders by way of tax credits. This is called dividend imputation.)

In theology, it means that God has IMPUTED or credited to one person what originally belong to another person. He puts it to their account.

[Consider Adam and his sins:

Were you there in the garden of Eden when he sinned?

No you weren't! But Adam's sin has been put to your account. It's been IMPUTED to you.

Did you (or yours) actually take the fruit off the tree?

No you didn't! But Adam's sin has been put to your account.

Were we guilty that day in the garden?

Yes we were, because we were IN Adam and Adam's sin has been put to each of our accounts.

The Bible calls this the IMPUTATION of Adam's sin. (Read Rom 5:12-21)]

However Adam's sin is not our subject at present.

We are talking about the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are talking about the people who have been chosen by the Father to belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here there is a double imputation! A mysterious exchange that goes in two directions:

Firstly, about me and my sin:

My sin is put to Jesus Christ's account and He is treated as if He had sinned my sin. 2 Cor 5:21 ²¹ *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

So, here are all my lies → they are put to Jesus Christ's account
all my impure thoughts → to His account
everything I should have done and haven't → to His account
everything I have done and shouldn't → to His account.

I should be punished but He has taken that upon Himself. He is treated as though He had sinned my sin. We see in this, that there is no gospel without the cross – no gospel without the resurrection in fact.

At the cross He was treated as if He had committed my sin.

That's IMPUTATION.

BUT if you stop there you haven't 'got' the gospel. So far only half of it. And the saddest thing is the Christian world today is that the vast majority of evangelical Churches preach only half the gospel. Only half the message. If what we have, so far, were the whole story where would we be?

My sins are put to His account and He is punished for me. BUT I would only be neutral in God's eyes. God would have no more reason to punish me, but God would have no reason to accept me. Where would I be?

However there is a mysterious exchange. The other part of the truth is that Jesus Christ was born without sin, and lived without sin. His perfect life is put to MY account. (Double imputation!) All His purity and His beauty. His truthful words. His holy thoughts. His Godly actions. Everything that GOD is that can be fleshed out into a human life is put to my account. The righteousness of God is IMPUTED to the believing sinner.

Let's read 2 Cor 5:21 again: ²¹ *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

That is the gospel!

You see it is the life of the Lord Jesus Christ as much as His death that saves us!

His life was perfect. Otherwise He would have to die for the sins of His own. But it was a perfect life which is put to my account.

[In the 'prodigal son', when the son returns wretched, dirty and stinking from his profligate and wasted life, the father rushes to meet him and puts on him the finest robes which cover him. The father overlooks his actual appearance and says to the other son, ³²*we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.* Luke 15:32]

The perfect righteousness of Christ is put to my account and God now sees me exactly like He sees His own dear Son. That's why I am welcomed and accepted and embraced and considered dear to God. That is the truth of Justification. I am declared to be righteous. To be just.

3. It Is God who Justifies!

Rom 8:33 ³³ *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.*

God, it is, who declares the sinner to be righteous. He does it freely. It is a gift. It is the gift of righteousness. We are justified freely at no cost by His GRACE. It's God who justifies.

Now we need to clear up some potential for misunderstanding.

It's NOT my faith that makes me righteous [It's not MY faith even, since this is given through the SPIRIT – more grace!] [And we should really use 'through' not 'by' in today's title Justification through Faith.]

Some people, however, preach, giving the idea that FAITH is a good work! A good work that pleases God. A work that God accepts INSTEAD of obedience. Something, they imply, that God considers to be just as good as keeping His holy law and worthy of a reward – justification. They give the impression that I am saved BY my faith.

I'm not saved by this!!

Faith is definitely NOT the ground (or basis) by which I am accepted by God. God **accepts** me because He has no reason to punish me because Jesus Christ died in my place and He **embraces** me because Jesus Christ's perfect life has been put to my account. It's the person and the work of Christ which is the ground of righteousness. And ONLY that. Where does faith come in then? Faith of itself is nothing. You can faith in Buddha, Mohamed or even your next door neighbour that he will return your mower! It must be (and can only be) faith in Jesus Christ. He's the only sin bearer. He's the only Saviour!

Faith is the hand which receives this gift of righteousness. It's the means by which God gives to me this gift of righteousness and puts, or 'hands it over' to me. It's the instrument by which all this becomes mine, in my experience. BUT it is NOT the source of that righteousness.

