

Church - Part 2

by Ken Baird

Ken Baird's sermon emphasizes the church's heavenly identity and its vital relationship with Christ as the head, exploring its roles as a body, building, bride, and flock.

Duration: 59:20

Scripture: Matthew 18:20, Ephesians 5:33

Topics: "Church Government", "Body Of Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses four figures that God gives us to understand the church: the bride, the flock, the body, and the building. The first figure emphasizes the importance of our love and obedience to Christ as the head of the church. The second figure highlights Christ as the shepherd and the center of the flock, calling for mutual love and respect among believers. The preacher also mentions the importance of the church as a body, with Christ as the foundation and believers as the members. The sermon concludes with a mention of future discussions on the practical aspects of the church.

Transcript

Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus. Now, the Apostle here addresses the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus, which in scope carries us clear past Ephesus. And then he says, Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. According as he hath chosen us in him, and before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him, in love, having predestinated us under the adoption of children by Jesus Christ himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved, in whom we have redemption, through his blood the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace. Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, shows them that they are spiritual, they are a heavenly people.

The church is heavenly in character, though she is down on this earth performing a very, very important function while she is here. Now, the Apostle Paul was a specially chosen vessel, and to him were given the great revelations concerning the church of God in a special way the Apostle Paul was entrusted with these revelations. Now, they are apparent even at the very moment that the Apostle was saved.

And I want you to turn, please, with me to Acts chapter 9. Acts chapter 9. You'll see two very, very important things in connection with Paul's conversion. And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus, to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven, and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest.

It is hard for thee to kick against the priest. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

And Saul arose from the earth, and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man. But they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. Now, the Apostle Paul, or Saul of Tarsus as he was known as at this time, learned the great truth of the church at the moment of his conversion.

Our Lord Jesus Christ said to Saul, and I'm sure he would remember this in days to come, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? When Saul of Tarsus touched the saints of God, he touched their head in heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the head, and he feels everything that touches the body. And here, right at the very conversion of Saul of Tarsus, we see that Christ is connected with the church in a vital union of life.

And that, of course, is seen under the figure of the body, the church as a body, and Christ as the head. And another thing, the Apostle Paul saw the Lord Jesus Christ in glory. He saw him there, and that fitted him to be the Apostle to the church in a special way.

The Apostle to the Gentiles, and the church is largely composed of Gentiles. Because you and I were never associated with Christ in this world. We've never seen him here.

We know him not after the flesh at all. We see him in the glory. The church is heavenly in character, and our experiences now are in the heavenly.

And our heart is in heaven. He wants our affection there. We were never connected with earth.

Now, Israel was always connected with earth, and always will be connected with earth. But we, since we are connected with our Lord Jesus Christ, our risen head in heaven, our blessings are spiritual. We have spiritual blessings, and we're blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in rhyme.

Now, the Apostle Paul so wonderfully gives us the truth of the church. I would rather be born in this dispensation than in any other of all the dispensations of God. Because I am a part of that church, and you are a part of that church.

That select company wherein God magnifies his grace. The Epistles of the Ephesians is wonderfully replete with expressions of God's grace. His grace rises to its highest height in the salvation of the Gentiles.

They are, he picks them up from the Lord's depths, without hope or without any covenant claim upon God. Strangers from the covenants of promise, absolutely nothing in themselves, going outside of the veil of blessing. And yet God reaches down, down past Israel, down to the Gentiles, the outcasts, and he takes

out of them a people for his name.

And God magnifies his grace in the church in a wonderful way. We have the most intimate place, so intimate that one of the figures which we have noticed last night is that of a bride and a bridegroom. Absolutely the most intimate relationship on earth, still falls far short, I'm sure, of really showing our blessed relationship to our Lord Jesus Christ.

We will always be associated with him in glory. We will share all that he shares. We are his, and he is ours.

What a wonderful position in our Lord Jesus Christ. Now last night we were considering four figures of the church, and they're all seen in connection with the Ephesians. Three of them are outlined in this epistle, and one of them is spoken of as the apostle talks to the elders at Ephesus in Acts chapter 20.

We notice that the church is seen under the figure of a building, it's seen under the figure of a body, it's seen under the figure of a bride, and it's seen under the figure of a flock. We mentioned last night that when we talk about the church we exalt Christ, for it's impossible to disassociate the church from Christ. Absolutely impossible.

If we talk of the church as a building, then Christ is the foundation. If we talk of the church as a body, then Christ is the head. If we talk of the church as a bride, then Christ is the groom.

