

**ONE
FOLD
and
ONE
SHEPHERD**

(What is the Church?)

by: Ray Ewart

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CONTENTS

Pages

Chapter 1 - “There is One Body” (Ephesians 4:4)	5 - 12
Chapter 2 – “That They May Be One” (John 17:11)	13 - 18
Chapter 3 – “I Will Build My Church” (Matthew 16:18)	19 - 29
Chapter 4 – “The General Assembly and the Church of the First-born” (Hebrews 12:23)	30 - 45

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FOREWORD

Once again I count it a privilege to be asked to write a Foreword to a book by Mr Ewart.

Like him, I have been grieved when attempting to discuss with some of my brethren in Christ such important matters as he deals with here. They seem to me to treat Bible texts as we do with food at a cafeteria – putting on our tray what we like, and passing by items we do not care for. Too often Scripture is merely squeezed into a mould and is not permitted to give its exact message. The “general tenor” of Scripture is said to affirm certain things, even where no plain texts do. But it is every Christian’s duty to find plain, unambiguous texts for everything we teach. We are on very shaky ground when we cannot.

To some theorists many things in Scripture do not mean exactly what we would naturally expect. “Saints” are not “the Church”, “the elect” are not what is normally understood by “the elect”, “immediately after” should be “immediately before”, and “first the tares” should be understood to mean “first the wheat”. There will be (it is imagined) several tiers or ranks of the redeemed in glory, with the believers of this cold and apostatising church of today getting the front seats and the martyrs past and future taking a less important place. This we simply cannot swallow. Can its root be unconscious spiritual pride? There will be ONE FOLD AND ONE SHEPHERD.

The author lets each Scripture speak for itself. You will not find the expressions, “Most godly commentators believe”, or “This passage is not for the Church” anywhere in its pages. Sufficient Scripture is amassed to prove each point, and the reader can then take it or leave it. Our sincere prayer is that he will take it – and take it in the kindly spirit in which it is written.

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CHAPTER ONE

“THERE IS ONE BODY”

(Ephesians 4:4)

It must have been a wonderful experience to listen to Jesus Christ. Luke records that in Nazareth those who heard Him speak “wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth” (Luke 4:22).

On one occasion the Pharisees and chief priests sent officers to take Him captive. Jesus however, took them captive with His words. They returned empty handed, and being rebuked for not bringing Him; they said of Him, “Never man spake like this Man” (John 7:6).

One only needs to read a chapter like Mark 12 to appreciate the completeness of Christ’s ability to use words effectively. The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders knew He was speaking about them when He told the parable of the wicked husbandmen (vv. 1-12); the Pharisees and the Herodians marvelled at His ability to answer their subtle questions (vv. 13-17); the Sadduces were silenced by His amazing application of a familiar Scripture (vv. 18-27); His answer to the lone scribe and His subsequent conversation with him convinced everyone that He was more than a match for any one man or any group of men – for the records states, “And no man after that durst ask Him any questions” (vv. 28-34). Mark ends the chapter with glimpses of His use of words in teaching deep truth in a way which “common” people could understand (vv. 35-37), exposing hypocrites (vv. 38-40), and passing truthful judgement (vv. 41-44).

This ability with words possessed by God the Son is possessed in equal measure by God the Father and God the Spirit.

God the Father wasted no words and left no doubt about what He meant when He said on the mountain of transfiguration, “This is My beloved son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye Him” (Matthew 17:5).

Surely God the Spirit has wasted no words and left us in no doubt about what He means when He says, through Paul, “There is ONE body” (Ephesians 4:4). The multitudes of erroneous teachings and beliefs about separate bodies for Old Testament Saints, New Testament Saints, Tribulation Saints, Millennial Saints, etc, must immediately be seen to be folly in the light of this one statement. The word “one” is being used emphatically in the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians. We are reminded that there is “one body”, one Spirit”, “one hope”, “one Lord”, “one faith”, “one baptism”, “one God and Father of all”, and all of this has a bearing on the “unity of the Spirit” (vv. 3-6).

This One Body will span all time and space. “That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in ONE all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth: even in Him” (Ephesians 1:10).

The One Body will embrace all nations and all classes of people. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all ONE in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

This One Body is the One and only body of the One and only Head – “And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the Church” (Colossians 1: 17-18).

ILLUSTRATIONS

Scripture brings before us several illustrations with the express purpose of teaching us truths concerning the Church. On one occasion Jesus referred to Himself as being the Good Shepherd (John 11:11). As such He accomplished a colossal thing for His sheep. Christ expanded the use of this description of Himself to teach us something concerning His Church. It is a natural part of the whole illustration that the Church is pictured as a **FOLD**. Christ had sheep in the nation of Israel, and they, for the time being, formed one fold, but they were not the only sheep which the Good Shepherd had. He had folds in other nations, and His grand intention was to unite them all in one place on a future occasion. When that happened they would not be brought together as individual and separate little folds presided over by a shepherd who would circulate from one group to another. The divisions which prevailed in the ages of time would disappear, and the truth that they had all been united to enjoy the same privileges would be manifested in that there would be ONE FOLD even as there is only ONE SHEPHERD.

“And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (John 10:16).

Paul uses the example of a **TEMPLE**. Saints of days gone by form the sub-structure, and as saints today are added, so the superstructure grows until one day the building will be entire and complete. The chief corner stone is Christ. He binds together the whole structure, welding it into a harmonious, perfectly balanced and absolutely sound unit. There is no possibility that there could be more than one such building, for there is only one Christ, only one “chief corner stone”. Nor is there any need for another building when it includes the past, present, and future people of God.

“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; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth into an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).

