

# WORD PICTURES OF GOD'S CHURCH

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Upon The Rock  
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# UPON THE ROCK

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## THE "CHURCH" OF CHRIST

Phil Grear

We can learn much about something by the terms used to describe it. By referring to our nation as the "United States" we are saying that it consists of several individual states united together into one nation. When we say it is a "democracy" we are describing our form of government. By calling it a "free enterprise state" we are saying that our economy is built on a system of private ownership.

The same is also true of Christ's church. We can learn much by examining the terms the Bible uses to describe it. Each of these descriptive terms helps us to look at Jesus' church from a slightly different perspective, thus gaining a better understanding of what He wants his church to be. Each of the writers in this issue will be discussing one of these "word pictures".

Perhaps the most common designation of Christ's church is simply the word "church". This word is used over seventy-five times in the New Testament. Sometimes it refers to the church throughout the world. God "hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church." (Ephesians 1:22). Sometimes it refers to a local congregation of God's people in a specific place. "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth..." (1 Corinthians 1:2) "The churches of Christ salute you." (Romans 16:16) The individuals "churches" make up the "church".

The Bible never uses the word “church” to refer to a literal building. We may speak of the “church on the corner”, or point to a building and talk about what a beautiful “church” it is. But when we do we are not expressing a Biblical idea. The church consists of the people who make it up, not the building in which they assemble.

The word “church” actually refers to an assembly of people who have been called together for a specific purpose. “Church” literally means “those called out”. God has called a group of people out of the world to be his people. “Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, *called to be saints*” (1 Corinthians 1:2) (emphasis mine, PLG) “Saints” means separated from the world. “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” (1 Peter 2:9-10) “Peculiar people” means “a people for God’s own possession.” God has called his people to leave the “darkness” of the world and come stand in “his marvelous light”. Those who heed that call become “a people for God’s own possession.” They are now “the people of God.”

God expects this group of people to live on a plane higher than that of the world. He has freed his people from Satan with the blood of Jesus. “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28) Since God purchased his people with the life of his Son, he expects them to live as those who belong to him.

With the word “church” the Bible presents a picture of a group of people who have heeded God’s call to come out of the darkness to stand in his light. They then call to those who are in the darkness to come into the light with them. Together they worship and serve God. Together they live in a way that glorifies and honors their Father. They show the world what it means to be the people for God’s own possession.

accurately reflected the situation and I owed a monumental figure. There was one and only one who could pay the debt and balance the books; Jesus was that person.

As a popular song says, “I owed a debt I could not pay. He paid a debt He did not owe!” By means of that gift and solely by means of that gift the debt is cancelled and I am declared righteous. The belief (faith) that righteousness can be attained by any other means is futile. Remember, God and God alone keeps the books. His Sovereign justice must be satisfied and no offer outside His system of accounting can be accepted.

Paul summarizes Israel’s problem in Romans 10:3 where he says that they “.... seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.” Either submit to God’s righteousness or establish your own system. These are the only two choices. Submission to God’s righteousness involves obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ and burial into His death (Romans 6:3-4). Jesus’ offer is made for all time. Accept it in faith by obeying His gospel today!

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whatever moral code applies. Whatever the code, man will transgress with time. Therefore, close doesn't count.

### **“What He Promised, He is able to Perform”**

Abraham's faith was the means by which God declared him righteous. Though Abraham did many good works and generally ordered his steps by God's moral code, he sinned. The method of justification therefore could not have been by means of the moral code or by his good works. While Isaac was as of yet unconceived, God said to Abraham, "I have made you a father of many nations." (Genesis 17:5

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& Romans 4:17a). Paul speaks of God as the One "... who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did." (Romans 4: 17b). Hence, the type of faith that justifies is depicted. God is able to perform what He promises. He gives life to the dead and calls things that do not exist as though they did. The faith that justifies is the faith that sees God in that way. In spite of the empirical evidence about us, there is a Divine set of books that He keeps. No one, repeat, NO ONE, is able to alter those books. What He declares is final in all matters pertaining to justification and salvation.

In this context, Paul establishes the fact of justification by God, God's Sovereign right to make such a decree, and the means by which it occurs. He does not discuss in this context the point in time at which such justification takes place. What He does establish is that man cannot of his own righteousness attain unto the righteousness of God. If man is to be righteous, it will be by the declaration of God through faith in God's operation.