So when we say, Justification by (or through) Faith what we mean (in full) is:

Justification by the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, which we receive through the means of faith. By coming to Jesus and relying on Him and following Him. We must never give the impression that faith saves. **Jesus Christ Saves.** It's faith by

which salvation becomes yours.

People look to their faith and ask, "Is my faith strong or weak". They will be damned doing this! You must be looking at Jesus. Look at Him. See and trust Him. Put your weight upon Him. That's faith. But stop looking at yourself. Look to Him. That's the way Justification and God's righteousness comes to us.

[2077]

Delivered Sunday 11 September 2016

Back to Basics:

Justification by (through) Faith

acknowledgement to Stuart Olyott (#12 back-to-basics)

Today we continue with the remainder of the doctrine of Justification through Faith. Last week we noted Paul saying that he was not ashamed of God's powerful, predicted, gospel – concerning God's holy Son, Jesus Christ.

Powerful because it brings salvation to everyone who believes. It is the revealing of God's righteousness, wherein the Sovereign Lord God, absolute in truth, mercy and justice, displays His absolute glory by reconciling separated, disobedient, 'fallen', human-kind to Himself through faith in the work and person of God the Son.

The two components of this mighty accomplishment:

Christ's taking on Himself the punishment of our sin – satisfying justice.

Christ's perfect life and person being applied to, or covering, us – so that God regards us as if we were righteous like Him.

(repeat the third point: It is God who justifies!

God it is who declares the sinner righteous in His eyes. He does it freely. It is a gift. It is the gift of righteousness. We are justified freely at no cost to ourselves – but inestimable cost to God the Son – freely by His GRACE. It is God who justifies)

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People look to their faith and ask, "Is my faith strong or weak". They will be damned doing this! You must be looking at Jesus. Look at Him. See and trust Him. Put your weight upon Him. That's faith. **But stop looking at yourself.** Look to Him! That's the way Justification and God's righteousness comes to us.

Now three further important points:

1. **Justification is an act.** It's complete in a moment. Complete!
Not a process that takes time. This means that when you come to the Saviour, IMPUTATION takes place the moment you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. A grace which comes from the Holy Spirit working within you.
At that very moment your sins are taken away because of the work of His cross. And also at that moment righteousness is put to your account. Complete Justification. God doesn't hold against you any more, your sins AND God embraces you without any hesitation, because of Jesus Christ's life and righteousness is put to your account. There is nothing more to be done. It is finished. It is complete. You are justified!

Remember then. You're either justified or you're not. There's no middle ground. There's nobody in the world who is partly justified, or on the way to being justified. You're either justified or you're not. Once God takes away your sins and once Jesus Christ's righteousness has been put to your account, you can't be unjustified. Because God won't go back on what He has done. The bible says so: (Romans 8:28-30)

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified;

those he justified, he also glorified.

So you are 'right with God'. There's no more anger that will fall on you. No condemnation that will remain yours. You are justified. That's in Scripture: In the opening verses of Paul's letter to Titus, he takes the opportunity in his greeting to state yet again the gospel and its future benefits.

¹ Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness – ² in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, ³ and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Saviour,

That 'certain hope' is the 'good news' to fallen sinners, otherwise facing an eternity of hell!

That's THE gospel of the Son of God.

2. **But you're not justified until you repent and believe:**

Hasn't God planned to save certain people, from all eternity?

YES!

Didn't Jesus Christ die to take away the sins of those actual people? YES!
Didn't the Holy Spirit cover them to bring those actual people to faith? YES!
But until the Holy Spirit calls you by the gospel and brings you to faith, in Christ. Until that moment, you are as lost as anyone else.

Reading Galatians 2:16:

¹⁶ know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

Because you're not justified (made 'right with God') until you believe. If you're not believing at present, you're not justified, But the MOMENT you believe you will be!

That's why Paul often says to believing Christians: (Col 1:21,22)

²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation -

This is how we all begin, but by God's grace as we come to Christ Jesus, we pass from spiritual death to eternal life. We are completely saved the moment we are drawn to believe, by the Spirit. Nothing but the gospel promises that!

People go on long pilgrimages, hoping to be saved; people get tied up with all sorts of cults, hoping to be saved; many pay penance and light candles, hoping to be saved. While all the time the gospel is saying: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you WILL be saved." The very moment you believe!

