

Sabbath School Lesson #6 – Images of Unity – 3-9 November 2018

Christ is not divided and would have us know that only in Him can we have true unity. Paul illustrates true unity by the image of a body with many parts yet one. “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also *is* Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12). The ‘one body’ spoken of here, the ‘image of unity,’ is achieved only by each individual being possessed by Christ.

In Christ we are God’s people. Israel were called the people of God; but His dealings with them abundantly prove, what the New Testament plainly declares, that only the faithful are really Israel, and no others were truly His people. The Lord sent word to Pharaoh, saying, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me.” Again He said, “Israel is My son, even My firstborn.” He also said He had seen the affliction of His people, and had come to deliver them, and to bring them into the land of Canaan. He did indeed deliver them out of Egypt, but of all the host that went out, only two were brought into the land of Canaan. The rest fell in the desert because of their unbelief. When they rebelled against God, they cut themselves off from being His people. Of many of them the Lord says, “I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not” (Hebrews 8:9). As says the text, when they refused to continue in His covenant, He regarded them not. To be the people of God in truth, we must have His law in our hearts.

“But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9). One of the most striking expressions in this verse is this: “a people for God’s own possession.” In the King James Version we have, “a peculiar people,” and alternate readings include “a purchased people” or “people acquired.” All these different expressions combined show us a wonderful picture of the true people of God.

Let us start with the alternate reading or rendering that says: “a purchased people.” God has purchased all mankind; but here reference is made to those who have ratified the purchase by delivering themselves up to Him. The price paid is His own life. The church of God “He hath purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). “Ye were redeemed not with corruptible things, with silver and gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with precious blood as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19). Here we have the fact of the purchase, and the statement of the price paid.

When one purchases a piece of property, it is in order that he may possess it. One often buys an estate some time before possession is given. If no one is in possession of an estate, the property runs down; and this will also be the case when the one in possession is careless. If you see a portion of a vast estate yet unclaimed and running wild, you know that the owner has not yet taken actual possession of it, so as to bring it under cultivation.

Thus we see that possession always means more than mere ownership. It means occupying. The real possessor of an inheritance occupies it. So God has purchased us in order that He might possess us – dwell in us. “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). The temple is God’s dwelling-place, and He has purchased our bodies as His temples, in order that He might take possession of them, and live in them; as it is written: “Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said. I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (2 Corinthians 6:16). If God is thus out from our bodies, is He deprived of His possession.

Sad to say, absolute and complete possession by the Lord is so rare a thing that in order to illustrate it, so that people may understand how real a thing it ought to be, we must refer to the opposite state, which is far more common, namely, possession of a devil. Everybody knows well what is indicated when one is said to be possession of a devil. The unfortunate person is known to be controlled by a stronger power, so that he is not master of his own movements or will. In the Gospels we have the record of many such cases. For instance, in Mark 5:2-5 we read of “a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains; because that he had been often bound with

fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces; neither could any man tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.” Again in Mark 9:17-22 we read of a child possessed by the devil, of which the father said: “Wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him; and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away;” “and oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him.” In both these cases we see that the evil spirit had complete control of the person whom it possessed; that is, so far as the person himself was concerned, for God had kept the devil, who is the destroyer, from killing them. When Satan, the adversary, possesses one he always seeks to ruin, to kill and destroy. The temple is defiled, and the property always runs down, under his management. But the cases cited show what is meant by a people who are possessed: that they act and think according to the will of the one possessing them. But God is life and light. He creates and builds up and preserves. Whereas Satan usurps possession, for the purpose of defacing and destroying, God takes possession – but only with the person’s free consent – to make him perfect and complete; and His possession is to be just as entire as Satan’s, only His control is to be as much greater as His power is greater than that of Satan.

Although in the adult man it is rare to find a case of complete possession by the Lord, we may learn how it ought to be if we take him at his earliest state, in his innocence. The one hundred and thirtieth Psalm presents a picture of complete possession, and in verse 13 we read: “Thou hast possessed my reins; Thou hast knit me together in my mother’s womb.” Then the Psalmist, recognising that it was God that formed him in the womb, continues: “I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are Thy works and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in Thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them” (Psalms 139:14-16).

If one will examine by ultrasound on video screen movements and growth of unorganised cell, which is but a tiny homogeneous mass, with no organs of any kind, yet carries on all the essential operations of nature common to the highest animals and even man, some idea may be gained of how God possesses one before birth. We see God at work, as it were; for we know that the tiny bit of protoplasm has no power in itself to work. We cannot deceive ourselves about it, as we do about ourselves. Even so the unborn child has absolutely no power or will; it is formed by the working of God in it; it is completely possessed by God.

Now just what God does for the unborn child, without its knowledge or consent, He should be allowed to do for the fully formed child or man, with his full knowledge and consent. As the unborn child, with its unperfect members, involuntarily yields to the Lord’s working, so the man, with his complete members, ought voluntarily to yield: “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Romans 6:12-13). Here is complete possession by the Lord.

Is not such a thing reasonable and possible? It is certainly our “reasonable service,” and everybody who believes that God is more powerful than Satan, must admit that it is possible. Certainly if Satan can move at his will those who yield themselves to him, God can work and act and think according to His own will in those who are completely yielded to Him.

A people so yielded and so possessed would be indeed “a peculiar people,” separated by the presence of God from all the rest of mankind. Thus they would be true witnesses for God, even as Christ was, who was but the instrument of God’s mind – the form through which God chose to reconcile man to Himself – “To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19). So we are purchased and possessed, in order that we may “show forth” the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9). Think of being an instrument to reveal the glory and perfection of God! What a glorious state! All have been purchased; who will be possessed?