

FIGURES OF CHRIST & THE CHURCH

The seven figures of Christ and the Church illustrate the intimacy of the relationship between Christ and believers in the Church Age. Each picture reinforces the truth that fellowship with Jesus Christ is the only thing that can satisfy our souls. Each picture also points to the organic unity of the Church and reinforces the principle that all Church Age believers are irrevocably joined to one another.

Body

1. **The Shepherd and the Sheep**-- The figure of the Shepherd and the sheep pictures [1] the utter helplessness of all believers, and [2] the extent of the Lord's tender love for each of us.

Cf. John 10:2-16-- **“But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. 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. And a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers [such is / way sheep have always been, and so they will always be, which makes them a perfect illustration of believers-- a helpless, defenseless animal that cannot fend for itself].’ This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them. Jesus therefore said to them again, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep [in / ancient world, when the sheep entered / door of / sheepfold, they had found the place of safety; are you looking for security, protection?-- well, here He is!]. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers [all / false-christs and / the imposters], but the sheep did not hear them. [Jesus said--] I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved [once and for all-- / union of eternal salvation], and shall go in and out, and find pasture [i.e., nourishment for his soul-- this is not union but communion, / communion of fellowship; cf. ‘Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret,’ pp. 234-237]. The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have {it} abundantly [/ promise to you and I is not just eternal life, and not just spiritual life, but ‘abundant life,’ a life overflowing with peace, with grace, and with / power of spiritual joy; it is a life of intimacy and depth of personal relationship with / Lord Jesus Christ]. [if you’re lonely, and if you need someone to provide for you and to care for you, take courage in these words, for Christ said--] I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep [which He did at Calvary’s Cross]. He who is a hireling, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, beholds the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them, and scatters {them.} {He flees} because he is a hireling, and is not concerned about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My *life* for the sheep. And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold [/ ‘fold’ of Israel; / ‘other sheep’ are CA believers]; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall [future tense] become *one* flock {with} one shepherd [what is that one thing above all others that makes the CA unique?-- that by faith in Christ Jew and Gentile are together in *one* Body!.”**

John 21:15-17 tells us the story of Jesus post-resurrection breakfast conversation with the Apostle Peter. In it Jesus uses the figure of believers as “His sheep” three separate times. He commands Peter three times, to **“Tend My lambs;” “Shepherd My sheep;”** and **“tend My sheep,”** i.e., care for those whom I will place under your guidance and protection. Nurture them Peter, feed them on the “bread of life,” and quench their thirst with the “living water.” You have the fresh, green grass they desire; you have the cool, clear water they long for, now give it to them! I have three points here.

- A. Christ is the Shepherd who provides for the sheep life, liberty, and sustenance. As the Good Shepherd the crucified Christ laid down His life for the sheep-- John 10:11.
 - B. As the Great Shepherd the resurrected Christ sustains and supplies believers with every good thing in the plan of God. Hebrews 13:20-21 say’s, **“Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, {even} Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom {be} the glory forever and ever. Amen.”**
 - C. As the Chief Shepherd the returning Christ is the source of eternal blessings and eternal rewards for those who followed Him. Peter told the Pastor-teachers of Asia Minor, that **“...when the Chief Shepherd appears [to call us home, at / Rapture], you will receive the unfading crown of glory,”** 1 Peter 5:4.
2. **The Vine and the Branches--** The Vine and the branches pictures the all sufficiency of Jesus Christ and the production in our lives that comes through communion with Him.

In John 15:1-7 Jesus said, **“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every {branch} that bears fruit, He prunes it [why?], that it may bear more fruit [‘pruning’ is / refining process of our spiritual lives, / stripping away of every source of interference to / plan of God-- all / arrogance, all / pretense, all / false priorities and pseudo-motivations which distract us from / execution of His will]. You are already clean [spiritually] because of the word which I have spoken to you. 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 [bear fruit], unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing [/ vine in Israel, as the source of wine, was a symbol of happiness and production and fulfillment; that’s / picture Jesus paints when He say’s, ‘I am the vine’]. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned [this is not *hellfire* and it’s not loss of salvation; this is divine discipline beginning with self-induced misery all / way down to / ‘sin unto death’]. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you [*live, dwell*, are ‘at home in you’; / Word of Christ is received in faith, retained in the soul, and recalled in application; what happens when / Word of God lives and breathes within us like this?--], ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you [here is / key to effective prayer, to spiritually energized prayer in the CA-- *communion* with *Christ*; this is that moment by moment fellowship which has its unshakable foundation in a life that is motivated, empowered and absorbed in / Word of God].”**

Jesus Christ produces fruit through the branches that draw their life from Him. All life flows through the vine; the branch can do nothing on its own. The fruit of spiritual service, of

Christian production, has to do with “abiding,” with faith, with receiving-- never with laboring from human strength.

