

Study of Jesus Christ (Gathers and preserves the church)

TIT 2:14 Who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Christ preserves the church.

Last week we dealt with the preservation of the invisible church: the ekklesia, the congregation whose names the Father wrote into the book of life before creation.

We saw that through the phases *pre-fall in the garden, post-fall pre-Christ, post-Christ, and New Jerusalem*, that man goes through four states in terms of his ability to sin: able to sin, able to not sin; able to sin, unable to not sin; able to sin, able to not sin; and unable to sin. These phases fit the four phases in relation to salvation history.

Last week we dealt with the table below.

<i>Phase:</i>	Pre-Fall Man	Post-Fall Man	Reborn Man	Glorified Man
<i>State:</i>	able to sin Posse peccare	able to sin Posse peccare	able to sin Posse peccare	able to not sin Posse non peccare
	able to not sin Posse non peccare	unable to not sin Non posse non peccare	able to not sin Posse non peccare	unable to sin Non posse peccare

Since the *Free-will* row in the table may cause some confusion, and the way this table was presented, the four-fold state of man was mixed with what I wanted to say in terms of man's free-will.

Again, the free-will mentioned here is not a reference to man's free-will to determine what he should do with his salvation, but rather the way in which he should behave as a Christian who had his eternal life returned as a gift through the merits of Christ.

Man's nature is bonded to sin all the time (unable to not sin) and unless he is redeemed from his sinful nature (able to not sin) there is no hope that he could escape from his chains. Only by the merit of Christ, applied by faith, can man escape sin. But it takes understanding and knowledge of the truths of Christ to be arrested by the gospel and carried away from the clutches of evil desire, sin and death.

JAM 1:13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14But each one

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is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. 16Don't be deceived, my dear brothers.

Even as the elect sit with choices how they would lead their lives after having been grasped by the gospel, it does not mean that life is a menu from which choices are made depending on one's mood or understanding of the consequences.

Elementary Christianity may start with such an understanding, but as the Christian grows in understanding what it is that the Scriptures teach and the magnitude of the sins that have been forgiven, the believer progresses to an advanced state of bondage to Christ – a bondage that is forged in God's love for us, bonded by that precious instrument: faith.

Let us look at elementary Christianity and the call to grow in understanding. The Apostle spoke to them about their understanding of the High-Priest Melchizedek:

Hebrews 5:11 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 12In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food. 13Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. 6:1Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, 2instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3And God permitting, we will do so.

11We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. 12We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

We see, then, that growth starts with the elementary things about the gospel and the believer should grow through diligence and "constant use" (regular prayer, reading of the Bible, attendance of the worship services,

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catechizing, and the communion of the saints). This constant use and growth causes us to bond with Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

We should also pray for one another as the Apostle prayed:

EPH 1:17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

We dare not take this lightly; we dare not tarry in our growth to know God better, to become mature Christians. We dare not remain comfortable with the elementary things about the gospel; but we ought to seek, stretch forward to obtain more knowledge, more wisdom – to become more like Christ.

Does bondage in Christ mean that our rational character, our free-will, has been compromised?

No, not at all.

It only means that, through growth in the knowledge of God we realize even more how great our rescue from death has been. With our increased knowledge through the spirit of wisdom, as our hearts become more and more enlightened, we would understand the absolute misery in which we were trapped. We will understand the huge price that God paid for our rescue to return to us our eternal life, which we lost through our First Parents.

The true believer's knees become weak and he sinks to the floor in awe, with relief that death has been conquered, in bondage to Christ. Free-will is an understanding of the facts and our interest in receiving our eternal bliss once we leave this sinful state.

Bondage through love is not a foreign concept. As married couples bond over the years, there are certain things that are done in concert with that bond.

An analogy may be in order here.

A man of wealth decides to build himself a house. He sits down and writes down all the things that he wants in his new house. He plans the

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construction, the time-line, the funds, and the property on which he will build his new home.

Then he goes out and negotiates with artisans, laborers, and technicians to start at the times when their services would be required and so complete his house in an orderly manner: foundation workers first, roofers later. He agrees with them the price for their services and based on that cost, added to the material cost, he calculates the final cost estimate to complete the project. The entire planning for his house is complete and he hires the workers and purchases the material.

The workers work their full shifts and build the house according to the plans exactly as the owner had foreseen the outcome.

The workers act freely within the framework of their employment. That is, they are willingly in bondage to perform the work.

We see similar forces at work in the believer's relationship with God. The believer is irresistibly called by the Holy Spirit and his heart is enlightened to understand what it is that God accomplished for him through Jesus Christ. The believer is bound by the awesome truth of the sacrifice of Christ to save him from death and restore to him his eternal life.

So, the free-will shown in the table is not a menu-type choice of options from which the believer may pick this or that. The believer would always choose that which is indicative of his faith in Christ – he is in bondage to choose that way. And because the chief end of man is to glorify God, remaining willingly in that bondage is absolute freedom. Anything else is bondage.

