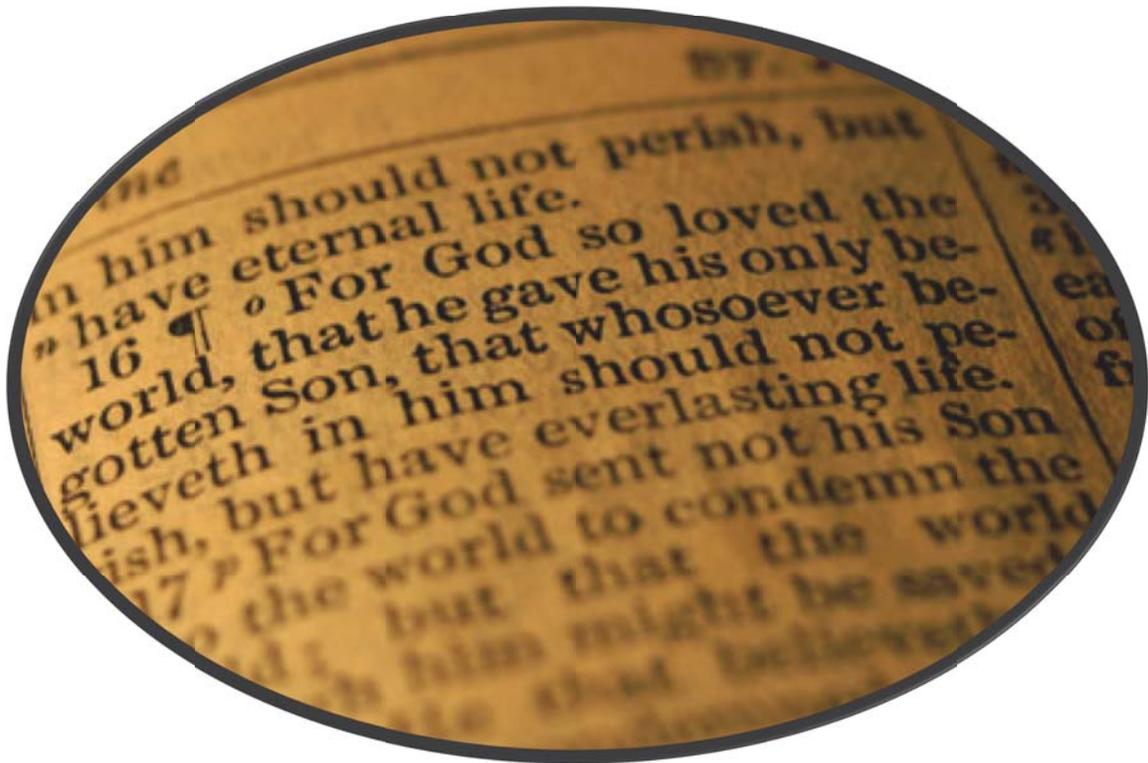


THE HEART OF GOD

COVENANT LIFE



T. M. Moore

A Scriptorium Study

And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets,

He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Luke 24.27

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Heart of God: Covenant Life
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Introduction to *Covenant Life*

The epistles of the New Testament were written to churches and individuals scattered around the world of the Roman Empire. In them we discover what the first church master builders considered to be important – both for believing the faith, as well as for living it faithfully unto the Lord.

The early churches faced many threats and trials, as well as many opportunities for glorifying God in their communities. In the excerpts selected for this study, we'll get a glimpse into life in the covenant communities of the early church, so that we might learn from them what our own lives as the people of God should look like today.

The Heart of God studies provide a road map through the Scriptures, unfolding key unifying threads and following the development of those matters closest to the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ, from Genesis to Revelation. Through all our study we'll see how the Scriptures lead us to Jesus, and how He, in turn, brings into the presence of our heavenly Father and His Kingdom. There, as we encounter God and His glory, the Spirit can transform us increasingly in to the very image of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We're pleased to provide *Scriptorium* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity with the Lord.

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1 Doctrinal Foundations

Read and meditate on Romans 4, Galatians 3 and 4, and Ephesians 2 and 3.

