

POWER

"... the gospel ... is the power of God unto salvation ..." (Romans 1:16)

REDEMPTION IN THE CHURCH

by Wade L. Webster

Those who wish to seriously study the church of Christ must study in depth the New Testament books of Acts and Ephesians. The book of Acts records the establishment and the expansion of the church, while the book of Ephesians records the greatness and the glory of the church. Our primary focus in this lesson will be on the book of Ephesians and a key statement that it makes about the church. In the fifth chapter of Ephesians, Paul declared:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything (Eph. 5:22-24).

Did you notice the simple statements that Paul made about Christ and His church? He declared that Christ is "the head of the church" and "the savior of the body." Sadly, many people miss these simple statements. I am convinced that people miss these simple truths for three basic reasons.

- First, they miss these truths because they don't read and study their Bibles as they should (Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 2:15; John 5:39). They listen to preachers who don't believe these truths.

- Second, when they do read their Bibles, they read them with preconceived, perverted, and premillennial notions about the church. They do not believe in either the eternity or essentiality of the church (Eph. 3:8-11). Furthermore, they do not understand that the church and the kingdom are the same and that there is only one church authorized by God.

- Third, they tend to focus on only one side of Paul's discussion. The subjection of the wife is such a highly charged matter in our world that it tends to get all of the attention.

Although others may miss what Paul said about the church, the bride of Christ, we must

not. As the title to this lesson suggests, that will be the focus of our study.

Although the headship of Christ is a crucial matter, our focus in this lesson will be on the fact that Christ is "the savior of the body." In the course of our study, will consider two main points:

- There is only one Provider of Salvation, Christ.

- There is only one Place of Salvation, the church.

No doubt, these points are surely believed by those of us who have been members of the church for any time at all. However, they need teaching and re-teaching. After all, most in our world have never heard them. Sadly, some even in congregations of the Lord's people have not heard them; at least, not in a long time. I am afraid that some congregations that tolerate virtually everything would not tolerate the simple truths that will be the thrust of this lesson.

There is only one Provider of Salvation - Christ.

Paul declared that Jesus "is the savior" (Eph. 5:23). Please note the definite article. He is *the* savior. He is not merely *a* savior. He is *the* savior. There is no other. If you want to be saved, you will have to come to Him. When examined by the high court of the Jews for the good deed done to an impotent man, Peter declared:

Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:10-12).

Please note that salvation could not be found in "any other." He is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). No man can come to the Father, "except" by Him. Throughout Scripture, He is identified as "the savior of the world" (John 4:42; Phil. 3:20; 1 Tim. 4:10). He is not merely the Judeo-Christian savior. He is not merely the savior of the West or of North America. He is the savior of the world. Those in the tropical jungles of South America must obey Him just like those in the concrete jungles of North America. All men everywhere are amenable to His laws (Mt. 28:18-20). Thankfully, most that are reading this chapter or hearing it presented realize His reign and have submitted to it. Thanks be to God that we can call him "our" savior" (Tit. 1:4; 2:13; 3:6; 2 Tim. 1:10; 2 Pet. 1:1, 11; 3:18).

The writer of Hebrews declared that Jesus is the "author" or source "of eternal salvation" (Heb. 5:9; cf. 12:2). Salvation flows from Him. He is the only source of living water. You cannot find it anywhere else. To the Samaritan woman, Jesus declared, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water" (John 4:10). Although others can provide physical water to quench the thirst of our bodies, only He can provide living water to quench the thirst of our souls.

I believe that the Old Testament account of the brazen serpent illustrates the point that I am trying to make concerning Christ being the only provider of salvation. Moses records:

And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the

Continued on page 2

REDEMPTION IN THE CHURCH

Continued from page 1

wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived (Num. 21:4-9).

What ingrates the Israelites were. They loathed the light bread that the Scriptures describe as "angel's food" (Psa. 78:25). They complained about being delivered from the cruel bondage of Egypt. It is no wonder that God sent fiery serpents among them. The wonder is that He showed mercy by giving them a way of escape when Moses interceded on their behalf. Amazingly, the antidote that the Almighty prescribed was another fiery snake - a brazen serpent on a pole. Those who were bitten could look upon the brazen serpent and live. There was no other way. As you likely know, Jesus used this serpent on a pole to illustrate His own redemptive death. We read:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved (John 3:14-17).

As was the case in Moses' day, there is only one antidote today for the serpent's bite. It is Christ and Him crucified. Just as the serpent on the pole delivered from physical

death, the Savior on the cross delivers from spiritual and eternal death.

There is Only One Place of Salvation - the Church

Paul declared that Jesus is the savior "of the body" (Eph. 5:23). The book of Ephesians makes clear that the body is the church. In the first chapter, Paul declared that God hath put all things under Jesus' feet and "gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23). Furthermore, it should be noted that Ephesians establishes that there is but one body or church (Eph. 4:4; cf. Mat. 16:18).