### **Jesus Pays the Deficit**

How can God declare a sinner to be righteous? Remember the situation I gave in the first part of this article with the corporate accountant? Where he could not accept my offer, God has accepted an offer — but it wasn't mine. The Father was able to accept the offer of Jesus Christ. The difference wasn't due to an accounting error, nor was a paltry sum involved. Rather, the books of Divine Justice

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How does God call people to be a part of his group? Some believe this is done through some miraculous feeling or "tingle" that is better felt than told. They look for some special sensation they believe to be a sign that God is calling them. Perhaps they interpret some impressive event in their life as proof God has "called" them. Sadly they are looking for that which the Bible does not promise. To do such would be to show partiality and favoritism. Why would he call one person in such a manner, but not another? The Bible says, "God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35). How could God be just and fair if he chose to miraculously call one person, but not another?

God calls every person in exactly the same way. "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto *he called you by our gospel*, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Thessalonians 2:14) (emphasis mine, PLG) It is through the preaching of the Gospel that God's call is made available to mankind. Any time someone hears the word of God, either through reading or preaching, he is receiving the call of God. It then is up to him to decide whether to accept the call or not. God will force no one to heed the call. "And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." (Revelation 22:17)

So when God calls people to leave the darkness and stand in the marvelous light as part of his church, how does one heed that call? The apostle Peter preached to a large crowd on the day the church began and told them to "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38) Those in the audience who heeded the call of God obeyed these instructions. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." (Acts 2:41) These saved ones were then added by the Lord to the church. "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (Acts 2:47) To be in the church (God's called-out group) is to be saved, and to be saved is to be in the church (God's called-out group). Why not

heed the call of God today? Be baptized so that God can add you to his church.

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## THE CHURCH - THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

By Jim Mitchell

How beautifully has the Holy Spirit compared the church to a bride. A bride is to be pure and undefiled. Christ purchased His “bride” with His own precious blood (Acts 20:28; I Peter 1:18-20). The church — those who have been called out of sin — are to bring forth fruit unto God. We can produce fruit unto God, through our marriage to Christ (Romans 7:4). The marriage of a man and wife is compared by the Spirit through the apostle Paul to the relationship between Christ and the church in the Ephesian epistle, chapter 5:22-23.

The bride of Christ is cleansed from sin, He cleanses her with “washing of water with the word” (Eph 5:26). Jesus had told Nicodemus (John 3:5) “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Jesus had promised to build His church (Matt. 16:13-19) and He called this church the kingdom, Paul tells us in Col 1:13 “Who (God) delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love; verse 14: In whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins,” Since our forgiveness (cleansing) is found in the kingdom (Church) of Christ, it is vital that we are in this church. Since Christ purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28) and those who are added to His church were forgiven of sins through obedience to His commandments (Acts 2:37-47), we should fervently desire to be in Him. We put on Christ in baptism (Gal. 3:26,27); we are baptized into Christ, buried with Him through baptism into His death (Rom. 6:3,4); we are raised together with Him to walk in newness of life so that we would no longer be in bondage to sin (Rom. 6:5-7); therefore we have become in Him cleansed by water and the Spirit.

God doesn’t have a Corporate Accountant. He and He alone keeps the books. No one else’s opinion matters when it comes to these books. He is the Chief Accountant and Auditor. His character and integrity are behind every decision regarding the righteousness of man. As the 20th century wound down, the earth’s population wound up to 6,000,000,000 souls. That’s 6 billion with a B. If six billion people passed by a particular point of observation at the rate of 1 per second, do you realize that it would take over 190 years just to count that many people? God keeps the books because He’s the only one who’s capable!

“For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted?’ (Romans 4:9b-10a). How indeed was it accounted? It was accounted by a Divine System of impeccable qualifications, i.e. by Sovereign God.