The new covenant communities of the New Testament were firmly grounded in the covenant and Scriptures of Israel. Foundational to life in these churches were the essential doctrines of the faith, especially as expounded by the Apostle Paul.

For reflection

1. Read through the assigned chapters in one sitting. As you do, note the ways Paul grounds his teaching, and that of the new covenant, in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. What especially stands out to you from this perspective?
2. How did Paul understand the relationship between the old covenant and the new? Were they totally distinct from one another? Did they possess any common threads?
3. In Paul's thinking, what place does the Church have in the new covenant? What is the Church, and what makes it so important for realizing the promises of God?
4. How does Paul understand the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church? Can there even *be* a church apart from the Holy Spirit? Explain.
5. How did Paul understand the relationship between faith, the Holy Spirit, the promises of God, and life in the new covenant? See if you can explain this in a single sentence.

Summary

The Holy Spirit gives birth to new believers and builds the Church as a dwelling place of God. We enter new life by grace through faith, and find our place as members in the Body of Jesus Christ, where, by the Spirit, we take up the ongoing work of Christ and His Kingdom. What can we learn from Abraham (Rom. 4) about living toward the old covenant promises of God?

Closing Prayer

How can a young man cleanse his way?
By taking heed according to Your word.
With my whole heart I have sought You;
Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!
Your word I have hidden in my heart,
That I might not sin against You.
Blessed *are* You, O LORD!
Teach me Your statutes.
With my lips I have declared
All the judgments of Your mouth.
I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies,
As much as in all riches.
I will meditate on Your precepts,
And contemplate Your ways.
I will delight myself in Your statutes;
I will not forget Your word.

Psalm 119.9-16

2 The Church

Read and meditate on 1 Corinthians 2 and 3, 1 Peter 2, and 1 John 3.

The Church is the focal point of the ongoing work of Christ, as we saw in the book of Acts. The local church is a sign and outpost of the Kingdom of God. We need to make sure we understand the nature and purpose of the church, and our place in it as members of Christ's Body.

For reflection

1. Read each of the assigned chapters in a single sitting. What is the church, and how does it come into being? What images do the apostles use to guide our thinking about what a church should be?
2. The apostles considered it important that members of churches should strive to grow in the Lord. How do you see that in these chapters? What's the difference between one who is *not* growing in the Lord and one who *is*?
3. How can you see that the Church brings to full and complete expression the Old Testament idea of a people created for God's glory (cf. Heb. 12.18-24)? What does this suggest about how we as church members should read the *Old* Testament images and stories of Israel and Jerusalem? What lessons, or what visions of what churches should be, do these Old Testament images and stories provide?
4. What distinguishes – or should distinguish – the Church from the rest of the world? What should a local church *look like* in its community?
5. What are the role of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God in helping local churches to realize their full potential as signs and outposts of the Kingdom of God?

Summary

Churches are comprised of people who have come to faith in Jesus Christ and are indwelled by the Holy Spirit of God. They are priests and kings unto the Lord, called to grow in Him and to carry on the work He began in that first generation of believers in the book of Acts. Does this describe your church? In what ways?

Closing Prayer

Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised
In the city of our God,
In His holy mountain.
Beautiful in elevation,
The joy of the whole earth,
Is Mount Zion *on* the sides of the north,
The city of the great King.
God *is* in her palaces;
He is known as her refuge.
For behold, the kings assembled,
They passed by together.
They saw *it*, *and* so they marveled;
They were troubled, they hastened away.
Fear took hold of them there,
And pain, as of a woman in birth pangs,
As when You break the ships of Tarshish

With an east wind.
As we have heard,
So we have seen
In the city of the LORD of hosts,
In the city of our God:
God will establish it forever.
Selah
We have thought, O God, on Your lovingkindness,
In the midst of Your temple.
According to Your name, O God,
So is Your praise to the ends of the earth;
Your right hand is full of righteousness.
Let Mount Zion rejoice,
Let the daughters of Judah be glad,
Because of Your judgments.