If we talk of the church as a flock, then Christ is the shepherd. He has a preeminent place, ever and always. Now last night we thought to show how we wanted to be sure that we have that vital link with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Are we resting upon that wonderful foundation? Are all our hopes for eternity settled upon our Lord Jesus, that rock of ages that was left for me? And then the body would show us the vital link of life. Are we connected with our Lord Jesus through that vital link of life? And then the bride would bring before us the love of the bride to the bridegroom. Do we love the Lord Jesus? Is he the object that fills our hearts? Then lastly, if the church is the flock, then Christ is the shepherd.

Have we realized that we, as individuals, were lost sheep going astray? And have we been found by our Lord Jesus Christ? If he is our shepherd, can we say, the Lord is my shepherd and I shall not want? Now these exercises concerning the gospel, but tonight I want to take up these four figures that God gives us of the church and see what they have, what they may hold for us in our relationship to him. Now first of all, in the building we have noticed already that Christ is the foundation and then we are the stone in the foundation. Let's notice again 1 Peter chapter 2. 1 Peter chapter 2, verse 4, To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye also as lively or living stones are built up a spiritual house and holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious, but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same as made the head of the corner. Now you and I are stones in that building.

We are stones, living stones, placed in the building. Now the foundation was the apostles and the prophets. As we read in Ephesians, Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.

Well now obviously you and I are up near the very top of the building because these stones are added as the building rises. Now of course we're looking at the church universal when we're thinking of the church in this respect, under this figure as the building. Now the local church is just but a replica of the church universal.

Now in the church universal you and I are added as stones. Someday the last stone is going to be added to this building, this wonderful building, and we are going to be raptured into the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. A saint of God, strangely enough, had the assurance of eternal security through studying the church.

He was acquainted with the fact, as he read the scriptures, the Spirit of God acquainted him with the fact that he was a stone in that wonderful building that God is building. And then he thought to himself, well now if I'm a stone in that building and other stones are added beyond me, if that's the figure, and above me and beside me, and I am put into that building, wouldn't the church of God look strange with a stone out here and a stone out there? The church of God all shut through, whole. Now wouldn't that be fine? And he saw the doctrine of eternal security through the truth of the church.

We are living souls in that building built upon the foundation of Christ. Now the truth, I think that we, or the chief phase of the truth to be emphasized in connection with the building, two things. A building is built for a purpose, and we read in Ephesians chapter 2 one of these purposes.

As a matter of fact they're both in the Ephesian epistle. We might as well turn to Ephesians chapter 2. He says in verse 19, Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the phantom of the household of God, and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom all the buildings fitly framed together groweth into an holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are builted together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. Now this temple, as the temple of old, is the dwelling place of the glory of God.

The glory of God fills Solomon's temple. It filled that temple to the extent that on the day of its dedication they couldn't even perform their services because the Shekinah glory was filling that temple. In Ezekiel's day he saw that glory depart.

It departed reluctantly. It raised up over the temple, and all the court in his vision was lighted by the glory as it left the temple. Then it stood over the threshold east of the courtyard, and the glory there lighted the courtyard.

Then it stood on the mountain east of Jerusalem, and then it departed. The glory, it would seem, just was reluctant to depart. Oh, how the glory of God once hated to leave that temple! But in Ezekiel's temple, or rather Ezekiel described it, in the millennial temple, it's interesting to note that when the glory comes back, and it's not said to be in the, the glory is never said to be in the the temple that was constructed upon the return from the Babylonian captivity.

It was a day of small things, but certainly that Shekinah glory shall inhabit the temple in the millennial reign of our Lord Jesus. And Ezekiel describes the return of the glory, and it doesn't, the glory doesn't return by step. It comes right straight back to the temple.

There's no rising over the temple. There's no rising over the threshold. There's no tearing over the mountain.

It comes right back to the temple. Now the glory of God inhabits His church. The Spirit of God inhabits this living temple.

This temple has a purpose. And you and I are the temple of the Holy Spirit as individuals in this world, and we are the temple of the Spirit collectively, that is the entire church. And the glory of God inhabits this temple.

It's wonderful to think of that. Now, someday this church is going to be taken out of the world. And according to the second chapter of, of 2 Thessalonians, when the church goes, the Holy Spirit will go with it.

And there will be no hindrance to evil in this world. You and I, as we are in this world tonight, are deterrents to evil. The Spirit of God is in the world, in the church.