Principle: Only in fellowship with Christ can we bear spiritual fruit.

3. **The Chief Cornerstone and the Stones of the Building--** The Chief Cornerstone and the stones is a picture of the invisible, spiritual temple being built by Jesus Christ. Cf. 1 Peter 2:5-9.

A. Notice the parallels between Israel and the Church.

- 1) Israel, like the Church, was called the “flock of God,” and the “sheep of His pasture”- - Jeremiah 23; Ezekiel 34.
- 2) Christ is the vine out of which flows life, energy, and power and we are the branches; Israel, by comparison, was called Jehovah’s vineyard.
- 3) Israel *had* a temple; the Church *is* a temple, **“a dwelling of God in the Spirit,”** according to Ephesians 2:22.

B. What *was* the “cornerstone” in the ancient world; and what did it do, what purpose did it serve? There are two definitions which come down to us, one pertaining to a building’s foundation, the other regarding the structure above that foundation.

- 1) A cornerstone was a stone laid at one corner of a foundation as the starting point for construction. It aligned and tied together the entire building. Believers are related to each other as stones, built on one foundation-- faith in Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:11 say’s, **“For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”**
- 2) A stone at the intersection of two walls, uniting them, was also called the cornerstone. In the doctrine of Dispensations (illustrate) we can see Jesus Christ as the stone that both unites and *separates* the Age of Israel and the Age of Grace.

It takes many, many stones to make a building, and all are to a certain extent dependent on each other. The stones themselves don’t do anything, they don’t exert any effort in and of themselves, they simply allow themselves to be fitted together by the Builder.

Paul said in Ephesians 2:19-22, **“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner {stone}, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit [or ‘by means of the Spirit’].”**

4. **The High Priest and Priests of the Temple--** This pictures the relationship of service shared by Christ with believers.

Remember Peter’s word in 1 Peter 2:9, that we **“...are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, ...a people for {God’s} own possession, that”** we **“may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called”** us **“out of darkness into His marvelous light.”** In Revelation 1:6 the Apostle

John said, “...**He [Jesus Christ] has made us {to be} a kingdom, priests to His God and Father...**”

- A. The function of the OT priests was to represent the people before God; ch’s 5-8 of the book of Hebrews show us that Jesus Christ is our High Priest who constantly intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father. In Hebrews 8:1-2 the writer say’s, “**Now the main point in what has been said [from ch. 5 up to this point] {is this}: we *have* such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.**”
 - B. Israel *had* a priesthood; the Church *is* a priesthood. Jesus Christ is a “...**a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek**”-- Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5:6. Because He is also the King, in fact royalty in three categories-- Divine, Jewish, and Battlefield-- we are members of a *royal* priesthood. As priests we are to offer worship and sacrifices of praise, of intercession, and of ourselves to God, as “living sacrifices” on the altar of grace-- Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:5.
5. **The Head and the Body**-- The Head and the Body is the most frequently used description of Christ and the Church. It pictures both the unity of believers and the authority of Christ. Paul said in Romans 12:5, “**so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.**”
- A. Each member in the human body has a specific, individual function. Each member, though different, is necessary. The unifying principle is that all members take their orders from the brain, but all by nature serve the other parts and exist solely for the function of the whole. The Church, likewise, is the Body of Christ. Every believer is placed “in Christ,” baptized by the HS into union with Him at the moment of salvation-- 1 Corinthians 12:13-- and all are exhorted to be “...**diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**” For as Paul said in Ephesians 4:4, “**{There is} one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all,**” vv. 5-6.
 - B. Israel was a commonwealth, an organized nation; the Church is a living organism which draws its life from the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. This figure speaks of the vital relationship between the two, the inseparable union of Christ and His Body, and, like the High Priest and His Royal Priesthood, of spiritual gifts and spiritual service.
6. **The Last Adam and the New Creation**-- In this figure is the picture of the risen Christ as the head of a new race, a new species of creation. We know it as the Royal Family of God. 2 Corinthians 5:17 say’s, “**Therefore if [1st class condition: true-- *since* or *when*] any man is in Christ [positional truth], {he is} a new creature [kainos means- of a new kind, a new form, *unprecedented*; it speaks of something impressive, better than the old and superior to it; *ktisis* means lit.- *creation*, something created out of nothing; i.e., a new spiritual species-- Royal Family of God]; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come [51 grace gifts of salvation; *all* the divine assets and equipment needed to become a hero of faith].**”
- A. Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:45-50. The first Adam brought sin, and with sin, death; the last Adam brought righteousness and with it, eternal life.

