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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this short booklet is to provide an outline of Bible teaching on the glorious subject of the Church, which is the Body of Christ for the benefit of a wide range of Christian readers. It is an area of divine truth which gained fresh focus from Bible teachers of the 19th century in what became known as Brethren Assemblies, but the need has been felt to spell it out again because of its enduring beauty and importance for those who wish to serve God according to His Word. The aim has been brevity, clarity and scriptural support rather than an exhaustive treatise, and we have tried to include key practical implications.

The first section entitled “I Will Build My Church” deals with what this Church is; then we explore in “The Mystery of the Christ” the special revelation of it in the writings of the apostle Paul. There follows in “The Church the Body and Churches of God” an explanation of how it relates to what are called Churches of God in the New Testament. In “The Practical Implications of the Church the Body Truth” there is an account of lessons to be learned and applied, and finally in “A Glorious Vision”
there is an attempt to pass on a more pictorial warmth and understanding. The “Doxology” is to lift us out of ourselves and into the sunlit uplands of God’s wonderful and glorious purposes in Christ.
I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH

The first explicit reference to this subject in the Bible is found in Matthew chapter 16:18: “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” This is a clear announcement by the Lord Jesus Christ to His apostle Peter in the presence of other disciples, and from it we learn that the builder of this Church is the Lord Himself and that it cannot be damaged, even by Satan himself or any of his minions. The designation “My church” leads us to identify it with the church referred to in Ephesians 1:22,23 as “the church which is his body” and in Colossians 1:18 as “the body, the church.” To determine what or who is the rock on which this church is built, we consider a number of Bible passages:

- “Ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock, his work is perfect” (Deut.32:3,4).
- “Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any” (Isa.44:8).
- “For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ” (1 Cor.10:4).
THE CHURCH, WHICH IS THE BODY OF CHRIST

These and many other similar scriptures enable us to recognize “the Rock” as a title of God and Christ and we therefore understand that Christ Himself is the foundation on which the Church which is His Body is built. We cannot support an alternative suggestion based on a verbal play on the name Peter and the meaning of the Greek word petros – a stone or piece of rock. The word the Lord uses for the foundation of the church is petra which means a mass of rock, and we will surely see as we pursue a scriptural study of this church how unacceptable would be the notion of Peter as the foundation of it.

WHO ARE IN THIS CHURCH AND HOW AND WHEN DO THEY BECOME MEMBERS OF IT?

The means by which a person becomes a member is described in 1 Corinthians 12:13: “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ... and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” From this we learn that baptism in the Spirit of God brings a person into the Church, the Body of Christ. We understand from the words of John the Baptist in Matthew 3:11, “he who is coming after me is mightier than I ... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit ...” that the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit is Christ Himself, and this baptism He spoke about to His disciples after His resurrection when he said to them in Acts 1:5 “you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” In their case we can see that this was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost as described in Acts chapter 2, and this was also the fulfilment of the promise the Lord made to His apostles in the upper room at Jerusalem on the night before His death: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth” (Jn 14:16,17).
This permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit in an individual is also described as a seal or guarantee in Ephesians 1:13: “In him [Christ] you also, when you heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”

And from all these verses we conclude that the members of the Church the Body are those who have believed in Christ and found salvation in Him, and that in doing so they were thereupon baptized by Christ in the Holy Spirit into the Church which is His Body.

WHEN DID THE BUILDING OF THIS CHURCH COMMENCE, AND WHEN WILL IT BE COMPLETE?

Since the addition of members to the Body of Christ involves baptism in the Spirit and the indwelling of the Spirit in the believer, we understand that the building commenced after the Lord’s death and resurrection on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit of God was given in fulfilment of the Lord’s promise: “if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you” (Jn 16:7). The arrival of the Holy Spirit in this way is described in Acts chapter 2.

The Lord made another wonderful “if I go” promise in the upper room at Jerusalem on the night before His death: “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (Jn 14:3). This is an assurance of His personal return for all believers in Him, both those who by then have died and those who then are living in this world.
as described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17: “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.”