### Close Doesn’t Count

Righteousness isn’t accounted by degrees. It is an either/or proposition. The declaration is either positive or negative. Or, to put it in modern parlance, it’s digital and not analog. In the judgment scene depicted in Matthew 25:31-46, the designations are sheep and goats, right hand and left hand, blessed and cursed, come and depart, eternal life and everlasting punishment. God’s requirement is perfection, but no one can attain it. His eyes see every deed and the motives behind it. Man may try hard to be righteous by his own doings, but he will fail. The God who is able to correctly adjudicate the deeds of multiplied billions of people can surely judge the righteousness of one! And to put it simply, close doesn’t count.

The Law of Moses was a marvelous moral code that helped to marshal the nation of Israel. However, not a single person was declared righteous because of it. Hence, Paul’s affirmation that righteousness is achieved apart from the law becomes especially poignant. “For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression.” (Romans 4:14-15). The LORD declared Abraham righteous apart from the Law of Moses. Righteousness is by faith and not by perfect obedience to

## Revelations from Romans (5 of 12) The Revelation of the Righteous Accounting of God (Romans 4)

Do I know, I mean really know, God? Do I know the God whose character underlies all 66 books, 1,188 chapters, 31,173 verses and 773,692 words of the [KJV] Bible? Though brazen questions like these make us uncomfortable, they are necessary. The consequences of a wrong answer are far too severe to leave such a critical question unasked! Do you know God? I mean really know Him. Do you know the God of the Bible? Revelations from Romans will help you to answer this most important of all questions affirmatively. Consider the Righteous Accounting of God!

### God Does the Accounting

I recently overheard a Corporate Accountant agonizing with a coworker over the fact that a \$1 difference existed between 2 sets of figures. They were trying frantically to find the source of the difference. I pulled a dollar from my pocket and jokingly offered to give them the dollar so they could get beyond that problem and go about more productive matters! The accountant wasn't amused! The dollar wasn't the problem. The accounting methods along with the accountant's reputation and integrity were on the line.

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The church is the bride of Christ in the spiritual sense. In Him we are to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. The truth of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). The Scriptures affirm that Jesus promised His apostles that the Spirit which He is sending then would guide them into all truth (John 16:13). Peter informs us: "seeing that his divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us by his own glory and virtue;" (II Peter 1:3) Can we not recognize that the fruit of the Spirit is produced as we study, learn and practice that which the Spirit teaches in the word?

The bride of Christ enjoys great blessings (Eph. 1:3-14). God has chosen the church as the haven of the holy. Through the blood of Christ Christians are cleansed of all blemishes. As children of the Almighty through adoption His grace is bestowed upon us in His beloved Son. We have been ransomed from our bondage to sin by the precious blood of Christ the Redeemer, "Him who knew no sin be made to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (II Cor. 5:21). To be the heir of God is the blessing predetermined in Christ. As a heritage we are to work in accordance with His purpose to bring praise and glory to the father in His name. The word of truth as delivered by the Holy Spirit, which we believe, is the earnest of our inheritance, This inheritance will be fully realized when Jesus comes to reward the faithful (II Thess. 1:3-12). Truly, every spiritual blessing is in Christ.

Surely blessings bring responsibility. Christians should so love the Lord that we naturally seek to please and glorify Him. Our bodies should be presented as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1), practicing those things which are sober, righteous and godly as we live in this world (Titus 2:11-14) and continually looking to heavenly things that we might "be manifested in glory with him." (Col. 3:1-4). As we let our lights shine God is glorified (Matt. 5:16). This loyalty, this renewing of mind and all its ensuing practice is the result of our being translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13). As faithful Christians, rather than seeking alibis that we convince ourselves excuse us from spiritual service, we will look for every opportunity to glorify God through our service. His word is our

only guide; His worship is our only spiritual one; and bringing forth fruit to His glory our only commission.