Hebrews 6:4 It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age; 6If they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

Strong words indeed, but it shows us that the elect cannot fall into this situation. To the elect, faith in God is a blessing, a gift, not a burden, but liberty. It is the elect who receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit to better understand the truths of God.

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Though the elect may sin, perhaps even more grievously than the reprobate, they will always repent because they offended the living God whom they love. The reprobate, on the other hand, may also repent but only because either they fear punishment or they seek some other benefit from repentance.

With this understanding of the free will of the believer, let's look at the preservation of the visible church.

The invisible church will only consist of the elect. The visible church will consist of the elect but the reprobate may also be present, even Satan himself may be in the visible church.

So, the invisible church is preserved in a very different manner than the visible church. A common thread running through the preservation of the church is that it always is about the elect, the invisible church.

Without the invisible church, there would be no body of Christ, and if there is no body, there can be no Head. If there is no Head, there is no Second Person of the Godhead, which is absurd.

This proves that the elect (the church) is a consequence of God himself and that it is not a human invention. The preservation of the church, therefore, is directly ascribed to the office of Christ.

There are so many visible churches, some of which are hardly recognizable as congregations of Christ. There are also many churches that are split because they differ in opinion of doctrine while agreeing on the foundational matters of doctrine.

This is indeed a sad state of affairs, but since we have proven that the preservation of the church is in the hands of Christ, we ought to look at this division from that perspective rather than merely shaking our heads in disbelief what some churches are able to profess while calling themselves 'churches'.

How are we to know, then, which churches are 'true' and which churches are 'false' churches. It is a judgment that one has to exercise with utmost care and circumspection.

There are three basic marks that define a true church:

1. Accurate and regular preaching of the gospel.
2. Legal and proper administration of the sacraments.

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3. Right exercise of church discipline.

Many churches, particularly the Roman Church, fail this test as a true church and deservedly so, because of their idolatry and repudiation of justification by faith.

Let's put this in practical terms.

If we imagine the doctrines of visible churches plotted on concentric circles around a nucleus, Jesus Christ, then we can derive from this that some churches would be nearer to the Nucleus and other would be farther from it. Some would be so far that they cannot be considered Christian churches any longer. So, at some point on a concentric circle, there would be a line, much like the arctic circle, beyond which a church cannot claim to be a Christian church. Let's refer to this line as the separator line.

We may further imagine that the elect are scattered all over the entire spectrum of belief systems and doctrines, even among the totally ignorant and the wicked.

The purpose is that they, the elect, should move closer to Christ at the center as they acquire more knowledge and understanding.

JOH 6:37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

2TI 2:19 ... God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."

The others would be left where they are, drifting around without any goal.

Depending on which criteria we use, churches' positions could vary in relation to the Nucleus. For instance, if we use the three marks of a true church to measure the Roman Church, we find that it is beyond the separator line. If we measure the Roman Church by their belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, which disqualifies them as the anti-Christ, they will be inside the separator line.

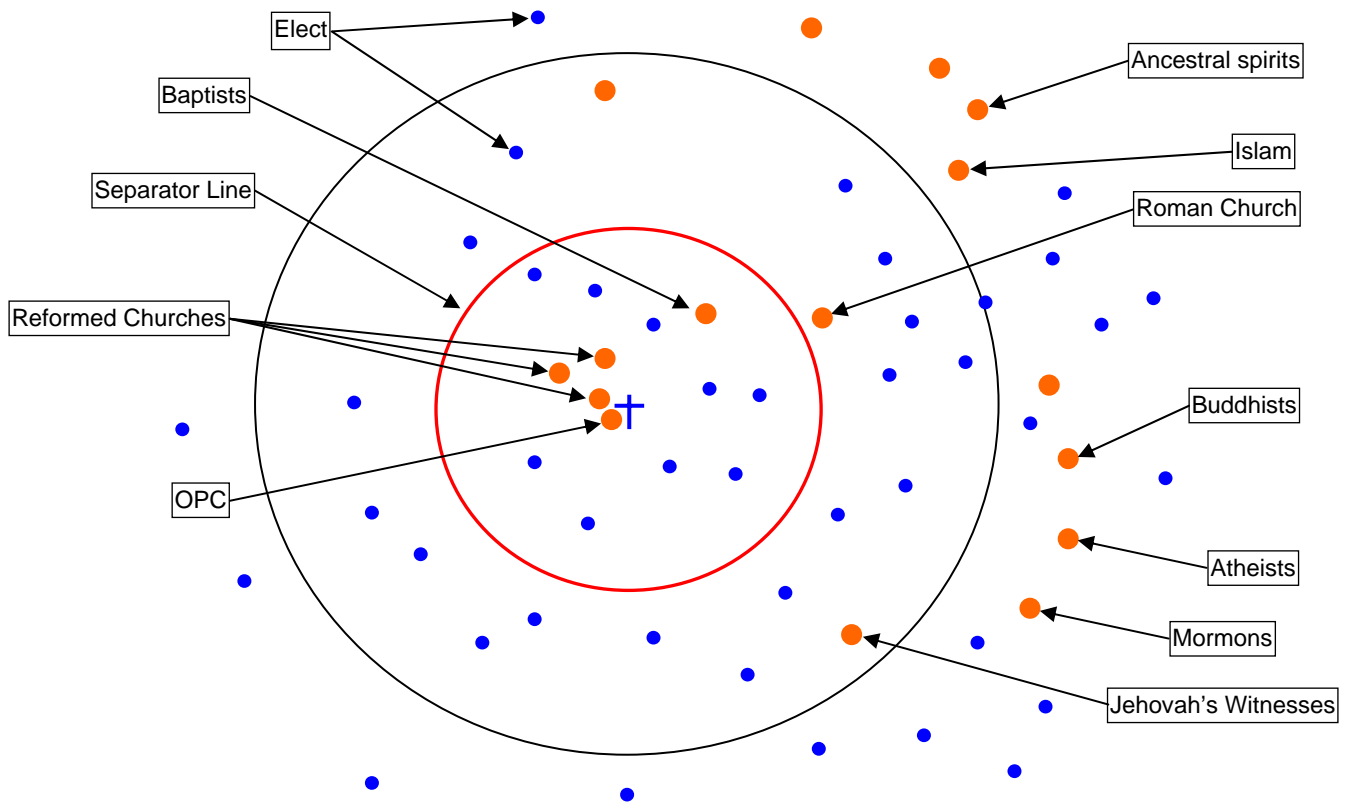
Churches like the LDS or Mormon Church will fall beyond the separator line regardless of the criteria used to measure them. Muslims, Buddhists, and other religions who deny that Jesus is the Son of God, will all fall beyond the separator line and may justifiably be called synagogues of Satan.

