

Major Bible Themes

52 Vital Doctrines of the Scriptures Simplified and Explained

Adapted from the book *Major Bible Themes*
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The Church: The Body and Bride of Christ and Her Reward

- Introduction
 - The Church has a unique relationship with Jesus Christ.
 - In the Scriptures there are seven figures used to describe this relationship between Christ and His Church...
 - ✦ The Shepherd and the Sheep
 - ✦ The True Vine and the Branches
 - ✦ The Cornerstone and the Stones
 - ✦ The High Priest and the Believer-Priests
 - ✦ The Last Adam and the New Creation
 - ✦ The Head and the Body
 - ✦ The Bridegroom and the Bride
 - ✦ The Order of the Church
- The Seven Figures of Christ and His Church
 - The Shepherd and the Sheep (Psalm 23, John 10)
 - ✦ Christ is the true Shepherd who entered through the door (John 10:2) and is followed by the true sheep (John 10:3-5, 27).
 - ✦ Christ is the Door of salvation for the sheep (John 10:7, 9) and He is also the source of their security (John 10:28-29).
 - ✦ Life and food are provided abundantly for the sheep by the Shepherd (John 10:9-10; Psalm 23).
 - ✦ Other so-called shepherds are merely hirelings who would not lay down their lives for the sheep (John 10:12-13).
 - ✦ There is a fellowship between the sheep and the Shepherd as between the Father and the Son (John 10:14-15).
 - ✦ Jews and Gentiles alike form the flock of sheep who follow the Shepherd (John 10:16).
 - ✦ As the Shepherd, Christ not only laid down His life for the sheep, but He took it up again (the resurrection) and ever lives to make intercession for the sheep (John 10:17-18; Heb 7:25).

- The True Vine and the Branches (John 15)
 - ✦ This figure speaks of both positional union with Christ and temporal communion with Christ.
 - ✦ Believers are exhorted to abide in unbroken fellowship with Christ (John 15:4, 10).
 - ✦ The results of this abiding are pruning/cleansing (John 15:2b), effective prayer (John 15:7) and joy made full (John 15:11).
 - ✦ The central truth of the figure of the vine and the branches is that the believer cannot enjoy his life or be fruitful in his service apart from a living connection with Christ (John 15:5).
- The Cornerstone and the Stones
 - ✦ The people of Israel had a temple (Ex 25:8) whereas the Church is a temple (Eph 2:21).
 - ✦ Christ is the cornerstone and individual believers are the living stones that make up the edifice (Eph 2:19-21; 1 Pet 2:5-6).
 - ✦ The temple that is the Church is a dwelling of God (Eph 2:22).
 - ✦ The figure of the cornerstone and stones highlights the believer's dependence upon Christ and the interdependence of all believers.
- The High Priest and the Believer-Priests
 - ✦ The people of Israel had a priesthood (Num 3:10) whereas the Church is a priesthood (1 Pet 2:9).
 - ✦ Christ is our High Priest who entered into heaven (Heb 4:14-15; 9:24) and intercedes for us (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25).
 - ✦ As believer-priests we do not need an earthly intermediary since we have direct access to God (Heb 4:16 ; 10:19-22).
 - ✦ Our priestly service involves offering ourselves as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2), worshipping God through praise and thanksgiving (Heb 13:15) as well as intercessory prayers (1 Tim 2:1), and offering the sacrifices of good works and giving (Heb 13:16).
- The Last Adam and the New Creation
 - ✦ Adam is the corporate head of the entire human race and we all have his nature, including the consequences of the fall.
 - ✦ Christ is the last Adam (1 Cor 15:45).and is the head of a new creation (Gal 6:15) which has a new nature in Him (2 Pet 1:4).
- The Head and the Body / The Bridegroom and the Bride
 - ✦ These two figures will be studied in more detail.
 - ✦ The figure of Christ as the Head and the Church as the Body reveals the present purpose of God.
 - ✦ The figure of Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church as the Bride reveals the future relationship of the Church to Christ.
- All of these figures are important to consider because they help us to understand the relationship that the Church (a unique group of people in God's A to Ω plan) has with the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