The beautiful, powerful prayer which Paul writes in Ephesians 3 is so needed in the mind of every saved individual. God is glorified as believers sincerely “bow their knees” to Him. He is our Father. All the redeemed are His and we are named as His. Strength to serve Him daily is available when we submit our minds, our wills to His Spirit. Faith in Him through Christ, who dwells in the hearts of the faithful, enables us to understand how much He loves us. This understanding surpasses the secular knowledge of this world. To trust absolutely in God enables us to stand fast in Christ despite the pleasures of sin, the selfishness of the carnal mind, the threats and persecutions of our enemies, and the fact that everything does not happen as quickly and as perfectly as we would desire. Such trust is thoroughly seen in the steadfastness of Abraham, the meekness of Moses, the endurance of Job and the prophecies delivered by Jeremiah. Look at Jesus’ prayer in John 17. Notice all the references to glorification. v. 1 “glorify thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee:”, v. 4 “I glorified thee on the earth,” v. 5 “glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”, v. 10 “and all things that are mine are thine, and thine are mine: and I am glorified in them,” v. 22 “And the glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them; that they may be one, even as we are one,” and v. 24 “Father, I desire that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world,” Jesus’ prayer for glorification is founded upon the principle of oneness. He and the Father are one eternally. Trust in Christ demands abiding in Him as He did abide in the Father. Being set apart and made holy comes through belief and obedience to the truth. The truth is His word.

The bride of Christ is one. Jesus the Christ has only one bride. The church which He purchased with His own precious blood is His bride. As the world has abused and misused God’s physical marriage institution, so it has done with His spiritual institution. He is not pleased with either distortion. Sectarianism is opposed to Christ’s spiritual institution – His one church – and God will condemn all opposition.

can choose to be strong and supportive. We can choose to blend well with the other building materials, other Christians. As mortar holds the individual brick of a house together, so love is the bond that holds Christians together in the church. Paul, in Col. 3:14, told of that bond: “But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.”

The restoration of old houses is an interesting topic. To go back and try to restore just how a house was built some two hundred years ago is certainly a challenging project. Especially helpful in an endeavor like that would be the original plans and patterns. Such is also true with the church, the house of God. We have the pattern, the plan, and the blueprint. The New Testament is our complete guide in making the church what God expects it to be. The Scriptures completely furnish or equip the church for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17). God has provided for us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:5). The pattern is there, clearly setting forth God’s plan for worship, the plan of salvation, and daily Christian living. It is not a humanly devised pattern, but it is of Divine authorship. If we follow that blueprint, we will be restoring the church to its original condition.

What a beautiful and easily understandable illustration! The church is the house of God. God planned it and prepared the world for it. Jesus paid for it with His own blood, then became the chief cornerstone. The foundation is made up of the apostles and prophets. We, as God’s children, are the living stones that make up the building. All Christians are a vital part of the building; all have responsibilities. What are you doing to see that the “house of God” remains strong? Are you making sure that you are focusing on Christ as the cornerstone of your life? Are you seeking first His Kingdom? The wise man builds a life that is pleasing to God by building on the rock. The wise man hears and does what Jesus says. The foolish man hears, but does not. Which one are you? May we all be alive, active, and faithful as living stones in the house of God.

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(Eph. 2:20). No other foundation will do. No other man can be the right foundation. When the apostles were asked by what power they performed miracles, or in what name did they work, their response was Jesus Christ: "This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:11-12). Paul, as an apostle, called himself a wise master builder. "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:9-11).

Once the foundation is laid, then the proper materials must be used in the construction of the building. When we speak of the church, we are not speaking of a literal building made of bricks and mortar. We are speaking of Christians. The church is made up of Christians. It is a spiritual building, and the materials are living materials. Peter calls us "living stones." "You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:5).

It is necessary, therefore, that we become Christians in order to be a part of the house of God, the church. If you are not a Christian, then you really are not a part of the church, the house of God. When you become a Christian, that is, you are a penitent believer in Christ who has made the good confession of your faith, and you have been baptized for the remission of your sins, the Lord adds you to the church. If you have never been saved, that is, you have not had your sins cleansed by the blood of Christ in baptism, then you fail to qualify as acceptable building material for the house of God.

Everyone knows of the importance of good quality materials with which to build. When we build houses, we spend considerable time making sure the boards are straight and strong. We check the blocks and bricks to make sure they are not weak and crumbling. God is also concerned about the quality of materials in his building, the church. And, that is up to us as to what kind of building material we are. We

Christ insists that His bride remain holy and blameless. Only in Him can this be true. The Lord's letters to the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 2 & 3) make it very clear that a congregation, individuals within any congregation and even the entire church can have its candlestick removed if it departs from the will of its head. Christ is the only head of the church.

