

MESSIAH THE PRINCE,
Or, The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ.
By William Symington.
Sabbath Afternoon Studies: Part 12.

CHAPTER 7.
THE KINGLY OFFICE OF CHRIST IN
RELATION TO THE CHURCH.

WE have seen that the mediatorial rule is strictly universal. It comprehends under it all things, without exception. We remarked¹ that among the ‘all things’ are included associations of every kind, civil and ecclesiastical. It was also observed, that there are two associations, which, both from their importance in themselves, and their particular relation to the subject in hand, deserve a separate and more full consideration. The first of these is THE CHURCH, without doubt the most important society in existence, and that in subserviency to whose interests it is that the Mediator has been invested with power over every other thing. He is head over *all things to the church* which is his body.

The fact of Christ’s mediatorial rule over the church is plainly testified in the Scriptures. He is ‘king upon the holy hill of Sion,—king of Sion—he reigns over the house of Jacob for ever—the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church—he is the head of the body the church—Moses was faithful in all his house as a servant, but Christ as a son over his own house, whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.’ They ‘who sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb,’ address him, besides other titles, by that of ‘King of Saints.’²

The term *church* is a familiar one. It is in the mouths of all. It is of importance that we attach to it some definite idea. The Hebrew word **קִהָל** (*qâhâl*), and the Greek word **ἐκκλησία**, which are used by the inspired writers to denote the church, signify an assembly convened by invitation or appointment, being derived from verbs the generic idea of which is *to call*. The nature of the assembly, whether civil or religious, must be determined by the context. ► In the New Testament the word translated church, when used in a religious sense, is applied:—to the whole body of the elect, as when Christ is said to ‘love the church;’—to a small association of private Christians, as when we read of the church in the houses of certain individuals;—to a regularly organised congregation, as when ‘the church of Ephesus,’ ‘the church of Smyrna,’ or such like is spoken of;—and to the whole visible catholic society, consisting of all, who, in every age and in every place, make a credible profession of true religion, together with their children, as when ‘the church in the wilderness’ is spoken of, or when the Lord is said to ‘add

¹ See page 97. [Related to associations in the previous ch. on the Universality of Christ’s Dominion.]

² Psalm 2.6; Zech. 9.9; Luke 1.33; Eph. 5.23; Col. 1.18; Heb. 3.6; Rev. 15.3.

daily to the church such as shall be saved.’ ► The first and the last of these views are of most importance. In allusion to these it is that the church is commonly spoken of as visible and invisible—the latter epithet referring to the first of the senses above enumerated, the former to the last. ‘The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be, gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.—The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation as before under the law,) consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.’³ Both of these views are comprehended, of course, in the one church of which Christ is the Head, and over which he exercises mediatorial rule. But it is the visible church with which we are at present chiefly concerned, and of which we are to be understood as principally speaking in the sequel. ► This comprehends many, we might almost say all, of the real saints of God who are upon earth, inasmuch as true grace in the heart prompts men to make an open profession of the name of Christ before the world. It does not, of course, include all the saints who are in existence, as many of these are in glory, of the mediatorial rule over whom we shall have occasion afterwards to speak; and it may also include some who are not true members of Christ’s mystical body. It is, nevertheless, a most interesting view of the church of Christ, the existence, and structure, and privileges of which are necessarily and most intimately connected with the best interests of the strictly spiritual kingdom of the Messiah. In what follows in this chapter, therefore, we would be understood as having a principal regard to *the visible church catholic, consisting of all, who, in every age and in every place, make a credible profession of true religion, together with their children*; while we would not be understood as overlooking that invisible church, for the promotion of whose interests alone it is that this was ever brought into being or organized.