Note the words “dead in Christ.” The term “in Christ” is used in the New Testament scriptures to identify those who are believers in Christ, members of the Church which is His Body, and so we understand that His coming described in 1 Thessalonians 4 marks the completion of the building of the Church which is His Body. Believers in Christ who are alive today are waiting for that glorious, promised event and it follows from what we have said that the Church which is Christ’s Body is still incomplete and many of its existing members are no longer living on this earth.

FUNDAMENTAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE BODY IMAGERY

Clearly baptism in the Holy Spirit and addition to the Church the Body of Christ are irreversible spiritual transactions involved in receiving salvation through faith in Christ. Our knowledge of them comes from divine revelation as expressed in the Scriptures, but they are a very real and exceedingly precious experience with amazing implications. Those who have received Christ as Saviour are united with Him in a relationship which is so close and integral that it is illustrated by the head and members of a living human body. They have become part of Him for ever. This is the message of 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 and Colossians 2:19.
Another illustration of this wonderful relationship is found in Ephesians chapter 5: “For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour” (v.23). Here the analogy is of bridegroom and bride, and here also we are shown the divine motivation behind this marvellous union: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (v.25).

The mental image this gives of the glorious day of the presentation of the completed church to Christ is of the utterly devoted lover gazing at his loved one and so delighted with her beauty that there is nothing about her that he would wish to change! In passing we note that this relationship is presented as the model for the marriages of Christians.

As we think of the greatness of Christ’s love for His Church, and the infinite price that He paid to make her fit to be His bride, we are reminded of another description of her: “the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph.1:22,23). What can this mean? Surely Christ’s Deity implies that He is complete in Himself? But “fullness” means “complement,” or what is required to render something or someone full or complete. We learn from this scripture that Christ Himself feels incomplete without His Church. Such is His love for those He has redeemed!
THE MYSTERY OF THE CHRIST

The revelation of this mystery was given in a special degree to Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, and we find its explanation in his inspired writings. We can almost feel how thrilled he was as we read his account of it:

“assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation ... When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit ... To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God” (Eph.3:2,3,4–5,8–9).

But first we should comment on the use of the word mystery. In English usage it normally denotes a situation about which
knowledge is very limited or non-existent. The Greek word translated ‘mystery’ in our Bibles is used by God to mean something that has been revealed which was previously hidden. God delights to make Himself known and He longs that people on earth will want to know Him. In the garden of Eden Satan sought to portray God as One who withholds knowledge and thus Eve was beguiled and turned away from the revelation that God had actually given. Terrible results for mankind followed from that early rejection of divine instruction.

WHAT IS THE MYSTERY OF THE CHRIST?

A direct answer to this question is found in Ephesians 3:6: “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”

In this statement the body refers to the Church, which is the Body of Christ and the key point is made that Gentiles (non-Jews) are fellow-heirs, fellow-members of the Body, and fellow-partakers of the promise with Jews who are also in Christ Jesus. Gentiles were strangers from the Old Testament covenants of the promise but Paul says, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one … and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross” (Eph.2:13,14,16).

Between Jew and Gentile stood the barrier of “the law of commandments expressed in ordinances” (Eph.2:15) but this has been abolished by the Cross of Christ. It is not only that the Gentile has been brought to where the Jew was in the purposes of God, but
rather that both have been brought from where they were to be reconciled in one Body to God through the Cross, for both were estranged from Him. The Jew, through the gospel separated from Judaism, and the Gentile by the same means brought out from their own religious or non-religious background, are both through the Cross, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, incorporated into the one Body with Christ as their glorious Head. We can see from the New Testament scriptures what an important message this was for the disciples of Christ in the first century A.D. as their minds and hearts expanded to receive the wonderful gospel of Christ in its world-wide appeal and application.

THE CHRIST

It is delightful to notice that the intimate association of Christ and His Church is given the title “The Christ.” We look again at 1 Corinthians 12:12 in the original Greek and find that the definite article is present: “all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with the Christ.” And similarly in Ephesians 3:4: “the mystery of the Christ.” Thus the members of His Church are transcendentally privileged to bear His very name.