It is worth noting that in this very passage Paul uses other illustrations which indicate that the people of God are one community. He refers to them as being “fellow citizens” – joined together as citizens of the one place. He follows this by saying that all saints are members of the one household – “the household of God”.

Quite often when Christ wanted to make a point easy to understand He selected a common, well-known object, and used it to illustrate the point. This was the case when He said to His followers one day, “I am the true **VINE** and My Father is the husbandman” (John 15:1). They all knew what a vine was, what it produced, and what attention it required. When Christ then told them that they were the branches of the vine they understood what part they played in relation to Christ, the central stalk. A situation was immediately created where Christ could pour out teachings which they could immediately grasp, for example:

(a) Their purpose was to bear fruit – “Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit” (John 15:2).

(b) They could not bear fruit unless they were in vital contact with Christ – “Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit in itself except it abide in the vine; no more can ye except ye abide in Me” (John 15:4).

(c) It is to the praise of the husbandman if abundant fruit is produced by his vine. God the Father is glorified by fruitful Christians – “Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples” (John 15:8).

THE BEST ILLUSTRATION

Of all the illustrations employed, however, none is more fitting than the one used in the title of this chapter – the **BODY**.

Everyone has a body. We all understand something of the needs of our body, how it reacts to certain situations and, broadly speaking, how it functions as a unit. This, then, becomes the almost perfect object to use in order to teach deep truths about the Church in a way which renders them easy to understand. Let us absorb some of this teaching as we direct our attention to several portions of Scripture. Consider firstly:

Romans 12:4-8

Paul had been making reference to our human bodies in the opening statements of the chapter. Quite correctly he affirms that it is our “reasonable service” to present our bodies as “a living sacrifice” in light of the mercies of God. In verses 4 to 12 he takes a few simple facts about our bodies to teach us something concerning the Church.

The body has “many members”. We all know this to be true. The body has fingers, thumbs, arms, toes, etc, but it is just ONE body. The Church is just the same

“For as we have many members in ONE body ... so we, being many, are ONE body in Christ ...” (vv. 4-5).

The different parts of our body are fashioned to do a different job. We cannot see with our elbows, nor can we walk on our ears. It is just the same in the Church. As individual

members of the Church we have a function to perform which differs from the functions designated to others – “All members have not the same office” (v. 4).

For the good of the body as a whole each member should carry out its duty in the best way possible. Each member is linked in some way to the other members. If one part of our body ceases to function, or functions improperly, it will affect other parts of the body. It is the same in the Church:

“So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or in ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness” (vv. 5-8).

Paul expands this teaching concerning the individual members as he writes to the believers in Corinth in

1 Corinthians 12

His subject is “Spiritual Gifts” (v. 1). He points out that there are distinctive varieties of gifts, given for the many jobs which have to be done, and there are many individual ways in which these jobs are executed by those who are gifted, but it is the one God in control:

“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all” (vv. 4-6).

Despite the staggering multiplicity of these God-glorifying gifts, it is ONE Spirit, God the Spirit, who controls them:

“But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will” (v. 11).

The same Spirit who controls these many gifts, uniting their purpose (v. 4) takes many members and makes them one body, the Church:

“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 baptised 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” (vv. 12-13).

The individual importance of each part of the body is then emphasised. This is a fact which Christians should learn and remember. There is no need for jealousy in the Church.

Perhaps you have always wanted to be a pastor, but God has not equipped you for that office. Inwardly you are jealous of some good pastor who carries out his duties in a way which makes full use of his God-given talents. Your jealousy in this case would be wrong and harmful. To let that jealousy lead you to take up full-time studies in a Bible college and train to be the best pastor man can make of you, would, if anything, be even more wrong and even more harmful. You could end up doing much damage to many souls in your so-called ministry and to crown it all you would miss doing the exceedingly important job that God has fitted you to do.

A correct understanding of the great truth of the individual importance of each organ in the Body of Christ would create in many believers a peace, a satisfaction, and a sense of purpose hitherto unknown:

“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 body 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” (vv. 14-20).

Since we have been placed in the body “as it hath pleased Him”, we cannot possibly please God by doing a work which He never intended for us.

Another truth of inestimable significance comes to light as the Spirit of God uses the illustration of the body to bring us teaching concerning the Church. Just as one part of the body needs another and depends on it, so we as members of the body of Christ need each other. Correct understanding of this aspect of things would surely lead us to respect each other more than we do.

“And 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. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another” (vv. 21-25).

The unity of our human body and the interdependence of its various parts produces a natural result. If one part is damaged or diseased, the other parts feel pain and the working of the whole body is affected. This is true in the Church. The suffering of members of the body of Christ in Communist and Islamic countries is keenly felt by true Christians in the free world.

Conversely, the well-being of believers in one part of the world gives great pleasure to the saints of God in other places.

“And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it” (v. 26).

Paul continues the chapter by listing many parts of Christ’s body gifted for their functioning by God the Spirit, and tells us that we should “covet earnestly the best gifts” (v. 31), but he concludes with a warning. Any gift which is not exercised in a spirit of love is of no value:

“But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way” (v. 31).

That “more excellent way” is the way of love, and this he makes clear as he continues (there being no chapters in the original):

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing” (13:1-3).

There then follows a description of true Christian love, which is quite perfect.

God the Spirit is using the same writer when He continues to teach believers truths concerning the church with the same illustration, in

Ephesians 4: 11-16

Early in the epistle, Paul made it clear that the body being referred to is the Church. He says that God the Father has put all things in subjection to Christ:

“... and gave Him to be the head over all things to THE CHURCH, Which is HIS BODY, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all” (1: 22-23).

His emphatic statement that “there is ONE BODY” (4:4) comes just shortly before the verses we are now about to consider. After Christ’s resurrection and ascension, working in absolute harmony with the Father and the Spirit, He “gave gifts unto men” (4:8).

