

Vision and the Christian Life

(Part 9)

The Christian Perception of the Church

What is the first thing that comes into many peoples mind when I say the word “*church*” ?

A building down the road?

An organisation run by priests or ministers?

Where some people go on Sundays?

A house for hypocrites?

How should a Christian perceive the Church?

How does Jesus Christ see the Church?

If I put the following letters on a blackboard CH CH what would we immediately recognise?

- a) Something is missing, the letters “*UR*” [You are]
- b) The two letters “*UR*” [You are] are central in the word Church

Both the above conclusions are true.

The Church has many facets and can be perceived in many ways.

Perceived as:

- 1 An organism
- 2 The body of Jesus Christ
- 3 The prolongation of Jesus in time
- 4 The extension of Jesus in space
- 5 An organisation of “*Jesus people*”

An organisation is **not** formed without a cause to fulfil.

First we have a cause then we form an organisation to work for that cause.

God wanted something done through His potential children so He called a group of people together to accomplish that goal and to meet a need.

An individual alone normally cannot accomplish a great cause.

An individual who is **not** supported by the enthusiasm and encouragement of others involved in that same cause usually soon gives up.

Human dedication and enthusiasm for a cause, like everything human, are contagious, caught not taught.

One voice alone would be like a soft whisper in the midst of the brass band of society.

However, a large enough chorus will be heard above the noise of a brass band.

So God formed a chorus to proclaim His message.

John 1:1-5, 14 [NIV] *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.” ... “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

God became a human being and called together a group of people to proclaim the message He had for humanity.

The Good News of God’s intention to make us His family of children, in a loving intimate relationship.

Matthew 28:16-20 [NIV] *“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

This chosen group of people were meant to invite others to invite others into the intimate relationship with God and into His created family.

What the Church is commanded to do is to give an invitation not make an announcement.

The invitation is given by example far more than words.

An old Chinese proverb says *“what you are speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you are saying.”*

John 13:35 [NIV] *“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

People only want values they can see lived.

The most important and effective people in the church called together by God are **not** those who live by preaching but preach by living!

The most important and effective people in the church are **not** those who tell us what love is, but rather those who love us.

This “*you and I*” church is God’s way of creating His family.

Why does God desire to have a family and therefore a church in which to create that family?

1 John 4:8 [NIV] *“Whoever does not love does not know God, because **God is love.**”*

God is love and the deepest instinct of love is to share.

Love has an inner need to give away what it possesses.

Genesis 1:26 [NIV] “... God said, let us make man in our image, in our likeness...”

Genesis 1:27 [NIV] “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

Note that in this original creation humans were only made in God’s “*image*”, **not** in His “*likeness*”.

The two different Hebrew words used give us an indication why humans are **not** complete in this physical creation.

“*Image*” – means a shadow not the real thing.

We often can recognise an object by its shadow but we know it is not the real thing.

“*Likeness*” – means two of a kind, a son, it is referring to character rather than physical form.

As we know character cannot be created, it is caught through an intimate relationship over a period of time.

The nature or character of God is love and love is generated in another as the result of loving actions.

For a group of human beings to become a Godlike family, love must flow through the whole network of family relationships.

Matthew 22:34-39 [NIV] “Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.**’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: **‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’**”

Love has to extend vertical to God our Spiritual Father and horizontal to our brothers and sisters who are also the created children of God.

Eventually such love unites everyone in a family.

This is God’s Mission and God’s Plan and it is to be accomplished within God’s Church.

1 Corinthians 12:14-27 [NIV] “**Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.** If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact **God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.** If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. **If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.**”

Each member of the church has received from God certain gifts which they should use for the common good of other members.

The Kingdom of God was the central message in the preaching of Jesus the Son of God.

Matthew 13:31-32 [NIV] *“He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. **Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.**”*

A kingdom is a family that has grown large from a small start.

Matthew 13:33 [NIV] *“He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like **yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.**”*

The family of God is intended to influence every other human being they come in contact with, so that it will grow.

Jesus seems to say that the growth of the Kingdom of God is in several phases.

Mark 1:14-15 [NIV] *“After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. **“The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”***

The Kingdom of God is near.

Luke 17:20-21 [NIV] *“Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the **kingdom of God is within you** [or among you].”*

The Kingdom of God is within us, or among us. Jesus was referring to Himself.

Mark 9:1 [NIV] *“And he said to them, “I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see **the kingdom of God come with power.**”*

The power of the Kingdom of God was first shown when Jesus the Son of Man was on earth. Jesus was referring to His own death and resurrection back to eternal life.

The growth of the Kingdom of God is also linked to Jesus Christ’s second coming.

Luke 17:20, 22-30 [NIV] *“Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation,” ... “Then he said to his disciples, “The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. Men will tell you, ‘There he is!’ or ‘Here he is!’ Do not go running off after them. **For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other.** But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. “Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. “It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulphur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. “It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.”*

Christ’s return as the King of Kings to rule over the Kingdom of God.

John 3:1-8 [NIV] *“Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no-one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.” **In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”** “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!” Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, **no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.** Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The*

wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

The Kingdom [family] of God is made up of “*born again*” people. People who are disciples of Jesus Christ and led by the Holy Spirit.

There is a story about a child wanting to be held by his mother at bedtime. When the mother reminded her little boy that the arms of God would be around him all night, the child replied, “*I know, but tonight I need a god with a skin on.*”

This is why God has fashioned a community of love which we call the Church.

Colossians 1:27 [NIV] “***To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.***”

It is Christ in each member of His Church that provides each generation with a “*god with a skin on*”.

John 14:8-9 [NIV] “***Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”***”

As a human being Jesus Christ came to reveal God to human beings.

Romans 8:9 [NIV] “***You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.***”

It is those who have the Spirit of Christ in them who are part of the body of Christ the Church.

Those who have Christ living in them by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

John 14:15-18 [NIV] “***If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.***”

The Holy Spirit in the Christian is Christ living in them, “*god with a skin*”.

What scripture is telling each Christian is that they individually and as a church are Jesus in this world today.

All of true Christians carry in their lives the treasure of the loving Jesus, working through us fragile vessels of clay.

Philippians 4:13 [NIV] “***I can do everything through him who gives me strength.***”

Christ in us can give this example of God’s Love.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 [NIV] “***To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.***”

In his personal weakness Paul was strong because of Christ in him.

Every Christian should want to give to the world a personal testimonial to God's Grace.

Give this testimony by words, lifestyle in our work and in our worship.

Telling others how *“Jesus has touched my life. By His Kingdom, by His encouragement and by His challenge, Jesus has made all the difference to my life. I was lost and now I've found the purpose of life, I was blind but now I see. But please be patient for God is not yet finished moulding me into His physical child.”*

This is the true Christian perception of God's Church.