Helped by the beautiful analogy of bridegroom and bride in Ephesians chapter 5, this takes us back to the divine statement about Adam and Eve in Genesis 5:2: “Male and female created he them .... and called their name Adam in the day when they were created” (RV). In their union the title “Adam” was bestowed upon them both. Wonder of wonders that so it is with Christ and the Church which is His body!
HOW AND WHEN WAS THE MYSTERY OF THE CHRIST REVEALED?

Paul tells in Ephesians 3:9 of “the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God” and in Romans 16:25 of “the mystery that was kept secret for long ages.” From the beginning it was concealed from angels and men. Aspects of it were present but hidden in the Old Testament, for Paul also tells us in Romans 16:26 that the mystery is made known through the prophetic writings. For example, the narratives of Adam and Eve and of Isaac and Rebekah contain allegories of Christ and the Church which are only recognized by later revelation.

After the death and resurrection of Christ and the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, “the mystery of [the] Christ ... has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph.3:4,5), and in a special measure to Paul. Of the New Testament writers, Paul alone is privileged of God to expound it in the Bible. Through these holy men it was proclaimed in the Spirit to others so that the revelation could be “made known to all nations ... to bring about the obedience of faith” (Rom.16:26).

It was also to be “revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col.1:26,27). This scripture indicates the pleasure that God takes in revealing the mystery and also wonderfully assures us that Christ, through the Spirit, is in every member of His Body.

There is, however, yet another aspect of the revelation of the mystery which is referred to in Ephesians 3:10–11: “that through
the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord.” God is the Creator of all things and He determined from all eternity that the many facets of His wisdom would be displayed to the angelic orders through the Church which is the Body of Christ. The mightiest angels must surely contemplate in deep wonder this amazing union of Christ with redeemed sinners, and bow before the Creator whose mind conceived and determined such an outcome.

THE PRE-EMINENCE OF THE CHRIST

It is impossible to overstate the majesty and glory of Christ in all of this. In Ephesians 1:19–23 Paul piles up distinction upon distinction in his inspired description of the greatness of Christ. First His position: seated at God’s right hand in the heavenly places; then His power and authority: far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come; then His supremacy: all things put under His feet; and finally, perhaps most preciously of all to God and to Christ: Head over all things to the Church, which is His Body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

The letter of Paul to the Colossians has sometimes been described as the epistle of the Pre-eminent Christ, and in chapter 1:14–19 God’s beloved Son is set forth firstly as One who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, all things and persons, heavenly and earthly, created through Him and for Him; then His complete precedence and omnipotent control:
before all things and in Him all things hold together; and then as in Ephesians, the final and dearest aspect of His pre-eminence: Head of the Body, the Church, in which role He is seen as the beginning and the firstborn from the dead. It seems that among all the myriad distinctions that are rightly His, Headship of the Church is the most cherished.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE TRINITY

God the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world (1 Jn 4:14). The Father of glory has also raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places (Eph.1:22). And He has put all things in subjection under Christ’s feet and given Him to be Head over all things to the Church which is His Body (Eph.1:22). And it has been His pleasure to determine that in His beloved Son all the fullness of God should dwell (Col.1:19). And He has delivered all the members of the Body of Christ out of the domain of darkness and transferred them to the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col.1:13). And the Father has given the Holy Spirit, permanently to indwell them (Jn 14:16).

God the Son loves the Church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, so that He might present the Church to Himself in splendour, holy and without blemish. He is the Head of the Church and her Saviour (Eph.5:23–27).

God the Spirit is the One by whom the mystery of the Christ was revealed to the holy apostles and prophets of New Testament times (Eph.3:4,5). In the Spirit believers are baptized into the
Body of Christ (1 Cor.12:13). And the Spirit indwells all members of the Body of Christ for the purpose of ministering to them of Christ for their comfort, help, instruction and empowerment (Jn 16:13,14).
To eliminate possible confusion, it would perhaps be helpful at this stage to consider the use of the word “church” in the New Testament Scriptures. The Greek word translated as “church” in the English New Testament means a called-out congregation or gathering of people. Such people have heard a summons and they have responded by coming out from where they were and being together with one another and with the person who has called them. In the case of the Church which is the Body of Christ we have seen from the Scriptures that the members are people who have each personally heard the call of Christ in the gospel and have responded by faith in coming to Him for salvation and are united with Him in an eternal heavenly, spiritual union. The Church which is Christ’s Body transcends earthly time and place and is not a physically visible entity in this world.