“And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers” (v. 11).

These parts of the body were to operate as living organs in a complex structure. No one would deny that the human body is a complex structure.

David was inspired to write, “For I am fearfully and wonderfully made ...”. From conception to birth, and birth to maturity, processes are set in motion which man cannot even understand. So limited is our knowledge and ability that time and time again the most proficient specialists cannot even correct a process that has gone wrong.

When the body comes to maturity it is a unity which could only have been created by God Himself. The bone, sinew, muscle, nerve, flesh, and skin are interdependent, and could do nothing without the organs they house or the brain that controls them. This is so in the Church. Having referred to Christ as the head, Paul goes on to say:

“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.” (v. 16).

Whilst it is evident from this that “every part” is important, and should ideally be working in harmony with every other part for the benefit of the whole body, there are parts which are more prominently used than others in the development to maturity. This is why we have brought before us here in verse 11 some significant parts of the body of Christ.

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers have a critically important role to play. They were given for an express purpose:

“For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (vv. 12-15).

A body ought to grow. By nourishment, exercise, and correct guidance a body will grow to maturity. This is true of the Church.

It gives inestimable joy to parents to see their children grow, to watch their character develop until, as an adult, their offspring is able to meet the demands of life in a capable fashion. Equally it brings untold grief to parents if their child fails to grow either physically or mentally. If godly parents have a son or daughter who, in adulthood, has no discretion or no moral fibre, or is easily led astray, then those parents derive no satisfaction from that son or daughter.

These things have their spiritual parallel in the Church, God wants His Church to come “unto a perfect man”. He derives no pleasure when His representatives on earth are “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine”. He has provided everything needful for our growth. We have a perfect Head, so that the correct

instructions will be given to the body in every circumstance. More than ample nourishment is available for us in the Word of God and in the ministry of the Triune God on our behalf. Abundant exercise is provided for in the work God has given us to do. Lack of growth to maturity can only be through our own failures.

CLEAR TEACHING

Whilst, in my own opinion, the body is an almost perfect illustration of the Church, it does, as an illustration, fall short in several ways. No human body has a perfect head, having a brain which is incapable of making a mistake, but the Church has. All human bodies are subject to decay; the Church is not, and so we could go on. Despite the shortcomings of the illustration, however, it is obvious that valuable, clear teaching can be readily absorbed, using the human body as a picture of the Church.

No truth could be made more clear than the fundamental point to which I directed your attention early in this chapter – there is only ONE CHURCH. The number of times the Spirit of God brings this fact before us underlines the critical importance of grasping it and using it to help you understand what Scripture has to say regarding the past, present and future of the body of Christ.

Let me, then, in concluding this chapter, bring before you several Scriptures that bear testimony to this truth:

Romans 12:5: “So we, being many are ONE BODY in Christ”

1 Corinthians 10:17: “For we being many are one bread and ONE BODY ...”

1 Corinthians 12:13: “For by one Spirit we are all baptised into ONE BODY ... “

Ephesians 4:4: “There is ONE BODY ...”

Colossians 3:15: “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in ONE BODY and be ye thankful”.

CHAPTER TWO

“THAT THEY MAY BE ONE”

(John 17:11)

Just a short time before He was betrayed, Christ prayed to the Father on the subject of the unity of believers. The prayer to which I am referring is recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John’s Gospel.

It is pointed out by many, whose war-cry is “One World, One Church”, that Christ’s desire was “that they may be one” (John 17:11).

In the light of the modern ecumenical movement we would do well to read this prayer carefully to discover exactly what Christ was requesting. Let us then examine what John records, and ask ourselves three simple questions.

Firstly:

WHO ARE TO BE UNITED?

Christ made it perfectly clear that He was not praying for everyone. He had a particular group of people in mind, and it was this group, and this group only, for which He sought unity, and this unity implied the exclusion of all others:

“... I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given me; for they are Thine. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; That all may be one ...” (vv. 9:20-21).

Already, from these few words, we can conclude that Christ was praying for God’s own people – “for they are Thine”. He was praying for those who believe on Him – “them also which shall believe on Me”. It was not even restricted to believers in one time slot, but included all “which shall believe” right down the ages of time which were then still future.

The list of qualifications for membership of this exclusive group which Christ was praying for goes far beyond the requirements for membership of churches currently in the World Council of Churches.

To be in the group to which Jesus referred you need to possess eternal life: “As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given Him” (v. 2).

To be in this group you need to obey the Word of God: “I have manifested Thy name unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world: Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me; and they have kept Thy word” (v. 6).

To be in this group you need to be the sort of person in whom Christ can be glorified: “And all Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine; and I am glorified in them” (v. 10).

To be in this group is to experience in full measure the very joy of Christ: “And now I come to Thee; and these things I speak in this world, that they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves” (v.13).

To be in this group is to experience the hatred of what Christ terms “the world”. Any examinations of His varied use of this term “the world” in several verses in the chapter reveals that He means here those people who are not members of His Church: “I have given them Thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (v. 14).

To be in this group is to become increasingly separated from the ambitions and actions that characterise ungodly people. This growth in godliness is brought about by absorbing and obeying the Word of God; “Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy word is truth” (v. 17).

To be in this group is to become a Christ-appointed missionary to those around you who are still in nature’s darkness: “As Thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I sent them into the world” (v. 18).

To be in this group is to have bestowed upon you, by grace, the glory of God: “And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one” (v. 22).

To be in this group is to have within you the love of God: “And I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it; that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them and I in them” (v. 26).