Psalm 48.1-11

3 Relationships in the Church

Read and meditate on 1 Corinthians 12 and 13, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, Romans 12 and 14, and 1 John 4.

The Church is the *community* of God's covenant people. Local churches forge community life by encouraging strong relationships. But churches should also be in relationship with one another, as part of the larger Body of Christ, as well as with the Church elsewhere. By our oneness – maintained through Spirit-filled relationships (Eph. 4.3) – we convince the world that Jesus has come with salvation (Jn. 17.21).

For reflection

1. Read the assigned chapters in a single sitting. It's clear that love is the foundation for all relationships within the covenant community. What is love? How can we know when we are loving as the Lord intends? Can we say that love is the *currency* of the divine economy within the Kingdom of God? Explain.
2. What are the great obstacles to sustaining loving relationships in a local church? Paul says we have to work hard at maintaining love in the community (Eph. 4.3). What does that require of you?
3. Is it obvious to the people in your community that all the churches in your community are part of one Body, one loving new covenant communion? Why or why not?
4. Give some examples from your own church showing how the gifts of the Spirit work together for the health of the church. Can you see any areas where this could be improved?
5. What are some ways your church might work harder to be an answer to Jesus' prayer in John 17.21? What might you do locally? Denominationally? With a worldwide focus? *Should* your church be working for unity like this?

Summary

The Church, being the dwelling place of the Spirit of God, should naturally express the love of Christ in all its relations – within the local church, between churches in a community, and with the Church worldwide. Why don't we see more evidence that the Church is the one Body of Christ, knitted together by the Spirit in bonds of peace and love?

Closing Prayer

Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is*
For brethren to dwell together in unity!
It is like the precious oil upon the head,
Running down on the beard,
The beard of Aaron,
Running down on the edge of his garments.
It is like the dew of Hermon,
Descending upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the LORD commanded the blessing—
Life forevermore.

Psalm 133

4 The Work of the Church

Read and meditate on Ephesians 4, 2 Corinthians 10, 1 Timothy 3-5, and James 1.

As a community of diverse, Spirit-filled members, local churches have work to do – the ongoing work of Christ and His Kingdom.

For reflection

1. Read the assigned chapters in a single sitting. How would you summarize the work of the local church? Put another way, how can you tell when a local church is *working* as it should?
2. What is the role of pastors, elders, and deacons in making sure a church is working as it should?
3. What are some examples of the work of ministry for which the “saints” in a local church are to be equipped (Eph. 4.11, 12)? Taking Paul’s idea of a “sphere” of influence – a Personal Mission Field – as the *place* where those works should be pursued (2 Cor. 10.13-18), for which works of ministry do *you* need equipping?
4. Churches and their members should be conspicuous within the larger community for their good works. According to James, what is the role of the Law of God in helping us to understand *which* good works we should do (cf. Eph. 2.10; Rom. 7.12)? Is it a good idea for us to neglect equipping in the Law of God? Explain.
5. Working churches grow as members are equipped for ministry within their own Personal Mission Fields. This is the responsibility of pastors and teachers, to make sure *every member of the local church* is equipped for the ongoing work of Christ. As this happens, churches grow strong in unity and maturity. How would you explain the ideas of unity and maturity Paul outlines in Ephesians 4.13-16?

Summary

A local church is a Spirit-driven, Spirit-empowered, spiritual machine, made up of all kinds of moving parts, which channels the energy of God’s Spirit into fruitful work in its community – work which advances the righteousness, peace, and joy of the Holy Spirit, which is the Kingdom of God (Rom. 14.17, 18). How does your church measure its effectiveness as a work-producing spiritual machine?

Closing Prayer

God stands in the congregation of the mighty;
He judges among the gods.
How long will you judge unjustly,
And show partiality to the wicked?
Selah
Defend the poor and fatherless;
Do justice to the afflicted and needy.
Deliver the poor and needy;
Free *them* from the hand of the wicked.
They do not know, nor do they understand;
They walk about in darkness;
All the foundations of the earth are unstable.
I said, “You *are* gods,
And all of you are children of the Most High.

