

Isaiah 43; Lord's Day 21

FAITH CONCERNING THE GATHERING OF THE CHURCH

- I. The fact.
 - A. Not man, but the Son of God gathers (builds), defends, and preserves the church as it is manifested on earth.
 1. The Lord Jesus added daily to the church (Acts 2:47); He is the Shepherd and He is the Door (John 10:14,7,9).
 2. Election is the Father giving us to Christ and Jesus' death determines the membership of the church.
 - B. It must be a divine work, not human: a wonder of grace.
 - C. History shows how the Son of God gathered His Church.
 1. Early in history (2500 years) the church had the form of families (including children and servants) under fathers.
 2. Later the nation of Israel was constituted the visible church (for 1500 years), limited to one nation almost exclusively.
 3. In the New Dispensation the church matured to a distinct existence and to a universal existence (2000 years).
- II. The manner in which the Church is gathered: by God's Word and Spirit, and in the line of generations.
 - A. The Shepherd, gathers and preserves by calling His people internally and efficaciously.
 1. The exalted Son of God calls externally through the means of the external preaching of the Word.
 2. What makes the external call to be internal and efficacious is His Spirit.
 - B. Christ gathers and preserves the one church, the spiritual seed of Abraham (Rom. 4:11,12; Gal. 3:7-9).
 1. Only the children of the promise are counted for the seed, not the children of the flesh (Rom. 9:6).
 2. He usually gathers in the line of generations, the natural or creative way (Gen. 17:7; Isa. 43:5; Acts 2:39; Deut. 6:6-8).
 - C. Also the church is identified as the pillar and ground of the truth, which defends and preserves the members (I Tim. 3:15).
- III. God graciously assures His children of their membership so they say, "I am and forever shall remember a member."
 - A. This assurance is not always equally present (Canon I-16; V-11).
 1. The reasons for a lack of assurance.
 2. The presence of doubt does not alter our unchangeable membership in Christ's body (Canons V-6,7).
 - B. Assurance springs from faith in God's promises and from the testimony of the Spirit witnessing with our spirit (Canons V-10).
 1. The heavenly Father does not leave His adopted children wondering about their status with Him (Canons V-11).
 2. Assurance is maintained through the means of grace and through sanctification (II Thess. 2:13).