Nor have we by any means exhausted the qualifications of this group in this list. We could go on to mention their knowledge, as set out in verses 7, 8 and 25; their security, as set out in verse 11; their future dwelling place with Christ, as set out in verse 24; and their possession of an indwelling Christ as set out in verse 26. If you talk, then, about uniting a company of people who each, as individuals, bear these qualifications and enjoy these privileges, then you talk about something which God supports. If, on the other hand, you pursue the unification of some who possess these qualifications and some who do not, then you pursue something to which God is diametrically opposed.

It is for good reason that Christ said, “I do not pray for the world” (v. 9). None of “the world” is in the Church, nor can they ever be. The Church is composed of those whom God the Father has given to God the Son (v. 2). This is exactly the same company of people as have “received” and “believed” the Word of God (v. 8). Their belief is deep when related to Christ (v. 20).

Many people get into a hopeless state of confusion by trying to judge from outward appearances or from word of mouth testimony. To the eye of man, unregenerate people of the world can appear like the people of God. The passage of Scripture we have before us brings out some similarities. Referring to members of His Church, Christ said, “They have believed that Thou didst send Me” (v. 8). At the same time He says that the unity of the Church can create a condition where “the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me” (v. 21). The unregenerate sinner and the saint could speak of their belief in similar terms. Again Christ says of His own people that they “have known surely that I came out from Thee” (v. 8), whilst also saying that the unity of the Church can mean “that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me” (v. 23). The ungodly and the godly could, therefore, speak of their knowledge in similar terms.

The two companies are, however, as different as night and day. To attempt any form of union between them is to try to join heaven and hell. The inspired words written by Paul to the saints at Corinth, when warning them against any alliance with the ungodly, bring out the utter difference between both camps:

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?” (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).

The simple answer to our first question is that the people to be unified are the people of God – and only the people of God.

Secondly:

HOW ARE THEY TO BE UNIFIED?

It is the duty, privilege and pleasure of every child of God to get to know God better day by day. I believe that the statement found in the latter part of Daniel 11:32 holds good in all ages, namely that “the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits”.

Through the revelation of the Scriptures we can gain amazing knowledge of God. Nevertheless, the mysteries of the Godhead are such that we can only comprehend relatively little about our Triune God; there are so many questions about the Godhead which we cannot answer, and will not be able to answer until Christ returns and makes our knowledge perfect – as Paul said, “For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face: now I know in part: but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

One of the deep mysteries in the Godhead is the unity of the three Persons. We understand the relationship of father and son in a human sense, and that influences our understanding of the relationship at Divine level. Perhaps it is for this very reason that we have difficulty in understanding how the SON is the FATHER as expressed in Isaiah: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a SON is given: and the government shall be upon

His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, THE EVERLASTING FATHER, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

Christ said in very plain terms, “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9), and again, “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30).

It is this unity, which to us is veiled by impenetrable light, to which Christ refers when He speaks of the unity of believers. Getting back to the seventeenth chapter of John’s Gospel, we pick up the words of Christ as he prays for His Church: “... Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one **AS WE ARE**” (v. 11).

This, then, is a form of unity which man cannot organise. It is not to be accomplished by joining a union or forming a Council of Churches or agreeing on an outward form of worship, a basis of beliefs or a common programme of work. It is infinitely higher than any or all of these. It is something which God alone can create.

Christ asked His Holy Father to do it. He also performed it Himself, for He says, “And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; **THAT THEY MAY BE ONE, EVEN AS WE ARE ONE**” (John 17:22). When we go further to read what Paul wrote to the saints at Ephesus we find that this unity is a work of God the Spirit, “Endeavouring to keep the **UNITY OF THE SPIRIT** in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

It is clear from Scripture, that this unity, far from being a work of man, is a work of the Triune God, each Person working, as always, in absolute harmony. Man’s part is to “KEEP” that unity in a way which becomes those professing godliness – “in the bond of peace”.

Christ went even further in revelation of this unity as He prayed to the Father. Not only did He reveal that it was a spiritual unity identical to the unity between Father, Son, and Spirit, but He went on to show that it is a unity with the Godhead:

“That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be **ONE IN US**” (John 17:21).

These truths are deep, rich, and amazing. In light of them the foolish notion that the ecumenical movement is fulfilling the Lord’s expressed desire “that they may be one” is so contemptible that it must be banished forever from the mind of every child of God.

The unity of believers can be described as nothing less than perfect. This is the way in which Christ referred to it as He continued to commune with the Father.

“I in them and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one” (v. 23).

Thirdly:

WHEN ARE THEY TO BE UNIFIED?

When Christ went with the disciples to the home of Martha and Mary, after Lazarus had died, Martha met Him as He approached. She told Christ that she believed that her brother would not have died if He had been there. Having said this she went on to say:

“But I know that, even now, whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee” (John 11:22).

She was confident that Christ’s prayers were always answered. Later that day, as He stood before the grave, He confirmed that Martha’s confidence was well founded. When they took the stone from the mouth of the cave, Christ said:

“Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always ...” (John 11: 41-42).

Consequently when He commanded Lazarus to come forth from the dead, he came.

We can have as much confidence as Martha, and more, to believe that Christ’s prayer for the unity of His followers has similarly been heard and answered.

THE UNITY OF BELIEVERS IS AN ACCOMPLISHED FACT.

Christ used the past tense when He referred to His work in creating this unity:

“And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one” (John 17:22).

The exhortation of the apostle Paul to the believers at Ephesus, which we quoted earlier, was to KEEP “the unity of the Spirit”. You can only keep something which is already in existence.

The body of Christ is a recognised, unified, separate entity, as is evidenced by what Paul wrote to the saints at Corinth:

“Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God” (1 Corinthians 10:32).

If we have correctly answered the three simple questions we can proceed to draw the conclusion that the unity Christ prayed for is a spiritual and eternal unity, already accomplished by the power and grace of God.

