

# **BIBLICAL IMAGES OF THE CHURCH**

## **GOLDEN TEXT**

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).

## **USEFUL PRACTICE**

Through each image that portrays the Church, the Holy Spirit reveals to us how glorious she is.

## **SCRIPTURE READING**

**Ephesians 5:25-32; 1 Peter 2:9, 10**

### **Ephesians 5**

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,

27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

29 After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church

30 for we are members of his body.

31 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”

32 This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.

### 1 Peter

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

- I) **To list** the images that describe the relationship with Christ;
- II) **To point out** the images that describe the function of the Church;
- III) **To explain** the images of the Church as God's dwelling place.

## INTRODUCTION

The Church of Jesus Christ is portrayed by a series of images throughout the pages of the New Testament. Each of them reveals a certain aspect of the Church of Jesus Christ. Thus, we can see images or figures that portray the relationship; that describe the function or show how the Church is the dwelling place of God. Therefore, in this lesson, we will study the main biblical images regarding the Church of Christ that communicate the relationship, function and dwelling place of this institution created by God.

### I - IMAGES THAT DESCRIBE A RELATIONSHIP

**1. The Bride of Christ.** Without a doubt, the image of the Church as the Bride of Christ is one of the most beautiful in Scripture. In fact, the Bible uses both the bride and the wife to represent the Church. First, the Church is described as a “pure virgin” (2 Cor. 11:2). It is worth noting that the Greek word *parthenos*, translated in 2 Corinthians 11:2 as “pure virgin”, is used in relation to a maiden who has not yet engaged in marriage. It is a figure of

the Church as a bride bringing an idea of chastity, purity and fidelity.

**2. The Wife of Christ.** Paul also vividly portrays the image of the Church as a wife (Eph. 5:25, 26). Just as the purity of the bride is highlighted, so is the purity of the wife. But we must emphasize that this relationship between Christ and the Church is based on love - "Christ loved the church" (Eph. 5:25). It is not like a cold relationship, based only on duty, but it portrays a relationship based, above all, on the reality of love that gives itself and sacrifices itself. Christ cares for the Church and watches over her because he loves her. This image of a loving relationship between Christ and his Church should be the parameter for the relationship of all Christian couples.

**3. Flock of God.** When he gathered the elders in the city of Ephesus, the apostle Paul exhorted them (Acts 20:28). Here, the Church is portrayed as a flock of God. It is a metaphor that illustrates the relationship between the sheep and the shepherd. Paul makes it clear that this flock came at a high price - the blood of Jesus Christ. With this image in mind, the apostle Peter also highlights this (1 Peter 5:2, 3). Peter's words should serve as a parameter for every pastor who cares for God's flock. In fact, it shows what the pastor cannot do in his dealings with the church, as he must be a model for the Flock of God.

## II - IMAGES DESCRIBING FUNCTION

1. Chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation and God's special possession. Just as there was a people of God under the Old Covenant (Ex. 19:5, 6; Isa. 43:3), in the same way, God has a people under the New Covenant (1 Pet. 2:9).

**(a) Chosen people.** The Greek word *genos*, translated here as "people" also has the meaning of "race". The New Testament shows that in Christ both Jews and Gentiles are part of one people or race because of what they have in common. There is no distinction of race, color, sex or social status. In Christ, everyone forms the chosen people.

**(b) Royal priesthood.** In his First Letter, the apostle Peter describes the believers who form the Church of Christ as those who exercise a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). This image comes from the ancient Levitical priestly system. In the Old Covenant, God chose a family, that of Aaron, to officiate as priests; He did the same in the New Covenant. However, there is a fundamental difference between the priesthood exercised under the Old Covenant and that exercised under the New Covenant. There, this function was reserved for just one tribe, that of Levi. Thus, the family chosen for this mission was Aaron's. On the other hand, under the New Covenant, every Christian is a priest. Now every Christian has the privilege

of “burning incense”, that is, of exercising a ministry of prayer and intercession before God (Ps. 141:2).

**(c) Holy nation and God’s special possession** (1 Peter 2:9). Both terms come with adjectives, showing what that nation and people were, represented, and were supposed to be. It was not just any nation or people. It was a holy nation and God’s special possession. This is a very strong figure to portray a Church entirely consecrated to Christ.

**2. Body of Christ.** This is one of the strongest and most frequent images in the New Testament to portray the Church. The Church is the Body of Christ! More than an organization, the Church is an organism. A living organism! The analogy of the Church as a body is very significant. Firstly, because it portrays the harmony and unity that exists in the body. In the human body, everything is in its right place (1 Cor. 12:12). All members cooperate for the proper functioning of the body (1 Cor. 12:21,22,25). Therefore, no member is less important for the body than the other ones: They are all necessary. The variety of organs, members and functions constitutes the essence of physical life. No organ can establish a monopoly in the body, taking over the functions of the others.

### **III - IMAGES DESCRIBING DWELLING**

**1. Sanctuary of God.** Even though it is common to identify the Church based on her architectural structure, this is not what the Bible identifies as being a Church. She is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16). The Church is portrayed as being a sanctuary, the dwelling of God. Individually, each believer is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). But in its corporate form, the Church is portrayed as being the sanctuary of God (1 Cor. 3:16, 17). This also means that God indwells the Church. She is his temple. In this aspect, the apostle Paul warns about the danger of desecrating the sanctuary of God (1 Cor. 3:17).

**2. House of God.** The Church is described as being the “House of God” (1 Tim. 3:15). This concept of the Church, as being the House of God, is derived from the Old Testament in which the people of God are portrayed as the house or family of God. The nation of Israel flourished from Jacob's family. This makes us see the importance of the church as a social institution. At the base of society is the family. A strong church is made up of equally strong families. The reverse is also true - weak families become weak churches. Behind many social problems is family breakdown. Paul's recommendation in 1 Timothy reveals that the Church is guided by a moral standard that should guide its behavior in society.

**3. The privilege of being Church.** In light of what we have studied in this lesson, we can make some considerations. First, the Church of Christ is an institution made up of saved people who have a relationship with God and, therefore, are part of his flock. Second, the Church of Christ is an institution made up of saved people who exercise a priestly role before God before the world. And finally, the Church of Christ is an institution in which God dwells and lives. It is a privilege to be part of the Church of Christ!

## **CONCLUSION**

In this lesson, we have learned through biblical images what the Church is and how important she is. They are figures that help us understand the Church in both its institutional and functional aspects. Thus, these images help the believer to discover their place in the Church, the Body of Christ. This way, he can better cooperate in the perfect functioning of the local church.