

MESSIAH THE PRINCE,
Or, The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ.
By William Symington.
Sabbath Afternoon Studies: Part 13.

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

II. Christ's mediatorial rule over the church appears from his organizing it, incorporating it by covenant, and purchasing it with his blood.

The church possesses a character of visible organization. It is spoken of in Scripture as 'a body,' the members of which exhibit admirable symmetry, nice adaptation, and wise subserviency one to another;—as a 'house,' all the parts of which are 'fitly framed together;'—as a 'city,' whose streets are distributed with regularity, and whose municipal regulations are calculated to secure the peace and order of the inhabitants;—as a 'kingdom,' and as a 'nation,' figures which suggest ideas of good government, orderly management, and proper subordination. Indeed, the nature of things and the necessity of the case require that the church be considered as a thoroughly organized society. ► Every society supposes, in its very structure, some kind of organization; and it is anything but honourable to the Head of the church, to suppose that he has left its members to exist as a confused mass of detached individuals, living separately, without any bond of connexion or plan of co-operation. Very different, indeed, is the fact, as the character of the Mediator should have led us to infer, even had we not been told, as we are, that 'from him the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love.' [Eph. 4.16.]

The church, thus organized, is incorporated by covenant. It is a covenant-society. Christ has made with his church an everlasting covenant. It is not merely founded on the covenant of grace, but he has made with it an express ecclesiastical covenant. This federal deed was renewed, if not originally made, with the church, in the person of Abraham, the father of the faithful. The transaction is recorded (Gen. 17.1-14.) This was neither a personal nor a domestic covenant. It had, properly speaking, in view, neither the personal salvation nor the domestic prosperity of the patriarch. The promise, 'I will be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee,' had respect to an ecclesiastical relation. Nor were they his lineal descendants that were meant by his 'seed;' for, on the one hand, there were several branches of his natural

posterity who had neither part nor lot in the covenant, while, on the other hand, there was provision made for admission to its privileges on the part of strangers 'who were not of his seed' (ver. 12.) ► Indeed, the circumstance that it constituted Abraham 'the father of *many* nations,' is decisive on this point, as his natural posterity formed only *one* nation, namely, the nation of the Jews. The same thing furnishes indubitable evidence, that the covenant in question had a respect to the visible church catholic in every age of its existence. Had not the church, whose interests are secured by this covenant, been something else than what is called the Jewish church, the part of the promise of which we are now speaking could never have been fulfilled; because, not till after the introduction of the New Testament dispensation, and the extension of gospel privileges to Gentile nations, could Abraham have become the father of more than the nation of the Jews. ► Besides, the Scriptures furnish us with sufficient evidence to prove that the Abrahamic covenant was never abrogated, and consequently that it was made with that church which is to continue to the end of time. It was not annulled at the introduction of the Levitical dispensation, as the apostle strongly affirms, when arguing for the continuance of its promises: 'And this I say, that the covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, *the law*, which was four hundred and thirty years after, *cannot disannul*, that it should make the promise of none effect.' [Gal. 3.17.] For the same reason, it could not be annulled at the introduction of the Christian economy, when the ceremonial ritual was abrogated. ► The apostle expressly argues the calling of the Gentiles, after this period, from the existence and terms of the covenant with Abraham. 'That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ,' he maintains, that 'to Abraham and his seed were the promises made: not to seeds, as of many, but as of one (and to thy seed) which is Christ;' whence he draws the legitimate and consoling inference, 'Ye are all one in Christ Jesus, and if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.' [Gal. 3.14,16,28,29.] Indeed, to maintain, either that the Abrahamic covenant was not an ecclesiastical one, or that it was ever annulled, were tantamount to asserting that the church is now an uncovenanted society, in opposition to what both the character of its Founder and the tenor of prophecy regarding it would lead us to expect, and is an idea too gloomy ever to be entertained by any true lover of Zion.

Christ, as Mediator, secured his right of dominion over the church, by purchasing her with his blood. 'Feed,' said Paul to the Ephesian presbyters, 'feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood.' [Acts 20.28.] The elect, the members of the invisible church, are all, we know, redeemed from sin and misery by the precious blood of Christ: but can the same be said of the visible catholic church, of which we are now speaking? With proper explanation, we think it may. We are aware that the saying of the apostle above cited, is commonly understood of the church of the elect—the invisible church. We are, however, inclined to take a different view. The church of God, of which Paul speaks, is that over which visible office-bearers are placed, and the members of which are the proper objects of those external functions which it pertains to such office-bearers to discharge. ► If it were the elect only whom ecclesiastical overseers were enjoined to feed, a knowledge of who are elect and

who not, would require to be imparted to the ministers of religion; nay, persons of the most profligate character would thus have a claim to the highest privileges of the church, as it cannot be denied that many such are included among those who are chosen of God to eternal life. It is only a visible church that can be the object of visible institutions. The duties required of the Ephesian elders were visible duties: the church, therefore, which is the object of them, must be a visible church. But, whether the church of God which Paul speaks of as purchased with his blood, be the visible church or not, we say that the same affirmation may be made with regard to this church. The Mediator purchased the visible church catholic with his blood.