But the word “church” is also used in the New Testament to describe companies of disciples of Christ, gathered together and serving Him together in specific places in this world. These are
called Churches of God. The earliest of these was the Church of God in Jerusalem, referred to by the apostle Paul when he speaks in 1 Corinthians 15:9 and Galatians 1:13 of how in former days “I persecuted the church of God.” We read about the formation of this church of God and its practices in Acts chapter 2. When the apostle Peter preached the Gospel to the Jews in Jerusalem, “those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (verses 41,42).

From this we learn the divinely appointed order that following salvation believers in Christ should become His disciples, be baptized in water and added to a church of God, in which they should continue devotedly in fellowship and collective service with the other disciples in the church.

Following the establishment of the Church of God in Jerusalem we read in the New Testament of how the preaching of the Gospel continued and spread so that other Churches of God came into being in many places in the ancient world dominated by the Roman Empire. Thus we find this word “church” used in the plural: “we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God” (1 Cor.11:16). In passing we note that this reference indicates the unity of doctrine and practice among the churches.

We can also see that many of the epistles in the New Testament were originally written to specific churches of God and that individual churches were distinguished by the name of the place where they met together, for example: “To the church of God that is in Corinth” (1 Cor.1:2). Note that in the Bible the Church which
is Christ’s Body is never referred to in the plural.

In this brief outline of the New Testament teaching about Churches of God, we also note that it is possible for a disciple to forfeit his or her place in a Church of God. For example, 1 Corinthians 5 deals with cases of serious sin which result in the sinning disciple being put away from the church. It is also possible for a Church of God to suffer damage by human agency. In speaking of his former life in Galatians 1:13, Paul says of the Church of God in Jerusalem: “I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it [made havoc of it – R.V.]” and writing to the Church of God in Corinth (1 Cor.3:17) he says: “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.”

In contrast we have already noted that it is not possible for a member of the Church the Body of Christ to forfeit his or her place in that Church because that is part of the inviolable salvation that Christ has accomplished. Nor is it possible for the Church which is Christ’s Body to suffer damage because He Himself ensures that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

These points have been made to clarify that the terms “Church which is Christ’s body” and “Church of God” cannot be synonymous. However, it is very important to recognize that it is God’s purpose that the wonderful unity of the Church which is the Body of Christ should be expressed and demonstrated in the teaching and practice of Churches of God. It is a fundamental principle of collective service rendered to God by His people under the New Covenant.
THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF CHURCH THE BODY TRUTH

THE PRACTICAL LESSONS FOR ASSEMBLY SERVICE

We have explained why the Church which is the Body of Christ is not another name for a Church of God or Churches of God. But in Paul’s first letter to the Church of God in Corinth he writes, “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (12:27). In the Greek original there is no definite article before the word translated “body,” so a literal rendering would be “you are body of Christ.” It is of course true that each individual in the Church of God in Corinth was a member of the Church which is Christ’s Body, but this statement would also convey that the Church in Corinth should be a practical manifestation of the characteristic unity of the Church which is Christ’s Body.

In the two letters of Paul to the Church of God in Corinth we find a great deal of important instruction about the proper functioning of Churches of God. Specifically, in chapters 11 to 14 of the first
letter we have teaching about the conduct of church meetings where the Apostle Paul addresses some of the failings of the Church in Corinth in this regard. In chapter 11 he deals with the meeting for the breaking of bread in remembrance of the Lord and in chapter 14 there is specific reference to meeting for prayer and ministry of the Word and singing of praise to God (see verses 14-16 and 26). These are the occasions when the Church in Corinth gathered together to serve God collectively.

