



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 13.2 – The Doctrine of Church and Ministry

Other Expressions That Refer to the Church

Sometimes the apostle Paul compares the Church of Jesus Christ to a building. He wrote to the Christians in Corinth: **“You are God’s building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ”** (1 Corinthians 3:9-11). Every believer is built on the foundation of Christ. The missionary Paul established Christian congregations by preaching Christ, and any Christian leader who followed him should be careful to build on that foundation with good Scriptural materials and not build on human opinions or ideas.

In several places the building that is the Church of believers in Christ is called a temple. Paul asks: **“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”** And he continues: **“If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are”** (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). Heathens thought of temples as the places where their gods lived. But the Spirit of God, the true God, dwells not in buildings but in the people who believe in Jesus Christ. Every believer’s body is a temple of God, and all believers in Jesus, thought of collectively, are God’s temple, in whom He dwells. When Paul warned against sexual immorality, he asked: **“Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you?”** (1 Corinthians 6:19). And in his warning against working together with unbelievers Paul asked: **“What part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell among them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people’”** (2 Corinthians 6:15-16).

In his letter to the Ephesians Paul again describes believers in Christ as a building. In this comparison he calls Christ **“the chief cornerstone”** of the building, and the **“foundation”** is **“the apostles and prophets”**. The apostles and prophets were those through whom God chose to reveal His Word. In other words, believers in Jesus Christ rest their faith on what the apostles and prophets have written about Christ. This is his comparison: **“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit”** (Ephesians 2:19-22).

The apostle Paul also compared the Church of Christ to a bride. Jesus Christ is the Bridegroom. Paul wrote: **“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church, and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the water, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish”** (Ephesians 5:22-27). In writing to the Corinthians, Paul used the same picture: **“I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”** (2 Corinthians 11:2). John the Baptist also used this picture, calling himself the friend of the Bridegroom, whereas Jesus Himself was the Bridegroom: **“He who has the bride is the bridegroom”** (John 3:29).

Jesus Himself spoke of the members of His Church as His sheep. He called Himself the good Shepherd, and said that He knew His sheep, and they knew Him. He said: **“I lay down My life for the sheep. ... And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd”** (John 10:14-16). Jesus also said: **“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand”** (John 10:27-28). In His description of the last judgment Jesus spoke of His sheep as being at His right hand, and to them He will speak these wonderful words: **“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”** (Matthew 25:34).

The apostle Peter used several terms to describe believers in Christ. In his greeting to them in his first letter he called them **“elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father”** (1 Peter 1:2). Later he wrote to them: **“You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood”** (1 Peter 2:5), and he added a bit later: **“You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God”** (1 Peter 2:9-10). In his letter to Titus the apostle Paul also called the believers in Christ **“His own special people”** (Titus 2:14).

Since God chose Jerusalem as the city where His temple was built and one of the hills of Jerusalem was called Mount Zion, God's people were also called **“the city of God”** (Psalm 46:4 and Psalm 87:3). **“Mount Zion”** (Psalm 48:11 and Psalm 125:1) also became a term for the people of God, as well as **“Jerusalem”** (Psalm 122:2 and Psalm 147:2). The letter to the Hebrews uses these terms to describe all Christians when it says: **“You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speak better things than that of Abel”** (Hebrews 12:22-24). The believers on earth become part of the great company of believers of all ages, who are destined to live forever with their God through their trust in the blood of Christ, their Savior.

The book of Revelation shows us in advance the beauty and glory of the Church triumphant: all the believers in Christ from all the ages of time and from all the corners in the earth. The apostle John was privileged to see the Church of Jesus as it will be forever, and he recorded what he saw in these words: **“I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God’”** (Revelation 21:1-3).

Questions

1. In what way is the Church of Christ like a building?
2. Which two things does Paul say are the foundation of such a building?
3. In what way is the Church of Christ like God's temple?
4. In what way is the Church of Christ like the bride of Christ?
5. Why are Christians compared with sheep?
6. In what way are Christians like living stones?
7. Why is it fitting that Christians are called Mount Zion and Jerusalem?
8. What did the apostle John see in the vision he received from God?