Returning to the context of the fifth chapter of Ephesians, we can further establish that when Paul mentions the body that he is talking about the church. Please note the reference to the church in the context under consideration:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of **the church**: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as **the church** is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved **the church**, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious **church**, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord **the church**: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and **the church** (Eph. 5:22-32).

Six times Paul made reference to the church within the context. Then, at the end of the context, he plainly declared, "I speak

concerning Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:32). There is simply no excuse for missing what Paul was discussing.

If the church is Christ's body, and it is, then to be in Christ is to be in the church, and to be in the church is to be in Christ. With this understanding, please consider some statements from the book of Ephesians:

- "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with **all spiritual blessings** in heavenly places **in Christ**" (Eph. 1:3). Please note that all spiritual blessings are said to be "in Christ." Again, to be in Christ, is to be in His body the church. Thus, only those in Christ, and His body, the church, enjoy "all spiritual blessings." Those outside of Christ may enjoy physical blessings, since the rain falls on the just and the unjust (Mat. 5:45), but they do not enjoy spiritual blessings.

- "**In whom we have redemption** through his blood, **the forgiveness of sins**, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7; cf. Rom. 3:24). Please note that redemption and the forgiveness of sins are said to be in Christ. Thus, only those in Christ, and in His body, the church, enjoy redemption and the forgiveness of their sins.

- "**In whom also we have obtained an inheritance**, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11; cf. 3:6). Please note that an inheritance is said to be in Christ. Thus, only those in Christ, and His body, the church, have a hope of eternal life (Tit. 1:2). Those outside of Christ are without hope (Eph. 2:12)

- "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now **in Christ Jesus** ye who sometimes were far off are **made nigh** by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:12-13). Please note that reconciliation is said to be "in Christ." Only those in Christ, and His body, the church, have been reconciled to God. Those outside of Christ and His body are still strangers. God doesn't know them (Mt. 7:21-23). Furthermore, within the context of Ephesians 2, Paul went on to argue directly that reconciliation takes place "in one body" (Eph. 2:16). Of course, the one

Continued on page 4





Deuteronomy 5:32

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REDEMPTION IN THE CHURCH

Continued from page 2

body is the church (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4)

• **"In whom** we have boldness and **access** with confidence by the faith of him" (Eph. 3:12). Please note that we have "access" to the Father in Christ. Only those in Christ, and His body, the church, have access to God. As Christians, we can approach God's throne with boldness and confidence (Heb. 4:14-16; 1 John 5:14-15). Those outside of Christ and His church do not have the privilege of prayer (1 Pet. 3:12; John 9:31; Prov. 15:8; 28:9).

Five special things - blessings, redemption, inheritance, reconciliation, and access, are all said to be in Christ and His body, the church. Obviously, if those things are in Christ and His body, the church, then we must be in the church to enjoy them.

To further establish that salvation is found in Christ and His church, please note a statement from the second chapter of the book of Acts. On the day of Pentecost, and in the days following, Luke records, "Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). Please note that within the context that being "added" is connected with being baptized (Acts 2:41). We read, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Eph. 5:21). Men are added to the church by the Lord when they are baptized. Baptism is how men get into Christ and His body, the church. To the saints at Galatia, Paul wrote, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:26-27). Clearly, we get into Christ by being baptized. Again, please remember that to be in Christ is to be in His body, the church.

A couple Old Testament accounts make clear the point that I am trying to make:

• First, please consider the account of Noah and the ark. As you know, salvation was found in the ark, and not out of it (Heb. 11:7; 1 Pet. 3:20; Gen. 6:17-20; 7:1-4, 21-23). The eight souls that were saved were saved in the ark. The thousands, and perhaps millions outside of the ark, perished in the flood. In like manner, salvation today is found in Christ and His body, the church. Like the ark, the church will be borne up when judgment comes (1 Cor. 15:24-26). Furthermore, like the ark, the church has only one door (Christ John 10:9) and one window or source of light (the Bible Phil. 3:16).

• Second, consider the account of the doorposts in Egypt covered with blood. As you recall, the final plague to hit Egypt was the death of the firstborn. However, God provided a means of escape for the Israelites. Death entered every house except where the blood had been applied (Ex. 12:22-23). It should be noted that in order to be spared, they could not go out. In like manner, salvation today is found in the house or church covered by blood (1 Tim. 3:15; Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25). To be saved, we must remain in the house.

Today, the church is the ark that saves us from eternal destruction and the house that saves us from eternal death. There is no other place of salvation.

God's plan is a simple plan. It involves one provider of salvation Jesus Christ, and one place of salvation the church. Sadly, the serpent through his subtility has beguiled many today as he beguiled Eve (2 Cor. 11:3). He has corrupted their thinking by convincing them that salvation can be found outside of Christ and His church. However, we know better. We know that "Christ is the head of the church" and that "He is the savior of the body" (Eph. 5:23).