- The Church as the Body of Christ
 - Through the baptism of the Spirit believers in the Church have all been joined together into one body (1 Cor 12:13).
 - Three major truths are represented by this figure...
 - ✦ The Church is a self-developing body.
 - ✦ Members of this body are given special gifts and are appointed to special service.
 - ✦ This body is a living union or an organism.
 - As a self-developing body, the Church is comprised of separate individuals who are being fitted together by what each believer supplies causing the growth of the whole body (Eph 4:11-16).
 - Members of the body of Christ are appointed to service in keeping with their gifts.
 - ✦ Just as in the human body different members have different functions, so it is in the Body of Christ.
 - ✦ Each believer should consider what spiritual gift (or gifts) God has given to him and what that means in terms of his role in the body. NOTE: Spiritual gifts should not be confused with natural talents.
 - ✦ Spiritual gifts are always subject to the Word of God and bring with them responsibility and accountability (Luke 12:48).
 - ✦ Believers will often serve in areas not related to giftedness, but the believer will produce the greatest fruit in gift-related service.
 - The Body is a living organism united eternally in Christ.
 - ✦ The Body of Christ is made up of Jews and Gentiles – people of various races and cultures (Eph 2:13-18).
 - ✦ The Body of Christ is a unique organism in God’s plan and this unity between Jew and Gentile was not previously revealed in the Old Testament (Eph 3:4-6).
 - ✦ The unity of the Body of Christ (Eph 4:4-7) is an eternal unity which forms the basis for Christian fellowship and service in the present age and is the ground for eternal fellowship in the ages to come.
- The Church as the Bride of Christ
 - Of the seven figures of Christ and His Church only the figure of the Bridegroom and the Bride has prophetic significance.
 - Israel was the unfaithful wife of Jehovah, but the Church will be presented to Christ as a pure virgin (2 Cor 11:2).
 - Although it was not fully understood at the time, John the Baptizer introduced Christ as the Bridegroom (John 3:29).
 - The full unveiling of this mystery is found in Eph 5:25-33.
 - ✦ Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her (v. 25).
 - ✦ Christ is presently sanctifying and cleansing her (v. 26).
 - ✦ Christ will present the Church to Himself in all her glory (v. 27).

- In the present age, Christ is preparing and cleansing (through the application of the Word producing the sanctification of believers) His bride for her future relationship.
- At the end of this age at the Rapture, the Bridegroom will come for His bride and take her to heaven.
- There He will present her without blemish, spot or wrinkle, a holy bride suitable for a holy Bridegroom.
- The wedding feast which follows (probably at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom) is one in which all other saints join in celebrating the marriage of Christ and His Church.
- The love of Christ for His Church revealed in Eph 5:25-33 is an outstanding demonstration of the love of God.
 - ✦ The eternal duration of the love of God stems from the fact that God is love (1 John 4:8).
 - God has not attained His love through self-effort or cultivation.
 - God’s love is not a possession which He can abandon.
 - Love is a vital part of God’s very essence.
 - To Israel God said, “I have loved you with an everlasting love.” (Jer 31:3).
 - Of Christ it is written, “He loved them eternally” (John 13:1).
 - ✦ The endless love of God is a motivator for His actions.
 - The love of God was manifested to us in the sacrifice of His beloved Son (Rom 5:8; 1 John 3:16).
 - If we could gaze into the heart of God we would see the same undiminished compassion for the lost that was expressed in the sacrifice of His Son.
 - The death of Christ was not a momentary spasm of divine affection, but rather the momentous announcement to a lost world of God’s eternal, unchanging love.
 - ✦ The love of God has transparent purity.
 - There is no selfishness in God’s love – He seeks no benefits for Himself.
 - God needs nothing, but bestows everything.
 - Believers are known as “beloved” because they are the objects of God’s love and benefit from it.
 - Peter exhorts believers to love one another with a love which is pure like God’s love (1 Pet 1:22).
 - ✦ The love of God has limitless intensity.
 - The costliest thing in all of history is the blood of God’s only Son, yet God so loved the world that He gave His Son for us.
 - That love expressed toward us while we were “sinners” and “enemies” seems to reach toward boundless infinity.
 - However, the Bible tells us of the “much more” love of God for those who have been reconciled and justified through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 5:8-10) – a love from which we cannot be separated (Rom 8:38-39).

- ✦ The love of God has inexhaustible benevolence.
 - God could not ignore the just condemnation of the sinner which His holiness imposed, but, moved by His love, God acted in behalf of those whom He otherwise would have had to banish from His presence forever (John 15:13).
 - Through this benevolent act of love, God was free to save the guilty without violating His own holiness (Rom 3:26).
 - Saving grace is more than love, it is God's love set absolutely free in triumph over the righteous judgments against sinners.
 - When someone is saved through faith in Christ, God is free to express His love by showing the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward the believer (Eph 2:7).
 - Being in union with Christ (1 Cor 6:17) the believer is loved even as Christ is loved by the Father (John 17:23).
 - This infinite love of God is not decreased when He administers corrective discipline (Heb 12:6; Rev 3:19) or when the believer faces testing and trials.
- ✦ The love of God is manifested in the believer.
 - The love of God is poured out within our hearts through the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5).
 - Man cannot love with this type of love on his own – it is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22).
 - It is through God's love expressed toward us that His love is manifested in us (1 John 4:9-10).
 - This type of unselfish divine love will exhibit the characteristics described in 1 Cor 13:4-8.
- ✦ Additional things to note about God's love...
 - Though God abhors the evil world-system (1 John 2:15-17), He loves the lost people in the world (John 3:16; Eph 2:4-5).
 - The exercise of divine love is the first commandment under grace (John 13:34-35; 15:12-14) and should be the outstanding characteristic of every Christian (Gal 5:13; Eph 5:2; 1 Thess 3:12).
 - This love cannot be cultivated nor can it be produced by the flesh – this love is from God (1 Thess 4:9) and is the normal experience of a believer filled with the Spirit (Gal 5:22).
- The Bride Adorned and Rewarded
 - At the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Church will face judgment and be rewarded.
 - ✦ This judgment takes place in heaven after Christ has come for His bride (Rev 22:12).
 - ✦ Because Christ has perfectly and completely paid for all sins, believers who stand before the Judgment Seat will be judged according to their works (Rom 14:10-12; 2 Cor 5:10).
 - ✦ The purpose of this judgment is to not to highlight the “wood, hay and stubble” which are the worthless deeds of this life, but rather to reveal the “gold, silver and precious stones” which are the rewardable deeds of spiritual production (1 Cor 3:12-15).