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Why do we, then, believe that the Reformed Churches are more 'true' than other churches?

Because we totally subject ourselves to the precepts of Scripture. Whenever we are shown to have drifted from Scripture, we repent and reform to live as close to what Scripture teaches as humanly possible. As close to the Word of God, His memra, as possible.

ROM 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. 31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?



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The representation above shows the elect scattered all over the landscape of doctrinal beliefs. The orange dots represent different doctrinal beliefs and include the elect that might be within them.

It stands to reason that for the elect to all come to faith in Jesus Christ, they have to move closer to the Nucleus at some stage in their lives. Those caught up in religious beliefs outside the separator line, will hear the gospel through other means than their 'church,' which is where mission work plays a role.

How will the Holy Spirit get to them all, especially where cultures and other factors, such as fear and excommunication from family, play such a powerful role in the lives of the members of those outside communities?

I propose to you that the answer could be found in the gift of speaking in tongues we receive from the Holy Spirit. It doesn't sound like a very reformed statement, does it?

Let's read in Scripture what happened when the Holy Spirit was poured out:

ACS 2:4-11 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. 5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. 6When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. 7Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?

8Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? 9Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome. 11(Both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs--we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"

The talking in a babbling of sounds by some preachers is just not biblical. The Holy Spirit gave them the gift of speaking in the languages of the people to whom they were called to declare the wonders of God. The purpose of this gift was so that the gospel could be proclaimed to all nations so that the elect, caught up among them, could be reached. The list of countries mentioned in Acts 2 all have members of the elect caught

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up among them and without this particular gift from the Holy Spirit, they wouldn't hear the gospel.

But once the gospel has reached many different countries, there was no further need for this gift to manifest itself in the physical expressions of a foreign language. The purpose of the gift is to proclaim the wonders of God to those who do not understand the preacher. It was a language barrier when the apostles received the Holy Spirit. It is still a language barrier today, but in a different sense altogether.

So, what about the gift of speaking in tongues in modern times?

Here, I propose to you, is the expression of the gift of speaking in tongues in later times:

I Corinthians 9:19 Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

We ought to speak in tongues, as explained in I Cor 9 when we proclaim the gospel, speak to our audience in a manner that they could understand. That is the gift of speaking in tongues in our time. Speak to Mormons in a manner (tongue) that they understand, Muslims in a manner that they understand and so on. If we preach to Muslims as we do fellow believers, they would think we are blaspheming and would rather be appalled, being pushed away, instead of piquing their interest in the gospel.

GAL 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

COL 4:5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

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1PE 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

2TI 2:25 Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth,
²⁶And that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

Why the differences between churches? From our schema, we can see that God's interest lies with the elect, having them move up to the Nucleus away from wickedness and towards Jesus Christ. If a church has become stale and they no longer act as an on-ramp for the elect, is it outside of God's reach to shake and dismantle a church or religion, break it up, so that it would regroup in smaller or different entities, which might result in a situation more conducive to the elect moving forward to the center? No, of course not.

DNL 11:27 The two kings, with their hearts bent on evil, will sit at the same table and lie to each other, but to no avail, because an end will still come at the appointed time.

MAT 24:24 For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible.

It is all about the elect, the preservation of each one of the elect. If Satan could make only one member of the elect to stumble, he would have victory because God promised, "no one can snatch them out of my hand."