

Our **1st seminar** established that we are set in the basic relation to Christ as the Church. All this depended on how God had, before the creation of the world, seen us in His eternal Son. This Son having come to us in history as the Christ of Israel, is the person God appointed for us, through Whom, and in Whom God has worked our salvation.

Our **2nd seminar** considered what it means to live in relation to a head. How were we to understand how this shaped our corporate attitudes and approach to the Lord.

In Our **3rd seminar** we saw that He is building us as his people, called out from the world. We also see that, in the light of the Ascension of our Lord, we are drawn into his present rule and that there is a relationship with earth and heaven, based upon the fact that our Head has gone into the heavens and has made provision for another One -like Himself - the Holy Spirit, to come and make His home with us. So, as a corporate body of the Head we understand that our binding and loosing can have a commensurate reciprocal answer in heaven.

In our **4th seminar** we considered how Christ, having taken our flesh, lived in it a godly life by faith in his Father. He did this for us. It involved him in participating in our life so that we might participate in his - by the Spirit. We saw that in his baptism for our sakes, he stood with sinners and embarked on a way of life that lead to the baptism of his death. He taught his disciples on the way to this death that they too would share in his baptism - there was to be a baptism common to us and Christ.

We saw that at his baptism in water at the Jordan, his baptism in blood at his death and the baptism of his Bride in holy Spirit and fire laid the base for our understanding of what it means for us to be baptised. Its meaning centred around the union between Christ and his Church. We were baptised "into Christ Jesus". Our baptism sets forth for us not what we do, - in our responding - or even what the church does to us - in the ritual - but what God has done, does do, and will continue to do for us in and through his risen and ascended Son.

In our **5th Seminar** we examined how the eucharist [Lord's Supper, Holy communion] is a meal at which the assembled church participates. Christ is the Host, who is the mystery of the meal. He focusses us on his suffering and sacrifice. He ate and drank on our behalf; we eat and drink as receivers of his vicarious work for us. He is God's passover Lamb and the manna sent from heaven for us. On the earth He was the Victim whose body was offered and blood shed. Post resurrection and ascension Christ is our High Priest, who sanctified himself for us so that we might be, and who opens us access into the heavenly life of God. We need to keep the communion with Him holy and exclusive - we cannot mix with other gods. We must also remember who we are and not defile the meal together by the way we do not care for one another.

"So, said Loisy, 'Jesus foretold the kingdom, and it was the Church that came.' This could be taken to be cynical statement, but it was not necessarily intended to be so ... That Jesus preached the kingdom of God but the Church was the result could direct attention to two truths of permanent importance in the matter. The first is that given currency by John Robinson in the form 'Have as high a doctrine of the Church as you like, as long as your doctrine of the kingdom is higher', and the second is that there is no doctrine of Christ without a doctrine of the church, no christology without ecclesiology, and vice versa.

The two earliest and most permanent christological terms are Messiah and Lord, and neither can exist without a correlative. The correlative of Messiah is Israel ... there is no Messiah without his elect. The correlative of Lord is slave or slaves ... there is no Lord without the community over which he is Lord."

Christopher Evans, "Is Holy Scripture Christian?" SCM 1971 page 80.

1 - The unity of the church is a matter of its foundation by the Lord.

We have seen that the church has four express relational properties in regard to its foundation. It is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. It is really important to understand that the unity of the Christian church/es has to do with the fact that the Lord has called them into existence and that He will preserve them. He insists in the Scripture that they are to live in harmony in the local place and to preserve the unity in the bond of peace. Such a preservation works from the basis that there is, already amongst them, a unity which is there. Their task, is not so much to make unity - we actually cannot do this in the spirit - but to preserve what the Lord has given.

This changes the issue from establishing a unity on the grounds of organizational unity - which is primarily having its origin in the flesh. Any attempt to "establish" unity indicates that we are already working in the flesh and that the game is lost and must be tackled some other way.

2 - Recognising/discovering the unity which we already have.