- In Romans 14:10-12 the figure of stewardship is brought out.
 - ✦ We are exhorted not to try to evaluate the quality of another believer's works (v. 10).
 - ✦ Each of us will give an account before God (v. 12).
 - ✦ We are not held responsible for what God has given to others, but for our faithfulness in using what God has committed to us.
 - ✦ Everything a believer has – intellectual capacity, natural gifts, physical health, spiritual gifts, wealth, etc. – is a gift from God.
 - ✦ The more God has entrusted to him, the more for which a believer will have to give an account (Luke 12:48).
- In 1 Cor 3:9-15 the believer's life is viewed as a building built on Christ as the Foundation.
 - ✦ Only believers are in view since unbelievers do not have Christ as a Foundation (v. 11).
 - ✦ The believer is exhorted to build a superstructure of godly service, or works, which will be tested by fire (vv. 12-14).
 - ✦ These works cannot be produced by the flesh, only by a believer who is filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18).
 - ✦ The fleshly works are burned away by the fire as the believer suffers loss of reward, but not loss of salvation (v 15).
 - ✦ The godly works survive the fire and are purified by it.
- In 1 Cor 9:16-27 (especially in verses 24-27) the figure of a race and winning the prize is used to reveal the quality of Christian life and service.
 - ✦ What is Paul's reward? It is directly tied to the nature and quality of the service Paul rendered to God (vv. 18-23).
 - ✦ Paul likens the Christian life to being in a race where only one receives the prize (v. 24).
 - ✦ This exhortation is for each believer to exercise diligence in order to receive the full reward which God has for him.
 - ✦ This requires orientation to God's will, spiritual focus and discipline in resisting worldly influences (vv. 25-27).
- In addition to the terms "prize" and "wreath" mentioned in 1 Cor 9:24-25, rewards are also referred to as "crowns" (2 Tim 4:18; Jas 1:12; 1 Pet 5:4; Rev 2:10; 3:11).
- Believers are warned that rewards for service may be forfeited (Col 2:18; 2 Jn 8; Rev 3:11).
- Rev 4:10-11 tells us that these rewards are not given to glorify believers, but to honor and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The ultimate reward for the believer is to be placed into eternal service to Christ as one who attained bond-servant status in this life through humble submission to His will (Rev 22:3).
- Just as with our salvation, rewards are not earned or deserved since God is the one who provides everything necessary for us to accomplish our works of service (1 Cor 12:4-6).
- When we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ we are evaluated purely only the basis of how our works are viewed by God – whether He sees them as good or bad (2 Cor 5:10) – so every believer should be encouraged to evaluate and prioritize his life according to God's standard of righteousness and His general and specific will for your life.

- Questions
 - Name the seven figures that are used of Christ and His Church.

 - What are some of the important truths taught by the figure of the Shepherd and the sheep?

 - Explain how the figure of Christ as the True Vine and believers as branches speaks of union, communion and fruitfulness.

 - What is the main thought of the figure of the Church as a building of which Christ is the Cornerstone?

 - What are the principal functions of a believer as a priest?

 - What truth is brought out by the figure of Christ as the Last Adam and the Church as a new creation?

 - Of what is the figure of Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church as a bride prophetic?

 - What are the three main truths presented in the figure of the Church as the body of Christ?

 - Name the five characteristics of divine love revealed in Christ's love for His Church.

 - In view of Christ's love for His Church, what is revealed about the love of the Father for believers?

 - In view of God's love for the Church, what is revealed concerning our love?

- In connection with the judgment of the child of God, why will a believer never be condemned for his sins?

- What is the main purpose of the judgment of Christians at the Judgment Seat of Christ?

- How does the judgment of Christians contrast with the judgment at the Great White Throne?

- How does the figure of stewardship illustrate the nature of the judgment of Christians?

- How does a building built upon Christ as the Foundation illustrate the judgment of the believer?

- How does the figure of winning a race relate to the Judgment Seat of Christ?

- What is the nature of the believer's reward?

- How important is the Judgment Seat of Christ and how does it relate to evaluating our present lives?