

LESSON 4



NATURE OF THE CHURCH

Scripture Texts: Ephesians 5:24-27; 1 John 3:9; 1 John 5:1-4; John 17:14-16; Ephesians 4:11-12

We have learned that the Church of God is a divine church, built and ruled by God. It is different from all other organizations. What is its nature? Some of the qualities that make up the nature of the church are these: It is subject to Christ, pure, holy, glorious, without spot or wrinkle, full of love, obedient, sinless, overcoming, righteous, full of faith, believing in Jesus as the Son of God, Spirit-filled, and it has one name. Its members are pilgrims who are witnesses unto Jesus Christ and thus are the light of the world.

MEMORY VERSE: *"And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them"*

John 17:26

No Spot or Wrinkle

Ephesians 5:24-27 **As the church is subject unto Christ.** The church has one center of affection—Jesus Christ. It exists to exalt Him. The church is the bride of Christ (see verse 32) and is subject to Him. They love Him because **He loved the church, and gave himself for it.** He died to prepare it as a bride for Himself. He died to **sanctify and cleanse** the church—to take away their sin and set them apart for Himself. Literal water cannot wash away spiritual filth, but it is used figuratively here of the blood of Christ, which does wash away sin when we obey His Word in repentance and belief. This is what makes the church fit for Christ. He is preparing **a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing . . . holy and without blemish.** God never would receive an offering or sacrifice that was blemished. Sin blemishes and is left outside the church.

First John 3:9 **Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin.** Being born of God is the only way anyone can meet so high a standard. Spiritual birth is the only way into the church. The seed of God—His life and nature—in the reborn one keeps him from sinning. Thus, it is the nature of the church to have a desire and purpose to live holy. The life of God and sin **CANNOT** remain in the heart at the same time. We find that purity and beauty are in the nature of the church.

A Service of Love

First John 5:1-4 Those born of God believe **that Jesus is the Christ.** To truly believe this in one's heart—not head only—causes one to surrender to God and to open the heart to Him. This gives power to overcome the world, fleshly tendencies, and sin. If overcoming is not present, then the belief is not genuine or active.

Saints love both God and other saints (enemies also). The Church of God has love for all. **He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love** (1 John 4:8). This love from God brings obedience to His commandments. Saints do right because they love to. **His commandments are not grievous.** When one begins to complain or comment that the standard is too high, or that God does not expect us to love as His Word teaches, you can be sure

there is something wrong with his love for God. A cold love will cause one to grieve over what God has asked of him. Sincere love gives saints a zeal to do all that God asks, so we see love is in the nature of the church.

In the World, Not of the World

John 17:14-16 People in the Church of God are strangers and pilgrims (1 Peter 2:11). This world is not their home because they are **not of the world**. Saints are citizens of Heaven, traveling here on this earth on their way to a heavenly country. Every person is either a stranger to the world or a stranger to God.

While saints are not of this world, still Jesus has sent them into the world to carry on His work. Jesus came as a light into a sin-darkened world (John 1:4-5). Now He is in the hearts of His church and must shine out through them if the world is to have the light of the Gospel (Matthew 5:14). It is the nature of the church to be a peculiar people, zealous of good works (Titus 2:14).

A Perfect People

Ephesians 4:11-12 Much of what we see that is called the church does not fit this pattern. Much that is called the church is not the church, but an imitation of it. It is built on falsehood and the work of error. The true church, being a living, growing organism, is not finished and standing still. It has in it newborn spiritual babes. It has its weak and immature members. It is because the church needs perfecting and maturing that God has placed in it spiritual gifts for **perfecting of the saints** . . . (a deeper study into this chain of thought will be in a later lesson). Also there are those who start to serve the Lord, then fall back into sin. These are no longer in the church but are sometimes counted by others to be so. While the divine nature of the church is not so plainly evident to the world in an immature Christian, still it partakes of the same quality in all.

Light ranks responsibility. A young Christian will be perfect walking in less light than one who has received more light. Each of us is responsible only for the light that has been given to him by the Holy Spirit. Saints are not, and will never be, perfect angels. Obedience to all of God's Word that we know makes us perfect men. This is the perfection God speaks of in His Word. Wherever you see the marks of Christ in human lives you are looking at part of the Church of God.

The fact that some congregations use the name Church of God need not confuse us. Using the name does not make a group a true Church of God, but a true Church of God should have His name. Any church a sinner can join and remain a sinner is not the Church of God (2 Timothy 2:19). Yet God sets people together in congregations, local churches. Wherever we see a group of saints with Spirit-led leaders committed alone to Christ and His truth, resting their membership only in their relationship with God, there we see a visible Church of God. Here we see the perfect nature of the church.

JUST A THOUGHT

**A good place to find a helping hand
is at the end of your arm.**