

Helps for Young Christians.

No. 3

THE
CHURCH OF GOD

AS A

Body, Building, Bride

According to the Scriptures

(Second Edition)

BY

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PICKERING & INGLIS, Publishers

14 Paternoster Row, London, E.C.4

229 Bothwell Street, Glasgow, C.2

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1 Corinthians xii, 12-20, 26, 27.

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.

For by one Spirit are we all baptized, into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

For the body is not one member, but many.

If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?

But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him.

And if they were all one member, where were the body?

But now are they many members, yet but one body.

And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.



The Church of God.

I Cor., xii. 12-28.

AWAY back in the Old Testament we find God had a dwelling place ; He said to Moses, “ *There* I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the Mercy Seat,” Ex. 25, 22. The blood-stained mercy seat with two cherubim overshadowing—inside the tabernacle, inside the veil, within the holiest of all—was where God met with His ancient people, Israel. This was His first *dwelling* place on earth. In the garden of Eden He had walked in fellowship with Adam before the fall, but in the Tabernacle He dwelt, and that in a way very different from the present ; for only one man, once a year, was able to enter His immediate presence in the holiest of all. Passing from the Tabernacle to the Temple we again find a similar order of things. The Shekinah glory dwelt there and very sacred and rare was it for man to enter that holy place. Turning to the New Testament, however, closing the Old at Malachi, we discover a new order of things ; the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God manifest in flesh, established a new relationship altogether between God and man, and whilst up to this time God had been shut away and it had been almost impossible to approach Him, now a way was to be made whereby we could have easy access into His immediate presence ; but although easier, no less holy, no less sacred. This is now the privilege of every believer, as we read in Heb. 10, 19, “ Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, . . . let us draw near.” How did this come about ? On this wise. Before the

Cross, God recognised only two classes of people, the Jews (His chosen people) and the Gentiles (the other nations), and they were so distinct in His sight that He speaks of a wall of partition existing between them, but through the death of Christ that middle wall of partition has been broken down and abolished, as we read in Eph. 2, 14 and 15, He "hath broken down the middle wall of partition . . . having abolished in His flesh the enmity . . . so making peace."

In Old Testament days the nation of Israel was known as God's people and in a future day they will again be known as such, but at the present moment He has turned aside from them, because they rejected Him, when they crucified the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary, and later, at the stoning of Stephen, refused the Holy Spirit. This period of their rejection is what we know as the Day of Grace. Since the death of Christ both Jews and Gentiles who believe in the Saviour become the people of God; and this brings us to our subject, for these people form what is termed in the New Testament the Church of God; which is an expression we never find in the Old Testament. It is entirely New Testament truth, first mentioned in the Bible in Matt. xvi., 17-18.

The Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples, "Whom do men say that I am?" (v. 13). They answered, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elias the prophet, some say this, and some say that." Then He turned to them and said, "But whom say ye that I am?" (v. 15), and Peter, who was very often foremost on occasions such as this, replied, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God," (v. 16). "Blessed art thou," said the Lord, "for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven." He has

revealed to you, Peter, that I am the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Now I am going to give you a further revelation, and that is, that upon this fact, that I am the Christ, the Son of the Living God, "*I will build My church.*" That is going to be the rock foundation of everything now, Peter. Some would have us believe that Peter is the foundation of the Church, and that when the Lord said, "Upon this rock I will build My church" He meant Peter was the rock. The fallacy of this is seen in the word the Lord used. He said, "Upon this *rock* (petra—note the word) I will build my church," whilst He had just before said, "Thou art Peter." (Petros meaning a stone.) Turning for a moment to John 1, 42, we find Simon came to the Lord Jesus among the early disciples, and when the Saviour saw him He said: "Thou art Simon, the son of Jona, thou shalt be called Cephas—a stone." That is the name given him by the Lord Himself, "a stone." Peter means a "stone," but the Church is built on "this rock," an entirely different word in the original. Christ is the rock, Peter a stone *on* that rock, and thank God He is not the only stone, for you and I too are stones in this building, as Peter himself tells us in his epistle, "Ye also, as lively (living) stones are built up a spiritual house." In 1 Cor. 3, 11, we have confirmation that the rock foundation of the Church of God is Christ Himself. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." We note in passing that not only is Matt. 16 the first place the church is mentioned in Scripture, but it is the only time it is called Christ's church. It is usually spoken of as the Church of God. Reference has been made above to stones built on the foundation. Notice it is not bricks that are mentioned, for whilst man

speaks of and uses mostly bricks and mortar, not so God. Bricks are of man's making, but stones are of God's quarrying. He finds them in the earth, in places of sin and corruption, and brings them out of that condition to set them as stones in His building. Solomon's temple was built of stones, all cut and fashioned before they were brought to the place where the temple was to be built; so it is here, all God's stones are fashioned and builded together. We find this in Eph. 2, 21, where it speaks of all the building being fitly framed together; and in the next verse, "Ye also are builded together." God is shaping and fashioning everyone of us, His children, for a certain place in His church.