But you shall die like men,
And fall like one of the princes.”
Arise, O God, judge the earth;
For You shall inherit all nations.

Psalm 82

5 Parameters for Our Work

Read and meditate on Hebrews 11, Ephesians 6, Colossians 1 and 3, and 2 Peter 3.

We will be more fruitful and effective in our work as we pursue it within the true parameters of our Kingdom-and-glory calling (1 Thess. 2.12). We have continuity with the past and expectations for the future that we need to keep in mind and work within as we carry on the ongoing work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

For reflection

1. Read the assigned chapters in a single sitting. Why is it important that we keep in mind the *heritage* which is ours as members of God's covenant people? Is it a good idea to be ignorant of our forebears in the faith? Why or why not?
2. How do these chapters describe the *spiritual* environment in which we pursue the ongoing work of the Lord (Eph. 6, Col. 3)? How does this manifest itself? How should we prepare to overcome the obstacles posed by this parameter of our work? How can we maximize the *vision* of this parameter to our advantage?
3. Meditate on 1 Chronicles 12.32. Looking at 1 Peter 3, in what sense or way are all believers called to be "sons of Issachar" in our generation?
4. Paul said (Col. 1.19-29) that he expected his readers to grow to completeness in Jesus Christ. How can we take Jesus and His Kingdom as the *primary parameter* for our walk with and work for the Lord? How do you do this in your own life?
5. Our covenant past, the spiritual world, the present realities of life in this world, and the world which is to come: These are the parameters within which we are called to *be* witnesses for Christ and *do* the good works He has prepared for us as members of His new covenant community. Meditate on Ephesians 5.15-21. How should you view the *time* of your life, each week, every day?

Summary

As members of the Body of Christ, we exist in Him, and He is pursuing His ongoing work of Kingdom progress *by* His Word and Spirit *in* His Church, and *through* local churches and their members around the world. According to Ephesians 5.15-17, if we are not making the most of our time for the work of Christ and His Kingdom, what happens to our time?

Closing Prayer

Those who trust in the LORD
Are like Mount Zion,
Which cannot be moved, *but* abides forever.
As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
So the LORD surrounds His people
From this time forth and forever.
For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest
On the land allotted to the righteous,
Lest the righteous reach out their hands to iniquity.
Do good, O LORD, to *those who are* good,
And to *those who are* upright in their hearts.
As for such as turn aside to their crooked ways,
The LORD shall lead them away

With the workers of iniquity.
Peace *be* upon Israel!

Psalm 125

6 Threats

Read and meditate on Romans 1.18-32, James 4, 1 Timothy 4, 2 Timothy 3, Titus 1, Jude, and 1 Peter 5.

The covenant community exists within a hostile environment, both spiritually and temporally. Spiritual forces of wickedness are arrayed against us, and the culture is dominated by people who reject the knowledge of God and prefer the Lie of personal autonomy and themselves as their own god. We need to be ever mindful of the threats to our wellbeing these forces represent.

For reflection

1. Read these chapters in a single sitting. Why does Paul say that those who reject the knowledge of God have chosen the Lie instead? What is the result of this? What kind of conditions does this create in society and culture, and why is it important that churches understand this?
2. What makes false doctrine false? How can we know when someone is teaching false doctrine? Why does this constitute a threat to the ongoing work of Christ? How should the shepherds of a local church work to prepare the Lord's flocks for recognizing and resisting false doctrine?
3. What role does the Word of God have in preparing us to recognize and resist the various threats that might come our way? Why is it important that *every member* of a local church be grounded and growing in the Word of God?
4. Meditate on Romans 12.21. What does Paul mean by "overcome with evil"? How does that happen? What can believers do to help one another overcome evil with good?
5. What is the role of pastors, elders, shepherds, and other church leaders in guarding local churches from these and other threats? Is there a role for church discipline in helping local churches overcome evil with good in their midst? Explain.