That's the only safe place of His abode. I know you've omniscient, that He has chosen to take up abode in you and in me. Now isn't that, as in that temple in Solomon's day, the stones were quarried separately.

They were quarried in Solomon's quarry and cut out there, and all the shaping was done in the quarry. And then the stones were brought together and assembled in the temple, and there was no sound of hammer or iron or anything when the temple went together. The stones fit together.

Now the Spirit of God fit you and me to be a part of this temple. We were fitted as individuals, but the Spirit of God fitted into that temple. And there was no, there's no noise.

You don't know that God is doing His greatest work today. God is building a masterpiece today in this world. This is the time, this is the time when men are saying that God is dead.

Did you hear about the sign on the church building in Michigan? Our God is not dead. Sorry about yours. God isn't dead.

He's doing His greatest work in the world today. He's building the greatest edifice that all the universe can possibly appreciate. God is doing it.

Now we are on display to a wandering universe. Ephesians chapter 3 now, if you please. He says, For this cause I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you, learn how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery, as I wrote afore in few words, whereby when you read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs unto the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.

Whereof I was made a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power unto me whom less than the least of all saints is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent that now, under the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God. God is teaching all the created intelligences, his wisdom, his power and his might. The manifold wisdom of God is seen in the building of this church.

This, I say without hesitation, is God's masterpiece." And you're a part of it. And I am a part of it. We're a part of that magnificent edifice.

And all the temples of God, in all their glory, even the Millennial Temple, will never compare with the church of God, this magnificent building that has been put together by the Spirit of God in this day of grace in which men are saying that God is dead. God is dead. He is performing his greatest work, the building of the church.

Then, in the case of the body, we have a truth to be emphasized in the body. Christ is the head and we are the body. Now, I think the body would bring before us that we are to obey our Lord implicitly as the members of the body.

That's the first truth I'm going to touch on. I want to mention three things. The key phrase of truth to be emphasized in connection with this figure is our implicit obedience to Christ as the members of the body obeys the head.

Then I want to see that we are nourished by that head. Then I want to show one has to look together at the care that the members have one for another. This is all a part of the truth of the church seen as a body.

Well, think of that one first of all. The members of the body obey the head implicitly. Now, as a sad state of affairs, when I appear, my head, tell my foot to move, and it doesn't move.

That is a sad state of affairs. My head directs my body. And you know what happens when the head has no control over the body.

You have a very sad state of affairs. But our head is in heaven and we are his body and that means that you and I should obey our Lord as implicitly as the members of my body obey me. We should no more ever think of disobeying our risen head in heaven as we would expect the members of the body to disobey the head.

Then we are nourished by the head. Colossians chapter two. Colossians chapter two, verse 19.

Well, verse 18, for sake of connection, let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshiping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the head, from which all the body, by joints and bands, having nourishment ministered and knit together, increases with the increase of God. Now the head feeds the body. That's true in more senses or in more ways than one.

More than just one sense. I take in food and I send it to my body. The food comes from the head and goes to the body.

The central nervous system nourishes all the nervous systems of the body. Christ the head nourishes the body. But then the body is interdependent too.

Dependent upon one another. Having bands, bands having nourishment ministered and knit together increases with the increase of God. Now notice please too Ephesians chapter four in this connection.

Verse 15, seeking the truth in love, we may grow up unto him in all things which is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplyeth,

according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. Now this shows us the inner dependence of the body. Each part of the body supplies nourishment for other parts of the body, and it's compacted together by that which every joint supplyeth.

Now we need each other. The truth of the church certainly tells us that you and I need each other in the Lord. You have something to supply to me.

I have something to supply to you. The same truth is bought out in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, when we look at the church as a body. Verse 12 of the 12th chapter of 1 Corinthians, For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

It is more properly, so also is the Christ, because the body and the head are thought of as one here. For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one spirit. For the body is not one member, but many.

Now it's interesting to notice here that Jews and Gentiles are seen to be in the same body. That was the mystery that was hid from the ages, that the Jews and the Gentiles, so different in their backgrounds, so different in their philosophies and their national makeup, should be members of the same body. But that's truth, and that's the truth of the church.

And it's also mentioned in connection with the body in the second chapter of Ephesians. But let's read on here. For the body is not one member, but many.

If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were a hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members, every one of them, in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee.

Nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more, those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor.

And our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need. But God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacks.