3. **No law keeping is necessary.**

Nobody is saved by keeping the 10 commandments, because nobody has ever kept them, except our Lord, Jesus Christ Himself – which is why only He can be THE Saviour. Nobody is saved by law keeping. We are justified through faith alone. Your performance doesn't come into it, because it is Jesus Christ's

perfection that saves you. Keep on looking to Him!

BUT! But this God given grace of faith alone that justifies is never ALONE. That is, true God-given faith is ALWAYS accompanied by good works. Always! Alleged faith without the evidence of good works – of noticeably changed lives – is DEAD. Not faith at all. A counterfeit!

If anyone claims to have true faith, but they don't have a life that matches their faith, their so called faith is a false one. Those good works; that change in our life that takes place when we believe (perhaps slowly at first) while they can never commend us to God must follow justification. They will never be good enough for Him – but he will accept them for Christ's sake!

Those 'good works' then are the 'fruit' of our Spirit-given faith: .. *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* (Galatians 5:22) and result in our possessing and spreading joy.

In the 'golden chain' (Rom 8:30 above) all who are justified are glorified – that is they inherit eternal life in the 'new heaven and the new earth', body, mind and soul. Between that instant of the declaration, by God, of justification and our glory, is the process of sanctification which develops throughout the remainder of our earthly existence.

Everyone who is 'put right with' God, has a changed heart (a new birth); changed character; changed life and is on a new road, actually becoming more like Jesus. Here is a quote from J C Ryle: (who died in 1900)

*Justification is the act of God **about** us, and is not easily discerned by others. Sanctification is the work of God **within** us, and cannot be hid in its outward manifestation from the eyes of men.*

Justification is always accompanied by good works. There are no exceptions to that! Nobody who is a true Christian can live as they used to. That's why we use the term 'conversion'. And nobody who is a true Christian does live as they used to.

We finish this morning with a reflection on Galatians 2:16. The larger reading that we had before this sermon relates Paul's taking Peter to task. One great apostle to this other great apostle. Paul reminds Peter of a fact they both know to be true:

¹⁶ know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

Note how many times the word 'justify' is used; how often does he say we are not justified by the works of the law. (That is keeping the 10 commandments – we should however keep them as obedient partners with the Spirit of Christ within us, as we experience the sanctification process through to our life's end. But this is not what justifies us. That comes at our 'rebirth' and is entirely God's gift of grace)

Well then! Are you justified? Am I? Do we know the gospel of which Paul was not ashamed? Do we know the power of that gospel. Do we have it in our experience? In our personal lives? By which we've been put right with God, whom we have offended. Put right for ever and ever, because of the life, death and (vindicating) resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1856]

“May this be so for all the saints gathered here today”

Delivered Sunday 18 September 2016

Back to Basics:

THE CHURCH

If the foundations are destroyed what can the righteous do: we read this, this morning. And if your foundation isn't well laid in your Christian life, you'll very shortly fall to pieces as a Christian. You must lay a good foundation.

So we're going right back to basics, doing away with the detail and going to the basic truths of all.

Now previously we have spoken about the Bible – so we know why this is the written Word of God. We have spoken about God – so we know what His nature is and how His laws are a reflection of His nature. Then about man – so we know what his needs are. Also about sin. – so we know what we need. The Lord Jesus Christ – so we know that He has brought the remedy that we need so much. The Holy Spirit and how He converts and sanctifies us by His indwelling presence. And most recently about the great truth that decides whether you're a Christian or not and whether this Church or any other Church is a 'true' church or not. Justification through Faith!

Now we come to: The Church.

Firstly we must discover what the Church is.

You may find on the notice board of a building the name of 'such and such' Church. Once we regularly passed a newly built shed-like building with religious type slogans on it. Then a new sign appeared! IT'S A CHURCH it announced.

But this is wrong. A Church is the people not the building that they may meet in. The

building might correctly be called a 'chapel'.

In the Scriptures the word Church is never used of a building. In fact Church buildings, although they may have lots of good uses were not used by any Christians for 400 years. The Church is not the building.

The word Church is not used for any organisation. Also the word Church is not used of any Denomination. The title: the Church of Scotland or the Church of England is technically a false use of the word Church.