On the basis of this conclusion we find the present, popular Ecumenical Movement to be a sham counterfeit. The instigators of this movement, and those who support them, are seeking to do a work which men cannot do, in a way which God never intended, using materials which, for the most part, are unsuitable.

It would be better for every true child of God to dissociate himself from the Movement. I fear that those who work to further its ends are prospering the working of the “mystery of iniquity” (2 Thessalonians 2:7), rather than pursuing the desires of Christ.

It must, however, be admitted that even the true people of God, separated as they are by doctrinal and denominational differences, are failing to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). This shows us to be lacking in uniformity, but not in the essential unity which God has created as we are, “by ONE Spirit”, “baptised into ONE body” (1 Corinthians 12:13). In a day future, in the resurrection, even the uniformity will be complete, by the grace of God.

CHAPTER THREE

“I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH”

(Matthew 16:18)

On one occasion as Jesus travelled with His disciples in the region of Caesarea Philippi He asked them, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” (Matthew 16:13). This question drew several answers from His disciples, for, as they had conversed with other people or overheard others speak of Christ, they discovered that people were somewhat confused on this vital question.

Some thought that Christ was John the Baptist come back to life. Others thought that he was Elijah, or perhaps Jeremiah, or some other prophet reincarnated.

Christ then directed the question towards His disciples, asking, “But whom say ye that I am? (v. 15). There could be but one answer from those who knew Him, and Peter was the one who put it into words as he affirmed, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (v. 16).

This was precious knowledge Peter had. He had not received it from man, but it had been imparted to him by revelation from the Father. Now he was to learn that this same Christ was the rock on which the Church would be built, for Christ replied:

“Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock 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 16:17-19).

THE SUPREME IMPORTANCE OF CHRIST

Volumes have been written on this statement made by Christ. Sadly, however, it has been made the basis of monstrous claims by those who wished to exalt Peter to a position which he never occupied.

Before we proceed to show how Scripture deals a death blow to the false claims made for Peter, let us grasp the glorious truth which shines through concerning Christ.

The subject of conversation is Christ.
The one who knew what was to happen is Christ.
The owner of the Church is Christ.
The builder of the Church is Christ.

The one who possesses “the keys” and has power to give them is Christ.

No clever argument needs to be presented to establish the one great truth which I want you to grasp and retain, namely, that Christ is the builder of the Church. We need only to repeat what Christ said to Peter – “I will build My Church”.

Christ is viewed as building HIS Church for which He gave Himself for it at Calvary; He is seen as building it as He cleanses believers in the course of their lives, and He will be seen as having completed the building when He presents the perfect, finished work to Himself in the ages to come. Paul put it well as he wrote to the believers at Ephesus:

“Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also 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).

Christ is the only means of access into the Church, which is pictured in John 10:16 as a **SHEEP-FOLD**, (Two different words are used in John 10:16 for the word translated “fold”. One means “count” or “yard” but the other means “flock” so that the verse should be indeed: “And other sheep I have, which are not of this **YARD** (i.e. Israel): them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be **ONE FLOCK** (i.e. Jew and Gentile), and **ONE SHEPHERD**”) for He says:

“I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture” (John 10: 9).

As the people of God spread the glorious message of salvation through faith in Christ, it is the Lord who adds to the Church, not the missionaries.

“... and the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2: 47).

No matter what picture is given of the Church, Christ is shown to be the all important one.

If it is a **BODY**, then He is the **HEAD**, for we are exhorted to:

“... grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: 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” (Ephesians 4:15-16).

If it is a **BUILDING**, then He is the **CHIEF CORNER STONE**:

“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; In whom all the building

fitly framed together groweth into an holy temple in the Lord; In whom ye are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22).

If it is a **FLOCK** of sheep, then He is the **SHEPHERD**:

“I am the good shepherd and know My sheep, and am known of Mine” (John 10: 14).

Under no circumstances should the position, authority, and work of Christ be challenged. He will not give His glory to another.

When we attack the erroneous teaching concerning Peter we do not intend it as a personal attack on Peter himself. If we wished to attack any individuals it would be the false teachers who attribute to Peter power which he never possessed, and who try to give him a position which is rightly occupied by Christ.

It is necessary that in refuting this wrong doctrine we must show Peter to be no better than any other human being.

FALSE CULTS

The Roman Catholic Church claims that Peter is the foundation on which the Church was built. This claim comes out quite clearly in the following extract from a letter written by Jerome to Pope Damasus in 376 A.D. He is appealing for an authoritative pronouncement on an expression which was coming into currency through the influence of the Cappadocian fathers:

“... it is to the successor of the fisherman I address myself, to the disciple of the cross”.

“As I follow no leader save Christ, so I communicate with none save your Beatitude, that is, with the chair of Peter. For this, I know, is the Rock on which the Church is built. This is Noah’s Ark, and he who is not found in it shall perish when the flood overwhelms all ...”.

This same Church further asserts that Peter, and his successors, have the exclusive authority to make a person a candidate for salvation. In the Bull, “Unan Sanctam”, 1302, Pope Boniface VIII had it recorded as follows:

“... furthermore we declare, state, define and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human being to be subject to the Roman pontiff”.