It is really important to understand that the unity of the Christian church/es has to do with the fact that the Lord has called them into existence and that He will preserve them. He insists in the Scripture that they are to live in harmony in the local place and to preserve the unity in the bond of peace. Such a preservation works from the basis that there is, already amongst them, a unity which is there. Their task, is not so much to make unity - we actually cannot do this in the spirit - but to preserve what the Lord has given.

The unity in the spirit which we already have is evident. But significantly it is often discovered away from the local scene. It occurs in the sort of situations where the Christians gather together in the atmosphere of the Spirit. Where denominational and other differences are forgotten and the assembled group goes forward as the

Lord works in their midst. Very many Christians have first experienced this reality when, for purposes of kingdom advance, they laid aside their denominational alliances for a season of kingdom advance. Then, to their amazement, the presumed spiritual unity, was found. And this is true in the local life as well. Where the unity is presumed there is a possibility of going forward without attempting to get an organisational unity in the body life. For, so often, the way forward is to have an event where the waiting on the Lord brings a change to the whole which is unanimous and clear.

This has a great deal to do with our decision-making. We need to wait upon the Lord and see what He will say much more than we do. We shall have to rely upon the use of charismatic gifts to hear the Lord - and at the same time be prepared to wait till the brethren are ready [in the sense of free] to act on what is discerned.

3 - Failure to preserve the unity which the Lord has already given us. [Eph 4]

Whenever we place a label on the local church of Jesus Christ which is other than that of specifying its location, then we have done something of far reaching significance.

1. We work against the preservation of the unity which the Lord has already given us. It is destructive because we are asking that the people within the church see themselves by a designation which defines them as different "from other Christians". It is a designation of difference. It works against the preservation of the unity which they already have with all Christians.

From the Lord's point of view we disobey his way of showing the things in Scripture. Where the local churches were simply differentiated by the locale/city. Never by the province [the churches in Galatia, but never the churches of Galatia]; or the country or the nation. That we live in a different place from other Christians is legitimate, the Lord has called us there. He has placed us, or found us there.

In relation to the strategy of the enemy, we open up pre-commitments which allow him opportunity to effectually stress differences into our relating which do not have to be there. We misread statements of one another. We then find it easy to adopt a defensive attitude towards our brethren before they open their mouth. We are not free to relate out of a pure heart, for we have categorised the brother/sister in a way which is other than that of a member of the family.

2. We exalt the non essentials to a place where they have sway over the whole of life. We have placed a separation from them in certain matters of difference of operation/teaching in such a way as we force it to the front as that which shall control all operations. In this way we commit ourselves to a foolish error.

We place all relations [organic] under the threat of interference from those things which are not organic and hence less significant for life. We are like the person who has put on the uniform in such a way we are always seen as the uniform wearer first, before we even begin to relate.

3. From our Lord's point of view we then find that He has to constantly hold back on the important matters of life while we play with the trivia. We major on the minors and minor on the majors. So the kingdom of God cannot go forward until we come to the end of our preoccupation with the trivia. We seldom grow into fruitful Christians or are the slightest interested in matters other than "club" matters. We are carnal Christians [1 Corinthians 1-2].

4. In relation to the warfare, we open ourselves to the enemy to allow us to be preoccupied with the trivia of Christian existence and to forget the main thing for which God has called us. He is very interested in us spending inordinate amounts of time eg. in getting the clubs to agree about the unity of the clubs, or having commissions to investigate matters about which there can be legitimate differences. For all this is confusion and frustration to the people of God.

5. We bring ourselves into the bondage of the inner circle of those who agree with us - such that we will be more likely to agree with them against others even on matters which were not the original matters we already disturbed the unity of the body over in the first place. In this way the club mentality of the group not only begins to colour our way of presuming how things shall be done; it also becomes more dominant than the basic relations that the Lord has set us within.

In this way we lose the wonderful ability to move beyond our boundary of the club. So we cut ourselves off from the comfort and the interest of other Christians all over the world.

4 - The Church is the agent of the kingdom.

