

TEACHING GOAL

Define the Church in the light of the Covenant of Grace.

DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

- Q. Did God leave all men to perish in the estate of sin and misery?
- A. God, having out of His mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a redeemer.

S.C. 20; L.C. 30-35; W.C. of F. VII; Savoy 7; Young 38-40

SCRIPTURAL BASIS

Study Passage: Ephesians 2:11-22

Support Passages: Matthew 5:13-16, Matthew 13 (All seven of these parables illustrate a great truth about the Church.)

BIBLE STORY

Isaiah 2:1-5; The house of the LORD; the chief of the mountains raised above the hills.

MEMORY ASSIGNMENT

Matthew 5:13

13 You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

APPLICATION

Since the Church is God's means of leavening the earth, we must as members of it, let our lights shine before men in such a way that they may see our good works and glorify our father who is in heaven.

SUMMARY

We have noticed in Scripture that God does not merely offer salvation to people, but He is a God to His people. He not only offers salvation but acts to bring His people into the estate of salvation that He offers. Since He has done so by means of a covenant which we call the Covenant of Grace, which promises salvation in the manner just described, the Covenant is also His means to bring His church into existence. This He did when He covenanted with Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:15) and with Noah and Abraham as was noted last week.

The Church did not originate in Acts at Pentecost but in the Garden of Eden. Did not Christ, the Lord, sow His good seed in the Old Testament as well as the New? Was not Abraham a son of the Kingdom, and Noah, and Enoch and Abel? (Matthew 13:37-43, Hebrews 11) The study text for today states in essence that there is no real difference between saved Jews and saved Gentiles, for they are made one in Christ. Together they are the Church, the Kingdom of God. The Gentiles, it is true, were brought into the Church in large numbers after Pentecost, but they had been brought into the Church on many previous occasions as well (e.g. Ruth, Rahab, etc.). God brought His church into existence for a purpose, perhaps summarized in the Lord's own statement, "You are the salt of the earth..." (Matthew 5:13 ff). But let us give our attention to Dr. Charles Hodge on the matter:

"God as the creator and preserver of the universe, and as infinite in His being and perfections, is, in virtue of His nature, the absolute sovereign of all His creatures. This sovereignty He exercises over the material world by His wisdom and power, and over rational beings as a moral ruler. From this rightful authority of God, our race revolted, and thereby became a part of the kingdom of darkness of which Satan is the head. To this kingdom the mass of mankind has ever since belonged. But God, in His grace and mercy, determined to deliver men from the consequences of their apostasy. He not only announced the coming of a Redeemer who should destroy the power of Satan, but He at once inaugurated an antagonistic kingdom, consisting of men chosen out of the world, and through the renewing of the Holy Ghost restored to their allegiance. Until the time of Abraham this kingdom does not appear to have had any visible organization apart from the families of the people of God. Every pious household was a church of which the parent was the priest.

To prevent the universal spread of idolatry, to preserve the knowledge of the truth, to gather in His elect, and to prepare the way for the coming of the promised Redeemer, God entered into covenant with the father of the faithful and with his descendants through Isaac, constituting them His visible kingdom, and making them the depositaries and guardians of His supernatural revelations. In this covenant He promised eternal life upon condition of faith in Him that was to come.

When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, they were made a theocracy so constituted in its officers, in its institutions, and in its services, as not only to preserve alive the knowledge of God's purpose and plan of salvation, but also to set forth the character, offices, and work of the promised seed of Abraham in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed.

The kingdom of God, therefore, as consisting of those who acknowledge, worship, love, and obey Jehovah as the only living and true God, has existed in our world ever since the fall of Adam. It has ever been the light and life of the world. It is the salt by which it is preserved. It is the leaven by which it is

ultimately to be pervaded. To gather His people into His kingdom, and to carry it on to its consummation, is the end of all God's dispensations, and the purpose for which His eternal Son assumed our nature. He was born to be a king. To this end He lived and died and rose again, that He might be Lord of all those given Him by the Father." ¹

¹ Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965, Vol II, p. 596ff.