The utter arrogance of the claims made by this church and its pontiff is typified in the Deposition of Henry IV by Pope Gregory VII. In February, 1076, he wrote:

“Blessed Peter, chief of the apostles, incline thine holy ears to us, I pray, and hear me, thy servant, whom from infancy thou hast nourished and till this day hast delivered from the hand of the wicked, who have hated and do hate me for my faithfulness to thee”

“Especially to me, as thy representative, have been committed, and to me by thy grace has been given by God the power of binding and loosing in heaven and on earth. Relying, then, on this belief, for the honour and defence of thy Church and in the name of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost through thy power and authority, I withdraw the government of the whole kingdom of the Germans and of Italy from Henry the King, son of Henry the Emperor. For he has risen up against thy Church with unheard of arrogance. And I absolve all Christians from the bond of the oath which they have made to him or shall make. And I forbid anyone to serve him as king”

The struggle with Henry IV went against Gregory for a time. The Emperor sympathised with Henry, and at councils at Mainz and Brixon, called by Henry, the pope was declared deposed.

This provoked Gregory to write a lengthy exposition on the supposed power of the pope, and the Roman Catholic Church. Something of the breadth and depth of the claim can be seen in the following quotations from that exposition, which took the form of a letter to Bishop Hermann of Metz, written in 1081:

“ ... Who does not know the words of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who says in the gospel: thou art Peter and upon this rock will I 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 upon earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose upon earth shall be loosed also in heaven? (Matthew 16: 18-19). Are kings excepted here? Or are they not included among the sheep which the Son of God committed to St. Peter? Who, I ask, in view of this universal concession of the power of binding and loosing, can think that he is withdrawn from the authority of St. Peter, unless, perhaps, that unhappy man who is unwilling to bear the yoke of the Lord and subjects himself to the burden of the devil, refusing to be among the number of Christ’s sheep? It will help him little to his wretched liberty that he shake from his proud neck the divinely granted power of Peter. For the more any one, through pride, refuses to bear it, the more heavily shall it press upon him unto damnation at the judgement.”

“The holy fathers, in general councils as well as in their writings and doings, have called the Holy Roman Church the universal mother, accepting and serving with great veneration this institution founded by the divine will, this pledge of a dispensation to the Church, this privilege entrusted in the beginning and confirmed to St. Peter, the chief of the apostles. And even as they accepted its statements in confirmation of their faith and of the doctrines of holy religion, so also they received its judgements – consenting in this and agreeing as it were with one spirit and one voice: that all greater matters and exceptional cases and judgements over all Churches, ought to be referred to it as to a mother and a head; that from it there was no appeal; that no one could or should retract or reverse its decisions”

“Furthermore, every Christian king, when he comes to die, seeks as a pitiful suppliant the aid of a priest, that he may escape hell’s prison, may pass from the darkness into the light,

and at the judgement of God may appear absolved from the bondage of his sins. Who, in his last hour (what layman, not to speak of priests) has ever implored the aid of an earthly king for the salvation of his soul? And what king or emperor is able by reason of the office he holds to rescue a Christian from the power of the devil through holy baptism, to number him among the sons of God, and to fortify him with the divine unction? Who of them by his own words can make the body and blood of our Lord – the greatest act in the Christian religion? Or who of them possess the power of binding and loosing in heaven and on earth? From all of these considerations it is clear how greatly the priestly office excels in power ...”.

He continues in this wearisome manner to brag of more power and excellence. Praise God, all the false claims of this pope, his predecessors, and his successors, fall to pieces and are seen to be worth less than nothing in the light of the Word of God.

AN ORDINARY PETER

Even a superficial study of the Scriptures brings us to the conclusion that Peter was not the man that the Roman Catholic Church would have us believe he was. Peter was the man to whom Christ addressed the rebuke, “Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou art an offence unto Me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men” (Matthew 16:23). It was to him that Christ said, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” (Matthew 14:31). It was this same Peter who denied knowing Christ and used cursing and swearing to make his denial credible (Matthew 26:69-75). So inconsistent was Peter during a period when the Roman Catholic Church would have you believe that he was supreme Pontiff, that Paul had to rebuke him in a most severe manner (Galatians 2:11-16). Even by his own confession Peter was not the most learned of persons, for he records that he found some of Paul’s writings hard to understand (2 Peter 3:14-16), and Christ certainly underlined this when He said to Peter (and to the others for whom Peter had asked a question), “Are ye also yet without understanding?” (Matthew 15:15-16).

These things, and many others, have been recorded that we might conclude, without any room for doubt, that Peter was a mere man.

PETER WAS NOT THE CHIEF

The disciples came to Christ on one occasion and asked Him pointedly, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (Matthew 18:1). It would have been easy for Christ to have answered, “Peter is the greatest” – but that would not have been true. His reply was, “Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:4).

Even when it came to such a late stage in Christ’s earthly ministry as the Last Supper, it was obvious that the disciples did not regard Peter as their head. Christ told them that one of their number would betray Him. Naturally this shocked them, and the prospect of such

a thing happening gave rise to much discussion and self-examination, but this discussion in turn gave way to a questioning about who would be chief:

“And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest” (Luke 22:24).

Once again Christ was presented with a perfect opportunity to name Peter as His successor, but once again He showed that this was not His intention, for He said:

“The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so” (Luke 22:25-26).

The Roman Catholic Church has not changed its mind on this issue, nor is it likely to make an alteration in its teachings. I was part way through the writing of this chapter when I read an article in the Melbourne newspaper, “The Age”. The article referred to comments made by the Administrator of the Archdiocese of Melbourne (Bishop John Kelly) concerning what he termed “a crisis of faith” in the Roman Catholic Church because members were refusing to accept the Pope’s teachings. He is quoted in the July 5, 1974, issue of the paper as saying:

“This is not so much a crisis of obedience and acceptance of authority, but a crisis of faith, of Catholic faith – a refusal to hear what God has to say to men through His body, the Church, and its head, the Pope”.

How distant from the truth this hollow belief is, and how dangerous to assert that any man, or succession of men, could be head of the body (whether a small or large H is intended for the word “head”), when Scripture so clearly says otherwise:

“For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church: and He is the saviour of the body” (Ephesians 5:23).