Every soul must hear the gospel of Christ, Belief in Him as the Lord and Savior is mandatory. A desire to please God causes one to recognize his sinful condition and repent. One must confess his faith and allegiance to Christ and be buried with Him in baptism, See John 8:24, Acts 17:30, Matt. 10:32,33 and Col. 2:12,13.

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## THE CHURCH AS THE FAMILY OF GOD

By Bruce Daugherty

"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved now we are the children of God: and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." (1 John 3:1-3).

The Church is known by several images in Scripture: body, bride, flock, temple, vine, etc. These images drawn from the natural or physical world make known the nature of the Church. They give concreteness to an idea that can be abstract. One of the images that is frequently used in our day and time is family. Family is a Biblical idea as several Scriptures use family terms to describe the Church: the household of God (1 Tim. 3:15, Ephesians 2:19), house of God (1 Peter 4:17), God's house (Hebrews 3:2), household of faith (Galatians 6:10). We need to remember that "house or household" is not talking about the physical dwelling place but it refers to the members of the

house, its inhabitants. Therefore, we are talking about God's family. The family aspect is also seen in the various terms used to describe our relationship to God and one another: sons or children (John 1:13), brothers, sisters, brethren (Acts 15:23, 1 Corinthians 1:10; James 1:2), heirs (Romans 8:17, Galatians 4:7).

What do these terms teach us about our relationship to God and one another? Certainly they give us a sense of closeness and unity that existed in the early church and needs to exist in our day and time. We cannot say we are children of God if we are not loving our brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Peter 2:17; 1 John 4:20-21). Can you love the brotherhood if you do not know the brotherhood? But intimacy and unity do not exhaust all the Scriptural ideas inherent in the idea of the Church as family.

The Church as God's family should give great emphasis to God the Father. "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a king of firstfruits of His creatures" (James 1:18). It is the Father's love that has made us His children, not our goodness. It is the Father who provides for our needs (Matthew 7:7-11). It is the Father who lovingly disciplines His children (Hebrews 12:5-11). Would we treat one another differently if we could see how the Father's heart is broken by our behavior toward each other (see Genesis 44:18-34)?

The Church as God's family should also give great prominence to Christ. It is Jesus who has opened access to the Father in prayer (Matthew 6:9; Romans 8:15). It is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus that we imitate when we are baptized into Christ (John 3:3,5; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27). It is the obedience of Jesus that we follow, so that like Him we can be sons of God (Hebrews 5:8-9). By sharing in Jesus' life and status, we are privileged to experience all the blessings of having God as Father and Jesus as elder brother (Ephesians 1:3; 2 Peter 1:2-4).

The Church as God's family also gives proper understanding to the work of the Holy Spirit. Whether the imagery is of the new birth (John 3:3-9) or of adoption (Romans 8:15) it is by work of the Holy Spirit, operating through God's word that we are made children of God

in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the spirit" (Eph. 2:19-22).

With this understanding that the church is in some way like a building, what lessons can we learn? In this lesson, we will survey some of the comparisons that can be made between the church and a building.

In the first place, before a building can be built, the proper plans must be made. There has to be a designer, or architect, and there must be a builder. Such is also the case with the church. In the Master plan of God, the church was a part of that plan from before creation. Paul spoke of the church being in God's eternal purpose. "To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord," (Eph. 3:10-11). It was God's plan and purpose that the church would be built, and his plan was completely carried out. That is where the builder comes in. All the plans in the world, however impressive they may be, will do no good unless there is a builder to follow the plans. When it comes to the church, Jesus is the Master builder. He promised that he would build His church, and that even death and the grave could not stop Him (Matt. 16:18). When Moses was given instructions to construct the tabernacle, he was given a Divine pattern with which to build. The Hebrews writer, commenting on that, said that those Old Testament things were a shadow of the New Testament church. "Who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, 'See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain'" (Heb. 8:5). The inspired writer had quoted from Exodus 25:40. Plans are important, but so is a builder who will follow the plans.