Summary

We do not pursue the ongoing work of Christ in a favorable or even a neutral environment. The world opposes the truth of God, and spiritual forces of wickedness seek our downfall. Weakness and decay enters a local church through a weak member or one who is not being vigilant toward such threats as we have seen in this lesson. What can you do to make sure *you* are not the cause of corruption or weakness entering your church?

Closing Prayer

Help us, O God of our salvation,
For the glory of Your name;
And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins,
For Your name's sake!
Why should the nations say,
"Where *is* their God?"
Let there be known among the nations in our sight
The avenging of the blood of Your servants *which has been* shed.
Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You;
According to the greatness of Your power
Preserve those who are appointed to die;
And return to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom

Their reproach with which they have reproached You, O Lord.
So we, Your people and sheep of Your pasture,
Will give You thanks forever;
We will show forth Your praise to all generations.

Psalm 79.9-13

7 Last Words of the Master Builders

Read and meditate on James 5, 2 Timothy 4, 2 Peter 1, 2 John, and Hebrews 13.

The apostles were the master builders of the Church. They laid the foundations and began to put up the walls of the Lord's temple, built upon the Cornerstone which is Jesus Christ. And they have left wise and urgent words to encourage us to carry on their work in the ongoing work of the Lord and His Kingdom.

For reflection

1. Read the assigned passages in a single sitting. What strikes you as the most important things these master builders want us to remember or do?
2. In what ways do the unifying threads of revelation – God's glory, God's people, God's work of redemption – appear in these "last words"?
3. From each of these chapters, see if you can identify *one word* that captures the apostle's message to you. Put all those words together into a single sentence, then pray that sentence back to the Lord.
4. Meditate on Hebrews 10.24. What can you do to encourage your fellow believers in these last words of the master builders?
5. What can you do to ensure that these *last words* are part of your *first thing* every day?

Summary

Jesus' last words to us promised us power to *be witnesses* for Him (Acts 1.8). In a very real sense, the last words of the Church's master builders are simply an elaboration on that command. From what we have seen in this study about life in God's covenant community, what does it mean for you to *be* a witness for Jesus Christ?

Closing Prayer

He shall have dominion also from sea to sea,
And from the River to the ends of the earth.
Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before Him,
And His enemies will lick the dust.
The kings of Tarshish and of the isles
Will bring presents;
The kings of Sheba and Seba
Will offer gifts.
Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him;
All nations shall serve Him.
For He will deliver the needy when he cries,
The poor also, and *him* who has no helper.
He will spare the poor and needy,
And will save the souls of the needy.
He will redeem their life from oppression and violence;
And precious shall be their blood in His sight.
And He shall live;
And the gold of Sheba will be given to Him;
Prayer also will be made for Him continually,
And daily He shall be praised.

There will be an abundance of grain in the earth,
On the top of the mountains;
Its fruit shall wave like Lebanon;
And *those* of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.
His name shall endure forever;
His name shall continue as long as the sun.
And men shall be blessed in Him;
All nations shall call Him blessed.
Blessed *be* the LORD God, the God of Israel,
Who only does wondrous things!
And blessed *be* His glorious name forever!
And let the whole earth be filled *with* His glory.
Amen and Amen.
The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.

Psalm 72.8-20

For reflection or discussion

1. What is the church's purpose? Why is it here? What should it be doing? How can we know when churches are working as the Lord intends?
2. What should local church leaders do to help make sure their church is getting the maximum benefit of the Holy Spirit's presence and power?
3. How can a local church know when its members are being equipped for works of ministry?
4. How can we prepare in our churches to recognize and overcome the threats that can distract or divert us from the ongoing work of Christ?
5. What are the most important lessons for you from this brief survey of covenant life?

Glory to Glory

We are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ *from* the glory we encounter in God's Word *to* the way we live for His glory in the world (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 1 Cor. 10.31).

What have you encountered *of* God's glory in our readings and meditations in this week's studies? That is, how has He shown Himself *to* you more clearly?

How do you expect this *experience* of God's glory to help you *live more consistently for* His glory in the daily details of your life?

What have you learned about yourself from this week's study to help you in knowing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom? To equip you for serving Christ in your [Personal Mission Field](#)?

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Thank you.