Note the expressions in chapter 11; “when you come together” v.17, “when you come together as a church” v.18, “When you come together” v.20, “the church of God” v.22, “when you come together” vv.33,34 and in chapter 14: “builds up the church” v.4, “so that the church may be built up” v.5, “building up the church” v.12, “in church” v.19, “the whole church comes together” v.23, “When you come together” v.26, “keep silent in church” v.28, “as in all the churches” v.33, “keep silent in the churches” v.34, and “speak in church” v.35. These references make abundantly plain that this is teaching about the practicalities of collective service in the Church of God in Corinth and that it applies also to all the churches of God.

In the heart of this passage we have a very full account of healthy bodily function in chapter 12, emphasizing the togetherness and interdependence of the members and their fulfilment of a common purpose and united harmony in their operation. From this we learn, for example, that in the meetings of churches of God, the church acts together in an orderly way (14:40). In thanksgiving and prayer a brother, prompted by the Spirit of God, speaks aloud on behalf of the whole church, who acknowledge he has done so by everyone saying “amen” (14:16).
He is therefore instructed to consider his brothers and sisters in the Lord and speak in a way that they can understand and readily give their assent (14:9). Each must not be preoccupied with their own affairs or speaking only for oneself, but conscious of being together in the presence of the Lord and of their brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Then we come to the heart of the matter in chapter 13 where it is made clear that the underlying motivation of the whole service must be love. This is to be the passionate force that creates and maintains the unity. It is of course the love of Christ for His Church and the love of His members for Him and for one another that produces the beautiful oneness that is so pleasing to God. In this way a church of God should be a manifestation of the Church which is Christ’s Body.

But we understand from the New Testament scriptures that God desires that the unity of the Church which is Christ’s Body should be demonstrated on an even wider scale than in an individual church of God. As we read the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of Paul and Peter a clear pattern emerges of all the churches of God in the first century united together in fellowship with a fully shared understanding of the teaching of the Lord and united in the practice of it. This unity of churches was maintained by the operation of a united elderhood which came together before God to reach agreement on difficult issues, as prompted and led by the Spirit of God. This is seen in operation in Acts chapter 15 where the elders of the churches of God met together to resolve the questions about circumcision which would have caused disunity among the churches. See for example Acts 15:25 & 28: “it has seemed good to us, having come
to one accord” and “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden …”

See also what Paul writes to the Church of God in Corinth in his first letter, “This is my rule in all the churches” (4:17 and 7:17). The united elderhood is also evident in Peter’s first letter to the churches in five Roman provinces where he addresses the elders of these churches, “So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder …” (5:1). Obviously Peter was not an elder in any church in the five provinces, but he makes clear that he and they are together in a united elderhood.

With this background we can now trace the application to this wider unity of the glorious truth of the Church which is Christ’s Body in Romans chapter 12 verse 5, “so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” Here again, Paul was not in the Church of God in Rome, but his use of the pronoun “we” confirms that the unity of the Church which is Christ’s Body was to be demonstrated in the unity of the total fellowship of Churches of God. This is a divine principle of such importance that it was the subject of the Lord’s prayer to God His Father on the night before He went to Calvary: “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one” (Jn 17:20,21).

We believe that this prayer goes beyond the perfect heavenly spiritual unity of the Church which is Christ’s Body, for that is something that He Himself has accomplished, but it surely extends to the visible demonstration on earth of that unity in the collective existence and operation of Churches of God, which has a dependency on human responsibility, devotion and
faithfulness to the teaching of the Lord.

THE PRACTICAL LESSONS FOR INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOUR

Perhaps the best starting point for this contemplation is Paul’s reference to “the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” in Colossians 1:27. The implication for me is that where Christ goes, I go; what Christ says, I say; what Christ does, I do; I am to be a living replica of Christ in my thoughts and attitudes and words and deeds. The spiritual union with Christ as a member of the Church which is His Body is to have this effect on me – “Christ in you.” Paul writes to the Ephesians “until we all attain to … mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children” (4:13,14).