The Church, in Scripture, is the people. When Paul writes to the Church of the Thessalonians, as he calls them, he says, “.. *we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth,*” (2 Thes 1:1, 2;13) So the Church is that people that God the Father chose.

When Paul writes to the Ephesians he says, “.. *as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her.*” (Eph 5:25) Christ didn't give Himself up for a building, an organisation or a denomination, but for the people He saved.

So the Church is that number of men and women, boys and girls, who have actually been bought by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom God the Father sent into the world (for this very purpose).

As we saw a few week's ago the people whom God the Father chose and the people Christ died for and saved are the same people, exactly.

The Church are the people who have been called by the Holy Spirit. Because as we've seen in this series, we are called by the Holy Spirit out of our darkness into light. Out of the kingdom of Satan into God. So when Paul writes to the Church in Rome he says, “*To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints.*” (Rom 1:7) As we have seen very recently, all such people (saints) have been indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

So there's a people that God the Father chose; who the Son of God died for; and the Holy Spirit has called and lives within. That people is called in the Bible, **the Church**.

Now notice that on the outline some further words have been highlighted. These are key descriptions of the Church. (Not a building; not an organisation; not a denomination but these **people**.)

- the Church is **holy**: set apart for God. God chose them for Himself; the Lord Jesus Christ redeemed them to have a people for Himself; the Holy Spirit called them to be God's people. So Paul writes to the Corinthians, “*To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy (literally: to be saints), together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – their Lord and ours.*” (1 Cor 1:2) The Church is holy. From among all the men and women who lived and died there are those who have

been called out and set apart to God. They are the Church!

- the Church is **universal** (or small 'c' catholic) it's the holy, catholic Church (see the Apostles' Creed). Paul says, "*Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her,*" Eph 5:25. There have been people redeemed by the blood of Christ from the beginning of the world right through to the end. And there are people who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ in ever imaginable part of the world today. They are redeemed by the same blood. But Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her. So everybody who is bought by the blood of Christ wherever they live in the world or wherever they are in history, they are members of the Church. So the Church is Universal, or catholic in the fullest sense.
- the Church is **apostolic**, because the Apostles preached the message. The message that they preached can be defined. You can say what it is. They themselves say, (see, Gal 1:6-10) that any other Gospel is a fake. And anybody who preaches any other gospel isn't even a Christian. Everybody whose ever been saved – anyone who has ever come to the Lord Jesus Christ for cleansing – has been saved by the same gospel. The gospel that the Apostles preached. So the Church is apostolic – we don't have our own message for the 21st Century. We still have the apostolic message! Even the members of Christ's church who were saved before He came – because Christ's redemption acts backwards as well as forwards – they were still Justified through Faith, in the shed blood of the Redeemer. It's the same gospel that saved them as saved us. All clearly explained by Paul in Romans. Even Abraham was saved in the same way as we are and we are saved in the same way Abraham was.
- so the Church is **one**. Ephesians 4:4-6. Listen to the Word of God: ⁴ *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called;* ⁵ *one Lord, one faith, one baptism;* ⁶ *one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.* The Church is one. God has only one people, not two, not ten. One people chosen. One people purified by the blood of Christ. One people called and indwelt. Only one people and the Church is one. There are not lots of Churches. There is only one church of Jesus Christ.
- And yet the Church is **local**, because the gathering of believers in a given (local) area is a microcosm of the Church. There is the Church of Jesus Christ (the big picture on a TV screen) and each pixel, as it were, is a microcosm of the whole. Each local Church. Each gathering of believers in a local area is a microcosm of the true Church of Jesus Christ. And anything that isn't a microcosm of the Church of Jesus Christ is not a true church. So that's why, when Paul writes to the Corinthians, he can talk to them as being the Church of God. He uses exactly the same word for the local group of believers as he uses of all the elect, of all time. Because the great Church of Jesus Christ expresses itself locally in local groups of believers.

That's what the Church is, in the great word of God. Very different from what many

people think, especially when they refer to a building, an organisation or a denomination as 'the Church'.

Christ and the Church

The Bible is a most wonderful book. It could dress up its complicated teachings in the most difficult language, but in fact God speaks in simple pictures. So simple to grasp. Yet they're profound and deep and filled with meaning.

There are three main pictures (analogies) which illustrate the relationship between Christ and His Church, and they're all easy pictures. Who hasn't seen a body, a bride or been in a building?

