

TEACHING GOAL

Examine the nature of our union with Christ and thus the nature of the invisible and visible church.

DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

Q. How does the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?

A. The Spirit applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.

S.C. 30, L.C. 62-69, W.C. of F. IX, X, XXV, Savoy 9, 10, 2, Young 58, 59

SCRIPTURAL BASIS

Study Passage: John 15:1-11

Support Passages: Support Passages: II Timothy 2:11-13, Romans 6:3-11, Galatians 2:20, I Corinthians 6:15-17, Ephesians 1:22-23, 2:4-6, 20-22, 4:15-16, 5:29-30, John 14:20

BIBLE STORY

Exodus 28: The people were not allowed to enter into the Holy of Holies, but Aaron bore their names into God's presence in the Ephod as their federal representative. It is the Old Testament type of our federal union with Christ.

.MEMORY ASSIGNMENT

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5, ESV)

APPLICATION

Abide or be burned. Those who are truly in union with Christ, by his grace, will abide in the vine. Let us note that abiding in Christ is related to commandment keeping.

SUMMARY

We are told that the Holy Spirit brings us into union with Christ by working faith in us. We shall study this aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit when we take up the study of effectual calling but this lesson is concerned with the nature of our union to Christ. We have also observed that unless the Holy Spirit applies the benefits of redemption to sinners, no matter how intimate with Jesus they may seem, they will ultimately fall away into eternal fire. We have also observed that the visible church is composed of many who are redeemed and others who only appear to be so.

The Lord Jesus compares the church to a grape vine (John 15), in which many branches bear grapes because they are alive and are connected to the vine in a viable manner. Other branches are also connected to the vine but are dead and not viable. The difference between a living union and a dead one is seen in the fruit, or grapes, and not more branches. The fruit is characterized by commandment keeping and whereas we are no longer related to the law as a tutor to lead us to Christ, since the Holy Spirit applied the benefit of saving faith to us, now we delight to obey the law to please our God and Savior. The result of union with Christ is a living branch that has been changed, made a new creature; the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. The branch now bears fruit; it delights in the law of God and meditates in it day and night. Such branches are said to be in Christ, members of His body, one flesh and one Spirit with Him and now we are even reigning with Him. This is called the mystical union because its depth and riches are so far beyond our understanding, and the workings of the Holy Spirit who effects them is supernatural and mysterious. Christ is the head of His body, and His church is His bride.

The high priest is a rich type of our union with Christ. Aaron represented his people before God; he carried the blood into the Holy of Holies, which only he could do, and sprinkled it upon the Mercy Seat. Thus it is just as if the people had done so for themselves because Aaron represented them. This union of Aaron and the people whom he represented is beautifully pictured in the twelve jeweled breast plate and the engraved shoulder stones which Aaron carried into the presence of God. Greatly should we praise God; we who have been so unified with Christ, by His grace.

But there is a dire warning for those to whom saving faith has not yet been applied, to those who are dead branches, who are superficially connected to Christ the vine. Such are pruned out, dried, and gathered for everlasting fire. We must search our hearts to examine the nature of our union with Christ, for we must abide in Him or be burned.

Such is the picture of the visible church. It is composed of wheat and weeds, of fruit-bearing branches intermingled with dead ones. But scripture also pictures the church as all of the elect; as those who have already gone to be with the Lord, those who in this life are truly unified with Christ and those elect persons yet to be born. There are no weeds in this group, the invisible church;

there are no dead branches. We are careful to notice that members of the invisible church are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. (John 15:3) The act of abiding in Christ is only possible to those who are living branches for the branch cannot bear fruit of itself and as Jesus said, "apart from Me you can do nothing." Only by the gracious act of God the Holy Spirit are the branches made alive but this will be the topic of our next study.