This he may be said to have done, inasmuch as the elect of God, who are in the visible church, were actually redeemed from sin by the blood of Christ. The visible church comprehends within its pale many of God's chosen ones; innumerable real saints belong to the covenant society on earth. Now, all such have redemption through the blood of Christ, and the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace. He has obtained eternal redemption for them. They are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. As embracing so many who are thus redeemed, may not the visible church be said to be purchased with Christ's blood?

Besides, all who are members of the visible church profess to be real saints, and ought to be such. None else have a strict and proper right to the privileges of Christ's house. Others, it is true, find admission to the visible covenant society. But, in imposing upon the office-bearers by a false and hypocritical profession, they are in no slight degree culpable, while, in making use of sacred things to which they have no right, they bring on themselves the additional guilt of sacrilege. Still, that all the members of the church ought to be true saints, is a position that will not be disputed. Now, it is not uncommon to affirm of individuals and societies, that they are what they ought to be, and what they profess to be. ► On this principle the members of the primitive churches are addressed, in the inscriptions of the apostolical epistles, as *saints, called, elect, chosen of God, &c.*; when it cannot but be supposed that in many, if not all of these churches, there were some who were only nominal Christians. The apostles knew, however, that real saints they ought all to have been, and they all professed to be; and, so long as there was nothing visible in their conduct to prove the contrary, they felt called upon to speak of them as really such. On the same principle, may not the visible church, though comprehending in it some who are not actually redeemed from guilt and corruption, be said to be purchased with Christ's blood? May we not be warranted in speaking of it as being what, at all events, it ought to be, and what, but for the hypocrisy which the rulers of the church have not the power of detecting, it actually would be.

But, farther, the privileges of the visible church catholic are purchased and secured to its members by the blood of Christ. The church has many privileges peculiar to herself as a covenant society; such as the word and sacraments, fellowship, discipline, and government. They are all appointed, in infinite wisdom, for the gathering in and perfecting of God's chosen ones. They are dispensed on the footing of the covenant of grace, and could only be procured by the blood of Emmanuel. They come not to her by the law of nature; for, even supposing that

the members of the church are under that law, these gospel privileges have no sort of connexion with it. They come not by the covenant of works; for men are incapable of meriting any thing by that covenant, and, supposing they were, nothing is now dispensed on this footing but the righteous judgments of the Almighty. The inference is thus plain and irresistible, that the privileges of the church come to its members on the footing of the covenant of grace, which is ratified and sealed by the blood of Christ. On this account may the visible church itself be said to be purchased with the Redeemer's blood.

===== SUPPLEMENT: THE CHURCH IS A COVENANT SOCIETY =====

By Thomas Houston of Knockbracken, 1878.

After the Fall, when true religion was diffused throughout the world among the descendants of Seth, those who professed it appeared as a Covenant-Society, separate and distinct from others—having ordinances as means of grace—under Divine special protection, and enjoying the fulfilment of gracious promises in all Covenant blessings. In the days of Enos, men “began to call on the name of the Lord,”¹ associating for religious fellowship, and the observance of ordinances, social and public; and they were known and designated as the Lord's people, distinguished from others by peculiar profession and privileges.

... The covenant-transactions recorded in the Scriptures have respect to the Visible church on earth, consisting of those who, in all ages and places, profess the true religion and their children. This society is called and incorporated by its exalted Head to profess His truth—exhibit its sanctifying influence—and to labour after the nearest conformity to the church invisible of real believers. Its privileges as a covenant-society are extensive and most valuable. It has the privilege of “being under God's special care and government, of being protected and preserved in all ages, notwithstanding the opposition of all enemies—of enjoying the communion of saints, the ordinary means of salvation, and offers of grace by Christ to all the members of it in the ministry of the Gospel, testifying that whosoever believes in Him shall be saved, excluding none that will come unto Him.” [Larger Catechism, Quest. 63.]

The seed of Abraham became more fully and formally organized as a National Church under the Mosaic economy; and it was still dealt with as a covenant-society. A priesthood, divinely called, was set up, and ordinances were appointed as channels of life and salvation to the heirs of promise. Jehovah condescended to stand to Israel in a peculiar honourable relation, as their God in covenant and theocratic King. This secured to them the highest privileges, and constituted their highest excellence. They thus became a “holy nation,” a “peculiar treasure to God above all people,” a “kingdom of priests.” [Exod. 19.6.] Through the whole period of the Mosaic institute, God treats Israel as a people in covenant with Him. His dealings towards

1 The original expression may be rendered, as in the margin of the authorized version, “Then began men to call themselves by the name of the Lord.” This would indicate that they appeared more openly as a separate covenant people.

them are marked by special condescension and favour. He separates them from all other people on the face of the earth. He appoints them laws and ordinances, and promises them manifold blessings in their due observance, and according as they walk in the way of holy obedience. . . .