In Ephesus stood the magnificent temple of Diana, in which was displayed a lifeless image of the goddess which was alleged to have come down from heaven. In Ephesus Paul envisages the Temple of God, in which are people who are living and growing images of Christ who came down from heaven to save them!

Some of the most powerful lessons to be learned from this wonderful subject concern our relationships with our brothers and sisters in the Churches of God. Scriptures such as: “God has so composed the body ... that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together, if one member is honoured, all rejoice together” (1 Cor.12:24–26) vividly depict how caring and responsible we should be for one another. We all face difficult
times and trials in our lives and it is lovely when we are able to get help from brothers and sisters in the church, and more lovely when we are able to give it.

An illustration that has appealed to me relates to bodily pain. The sensation of pain has an important function; it alerts the body to potential damage by messages transmitted to the brain. If for any reason, such as failure of the nerves, the message is not transmitted, serious bodily damage can result. This is the reason why sufferers from leprosy incur repeated damage to limbs and extremities of their bodies which result in erosion of the flesh and tissue and bone. If my brother or sister suffers and I am unaware or insensitive and do nothing to help, I may find one sad day that they are no longer at my side as a partner in the service of the Lord.

SPIRITUAL ENABLING

The experience of the new birth, involving baptism in the Spirit into the Church which is Christ’s Body, marks the beginning of spiritual life for the redeemed sinner. From that point the believer is able to engage in spiritual service that is acceptable to God. This is referred to in scriptures such as Romans 12:1,2: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (We note that the word translated here as “worship” is normally translated as “service,” and it is of course true that worship of God is the highest form of spiritual service.)
Now spiritual discernment can only be obtained, and spiritual service acceptable to God can only be accomplished, by the help of God, and so perhaps it isn’t surprising that this spiritual enabling is associated with membership of the Church which is Christ’s Body – and such enablings are described as gifts from God. This is made clear in scriptures such as Romans 12:4–8:

“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”

See also 1 Corinthians 12:27–30 and Ephesians 4:7–16 in this connection. From such passages we learn that:

- These gifts are to be used for the benefit and blessing of others.
- The Christian life is to be an active one, giving glory to God, in contrast to a life without Christ in which:

  I lived for myself, I thought for myself,  
  For myself, and none beside –  
  Just as if Jesus had never lived,  
  As if He had never died.

- No disciple of Christ should think that he or she can make no worthwhile contribution.
THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF CHURCH THE BODY TRUTH

- Acceptable spiritual service to God must have a substantial collective dimension, as seen in the New Testament pattern of Churches of God.
A GLORIOUS VISION

When God delivered the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, He took them to Himself and they became His people, His nation. Near the end of their journeys in the wilderness they encamped in the plains of Moab and God spoke about them through the prophet Balaam. In Numbers chapter 24 we read that:

“Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. And the Spirit of God came upon him, and he took up his discourse and said, ‘The oracle ... of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, ... How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel! Like palm groves that stretch afar, like gardens beside a river, like aloes that the Lord has planted, like cedar trees beside the waters.’”

These prophecies of Balaam reveal to us God’s delight in the people taken out of Egypt and who were pledged to serve Him and live and worship together according to His Word. But in this passage God looks down upon them and describes their
orderly encampment as “gardens beside a river.” Now a garden is indeed a place of order, carefully designed and tended, not a wild and confused mess of uncontrolled growth or a bare desert. A garden has well-defined geometry and pattern without which it could hardly be called a garden at all. However, although that is necessary, it is not enough; it would just be an assortment of dead shapes. A garden also needs the life and colour and fragrance of living, well-watered plants and flowers and foliage.

If we pursue this parable and apply it to the people of God in the New Testament, gathered together in Churches of God, the Scriptures give ample instruction about the order and procedure and constitution of these Churches, and that is indispensable because it is from God and He is the God of order and not of confusion. We cannot stress this enough in today’s world, because anything that is of special value to the Lord will inevitably be under continuous attack by the adversary. Satan hates the Churches of God and continually strives to obscure in the minds of God’s children the significance and importance of church teaching. But the matter of collective worship and service in the right way is very important and church fellowship is a vital subject. The Lord does have a pattern for that fellowship and that service and blessed are all who find and follow it. We can think of this as the necessary geometry of the garden.