By spiritual birth, by regeneration, believers have become a part of the new creation, but the glories of this relationship await Heaven when all believers will be released from their OSN's-- free from the very presence of sin-- will experience their citizenship in Heaven, and will be given resurrection bodies just like the body of Christ.

Commenting on that glorious day, Paul said, **"...having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for {our} adoption as sons, the redemption of our body,"** Romans 8:23.

B. Israel was of a different order, an old creation related to the earth; the Church is of a new order, the New Creation related to Heaven. The "new creation" pictures the wealth of divine power and divine provision available to every last believer **"in Christ."**

7. **The Bridegroom and the Bride--** The Bridegroom and the Bride is perhaps the most intimate description of the relationship between Christ and His Church. Cf. Ephesians 5.

A. The analogy is brought out vividly and lucidly in Ephesians 5:22-23. It say's, **"Wives, {be subject} to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself {being} the Savior of the body."** Paul lays down the command for husbands in v. 25, to **"...love your wives [agapao- unconditionally and sacrificially; this is the spiritual love that impels one to give himself in self-sacrifice for the ultimate good of another], just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her."**

The reason He **"gave Himself up,"** sacrificed Himself **"for her"** is given in vv. 26-27, **"that He might sanctify her, having cleansed [purified] her by the washing of water with the word** [or, 'in the sphere of the Word'; Word of God is / only thing in life which can purify and sanctify / inner man, / innermost part of / believer, his soul and spirit], **that** [*hina* gives us / beginning of a final purpose clause, i.e., everything that has been accomplished with reference to / Church-- / sacrifice of Christ for Her, Her experiential sanctification by / power of / Word of God-- everything has been building toward this one event right here; *in order that--*] **He might present to Himself the church in all her glory** [when will this begin?-- at / 'exit resurrection,' / Rapture], **having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing** [word for 'spot,' *spilos*, means- *blemish, stain, imperfection*; in 2 Pt. 2:13 Peter uses it to describe / lascivious lifestyles of false teachers-- 'without spot' speaks of personal sins which were judged at / Cross; / wrinkles refer to all / acts of human good we accomplished in / energy of / flesh; we saw *when*, now where?-- in Heaven, after / Bema Seat Judgment]; **but that she should be holy** [lit., *separate from evil*, which includes all our human good] **and blameless** [faultless, absolutely without blemish; why?-- because She who was / Body on earth is about to become / Bride in Heaven]."

B. The picture painted for us through this figure is not only of Christ's authority over and protection of His Church, but also the tenderness, the love, the unity, and the intimacy that will exist between Christ and the Church forever.

C. Israel is represented in the OT as the apostate wife of Jehovah, yet to be restored-- the story of Hosea and Gomer was intended to be the divine illustration of Israel and her Lord, and of His undying love for His chosen people, how He cared for them and had compassion on them, in spite of their unfaithfulness-- the Church, on the other hand, is the espoused virgin Bride of Christ.

She's not yet the Bride of Christ, but She *will* be in the future. She will be claimed by Him at the Rapture and She will reign with Him-- 2 Timothy 2:12-- sharing in His glory-- Romans 8:17. The finite human mind cannot even imagine the changes that will be achieved by the power of God in those who comprise the Bride of the Lamb. She will be perfected to an infinite and *immeasurable* degree. In that perfection the Church will share in the resplendent glory of Christ throughout all of eternity.