- **A body.** This is a picture which the inspired Apostle Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 and again at Romans 12:3-8 and elsewhere.
How are all the parts of the body directed? Where is the nerve centre of the body? Where do all the directions come from? What is it that rules the body? The head. And there is a head of the Church – Jesus Christ. There's is no other head. Although there is an executive in the Church to make sure His laws are obeyed, and a judiciary for the laws of Jesus Christ – to make sure that when His laws are disobeyed, that doesn't continue. But there is no legislature in the Church of Jesus Christ. Nowhere in the Church of Jesus Christ is there anyone making laws. Nowhere in the true Church, because we know that the only lawmaker for the Church of Jesus Christ is Jesus Christ Himself. And all the laws have been made. There are no new ones to add.
He is the head of the Church, so nothing may go on in the Church, nothing may be done in the Church, nothing may be believed in the Church unless the head says so. He is the head of the Church. We are the members. But we're very different one from the other.
There are many organs in the body, but only the one body. The eye can't say, "I have no need of you." looking down on the foot. And the ear can't say, that because I'm not some another part of the body I'm not part of the body at all. We are very different and we have different talents and gifts. And we live under the same headship of Christ. We all have something that we can contribute to the body.
Paul goes on to say that the parts of the body that we despise the most (we are the most sensitive about) are the ones which are given the greatest honour. There should be no tension and no division in the body. So you as a Christian and I as a Christian we live under the laws of Jesus Christ, but there is no uniformity, God intends that we should all be different. There is no stereotype. None of us have exactly the same role. Exactly the same gifts. None of us have exactly the same character, personality or opportunities or talents. Everything about us is different, but we are in the body and we all have a place there. To do the rest of the body good.
A very simple picture, but very profound.
- **The bride.** The next picture, the Bride. Why does a man marry a woman? Because he loves her. *"Husbands love your wives as Christ loves the Church*

and gave Himself for her.” Then the Apostle Paul goes on to say that Jesus Christ intends to sanctify the Church. He's making this group of sinners who have been saved by His blood, more and more holy, that He might present His Church to Himself. A glorious Church, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. (Ephesians 2:25-27)

That tells us a lot about the Church (the believers, remember). We're justified through faith; our sins are forgiven, we're put right with God; but then the Lord Jesus Christ by His Word and Spirit, He makes them (the men and women that make up the Church) more and more holy. Because He wants the Church to be pure – modelled on His own character.

He's changing us all from glory to Glory. (It seems very slow to us, but it really is happening. We are different than we once were.) And at last this work will be complete. When the 'last day' comes the whole Church will be gathered and there will be the Church without any imperfection in it at all. It's full of imperfections at the moment! But the day is coming when we will be in heaven and the marriage supper of the Lamb will take place. We will be taken into the heavenly, everlasting, holy, state, which God has prepared for every believer. For all believers! Heaven isn't an individual thing. It's where the Church goes. [2172]

- a **building**. The third picture is a building.. (next week)

THE CHURCH (Part b)

Review last week:

The Church of Jesus Christ is not a building, an organisation, nor denomination. But it is the people who have been called by the Holy Spirit: The people that God the Father chose; who the Son of God died for; and the Holy Spirit has called and lives within.

As well as these **people**, the Church is also **holy, universal** (catholic), **apostolic**, is **one** and **local** – being a microcosm of the whole Church of Jesus Christ.

In simple pictures the Bible explains the relationship between the Church and its only head, Christ. These pictures are the **body**, (how the different parts work together, ordered by Christ the head), the **Bride** (how Christ loves and purifies the Church, as a loving bridegroom), and thirdly as a **building** (where different parts are held together by the 'corner stone' of Christ).

- a **building**. The third picture is a building.
“Here is a wall”, says, Paul, “and here is a wall”. Two very different walls! How can they find any cohesion? They find cohesion at the corner. But what holds the corner together? The corner stone.
There are Jewish believers and there are gentile believers, who could never ever get on, but they are all one in Christ Jesus. They're built on the same corner stone.
And so the building goes up and it becomes a temple and God lives there. The New Testament says so!
One shouldn't look for a decorated, purpose-built building (lofted ceiling, stain glass windows etc) on the assumption that this should make it easier to pray there. Rather the Church is the people. God lives in us as individuals but we as such are a habitation of God through the Spirit. This is why, when we are together, we are particularly conscious of spiritual things. God lives in the collective, Church. It is the Church of Jesus Christ and God lives there. How can we belittle her!
She is the one, holy, universal, apostolic Church of Jesus Christ expressed locally.