The wonderful truth of the Church which is Christ’s Body, revealed in the New Testament Scriptures, is a truth of divine love and glory and beauty which surely provides the overwhelming life and colour and fragrance of the garden parable in God’s people today.
In his letter to the Church of God in Colossae Paul states the importance of “holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God” (Col.2:19). It is God’s desire that this truth should be understood and applied in Churches of God, for it is the powerful source of life and beauty and fragrance in the garden. Indeed we could rightly say that all spiritual growth and fruitfulness in both the individual lives and the collective Church fellowship of Christians directly relates to their personal love and devoted commitment to Christ, “holding fast to the Head.”
We conclude with this Glory Word (Doxology) of encouragement and blessing:

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph.3:20,21).

J.W. Archibald
I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH

1. If someone told you that the disciple Peter is the ‘rock’ on which the Church is built, how would you reply from Scripture?

WHO ARE IN THIS CHURCH AND HOW AND WHEN DO THEY BECOME MEMBERS OF IT?

1. 1 Corinthians 12:13 states that we were baptized in the Spirit but, if the Holy Spirit also lives within us (Jn 14:16,17) how can this be?
2. If the Church, the Body of Christ commenced on the day of Pentecost, what is the position of those who came to faith in Christ prior to that date and who may not have been in Jerusalem at that time – e.g. the woman in John 4:7?
3. How can we be confident that membership of the Church which is Christ’s Body is automatic at salvation, given the events of Acts 19:1–6?
WHEN DID THE BUILDING OF THIS CHURCH COMMENCE AND WHEN WILL IT BE COMPLETE?

1. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 was quoted to explain the event that confirms the completion. What other Scriptures support this fact?

FUNDAMENTAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE BODY IMAGERY

1. What scriptural arguments would we adduce to support the statement that the two events, i.e. being baptized in the Spirit and becoming a member of the Body are irreversible?

2. Given the irreversibility of these spiritual transactions, how would you answer questions about eternal security arising from the following Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 15:2, Colossians 1:22–23, Hebrews 2:3; 3:14; 5:9; 9:28, 2 Peter 2:20?

3. There can be no closer relationship than that between Christ and His Church – the Head and the members of His Body. How is that relationship reflected in your life?

4. When will the presentation event described in Ephesians 5:27 take place (“... might present the church to himself in splendour ...”)?

THE MYSTERY OF THE CHRIST

1. What other ‘mysteries’ are revealed in the New Testament?

2. What is the mystery of the Christ?

3. Do we tend to focus on ‘Gentile’ expressions regarding the work of Christ at Calvary and miss the unifying truth of Ephesians 2:14? Should we be more aware today of the
THE CHURCH, WHICH IS THE BODY OF CHRIST

work of God with Jews, given the significance of that work?

THE CHRIST

1. If a significant title were given to us, appropriate response would be essential, e.g. gratitude, behaviour, etc. How am I affected by the realisation that believers in Christ share in His title, the Christ?

HOW AND WHEN WAS THE MYSTERY OF THE CHRIST REVEALED?

1. Investigate in what aspects the narratives of Adam and Eve and of Isaac and Rebekah are pictures of the Church which is Christ’s Body.
2. Are these the only ‘pictures’ of the Church, the Body of Christ in the Old Testament?
3. Ephesians 3:9–11 tells us that the revelation of the mystery of the Church, the Body of Christ shows God’s wisdom in a new light to heavenly rule and authority and as being in His eternal purposes. How should this impact on our own worship of God?
4. How is our own view of the Church impacted by such a revelation?

THE PRE-EMINENCE OF CHRIST

1. The writer has said about the Lord Jesus, ‘It seems that among all the myriad distinctions that are rightly His, Headship of the Church is the most cherished.’ What does the Church, the Body of Christ mean to you?
THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE TRINITY

1. Each member in the Body has the Holy Spirit. How does this truth affect our prayers when considering the need of comfort, help, instruction and empowerment?