When any building is being considered, of utmost importance is the right foundation. Regardless of how impressive or ornate a building may appear, if the foundation is weak, the building will also be weak. The chief cornerstone of the foundation is Jesus Christ. He is the beginning point. From Him, all else is measured. Then, from that corner, the apostles and prophets are laid as the foundation

Are you a member of the body of Christ? To be a member of His body, you must be in Christ, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (2 Corinthians 5:17). My friend, to be “in Christ” you must be baptized into Jesus Christ. When you are baptized into Jesus Christ, you are baptized into His death (cf. Romans 6:3). Jesus shed His cleansing blood in His death on the cross and it is upon our death with Christ in the waters of baptism that our sins are washed away by His blood (cf. Revelation 1:5; Acts 22:16). In our burial with Christ in baptism our sins are forgiven and at the same time the Lord adds us to His church. Paul wrote to the church at Galatia, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:26-27). It is essential that we be members of the body of Christ, for Jesus is coming again to be “the savior of the body” (Ephesians 5:23). As Christians we must strive to remain “holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27) by “denying ungodliness and worldly lust” and living “soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:12). Dear Christian, if you are not what you ought to be, seek God’s forgiveness today by confessing your sin and repenting of it. May each of us ever live in such a way to bring glory to our heavenly Father and honor to our loving Savior. “And now little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming” (1 John 2:28).

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## THE CHURCH - THE BUILDING OF GOD

By Randy Cook

Among the several illustrations in the New Testament to describe the Church of our Lord, one of the more interesting ones is that of a building. Paul spoke of such as he explained to the church at Ephesus how that they were a part of a spiritual building. “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,

(1 Peter 1: 22-23). It is the Holy Spirit who seals Christians and is the guarantor of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14; 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5). It is the Spirit who will raise our bodies in the resurrection (Romans 8:11, 23). Thus, the Church as God’s family is an image which gives emphasis to the entire Godhead.

Another idea inherent in the image of the Church as God’s family is that of obedience to the Father. In Matthew 12:46-50, Jesus made an important declaration concerning who was His family and an important description as to what behavior would characterize them. Jesus’ family would not be individuals related to Him by physical ties, instead they would be those who “do the will of the Father.” It is often noted that children bear resemblances to their physical parents: “he has his father’s eyes, his mother’s nose, etc.” And it is often the case, that children imitate the manners and behavior of their parents. Such is the case spiritually as well. “Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma” (Ephesians 5:1-2). John makes it clear that a life of sin is indicative of devilish spiritual parentage, while a life of doing what is right is the nature of God’s children (1 John 2:29; 3:8-9). In the passage cited at the head of this article, John says that the wonderful gift of God’s love, to call us into His family, instills a powerful hope which motivates us to live purely. Can we call ourselves children of God if we do not know His will? Can we say we are in the family of God if we refuse to obey what He commands? Can we say we are His children if we are characterized by filthy, impure lives?

As we close this brief study of the family of God, it is important to observe that one’s spiritual status in the family of God can be forfeited. This runs counter to some who say, “Once I am born into the family of God, I can never be unborn from it. I may be an erring child of God but I am still His child.” Is this statement true? What does the Bible say?

While it is the case that one’s physical birth cannot be undone except by physical death, not everything in the physical birth parallels the spiritual birth. My parents never asked me if I wanted to be born into the family; I had no knowledge of it, nor did I consent to it But the

spiritual birth is one of the will of both God and man: “Of His own will He brought us forth” (James 1:18). But not without our knowledge and submission of our own wills! A groom takes a bride by his will, but not without her will and consent. Yes, the initiative is with God, but God’s initiative of love requires a response from man. As said before, the new birth is by the Spirit operating through the word. We do not become children of God without knowledge of the Gospel (Romans 10:8-17), nor without our submission to it.

Another difference between physical birth and spiritual birth is that the child receives life independent of his parents. If they die, the child will still live. But it is different in the spiritual birth. We share in the life and nature of our Savior. If we are removed from Him, we have no life (John 15:6). Indeed, Jesus is the Christian’s life (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:4). Our new birth is one of a continual, sustained relationship to Jesus (1 John 3:6,9).

What a wonderful blessing to be a part of the family of God! May we understand our blessings, privileges, and duties as God’s family.