That there should be no fizzle in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with him. For one member be honored, all the members rejoice with him.

Now, ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. Now, this shows us the absolute inner dependence of the body. The mature Christians can't say to the young Christians, I have no need of you.

Nor can the young Christians say to the mature Christians, well, I'm not of the body because I'm not the I. Those that are in the body are dependent upon the whole body. We have no members of the body that are independent of other members of the body, and we need each other. Now, God hath fit us in that body in his infinite wisdom.

Now, I may be only the little finger, but that little finger may be very, very important. I may be one of these little glands, these little insignificant glands. But the body needs that nourishment.

We need each other. We cannot go on in independence of each other, because each part of the body is dependent upon other parts of the body. We should remember that, because I think that we are inclined in the church of God to seek our own level spiritually.

I'm going to talk about cliques within the church now. We'll talk about schisms later. We'll talk about divisions.

But I'm talking about cliques that develop in any normal assembly. All right, I'm going to be practical now. One of them is the family clique.

I've seen it. I've seen it in actions. One of them is the family clique.

The little, the members of the one family get together, and those that are related by marriage, and they're talking just as fast as they can. And here is another little clique over here, other members of another family. Now, it's nice for families to feel their oneness, but let us remember that we are members of a body of which every saint is a part of that body.

Now, we're so inclined to seek our own level mentally, and so we, and spiritually. I'm thinking of spiritual maturity. Actually, I think a young person can be just as spiritual as an older person, absolutely.

But I'm speaking of spiritual maturity. All right. Is it right for me to just be talking to the elders all the time? No, it isn't.

And if I spend all my time with the elders and don't pay any attention to the faith in Christ, there's going to be a neglect. There's going to be a repercussion. The members of the body are dependent upon one another, and if God places those members in there, believe me, no member is more important than the other.

Now, I say that advisedly. God in his wisdom has fitted the body together to function, and I say that no member is more important than the other. That which we think to be less important, upon that part, God bestows a more abundant honor.

He's trying to straighten the thing out. He is trying to compensate in his own way. Now, we need to remember this, that the church is a body, and that no part of that body is to be neglected by us in our thinking or in our actions.

Even the children that know our Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, and ours too, should not be neglected by the old, most mature, and most learned person in the assembly. We are absolutely interdependent upon each other in these respects. Now, in the matter of the bride, seeing the body under the figure of a bride, the chief phase of the truth I believe to be emphasized is our obedience to him as based on love.

Now, in the body, we see our obedience to Christ as absolutely implicit. That's what the figure, I believe, would bring before us. But now, here's another phase of our obedience to the Lord that is seen under the figure of a bride.

Why does she obey her husband? Because she loves him. That's why she obeys him. And even in the relationship of man and wife, which is a picture of Christ and his bride, obedience is insisted upon from the

wife to the husband.

And love is insisted upon from the husband to the wife. Now, let's notice that in the fifth chapter of Ephesians, because I think in looking at the counterpart or the type here on earth, we can gain something of the great anti-type Christ and his church. This is approaching us from the reverse direction, but I'm sure that we can profit by it.

Ephesians chapter 5, verse 22, Why submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord? For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, and he is the savior of the body. Therefore, that is, he's the preserver of the body. Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it. That he might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church. Verse 32, This is a great mystery that I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Nevertheless, let every one of you in particular so love his wife, even as himself and the wife see that she reverence her husband. Now, it's amazing that such a relationship as husband and wife, and as intimate as it is, is not regulated more in the Bible. Very little is said about their relationship together.

Some is mentioned in the 7th chapter of 1 Corinthians. We may have occasion to look at that. There are other references, but actually these all told together would hardly fill a good long chapter.

And here is a relationship that exists maybe perhaps through 50 years of our lives, and covers, I suppose, perhaps the greatest portion, greatest fraction of our lives. A relationship wherein you would think you'd have the most detailed instruction. And there are very few.

And one is wives obey your husband. The other is husbands love your wife. And that's all there is.

Is this enough? I think it is. I think love takes care of a lot of these things. I think that a bride will want to obey her husband.

She respects him, and she should respect him. She doesn't respect him, she shouldn't marry him. She should respect him when she marries him, and then obey him.

And a husband should love his wife, love her dearly. And he is given the hardest part. I know it's in these days of independence, when women have found their independence in the highest degree, it is hard for them to find themselves obeying their husbands, because of the unreasonableness sometimes of the husband.