That the term *church* occurs in this sense in Scripture has been denied by some, whose peculiar views of ecclesiastical government require them to understand it, either in the sense of the whole chosen of God, or in that of a particular congregation assembling for worship in one place. But the word occurs in passages in which it can be understood in neither of these senses. Speaking of Moses, Stephen says in his address:—‘This is he that was with the church in the wilderness.’ [Acts 7.38.] The church here means the Jewish church. It cannot be supposed that all who were comprehended in that church were elect persons, much less that it comprehended all the elect. Nor did the members of that church meet all in one congregation; there were many congregations of Israelites scattered throughout the land of Judea. ► Again, Peter says:—‘The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.’ [Acts 2.47.] The church here cannot mean the whole body of the elect, for to such there is no addition, it is complete from eternity: neither can it mean a single congregation, as the increase of the church was not confined to one town or district. When it is said, ‘Saul made havoc of the church, entering into every house,’ [Acts 8.3.] the elect cannot possibly be meant, as the most lynx-eyed persecutor

3 Westminster Confession, chapter 25, sections 1 and 2.

cannot distinguish such from hypocrites; and it is surely not reasonable to suppose that the zeal of such an enemy as Saul of Tarsus would be confined to one congregation. Paul says:—‘Gaius mine host, and of the whole church.’ [Rom. 16.23.] Gaius’ hospitality could not be exercised only to the elect, as he did not know who were such; nor is it at all probable that a person of such distinguished liberality would confine his attentions to a single congregation. Besides, it is written:—‘God hath set some in the church; first, apostles; secondarily, prophets, &c.’ [1 Cor. 12.28.] It is not over the church of the elect, but over the visible church, that God has appointed visible office-bearers: nor are these functionaries restricted to one congregation.

► These are a few of the passages in which the term ‘church’ cannot be understood in either of the senses supposed, and in which it is not easy to see what other sense can be attached to it than that of which we are speaking, namely, the visible church catholic. This, indeed, is the meaning it bears in the common language of Christians. When they speak, for example, of ‘the church,’—of the faith of the church, the worship of the church, the sufferings of the church, the progress of the church, or the triumphs of the church,—such is the import of the term.

I. Now, this church, the visible church catholic, owes its existence to Christ’s mediatorial authority.

Without the work of Christ, agreed upon in the eternal counsels, the church could never have had a being. Its entire structure, privileges, and ends, rest on what he did. But for his engagement from eternity, it is impossible to see how such a society as the church of God could ever have existed. Nor is this all. The church owes its existence to the creative authority of the Redeemer. It is not a self-existent, self-constituted association merely, formed by voluntary agreement or mutual compact among its members, with reference even to the work of the Son of God. It is expressly founded by the voluntary and authoritative appointment of the Redeemer himself.

The existence of the visible church may be traced as far back as to Eden, when the primitive ordinances of social worship were instituted, and the blessings of grace began, through them, to be dispensed to our fallen progenitors.

It is true, there are several distinct periods of the church’s existence, which have been marked by something peculiar to themselves. In a popular, but improper sense, we speak of the Patriarchal, the Levitical, and the Christian churches. These, however, correctly speaking, are but different states of the same church. The church, the spouse of Christ, is one and the same in every age. God has had but one church in the world, and that church has existed since the revelation of the Seed of the woman at the fall of man. There have been, as above hinted, different periods, when, after suffering declension, it has undergone, so to speak, a sort of reorganization: and, on these occasions, as well as at its formation in the beginning, we find the interposition of the Mediator. When, at first, Adam and Eve united in the act of offering sacrifice, connected with prayer and praise, the visible church catholic was formed, and we cannot doubt that it owed its being to ‘the voice of the Lord God,’ who was heard in the garden at the cool of the day, calling the attention of the guilty pair to their destitute and sinful state, and to the way by which fallen men were to be rescued from the curse and condemnation of a