## The Church—The Kingdom of God

Patrick Morrison

The vast majority of “Christian” denominations teach that the church and the kingdom of God are two completely separate and distinct institutions. The damnable doctrine of premillennialism is at the heart of this attempt to draw lines of distinction between the church and the kingdom. In a nutshell, those who advocate premillennialism teach that Jesus the Messiah came to earth in order to establish an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem. However, the Jews rejected him and his ideals, and put him to death upon the cross, thwarting the attempt of the Godhead to establish this terrestrial Messianic kingdom. In place of this earthly kingdom, Christ then set up the church to act as a stand-in for the kingdom until such time as he can return and try the second time, albeit successfully on this attempt, to establish his earthly kingdom headquartered in Jerusalem. There are a number of problems with this devilish, yet extremely popular, teaching,

he penned, “So we, being many, are one body in Christ and everyone members one of another.” Each Christian has the responsibility to fulfill their God given role in the church. As each member does their part by bearing their own burden (cf. Galatians 6:2) and utilizing their individual talents, the overall well being of the church will be affected for good.

Paul further wrote that there is to be no “schism” in the body, that is, division. As the body of Christ we are to get along with each other. As God’s children we are to be united as one in thought, word, and deed. The true unity of believers can only be achieved in Christ by all speaking “the same thing” and being “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10). Religious unity is only possible by being united upon the teachings of God’s Word.

In the body of Christ we are to “have the same care one for another (1 Corinthians 12:25). Every member of the church is important to God, and as such, each member should be important to us. Paul said, “Whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26). My wife has suffered in her life through seven different kidney stone attacks. Personally, I have never had such an episode and pray that I never do. But having been with my wife during those times of illness, I have witnessed the pain she went through. The pain does not just affect the kidney, but almost her entire body! So Paul writes that we should be so close to one another in the body of Christ that we feel each other’s pain. This is to be true whether it be in sorrow or in joy. When one member is honored, we are to rejoice with them. When we have the same care for every member no one is left out. Not one member will feel slighted, or unimportant, or that they are not needed. To truly be “members one of another we must develop the same sacrificial love for the church, our brethren, as Jesus has for us. Jesus “loved the church and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 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” (Ephesians 5:25-27).

are saved by their obedience to His gospel (cf. Acts 2:38-41,47). The church is precious to Christ and should be to each of us.

Within the New Testament various phrases and images are used to describe the church of Christ. One such phrase that is often used in reference to the church is “the body of Christ.” The apostle Paul clearly identifies “the church” as being “his body,” the body of Christ (cf. Ephesians 1:22-23). Furthermore, Paul clearly declares that “he (Jesus) is the head of the body, the church” (Colossians 1:18). Just as our physical bodies have one head from which our body is ordered, so Jesus, being the head, gives instruction and direction to His body, the church. Jesus has sole authority because God has given “him to be the head over all things to the church” (Ephesians 1:22). Jesus said, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18). Because Jesus is the head, we have no right to take it upon ourselves to alter His revealed will. In fact, we cannot change God’s Word because “Forever O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89). All the directions needed to become a Christian, organize the church, worship, and live as Christ’s church should, has already been written and recorded in the inspired pages of the New Testament scriptures. We dare not add to it, nor take away from it (cf. Revelation 22:18-19).

Individually, those who are Christians make up the body of Christ. Paul used the illustration of a human body to set forth the point that just “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” (1 Corinthians 12:12). Each of our physical bodies are comprised of many individual parts such as skin, bones, fingers, toes, joints, ligaments, nerve endings, blood vessels, internal organs, etc. Each part of our body has a role to play, a function to perform. The human body, as designed by God, is truly an amazing thing. It is little wonder that the Psalmist penned, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14). Each body part works in conjunction and harmony with the others for the overall good of the body. Isn’t it wonderful to be blessed by God with good health!

In speaking of the church Paul wrote, “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (1 Corinthians 12:27). In Romans 12:5

First of all, why would the Jews reject a physical kingdom based in Jerusalem when they so desperately wanted that to come to pass? With the exception of but a few, the Jews as a whole viewed the coming Messiah and his kingdom as an earthly institution which would be their deliverance from Roman oppression. On a number of occasions the Jews tried to take Jesus and force him to be king, but each time he fled from them. Why refuse their attempts if an earthly king was part of the Divine plan? Even those closest to Christ, his apostles, greatly misunderstood the kingdom. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, sought out positions of greatness in the Messianic kingdom, believing it to be earthly in nature (Matthew 20:20,21). Even after Jesus had been crucified, the apostles still did not understand the nature of the kingdom of the Lord. When Jesus appeared to them before his ascension, his followers asked, “[W]ilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6)? They were looking for the restoration of Israel to her former glory as a great political and military power, this being the Jewish concept of the Messianic kingdom. Christ’s teaching while upon earth left no doubt as to the nature of his coming kingdom. Consider John 18:36, 37: “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.” Notice that Jesus states he was born to be a king, and that was his reason for coming to this earth, but that his kingdom is spiritual in nature, not earthly. This should forever put to rest the false notion that Jesus will reign over a physical kingdom.