Now I want you to read Eph. 2, 19 and 20. "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone." I hear someone say immediately that this is a little different from what we have just considered. Then we said that Christ Himself was the foundation; here it says, "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets." How can we reconcile these facts? Facts they are. and they are both in the Bible, the one in 1 Cor. 3, 11, "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid which is Jesus Christ," and the other in Eph. 2, 20, "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone,"

Let us illustrate thus. A builder sets out to erect a structure. He has first of all to find a good foundation, so he digs down—for rock. When he has found a *rock* foundation, then he lays his foundation on the rock. When the Lord was going to

build His Church, He said, "On this rock I will build My Church." What rock? Christ, the Son of the Living God. Thus you see in the type of the building, He is the solid rock foundation and on that rock (on the Christ the Son of the Living God) come the apostles and prophets next in the order of the building, and on the apostles and prophets you and I are built. They have passed away in person, but they being dead yet speak, for they are still here in the Scriptures—the Epistles of the New Testament—which are the foundation of the Church to-day. If only the Church of God were built a little more on this, being guided and instructed by the Word of God, how far different things would be! We have in the Epistles ALL we need to guide us concerning the Church of God. This is what the Church *should* be guided by, and when the Holy Spirit speaks of the Apostles and Prophets being the foundation, He means the Apostles and Prophets that were, and also the Epistles that are left to us. Some turn round and say, "How is it that we have no Apostles in the church to-day, and how is it that we have no Prophets?" Because we are nearing the top of the building and you never find the foundation at the top. God gave the Apostles and Prophets at the beginning of the church in order that a good foundation might be laid and it is left to us to follow in their steps; they are the foundation of the Church of God, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone.

AS A BODY.

When we turn from considering the Church of God as a building to think of it as a body, we go from one side to the other. Doubtless you have

seen photos of a certain cathedral giving one view from the North, another view from the East and another view from the South. Looking at the three pictures together you would probably think they were views of different buildings. Why? Because you are looking at the same thing from various view points, and that is just how God presents His church in the Scriptures. We have just been looking at the first (the building aspect) and as such it is spoken of under at least four different titles:—

- (1) The Habitation of God.—Where He dwells.
- (2) The House of God.—Where He rules.
- (3) The Temple of God.—Where He is worshipped.
- (4) The Pillar and Ground of the Truth.—God's Testimony.

The building aspect of the Church is the outside view. When we come to the Church as a body, we are looking at it from the inside, at the Assembly in the individual relationship of its various members to one another, see Eph. 1, 22, Eph. 4, 4-16, and 1 Cor. 12, 12-28.

Eph. 1, 22, "And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to *the Church, which is His Body,*"

Eph. 4, 12, "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of *the Body of Christ.*"

Eph. 4. 16, "From whom *the whole body* fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of *the body* unto the edifying of itself in love."

In the Body of Christ, every believer (whether

Jew or Gentile) forms a part. We are never told what part of the body we form. We have to find that out, and it is most important that we should, for we can only do the work of the member God has set us to be in Christ's body; we cannot do another member's part.

If in the sight of God I am a hand of the body, I cannot do the work of a foot, and if I am an eye I cannot do the work of an ear. I must find out just what God has set me to be in His church, and there I must fulfil the duties He has given me to do "For He hath set the members in the body *as it hath pleased Him*," and it should therefore please me, too. The parts of the natural body mentioned are to serve as illustrations of the truth; in other words I may be a Help, Government, Teacher, Pastor, Evangelist, Sunday School Teacher, Open-air Worker, Tract Distributor, which are some of the various members of the body. If God has made me a teacher let me wait on teaching, and if God has made me a pastor, let me diligently pursue a pastor's work. If I leave undone the particular work that God has given me to do, or attempt another member's part, the whole body will suffer because one of its members is not working as it should.

NO ENVY.

1 Cor. 12, 15 says, "If the foot shall say, 'because I am not the hand, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body?" This tells me that I must not *be envious*. One may say, "Because my brother is able to do more than I can, then I am not going to do anything at all."

If I do not do my portion, then the other members will suffer in consequence, but if I fill my place

it will help the other members to work together better. Though the place that we hold in the Church of God *seems* to be less important, we are no less necessary to the body and if we fill that post to the best of our ability, we shall not be envious of one that seems to have a more important place.

NO CONTEMPT.