Now, as we continue, we take a closer look at this local Church.

God's Word gives us a detailed picture of THE local church, which is the mother of all local churches.

For 7 years there was only one Christian church in the world. Only one. The Church at Jerusalem.

The Church at Jerusalem is the prototype and model of the local Church. And its pattern has been reflected in churches ever since. The 'mother' of them all. The first elders of that Church were the Apostles themselves.

What was that Church like? Who were members of it? What did they do? Acts 2:41-47 begins: with those who accepted the message, the Gospel! It was composed of those people who accepted the Apostolic Gospel. They didn't just hear it. They didn't just believe it. They accepted it! Have you? That Apostolic Gospel was the gospel that exalted Jesus Christ and said, '*Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.*' (Acts 2:36)

Conscious of their guilt and conscious that they had treated Christ so badly. The Christ that God had exalted. They were pricked in their hearts and broken in their conscience and came to God overcome with the sense of their unworthiness, saying, "What shall we do?" The Apostle (Peter) told them to repent – turn their back on their old life – and embrace Jesus Christ, be baptised ... and they did!

So the first Church was composed of baptised believers. Because they owned that they were Christ's and in Christ's way. [It was some time before the first believers were called Christians (initially a title of derision). At first they were called followers of *the way* – Christ's way.] Through the symbolic cleansing of water the old life is dead and buried. They say, 'We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.' – that is, living in the 'newness of life.' (Romans 6:4) By Him who died for us and rose again for us.

So they were a body of baptised believers. But what did they do?

- Acts 2:42. *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching ...* so first of all they were a school. They came together to be taught.
- *and to fellowship*, ... so secondly they were a family with all their lives intertwined with each other
- *to the breaking of bread* ... they stopped regularly to remember the cross. They broke the bread and drank the wine and remembered the cross.
- *and to prayer* ... They prayed together because the Holy Spirit had called them together to be Christians. The Holy Spirit indwelt them. They were animated by the Holy Spirit. They knew that without Him they could do nothing.
- *And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.* ... Because with their full and abundant hearts, they spontaneously as individual Christians, spoke about the Lord Jesus Christ to others.

But when people were converted, they were added to *what?* ... To the local Church.

If you're a Christian you should be a Church member. Don't bother if your not a Christian. If you're a Christian you should be baptised and become a Church member. That is your responsibility before God and you can not and should not live with your conscience, if you're a born again believer.

The next point on the sheet:

God's Word reveals that a properly organised local church has elders, and, if necessary, deacons.

The Church we saw was first of all a school. But who's going to teach in a school? Well God raises up men, with Christian character and teaching gifts.

But in a school there has to be order. God raises up men who apply Christ's laws, lovingly, but strongly, in the Christian community. These people are called elders. They are bishops – in the sense that they rule, and they are pastors in the sense that they feed the flock, or teach.

Then sometimes un-met needs in the Church occur. In this case there were widows, who depended on the Church for their livelihood, who weren't being properly looked after. Then there are administrative tasks and other things that need to be done so that the family remains properly a family. It's not right that those who preach the Word of God shall be distracted by administration and the giving out of diaconal aid. So when it was necessary local churches had deacons too. God raised them up. They weren't entirely separate from the eldership. The eldership is like a big circle. And the deacons labour within that circle, but they don't just labour 'off their own bat' or by their own initiative, but under the superintendence of and fellowship with the elders.

So every need, at every level, is met in a proper manner. In a properly organised local Church.

Next:

God's Word shows that discipline is 'part and parcel' of local church life.

Now we saw this a few weeks ago. If Christ is a Prophet, Priest and King that will be demonstrated amongst His people. Now people don't like the word 'discipline', but in the Bible discipline is the beginning of making people teachable. That is 'bringing them back' so that they have a teachable spirit and as sheep are guided again by the good shepherd.

When people wander, someone must help them back. There is such a thing as '**admonition**'. That's when words are spoken.

Some people are so stubborn that words will not bring them back. So there's such a thing as '**suspension**'. This is not a punishment it's a way of bringing them back to the shepherd.