Second, the premillennial view of the church, that it is nothing more than an afterthought, a fill-in, does not find harmony with what the Bible teaches regarding the church. While men say that the church is not important, that it was plan B, the Bible teaches that the church has always been a part of the Divine plan to save man through the Messiah. Paul states, “To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, [a]ccording to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Ephesians 3:10, 11). This passage destroys any idea of the church being an afterthought, for

Paul states that the church is the eternal purpose of God. Christ considered the church of utmost importance, for he gave his very life for it (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25). Does this sound like an unimportant secondary plan? Absolutely not!

Third, the Bible clearly teaches that the church and the kingdom are one in the same, and that both were in existence in the first century. Jesus himself taught the oneness of the church and the kingdom when he said, “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock (the fact that Jesus is the Son of God, SPM) I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:18,19). Peter used the keys to the kingdom on the day of Pentecost when he taught the terms of entrance into the church of our Lord (Acts 2; see v. 38). The many references to the church in the New Testament leave no doubt that the church came into existence during the first century. This is a fact almost universally accepted. However, those who hold to the views of premillennialism deny that the kingdom was established in the first century, that it will be established at the coming of Christ. Again, the doctrines of men find their death at the hands of God’s word. Jesus stated that “there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power” (Mark 9:1). If the kingdom is not yet in existence, then there are disciples of the Lord some 2000 years old still living upon the earth. But this is not so, for they saw the kingdom of God come with power during their lifetimes, on the day of Pentecost, AD 29 (Acts 2). Paul declared the existence of the kingdom when he wrote, “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Colossians 1:13). Note that Paul said we **have been** translated (moved from one place to another; in this case, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of Christ), not that we will be translated. If as children of God we are not yet in the kingdom of Christ, then we have not yet been delivered from the power of darkness. Yet the blood of Christ is able to free us from the shackles of sin, and bring us out of the darkness into his marvelous light (2 Peter 2:9). The apostle John declared that he is “your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom (emphasis mine, SPM)

and patience of Jesus Christ? (Revelation 1:9). How could John be in the kingdom if the kingdom does not yet exist? He was in the kingdom because he had obeyed the commands of the Lord and was a member of the church, the body of Christ. To be in the kingdom is to be in the church, to be in the church is to be in the kingdom. They are one in the same.

The church as a kingdom has a law, a lawgiver, citizens, requirements for becoming a citizen, and requirements for maintaining citizenship, just as any kingdom does. The lawgiver for the kingdom of Christ, the church of Christ, is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 6:15). He has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). Therefore, we submit to him as our king and lawgiver. The law of Christ is perfect (James 1:25). Unlike the laws of men, the law of Christ has no flaws, no loopholes. The kingdom of our Lord is composed of those who have rendered obedience to his law, by believing in Jesus as the Son of God (John 8:24), repenting of one’s sins (Luke 13:3), confessing Christ (Matthew 10:32,33), and being baptized in water for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). These are the terms of entrance into the kingdom of Christ, the church. Upon complying with his law, one is added by the Lord to his church (Acts 2:47), becoming a citizen of his kingdom. Faithful obedience to the law of the Lord maintains our citizenship in the glorious kingdom of His dear Son. What a great privilege it is to be a member of the Lord’s church, the kingdom of him who gave his life for us!

## THE CHURCH, THE BODY OF CHRIST

Bob Vincent

The church of Jesus Christ was in God’s plan for mankind from eternity. The church was predicted by the prophets of old and proclaimed to be near at hand by John the Baptist in the first century. The church was purchased with the redeeming blood of Jesus and came into being on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 nearly two thousand years ago. The church is so vital and significant because it is comprised of the saved and the Lord adds to the church those who