From the Captain's point of view we lose sight of His overall strategy, we have no interest in the souls of others except to make them members of our own "club". We cannot bring to those churches which are planted the freedom of the Holy Spirit because we infect them with the same material which is our bondage.

Today is the day to understand that we are to cease to have denominational affiliations from here on. We need to ask the Lord for the freedom from all the ties that bind us which are "club" ties. We need to under-

stand that the way to bring the kingdom is to work in the locality of the area for the active living with the Christians who are placed there. This is your place of call for it is the only place where you can grow into a Christian community. A local church is the only sort of church which the Lord will use to bring the kingdom there. For it alone has the possibility of actually being an organism. Which is one of the prerequisites for the active work of the kingdom.

5 - Meetings do not bring life - the common life energises the meeting.

You cannot learn this in a lecture hall - you can make decisions about leaving it behind. But you have to learn what it means by actually working it out in practice.

It cannot be done in the vacuum, or by driving to a place where you meet under a public rain-shelter. For where there is no common life there is no organism. There is at best, loose associations of Christians who meet for an inadequate time to sing, praise and then go home to a place where they voluntarily cut themselves off from the local Christians [by virtue of their commitments to the "club"] and then starve until the next meeting. This accounts for the multiplicity of meetings which begin to take place in the "clubs" when there is any sign of life. It is the attempt to give expression to the life which the Holy Spirit wants. The desire comes from the Spirit, the exhaustion comes from the inadequate wineskin.

6 - The confusion of maintenance with the kingdom advance.

This is the observation that the growth of a church, or of an individual for that matter, depends upon the work of the Holy Spirit alone. It is tremendously important to understand that the leaders of a church do not make it grow. They are simply there as shepherds to pick up the sheep when they fall over. Their task is to understand that the sheep grow automatically as the Holy Spirit is at work. This is vital, for it allows us to have an expectation that as we commit our lives to the Lord He is busy growing us. The implication of this for the growth of a local body is important. Amongst other things, it means:

1. we do not trust in men and women to grow the church, we trust God to do it.
2. that the work of growth is left to the Lord and the maintenance of the body is

[a] preventative of error, or

[b] facilitative of what God is doing, yet

[c] understands that no decisions which are counter productive to the advance of

what the Lord is doing are taken.

For example, just to take one historical example; the breakdown of the local city into a parish system, which separates the various geographical sections off in such a way as to place them under the care of a centrally governed pastor seems a good maintenance decision. In fact, it is counterproductive to the growth and the free run of the Holy Spirit to plant and to grow wherever He wishes. We should be careful to understand that we do not, in the name of the maintenance of the body, take decisions which infringe on the freedom of the Lord to move His people as He wants in the future. This will probably mean that we keep things fairly simple and primitive. The more sophisticated a system of organisation becomes, the less it is able to react to the commands of the Master.

7 - The failure to live by grace.

There are failures to preach and live by grace which I have outlined in another place. There I am more concerned by the prevailing culture in which we live as to how that undermines the grace of the gospel in the church and its life. Here we are looking at church practices that do so.

The influence of the legal practices into the body of Christ.

This expresses itself in a host of ways:

1. Authorised persons - the introduction of situations where only authorised persons, [usually authorised by some other centrally placed person to whom the authorised one is beholden] can perform certain functions. eg. preside at the Lord's supper. [This leads to the foolishness of so much lost time in maintaining "club" rules that the work of the kingdom is held up.] The enemy gains a thorough advantage over the church in such cases.

We are seeing an increase in the robes, titles and platform ministries, which are always dividing to the people of God into a "clergy/laity" split which is ungodly.

The New Testament understanding of the priesthood of all believers needs to be recaptured from a bondage - if indeed, it was ever fully flowered. We need to see that all are free to serve the Lord, that there are to be few reserved functions. The Holy Spirit gifts according to how He wishes, and the gifted persons must be free to serve in this way.