But I think that these things are illustrated in a little quarrel that a man and his wife are having. And he was complaining to her, and he said, you don't obey me like you should. The Bible says that you should obey me.

And she said, well, you don't love me as you should. The Bible says that you should love me. Well, he said, if you would obey me more, I would love you more.

She said, if you would love me more, I would obey you more. So they added up. Well, now wouldn't that have been better, if they would have both obeyed the word of God, and eliminated all the trouble? I say that 95% of marital trouble would be eliminated by the simple observation of one verse in the Bible, that

every one of you in particular so love his wife, he is as even as himself.

And the wife sees that she reverence her husband. That's all you need. The word of God is so, so very, very inclusive.

So all inclusive. But I'll tell you, brethren, we've got the hardest job of all. We're to love that wife.

We're to love her. There isn't anything said here about her loving him. Of course, the older women teach the younger women to love their wives, and Titus.

But not here, it's not mentioned. But it's certainly mentioned that the husband should love the wife, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself forth. There's your standard.

You know, it's wonderful how these dear sisters respond to love. Well, it's wonderful how anybody responds to love. But especially a wife.

Brethren, let's take a word of admonition. Let's love our wives. Let them know it.

Tell them once in a while. Even if it might shock them. I'm not going to talk too much about the other, because you sisters think sometimes that we brethren have it in for you, and it's a matter of obedience.

But I'll tell you really, if we would just listen to the word of God and obey it, instead of expecting the other to obey it. We have our work cut out for us, brethren. Let's love our wives and show it.

I know this to be true. I've been reminded of this before, in my own life. It works that way.

Now, in this lovely relationship, we see the relationship of Christ with the church. Now, is there any question about his love for us? Is there any question about our obedience to him? I'm afraid so. He isn't falling down on the job, is he? Are you falling down on the job? Are you obeying him? Oh now, come on.

Are you obeying your Lord to your divine bridegroom? We can talk about that, can't we? Shouldn't we, as much as he loves us, shouldn't we obey him? Out of love. Not out of compulsion. Out of love to the Lord Jesus.

How much do we love the Lord? How much do you love the Lord? I'll just ask you another question. We'll just turn the coin over. How many times do you say, I'm going to have it this way? When you know the Lord says differently.

May God help us to fulfill our bargain in this matter of being the bride of Christ and obey him. Then there is the figure of the flock, and I think that the chief truth to be emphasized here is that Christ is the center of that flock. He's the shepherd.

Shall we turn to the 10th chapter of John, please? John chapter 10. He says in verse 14 in the 10th chapter of John, I am the good shepherd and know my sheep and am known of mine. As the father knoweth me, even so know I the father, and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Another sheep I have, which are not of this foal. Them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one foal and one shepherd. Now the word foal is used twice in this verse, but the second usage of it near the end of the verse is incorrect.

Your margin of your Scofield Bible will tell you that, that the word should be translated flock. Now the Lord Jesus says, other sheep I have, which are not of this foal. Them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

Now before the 16th verse of this 10th chapter of John, our Lord Jesus is talking about the foal entirely. He's talking about the foal when he talks about the porter. Now this porter is the person who keeps the communal flock overnight.

The shepherds bring their sheep to this communal foal, and that foal was composed of a high row of stakes interwoven with thorns, and that was so tightly woven and so secure that no predatory animal could work its way through that fence, through that foal. Those sheep were safe inside the foal. The shepherds would bring their sheep together at night and put them in this foal, and there was a porter that was hired to stand by that door and keep the sheep safely during the night.

Then in the morning, when the shepherd came to take out his sheep, you would say, how in the world is that shepherd going to separate his sheep from all that community flock? Well, it was very simple. The shepherd just called his sheep by name, and you would see them moving out of that communal flock. You'd see a sheep moving here and a sheep moving there.

And those sheep would follow that shepherd, and he would take them out into the fields to graze during the day. They loved that shepherd. They knew his voice.

And regardless of how large the flock was in that community flock, those sheep would go out following the shepherd, and he led them out to the pastures for the day. Now, they loved that shepherd. That's why he was the center of that flock.

They were attracted to him. Now, our Lord Jesus says here, other sheep I have which are not of this foal. Now, the foal is Israel, and the flock is the church.

Now, what is the difference between a foal and a flock? Well, some of you have heard this before, but I'm going to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance. A foal is a circumference without a center. A flock is a center without a circumference.