broken law. ► The covenant made with Abraham, long afterwards, marks another interesting period. It was without doubt an ecclesiastical covenant, in which the visible church in general was interested. This appears from the fact, that, while some of the patriarch's natural posterity were shut out from its blessings, express provision was made for the admission of others who were not his seed; and from the promise of his being made 'the father of many nations,' which could not have been fulfilled if the covenant had had respect only to the one nation of the Jews. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to suppose that he who proclaimed this covenant to the patriarch, was no other than the Angel of Jehovah, the uncreated Messenger of the covenant; for that covenant, we know, 'was confirmed of God in Christ.'⁴ ► With regard to the solemn and awful transactions at Sinai, when the whole Levitical economy was fixed and arranged, we are assured that the law was 'ordained by angels in the hands of a Mediator.' [Gal. 3.19.] At the introduction of the New Testament dispensation—that dispensation which is to continue to the end of time—we are assured that the Lord Jesus Christ himself administered ordinances, authorized and sent forth ministers, countenanced with his presence the social meetings of the church, and, on the day of Pentecost, shed abundantly on his assembled disciples the influences of his Spirit. Whatever, then, may be the period at which the origin of the church is fixed, it will be found that it owed its existence to Christ.

[The Marks of the Visible Catholic Church]

What, it may here be inquired, are the marks by which the visible church catholic, of which we are speaking, may be known? Not every one who makes a profession can claim to belong to this church. What then are the characteristics of the true church—the *notæ veræ ecclesiæ*? They are not those to which the Romish church pretends,—antiquity, universality, continued succession, the power of working miracles, and the like. It would be easy to shew that all these are false, even as respects that very community, and that they are altogether spurious and unfounded as respects any denomination whatever. Antiquity, universality, &c., may be properties of the true church, but they are not *exclusive* properties. The characteristics of the visible church catholic are what belong to it, and to it *alone*. These are—soundness of doctrinal sentiment, a lawful and regular ministry, and the due administration of gospel ordinances. Whatever ecclesiastical society can lay claim to these, has a right to be regarded as a section of the visible church catholic; whatever cannot, has no right to be so regarded.

The church is the pillar and ground of the truth. The exhibition and maintenance of divine truth being one end of its existence, the adoption of gross error, whether with regard to the character of God, the person and offices of the Redeemer, the nature of Messiah's kingdom, the method of salvation, the character of Christian duty, or the doctrine of a future state, must prove fatal to the ecclesiastical standing of any professing body. Gross heretics, of any description, have no right to be regarded as members of the visible church. 'Continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine,' is indispensable to such relationship. Whoever aspires to this honour, must

4 Gal. 3.17, εἰς Χριστόν, in respect of Christ.

‘have been taught as the truth is in Jesus;’ nor must they make any such pretension ‘who walk not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel.’⁵

A small association of private Christians may be called, in some sense, a church; but to constitute the visible church, the existence of office-bearers would seem to be requisite. A legitimate ministry, therefore, is another mark of the true church. In order to this, the persons bearing office must be properly qualified, regularly called, and duly initiated. If, in any ordinary case, the individuals who officiate are such as have assumed the office of themselves, or have received only a call from the people without scriptural ordination, or are grossly deficient in ministerial qualifications, this circumstance would seem sufficient to impair the right to being regarded as a part of the visible church. The apostles ‘ordained them elders in every church.’ And if ‘Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest, but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to-day have I begotten thee,’ no man surely ought to ‘take this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.’

‘How shall they preach except they be sent?’ ‘I sent them not, nor commanded them, therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord.’⁶ If the supply of ecclesiastical offices were left to spontaneous assumption, it must be obvious to every one that they would soon either die away altogether from apathy, or become so debased, by the corruption and inability of those who held them, as to be no longer capable of serving the end of their institution.

To the existence of the visible church there must be, farther, the due administration of gospel ordinances. Preaching, prayer, praise; baptism and the Lord’s supper; discipline and government, must be regularly dispensed, that is, must be dispensed by persons properly authorized, and with a view to the purposes for which they were appointed. When the ordinances are either altogether wanting, as is the case in regard to some of them in certain professing bodies—or greatly corrupted, as is the case in others—or prostituted to other than their legitimate ends, as has been done by using them to qualify for civil offices, rather than to promote the salvation of the soul; the evidence that such as do so belong to the visible church catholic, is thus far impaired, if not altogether subverted.