2. Ways and Means - the tying up of the churches life into traditional patterns [Advent, Lent, Trinity, endless saints days etc] which are predictive one year to the next, and so inculcate the idea that there will not be change. This also places upon the sheep an enormous burden, which the Lord does not require. It heaps up, as the early Pharisees did upon the people of the land, a heavy yoke of religion from which they need to be released. It brings them under the bondage about what they shall eat, approve and which days they shall regard - all of this, well meaning as to the public reading of Scripture - can end up so contrary to the practice of the Scripture [Colossians 2.16]

3. Goal driven agendas with long range plans -

So often, many assemblies/churches are able to plan further and further ahead in such a way that they are not able to respond to the Holy Spirit [let alone set a possibility to hear Him] should He call for a quick and important change in their life and mission. In this way, the maintenance [although there is no calling for such a maintenance here - it is rather an infliction of a burden upon the community of the King to hamper them] .

8 - Freedom of the Lord or the control of men and women

We have seen in this course that when it comes to the warfare of the Christian life, whether it is seen from within the person [the power of sin, the flesh] or in the wider body of Christ, the issue is one of control.

Whenever we have seen something which we sense that the Lord has given us because He wants us to share in the changing of it we need to be careful to identify the right source of the problem. If we do not do this, then we shall have a problem with people and not with the ultimate source of the problem.

Nothing is more important than identifying the problem in this case of control. For there are many ways which we find ourselves as the people of God who have been set free by the work of the Lord that we have to struggle to keep our freedom. This is very important in considering the way the church of the Lord is to work out its order. And what we need to see is that the issue is not to be disturbed with people so much, but to identify the right enemy and to understand how it is that he gains such a ready access in the life of the people of God.

9 - There is freedom to obey the Lord only where you are not in bondage

This is such an obvious truth yet I want to spell it out in a descriptive way. You see, the closer we live with people the greater freedom we have in our relationships and activities. [Unless we are controlled by them, and we shall soon know, for here we become aware of that very quickly - for it seriously hinders our way of life.] So, wherever the organism of God's people begins to wait on the Lord and get cleaned up in their life, there is a place of freedom gained. And, as we have seen, freedom comes through repentance and coming into line with the way the Lord wants us to function.

10 - Arriving at a freedom once we have lost it - a personal matter

Whenever a freedom had been regained it has come back into our life along the following lines of recovery.

1. Having a sense of lack of contentment in what we are doing and yet not understanding the reason. [an awareness in our spirit of dis - ease, yet confusion as to why.] This is often the first gentle probing of the Holy Spirit.
2. Identifying what the truth of God's word said. In a corporate sense, we have received light or revelation on it.
3. We see our failure/bondage: perceiving the reality of the teaching of God makes us aware we cannot/do not practise it.
4. Repenting of all that is contrary to the teaching of the Lord, we then turn decisively from that. We have a change of mind/resolve to act upon the information].
5. Exercising our faith we begin to believe for the new way to be manifest in our experience[act of trust in the truth as revealed to see it happen]
6. Growing in wisdom about the practice. The more we do it, deeper insights come. Also we become more and more satisfied with the truth of the teaching because it works consistently again and again as the Lord said it would. We gain wisdom in practice and firmer in resolve to not compromise it. There is then a holy contentment which comes from a settled practice of that which our consciences are pure about.

7. We begin to become aware of the way of God as He works within the parameters of the obedience of his children - we see renewal and power evident in the advance of the kingdom.

11 - Arriving at a freedom once we have lost it - a corporate matter

Considering this line, the act of repentance at point 4 is the turning point for the rest. You cannot do 5, or know the place of 6 and 7 until you have moved on 4. This is obvious, and we know it in our personal experience.

However, in our corporate experience there is often a need to see other forces which come into play. For corporate repentance to take place we need to see some other hindrances.

a. personal repentance is something each of us can do all the way through from points 1-7. Corporate repentance is personal from 1-4, and then from 5-7 a number of factors come into play.

b. there needs to be an understanding that we are moving from the personal application of the new wine to the finding of the new wineskins into which the corporate task of the body will find an expression.