The foal holds the sheep together from the outside. The flock holds the sheep together from the inside, and the Lord Jesus is that attraction that holds the sheep together. Now, that foal, or that fence, was represented by the law which separated every Jew from every Gentile in all the world.

The Gentiles were outside of that foal, and that law kept the Jews an entity. That law kept the Jews a distinct people, and the only Gentiles that ever got inside of that foal were proselytes who became Jews. That foal, that fence, was the answer, and that fence, that middle wall of partition of which Paul speaks in Ephesians which has been broken down, kept the Jewish people intact.

Strangely enough, in the case of the flock, there's no high wall. Christ is the center. They're gathered together to him.

That's the picture in the flock. That's the picture of the church. Now, in Matthew chapter 18, we have a lovely, lovely verse that I think illustrates this.

Then we're going to get practical. The 18th chapter of Matthew says, verse 20, for where two or three are gathered together in my name, that's the attraction. There am I in the midst of them.

We have here the figure of the flock. There is an attraction to the Lord Jesus Christ, and this church, this local church right here, this assembly, should illustrate this at all times, and I think we've lost track of this truth. Because we have lost track of this truth, we have lost track of some of the people of God.

They've strayed away. Now, why do you come here to this assembly? Do you come here because your folks do? Your relatives do? Your friends do? Now, there's nothing wrong with folks, and relatives, and friends. But why are you attracted? Are you attracted because of what you see of Christ in others, or what you share with him in fellowship with Christ? That should be our motive for coming together.

The scriptures say, for where two or three are gathered together in my name, because of their mutual love and respect for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, they come together, and they form a church. We have the image of the flock, the forest, Christ, the gathering center. Now, it's so easy, it's so easy to seek our fellowship because of other reasons.

Perhaps we go to one place or another because there is a professional element in this place. Because there's a nice building. I hope that wouldn't be the reason.

Or because there are more young people. I know of a case where a family changed their assembly affiliation because there were a lot of young people over at another assembly. This happens a thousand miles away.

You never, you'll never know who it is that I'm talking about. But they did, they changed their fellowship because there was a lot of young people over there. So they removed their own two young people out of the assembly where there were so few young people and took them over where there were a lot of other young people.

Well now, young people like to be with young people. But how are you going to get the young people over in this assembly when you take them all out because there's none there? Where do we start? Well now, that's kind of like transplanting limbs, isn't it? Transplanting kidneys or something like that. Taking one part out of the body and putting it over here in this body.

Now, wouldn't it be better if perhaps we would be absolutely unselfish, seeking the glory of the Lord in these things and not our own convenience? No, I have nothing against young people being pathetic. I was young once myself. I could tell you a story to prove that I'm old, but I won't do it.

Why do we meet where we do? Do we meet because of a mutual attraction to the Lord Jesus? Do we have fellowship with the people of God where we meet? If so, we're attracted to Christ and He's the center. I would like to have all of us that meet here and remember the Lord in this assembly and fellowship in this assembly to be able to give a good reason why you're here. Of course, if you're not here by conviction, it's easy for you to go elsewhere.

But if you're here by conviction, then that won't happen. Are we gathered to the people? Certainly not gathered to the buildings. Or are we gathered to the Lord Jesus? He is the center of the flock.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could see that? Who did you think that you would see tonight when you came to the assembly? Did you think that you would see this person or that person? When you sit to

remember the Lord, perhaps you're sitting on this side or this side. Now, I didn't notice this. I'm not reminded of this by any particular action that I noticed last Wednesday morning.

But are you interested in who's coming in the door? Or are you interested in whose divine presence you're sitting at the time? Christ says, for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. I wonder if you thought about the fact the Lord was here last Lord's Day morning in the midst of his people. Did you think about that? Say if the If you'd had some celebrity, Christian celebrity here in this assembly, you'd have talked about it to all your friends.

Are we lacking in faith? Have we lost this truth? We should gather to Christ. He should be the divine attraction. He should be the center.

And if we have a mutual love together, a mutual respect for him, we'll have a mutual respect for each other because we see something of Christ in each of our brethren. Now, may the Lord take these few simple thoughts and make them precious to our hearts. Remember the Gathering Center.

I think we're just going to have to talk a little more about this tomorrow night. And then, by the will of the Lord, we want to get into the practical aspects of the Church as seen in the Corinthian Apostles. First Corinthians especially, we'll just make that as a kind of an announcement in regard to tomorrow night's meeting.

Brother Willard Rodgers, would you close with a word of prayer?

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