1 Cor. 12, 21 says, "The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee ; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you." This is putting the truth round the other way. It speaks of one who looks down on some other member and says "you are not wanted at all." God says you cannot dispense with one that does not *seem* to have such an important place as you have, any more than you can occupy the place of one that seems to be higher. We have just to keep in the particular place where He has placed us. If this truth grips our hearts (that we have a certain place to fill and none other) we shall soon begin trying to find out *where* God has put us, and *there* do our work, not envious, not with contempt, but with

FELLOWSHIP ;

with what verse 26 says, "If one member suffer, then all the members suffer ; if one member be honoured, then all members rejoice." Suppose you cut your finger, what is the first thing you will do ? The other hand will fly to the cut finger and hold it, because there is fellowship, one member with the other. You drop something on your foot, and immediately sit down and hold it. Why ? Because the other members come to its aid directly.

Shall I tell you something further? The moment you injure a member of your body it is known by your head first, which communicates it to the other parts of the body. In like manner if one of God's children is hurt, injured, or ill spoken of, the very first one that feels it—do you know who it is? The Head in Heaven. We are the body, but Christ is the Head, and He is the first to know, and through the Spirit communicates to the other members, thus establishing fellowship one with another. This is illustrated when Saul of Tarsus was persecuting the Christians. When the Lord struck him down on the road to Damascus, He said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou ME?" What a wonderful truth this is and what a wonderful God is ours! We hear brother So-and-so has been knocked down and we visit him in his trouble, why? Because the Head in Heaven has communicated to another member of the same body that one has been hurt. This is a divine theme and is as the Church, the body of Christ, should be. Just as the natural body fulfils its functions so the Church of God as a spiritual body. Should a certain member have paralysis and another member be hurt there is no response by the paralysed part. Thus it is that members of the Body of Christ suffer, and thus it is that the work of God is retarded and apparently fails. *Are you a paralysed member of the Body of Christ dear reader? Or is it possible that you are not a member at all, not being a Christian?*

AS THE BRIDE (Eph. 5).

Now we are going to look at the Church as the Bride, which shows our relationship to the Lord Himself, and speaks not so much of our care for our fellow-believers, as of our Lord's

care for His Bride. You will find some say that it is impossible for *the Church* to be the Bride of Christ, and they give one of two reasons, either they do not know who it is or else that it is Israel. Their question is, How can the Church be both the body and the Bride? They forget God says concerning Israel that "Israel is My son, even My firstborn," whilst Paul, speaking of the Bride, says, "I speak concerning Christ and the Church," Eph. 5, 32. The body of Christ is also the Bride of Christ. In the garden of Eden, God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and took a rib from his side and builded a woman, and said, "They shall be one flesh." That woman became the bride of Adam. Christ and His Church are spoken of in exactly the same way. Thus we learn that as a result of the death of Christ, God is now building a Bride for His Son. Chosen before time was, prepared during His absence, ready to be revealed in glory by and by. A three-fold cord is unfolded in Eph. 5, giving the Past, Present and Future of the Church. In verse 25 we have the

PAST.

"Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it." God loved the world, but Christ especially loved the Church: two aspects of divine love. This was manifested at Calvary in the past. Verse 26 gives us the

PRESENT.

"That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word." To-day, through the Holy Spirit, He is cleansing the members of His Body with a continual cleansing from the defilement of the world, because of a

glorious future which comes in the following verse, Eph. 5. 27.

FUTURE.

“ That He might present it to Himself a glorious Church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.” God’s eternal purpose for His own Beloved Son was that He should have a Bride to share His glory. The time is coming when the last stone will be added ; the building will be complete, and the body perfect, having its full complement of members. Then will the Bride be ready and the Lord will come. How ? do you ask ? Just as Isaac came to meet Rebekah whom the unnamed servant brought. They met somewhere between their two homes and that is where the Lord is going to meet us. The Holy Spirit, typified by the unnamed servant, will take us up to meet the Lord in the air. Christ is coming out from glory, coming in the clouds and we are going to meet Him somewhere between His home and this wilderness scene, and then He will take us back to yonder glory. As He said, “ If I go, I will come again and receive you unto Myself that where I am, there ye may be also.” Christ will then see of the travail of His soul and we shall be in His presence forever, fully satisfied and in His likeness.

In Rev. 21, we see the final glory of the Church.

The Bride, the body, the building which in the Epistles is being completed, is here in the last book of the Bible, Chapter 21, being revealed. Just previous to the manifestation, has been the marriage supper of the Lamb, the judgment seat of Christ and many other important events, and

now the Lord comes out finally in everlasting glory, and with Him is the Bride, the Lamb's wife, who is none other than you and I who are called to share in this wonderful scene. "When He will to wondering worlds display that we with Him are one." With such a past and with such a future what manner of persons ought we to be in the little time that is left us here to serve! How faithful we should be, how true to the Lord that has bought us, how careful of where we go, of what we say, and how we act! Let us, then, in view of the future, and in view of the past, **CONSIDER THE PRESENT**, and say—

Glory, glory everlasting
Be to Him Who bore the Cross,
Who redeemed our souls by tasting
Death, the death deserved by us.

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