The desperation of the enemy becomes acute here - for he fears the authority and commission of the church of the Messiah once they get their act together here. For it will mean that his strategy to keep them inwardly messed up is lost and now the outward push of the kingdom of God into regions not yet taken, will be harder to resist. He is losing control over the church and he is losing new ground which was not before under threat.

c. there is the overthrowing of traditions which have been long established in the minds of believers. These the enemy will attempt to re-establish in new localities. So it is vital to understand the source of the control and to concentrate there and not look at the forms of the control which men and women have brought.

So, in this way, principles of the descriptive sort in Scripture will help us - for they will be examples of what to do in like circumstances. But they will also be instructive as to how they preserved the freedom of the kingdom of God to stay growing and not to be hampered by the immediate decisions. [See the idea of the difference between maintenance of the body and the preservation of kingdom growth].

d. The overthrow of traditions is the place of maximum confrontation of the kingdom of God with the enemy for it is the raw intersection of two places of control. For example, we see in the Gospels the teaching of Jesus concerning love for enemies, expressed in the Sermon on the Mount. This is something very radical, but it does not meet with the strong opposition. No one objects to "new wine" as long as it stays personal and does not conflict with the status quo. Of course, as we shall see, this is in fact a sort sighted and foolish matter - for eventually changing of individuals means the outburst of a corporate new ways - it leads to wineskins.

What does meet with the strong opposition is the overthrow of the traditions of men. In fact, it is the traditionally placed people in power positions who killed Him. For, behind them is the enemy who has control over the people through these agents. Many of these agents would have been blind to the fact that they were agents, but the fierce response and the blindness of their perception of the Messiah make it undeniable that they were. So we need to not war with flesh and blood here, we have to see the source of the control and understand traditions as ossified decisions of the past [whether good or bad then] as victories of the enemy which are there to put a straight jacket on the church of the present.

For the organism is alive, and what ever is alive is changing, dynamic and its life makes for change. Inability to change in an area is a barrier to life in any organism. For if the Spirit wished to give a different direction, we would find Him hindered for it has tied up the possibility of mission response.

As it is with our own personal life so it is with the corporate body. We flow along as things go until we find that we are hindered. Then we become aware of the need to see our bondage and seek the Lord for light on the issue.

c. The increasing "centralist" government which is coming upon the churches today is a sign of increasing control. This is not only found in the traditional places it is even exercised in the so called "freer" churches. Only there it takes the form of expansion by the planting of satellites who are said to "come under the covering" of the planting central place/person.

This amounts to no less and often a good deal more than the centralist control of the traditional churches. Such centralist styles have the same thing in common of all organised religion. They do not grow the local scene, because for people to grow the one thing they must have is the freedom to hear God and move, and the responsibility of their own actions.

This has a great expense for the local congregations who come under such a bondage as this - for the maintenance of the structures, which actually bring them under the slavery, is financed by themselves. They are not free to spend on what the Lord directs - but only on what the centralist government ap-

proves.

12 - The movement is from wine to wineskins, not the reverse.

It is really important to understand the strategy of what we are seeing amongst God's people today as the impossibility of putting new wine into the old wineskins. This teaching of Jesus, in the context of the coming of the new covenant, made it clear that there is a new wine which is incompatible with the old wineskins.

It is worth observing that, when the Lord spoke of the changed life which the disciples should have, and the new wine which would be the basis for their life style, that no one objected to changing men. But the minute the Lord began to indicate that there were new wineskins to put the new wine into then the religious controlling people found excuse and common cause to crucify Him. This is very important to understand, for the opposition to the new wineskins was coming from the vested interest of the structures which were already in place. The desire to see the kingdom come would, in their opinion, not be at the cost of the established wineskins. So once it was clear that Jesus set about bring the downfall of the current wineskins, then the opposition rose in common cause against Him. The issue is the same today - it is the issue of control.

However, it is right to understand - and history, particularly reformation history - backs this up, that it is the renovation of the individual that precedes the renovation of the wineskins. Where there is no change in the persons, there cannot be change brought upon them from without by corporate or other pressures.