===== Supplements on the Marks of the Church =====

Henry Bullinger on the Marks of the Church, in his “Decades”

“Now forasmuch as we have said, that the Church militant upon earth, is marked by God with certain tokens and marks, whereby it may be known in this world: it followeth next, that we should speak of those outward marks of the church of God. And there are two special and principal marks. The sincere preaching of the word of God, and the lawful partaking of the sacraments of Christ: whereas some add unto these, the study of godliness and unity, patience in affliction, and the calling on the name of GOD by Christ; but we include them in these twain

5 Acts 2.42; Eph. 4.21; Gal. 2.14.

6 Acts 14.23; Heb. 5.4,5; Rom. 10.15; Jer. 23.32.

that we have set down.” [In explanation, he goes on to cite Eph. 5.25,26; Acts 2.38; Matt. 28.19; Acts 2; Isa. 59.21; John 8.47; John 10.27,28; John 14.21,24; John 18.37.]

Theodore Beza

In his “Discourse of the true and visible Marks of the Catholic Church” Beza affirms, “that a true definition of a true Church, either particularly, or universally considered, is that, by which it is said to be a congregation, that confesseth the true Jesus Christ, their only savior. For we say that Jesus Christ is that only foundation of the true spiritual house of God; Jesus Christ only, is the soul of that mystical body; Jesus Christ only, is the square of that building.”

Then in his 1558 “The Christian Faith” Beza plainly enumerates the following marks: (1) The Word of God purely preached; (2) The Sacraments purely administered; and (3) Ecclesiastical Discipline conducted according to pure doctrine.

The Belgic Confession – Article 29

“The marks by which the true Church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin... all these things... managed according to the pure Word of God.”

The Confession of 1560 for the Church of Scotland – Chapter 19

BECAUSE That Satan from the beginning, has laboured to deck his pestilent Synagogue with the title of the Kirk of GOD, and has inflamed the hearts of cruel murderers, to persecute, trouble, and molest, the true Kirk and members thereof, as Cain did Abel, Ishmael Isaac, Esau Jacob, and the whole Priesthood of the Jews Christ Jesus himself, and his Apostles after him. It is a thing most requisite, that the true Kirk be discerned from the filthy Synagogues, by clear and perfect notes, lest we being deceived, receive and embrace to our own condemnation, the one for the other... The notes therefore of the true Kirk of God, we believe, confess and avow to be: *First*, the true preaching of the word of God, in the which God has revealed himself unto us, as the writings of the Prophets and Apostles do declare. *Secondly*, the right administration of the Sacraments of Christ Jesus, which must be annexed unto the word and promise of God, to seal and confirm the same in our hearts. *Last*, Ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered, as God’s word prescribes, whereby vice is repressed, and virtue nourished. Wheresoever then these former notes are seen, and of any time continue (be the number never so few about two or three) there without all doubt is the true Kirk of Christ: who according unto his promise, is in the midst of them. Not that universal, of which we have before spoken, but particular, such as was in Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, and other places, in which the Ministry was planted by Paul, and were of himself named the Kirks of God: and such Kirks, we the inhabitants of the Realm of SCOTLAND, professors of Christ Jesus, profess ourselves to have in our Cities, Towns, and places reformed. &c. &c.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is signified by the words for the “Church” used in the Bible?

A. The Hebrew term *qâhâl* and Greek term *ἐκκλησία* signify “to call”; so that the Church is especially understood as an assembly of those called into fellowship by the Word of God.

2. What are the various significations of the word “Church”?

A. (1) It may signify the whole body of the elect, or Invisible Church Catholic. (2) A small association of Christians: a church in a house. (3) A regularly organized congregation, as those “churches” in particular cities, named in the New Testament. (4) The whole visible catholic society of all who in every place make a credible profession of true religion, together with their children.

3. What are the Marks of the Visible Church?

A. Mr. Symington enumerates them as (1) Soundness of doctrinal sentiment; (2) A lawful and regular ministry; (3) The due administration of “gospel ordinances.” — But the standard Reformed enumeration is expressed as: (1) The true preaching of the word of God; (2) The right administration of the Sacraments of Christ Jesus; and (3) Ecclesiastical discipline uprightly administered.