THE CHURCH, THE BODY OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCHES OF GOD

The reference to Christ paying the ultimate price to make the Church fit to be His bride (Eph.5:25) has a parallel in Acts 20:28 relating to the Church of God.

1. In what other ways are these two distinct New Testament Churches similar?
2. In what ways are they dissimilar?
3. Is one more important than the other?
4. How do they relate to one another?
5. According to Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” How should the unity seen in the Body be reflected in our Assembly life and how should it impact on our attitude towards those not in the Body?

THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF CHURCH THE BODY TRUTH

THE PRACTICAL LESSONS FOR ASSEMBLY SERVICE

1. How does your understanding of the Church which is the Body of Christ impact upon your Assembly life? Consider a) Relationships, b) Worship, c) Outreach, d) Unity.
2. The writer states that fulfilment of John 17:20,21 and the Lord’s Prayer “that they may all be one” is dependent on human responsibility. What is your response?

THE PRACTICAL LESSONS FOR INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOUR

1. The writer says, ‘where Christ goes, I go …’ when speaking about “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col.1:27). You might have expected him to say ‘where I go, Christ goes.’ Why is the former expression significant? What are the implications?
2. How would the care we show for fellow members of the Body be best expressed?
3. How does the consideration of the lesson that pain in a physical body is transmitted by the brain assist me when I consider personal failure in serving the Lord?

SPIRITUAL ENABLING

1. Are your spiritual gifts being used or wasted?

A GLORIOUS VISION

1. The truth of the Church which is His Body is precious to the Saviour. How can we make it more precious to ourselves, knowing it is His desire for Churches of God on earth to express that eternal purpose – yet that purpose is not seen flourishing amongst the general Christian population?
2. How do we get encouragement from how God is working on earth today?
3. Near the beginning of the booklet, the author wrote, ‘we
will surely see as we pursue a scriptural study of this Church how unacceptable would be the notion of Peter as the foundation of it.’ Having now completed the booklet, what evidence can be drawn from it to support such confidence?
Hayes Press (www.hayespress.org) is a registered charity in the United Kingdom, whose primary mission is to disseminate the Word of God, mainly through literature. It is one of the largest distributors of gospel tracts and leaflets in the United Kingdom, with over 100 titles and many thousands dispatched annually. In addition to paperbacks and eBooks, Hayes Press also publishes Plus Eagles’ Wings, a fun and educational Bible magazine for children, and Golden Bells, a popular daily Bible reading calendar in wall or desk formats.

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Baptism - Its Meaning and Teaching

The closing words of the Lord Jesus to the eleven disciples are all-important for all time: ‘And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit …”’ (Matt.28:18–19). This is the Lord’s mandate to His apostles to teach and carry out the practice of baptism. This booklet endeavors to explore its relevance, taking a broadly chronological approach to the subject.

The Deity of Christ

Who is Jesus? That is definitely one of the most important questions that could ever be asked, as the salvation of every human being that has ever lived depends on the answer! It was a live question when Jesus was here 2,000 years ago, and must surely have been in the minds of the writers of what now forms our New Testament. It’s an equally true question today. Was He just a good man, or a wise teacher, or was He (and therefore IS
He) actually God? Almost every world faith has an opinion on the question, as does almost every man in the street.

But the focus of this booklet is on what the Bible has to say about Him. It gives abundant Bible references that have a clear implication in reaching confident conclusions about the deity of Christ; and additionally includes some that are capable of varying explanation. In such instances the writer’s views are briefly stated, taking the approach generally that the less clear Bible statements are best understood by fitting them within the most clear statements. This booklet is therefore commended to readers in the confident hope that the Holy Spirit will use the information it contains to their blessing.

The Kingdom of God and the Holy Nation

God is holy and therefore His kingdom would also need to be a holy nation. This booklet explores the principles and characteristics of nationality in general and their particular application first to God’s Old Testament kingdom of Israel, and then to its New Testament counterpart, that was established by Jesus Christ. The constitution, government, service, and destiny of God’s kingdom are traced from earliest times to the ultimate realization of the purposes of God in a new heaven and a new earth.