The visible church especially appears as a covenant-society, under the clearer enlarged dispensation of the Gospel. Numerous predictions that were designed to mark their fulfilment in New Testament times, speak of this as its prominent characteristic. “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah. [Jer. 31.31.] “Also the sons of the stranger that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant.” [Isa. 56.6.] “In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of hosts. And the Lord shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the Lord, and perform it.” [Isa. 19.18,21.] “In those days, and at that time, the children of Israel and the children of Judah shall come. . . they shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward, saying, Come and let us join ourselves to the Lord, in a perpetual covenant which shall not be forgotten.” [Jer. 50.4,5.] These bright predictions were, in part, accomplished, at the opening of the New Testament economy, and in the first organization of the Christian church. . . .

Down to the end of the apostolic age, and till the canon of Scripture closed, the Christian church exhibited all the characteristics of a covenant-society. They were gathered out of the nations, and were incorporated into one mystical body a separate, peculiar people. For this society were provided precious ordinances, and all covenant privileges—in blessings of grace and in providential rule and benefits. The existence, extension, and universal establishment of the church in the earth are the fruit of Jehovah’s sovereign favour. Her high and honourable privileges are secured by covenant-stipulation. And her mission in the earth is to do the work assigned her in the purpose of Infinite wisdom; to which she has pledged herself by solemn engagements, and for the performance of which all grace and strength in the covenant are guaranteed. Herself blessed of the Lord, she is set up as a blessing in the earth, in accordance with the promise to Abraham—“In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”

The special ordinances given to the Church by her glorious Head, that have been designated symbolical and sealing, exhibit her as a Covenant-Society—a “holy nation,” set apart to the Lord and owned by Him—by solemn voluntary vows, frequently renewed, displaying the character and doing the work of a covenant people in the earth. These ordinances were instituted for the purpose of teaching, by significant and impressive symbols, the great fundamental truths of the scheme of human redemption, and of confirming to the heirs of promise the enjoyment of all precious New Covenant blessings. Circumcision given to Abraham as “a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith” [Rom. 4.11,] was the great ordinance of initiation in the covenant; as the Passover, afterwards appointed, was the ordinance of

nourishment in the covenant, instituted as the memorial of deliverance, and the prefiguration of spiritual redemption through the promised Saviour. Baptism, now taking the place of the former, is significant of the same spiritual blessings and privileges, and a like seal, confirmatory of their enjoyment to believers. And the Lord's Supper, supplanting the ancient Passover, is the perpetual memorial and exhibition of the one great Propitiatory Sacrifice, to which all preceding types looked forward, and the ordained seal and ratification to believers of the covenant-inheritance.

Discussion Questions:

1. In what way does the Church possess a character of visible organization?
 - A. The members of the Church are adapted to the subserviency of one another, and the Church's regulations serve to secure peace among its inhabitants.
2. When considering the Church as a covenant-society, how far back into the Church's history can we go to find its covenant character?
 - A. We may very easily go so far back as (at least) the time of Abraham and the covenant transaction in Genesis 17.1-14.
3. Did the Mosaic order with its ten commandments and established priesthood supplant the covenant organization of the Church that had previously existed?
 - A. Not at all. Paul explicitly affirms that the law, which was 430 years after the promise given to Abraham, could not disannul that promise.
4. How did Jesus Christ secure a right of dominion over the Church?
 - A. He secured his right of dominion over the Church by purchasing her with his blood. (Acts 20.28.)
5. Should Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 be understood as calling them to the spiritual service of the elect only, or a service for the members of the visible church in general?
 - A. It should be understood as calling them to be diligent in their duties toward members of the visible church in general, as they exercised visible institutions for the benefit of visible members of the church. Ultimately this Christ's means of providing for the spiritual care of the elect as he joins his blessings to these ordinances.
6. What do we find the apostles doing in their inspired epistles, that gives warrant for regarding professed saints as true saints, without torturing our minds and consciences about whether we are convinced they are elect?
 - A. They consistently inscribe their epistles to the *saints, called, elect, or chosen of God*, though writing to the visible members of local congregations, each of whose actual spiritual state often varied.
7. How else is the purchase of the Redeemer's blood relevant to all members of the visible church, whether elect or reprobate?
 - A. The privileges they enjoy in this covenant society, are privileges granted on the footing of the Covenant of Grace and in view of the purchase of Christ's blood.