When people know what the truth is and how they should live, but live repeatedly in opposition to that truth, then they must be suspended in the Church.

They still come to it but they can't take any active part. So when they're there they can't pray in public. When there's a Lord's Supper, they can't participate. At Church meetings, if they come they can't speak up. If they have been Sunday School teachers, they can't continue to teach because their lives, (not just now and then, but by choice) are a contradiction with the Gospel that they profess.

And there's such a thing as '**excommunication**'. If someone teaches a gospel, which is not the Gospel of the Apostles and he refuses to repent of his error, he must be excommunicated. In other words he must be treated as a non-Christian, with all the courtesy and affection that we have for non-Christians, but he must be treated as a non-Christian. For we cannot believe that such a man is a Christian.

So there may be such people, who have been spoken to and suspended, who turn their ear completely from Christ's Church and refuse even to consider that there is a better way. Eventually their life demonstrates that they are 'living a lie'. It becomes impossibly to say, humanly speaking, that these people are Christians. We are not pronouncing them non-Christians. We're not declaring what their eternal destiny is. We're saying that as far as 'human eyes' can tell, they are acting like non-Christians, so they must be treated like non-Christians. So they are 'excommunicated'. They can still come, but we can't treat them as we would treat Christians. We can't treat them as brothers or sisters or members of the holy, universal, apostolic, one, local Church.

Here's something you might not like to hear: the next sentence on the sheet.

God's Word teaches that Christ's Church and Sunday are inseparable.

When did the Lord Jesus Christ rise from the dead? On what day of the week?
SUNDAY.

When did the first Christians gather together, without the physical presence of Christ?
SUNDAY.

And what day did He choose to reveal Himself to the first assembly of Christians who had gathered without His being bodily present? He chose SUNDAY.

And the very next Sunday, what did He do? The risen Saviour revealed Himself again, to the gathered Christians on --- SUNDAY.

Then our Lord, after 40 days ascended into heaven. Then 10 days later it was Pentecost ... a SUNDAY. And on that SUNDAY they were all gathered together with one accord in one place and the Lord Jesus Christ sent into the assembly the Holy Spirit. ... On a SUNDAY.

Later on, in the New Testament, Paul is in rather a hurry to get to Jerusalem, but he arrives in Troas, where he also wants to meet the Christians there. He arrives on a Monday. So despite his hurry to get to Jerusalem he waits to the following Sunday to preach at Troas. He preaches well into the night and continues his journey on that next Monday morning. Because everybody knew that the Christian Church and Sunday are inseparable.

Finally:

God's Word underlines the supreme importance of the local Church.

The family is wonderfully important. It's a sacred God given institution.

The State is important, it also is a God given institution.

The local Church is very important, but it is different from these other two. All men and women are members of families to a greater or lesser degree. All men and women are members of a State. But only Christians are members of the Church of Jesus Christ expressed in a local microcosm.

And the Lord underlines the supreme importance of the local Church. When the Lord appears to John on the island of Patmos, He's seen walking amongst 7 lamp-stands. [Not one lamp-stand with seven branches! It wasn't a denomination. It was 7 golden lamp-stands. Each local Church independently. But Christ walks among them and so they are thus connected, through Him. This is the basis of their union with each other]

But why are they represented as lamp-stands? Because the world is a dark place and needs a candle to shine, which is the local Church. God has put us there so that His light, His glory, is seen in the world. The local Church puts forward the 'message'. The local Church has the responsibility to show what it is like to live a Christian life.

God has put us here so that light is shed on the unconverted world. How to be right with God. It's the local Church that is given this responsibility.

And as we see in 1 Timothy 3: 14-15: the local Church is the pillar and ground of the local truth. There is one pillar that God has put up and only one, and on it is the truth. If the pillar holds firm the truth is held up, but if the pillar fails or falls the truth falls to the ground with it. That pillar which holds up truth in the world is the Church of the living God. Paul, in writing to Timothy, is writing about the local Church at Ephesus.

What is it that holds truth up in the world? Publishing houses, Bible translators, other Christian organisations – many of which are good? Perhaps. But it is the local Church which is the Christ appointed column to hold up the truth in the world.

That's what God says about the Church. Now what will you do, in the light of God's truth?

[2244]

May God guide all the saints gathered here today.