PETER IS NOT THE FOUNDATION

When Christ said to Peter, “... thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church ...” (Matthew 16:18), He left no room for us to confuse the meaning of the name “Peter” with the “rock”, which is the foundation of the church.

The Aramaic name for Peter is Cephas, and it is this version of the name which Christ used when He gave us its meaning as it is recorded in John’s Gospel:

“And when Jesus beheld him, He said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona; thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone” (John 1:42).

The word used for “rock” on the other hand is the same word as is used for the foundation on which a wise man would build his house. Christ said:

“Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock” (Mathew 7:24).

It is the same word as is used by Paul when he wrote to the Romans:

“As it is written, Behold I lay in Sion a stumbling stone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed” (Romans 9:33).

And there it referred to Christ.

It is the same word used by the same writer when he wrote to the church at Corinth:

“And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of the spiritual rock that followed them: and that rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4).

Again it referred to Christ.

The foundation for successful building has to be Christ.

“... But let every man take heed how he buildeth there-upon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:10-11).

PETER HAD NO SPECIAL POWER

To conclude that Peter had special powers conferred upon him because of what Christ said would be wrong. When Christ said:

“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:19), He was not exalting Peter to a position which no one else could share or occupy. It is obvious from Scripture that other people were already manipulating the door of the kingdom of heaven. Christ said on one occasion:

“But woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in” (Matthew 23:13).

Something is added to this thought by Luke as he records the words:

“Woe unto you lawyers; for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered” (Luke 11:52).

Peter was to have the privilege of bringing the key of knowledge of Christ to many, but this privilege was to be shared by other apostles, prophets, teachers, pastors, evangelists, and relatively ungifted saints of God.

When the angel in Revelation 9:1 was given the key of the “bottomless pit” we do not assume that he became the sole possessor of it. Such an assumption would be shaken by seeing another angel (or at least an angel not being identified as the same one) using the key in Revelation 20:1, and it would ultimately be shattered by seeing that this very key belongs to, and is in the possession of, Christ, according to Revelation 1:20.

All “keys” of this nature are the sole property of God, who permits people to use them for a given time.

Again, when Christ said:

“... 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 16:19), He was not giving Peter any more power than He was giving to the rest of His faithful followers. Scripture makes this plain when it records that Christ said to all of the apostles:

“Verily I say unto you, whatsoever **YE** shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever **YE** shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 18:18).

These promises merely underline a lesson that comes through time and time again in the Word of God. What you do on earth is of extreme importance because it determines your eternal future. If you are not converted on earth, in the course of time, you will not have opportunity to be converted in the life to come. If you are a child of God and you live with disregard to the Word of God, neglecting your salvation, you will suffer the effects of it in heaven.

CHRIST

Even this brief study of Matthew 16:13-19, demonstrates that Christ is the all-important One.

Let us now direct our attention to the importance of what Christ said in Matthew 16:18 concerning the Church. The full verse reads as follows:

“And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”.

We have already seen that the ONE BODY, the Church, spans all time, for the Scripture says:

“That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in ONE all things in Christ” (Ephesians 1:10).

If the Church is one body, and is therefore composed of all believers from all ages of time, why does Christ say, “I **WILL** build My Church” as though it were a work yet

future at that time? If it was still future, how could it then include the Old Testament saints who were already dead?

Surely these questions must occur to a person sincerely seeking to know the truth, but the answers to the questions come as easily as do the questions.

When we are talking of Christ we are talking of The Eternal God, who is unrestricted by time. The work of Christ on Calvary was still future at the time Christ said to the Father:

“I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do” (John 17:4).

Christ could speak of the work as if it were already accomplished, for indeed, in the unchangeable plans of The Eternal God, Christ was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8).

In the foreknowledge of God the names of the members of the Church, of Old and New Testament times, were already recorded and are covered by the Scripture:

“He hath chosen us in Him **BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD**” (Ephesians 1:4).

Those who would not be members of the Church are covered by Scripture:

“... whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 17:8).

The very fact that the Old Testament saints are included in the Church is guaranteed by what Christ said in the verse under consideration, for He said, “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”.

How were the gates of hell prevailing against it? Simply by this, that the Old Testament saints were in that place of the departed called hades. Christ told a story once about a certain rich man and a beggar named Lazarus, who lived close together. Lazarus was a saint of God, but the rich man was not. Both men died, and the Word of God records it this way:

“And it came to pass, that the beggar died and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom; the rich man also died and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in this bosom” (Luke 16:22-23).

Both men were within sight of each other, but in entirely different circumstances, being in entirely different regions of that place called hades.

When Christ yielded up the ghost (Matthew 27:50), whilst His body was on the cross, and later in the sepulchre, His spirit went down into hell:

“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit. By which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison” (1 Peter 3:18-19).

He brought the Old Testament saints out from hades when He ascended to the Father.

“Wherefore he saith, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth. He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things)” (Ephesians 4:8-10).

Now there are no saints of God held captive in any sense in hell. Christ took the members of His Church out and fulfilled the promise that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”.

Even the bodies of some of those saints arose to give testimony to what had been accomplished, for Matthew records:

“And the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after His resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many” (Matthew 27:52-53).

What a blessing that it is Christ we are depending on, and not Peter, or any other man or company of men!

“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20).

What a blessing that Christ has all power and authority, and not Peter, or any other man or company of men!

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, “All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18).

What a blessing that all judgment has been committed to Christ, and not to Peter or any other man or company of men!

“For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father” (John 5:22-23).

What Christ has done cannot be overstated:

“ ... For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).

“... but now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Hebrews 9:26).

What Christ can do for the one who puts his hope, trust and faith for salvation in Him alone can only partly be expressed:

“Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25).

“Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever, Amen” (Jude 24-25).

This is the Christ who said, “I will build My Church”.

CHAPTER FOUR

“THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND THE CHURCH OF THE FIRST-BORN”

(Hebrews 12:23)

One of the chief criticisms levelled against the Church, as men see it today, is that it is divided. There are so many sects and denominations, so many doctrinal differences, so many variations of emphasis on evangelism, that the world at large concludes that there is no real unity and very little possibility of unity ever existing.

Whilst it is easy to understand how an impartial observer could make such an assessment, it should, however, be pointed out that people generally make two fundamental mistakes in arriving at this conclusion. In the first place they usually assume that all sincere members of all sects and denominations are members of the true Church. This is not the case. In the second place, they usually look for an outward unity when all the while it is a spiritual unity which exists.

The spiritual unity, which cannot be seen, will, nevertheless, be accompanied by a perfect outward and visible unity in the resurrection. It will then be seen by all created beings that the Church consists of every redeemed person, from every age of time. The saints who lived before the flood in Noah's day will form part of it; redeemed people who saw the glorious reign of Solomon will be included; followers of Christ right down the centuries of recent history will be there; Tribulation and Millennial saints, Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, kings and commoners, whoever they be, who are bought by the blood of Christ, will be seen to be members of the One Fold and One Body which is the Church. This is the General Assembly and Church of the First-born (Hebrews 12:23).

BASIC TRUTH

The basic truth which must be grasped in order to understand this glorious teaching is that salvation is provided in no other way and in no other person than Christ.

According to Acts 4:8 Peter was “filled with the Holy Ghost” when he made this very point to the rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, by saying:

“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Christ Himself left us in no doubt in this matter when He said to Thomas:

“I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me” (John 14:6).

From the first prophecy of the coming Saviour in Genesis to the last mention of the coming Lord in Revelation, Christ is revealed as fallen man's only hope. He is viewed as

the One who, in the Father's eternal plan, would pay the price of man's redemption. The Amplified Version puts it admirably when it renders 1 Peter 1:20 thus:

“It is true that He was chosen and foreordained before the foundation of the world, but He was brought out to public view in these last days for the sake of you!”

If you hope to be saved by your own goodness, or your form of religion, or the ordinances of your church, or a combination of any or all of these things and the merit of Christ, then you have a false hope and you will be lost. If you have the notion that some people will be saved by keeping the Commandments or adhering to all the Laws delivered to Israel, or by helping the brethren of Christ during the tribulation, then you have a false notion. Salvation is found through Christ **ALONE**, plus nothing and minus nothing.

Scripture shows us:

(i) THE CHURCH IN THE OLD TESTAMANT

And goes on to assure us that the Old Testament saints are one with us in Christ.

The writer to the Hebrews says:

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became Him for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons into glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering. For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one; for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare Thy name unto my brethren, and in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee” (Hebrews 2:9-12).

In this Scripture the writer, in referring to Christ's redemptive work in making lost sinners “Sons of God” and thus “Brethren” of Christ, and thus members of the “Church”, quotes from David's inspired writing in Psalm 22:2, where the latter verse is rendered:

“I will declare Thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee”.

The word “church” in the New Testament is translated “congregation” in the Old Testament in this instance.

When arguing out the doctrine of justification by faith in the Epistle to the Romans, Paul uses Abraham as our example, and is careful to point out that it was “righteousness” that he obtained by faith. Moreover, he obtained this righteousness before the giving of the law and even before the introduction of circumcision:

“For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

“Cometh this blessedness upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness”.

“How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; and that righteousness might be imparted to them also: and the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised” (Romans 4:3-12).

Abraham is assuredly one of that “congregation” of the Old Testament which is the “Church” of the New Testament. Many other members of that “congregation” are mentioned in Hebrews 11 as the writer deals with salvation by faith. As he concludes the tenth chapter the writer makes it perfectly clear that he is discussing saving faith when he says:

“Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul” (Hebrews 10:38-39).

He then defines faith as:

“... the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1), and proceeds to name members of the “congregation”, including Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel. This list is by no means comprehensive, for he mentions others so numerous that space would fail to tell of them and their faith.

He concludes the chapter by pointing out that these people will be “made perfect” with “us” (referring to the New Testament saints):

“And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect” (Hebrews 11:39-40). The Amplified Version renders these verses this way:

“And all these, though they won divine approval by means of their faith, did not receive the fulfilment of what was promised, because God had us in mind and had something

better and greater in view for us, so that they (these heroes and heroines of faith) should not come to perfection apart from us (that is, before we could join them)".

It is then no surprising thing that we New Testament Gentile members of the Church are merely represented as a branch grafted in to the tree of Old Testament Jewish saints that we might be members of the one tree being fed by the same root:

"I say then, Hath God cast away His people? God forbid, For I am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin".

"For I speak to you Gentiles insomuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office; if by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them

"And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; boast not thyself against the branches. But it thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee" (Romans 11:1, 13, 14, 17 &18).

The Old Testament "congregation" as man saw it, did, of course, contain many unbelievers who are not in the true Church. Included among these unbelievers were the "branches" that were broken off". When Stephen, therefore, referred to "the church" in Moses' day he made it clear that many of this assembly were judged as unbelievers. His answer to the accusations made against him is recorded in Acts 7, and he says:

"This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in **THE CHURCH IN THE WILDERNESS** with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us; to whom our fathers would not obey ..." (Acts 7:37-39).

Disobedience and unbelief has been a characteristic of every age and Stephen referred to New Testament times when he said, on the same occasion:

"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye" (Acts 7:51).

We can, however, rejoice in the knowledge that Old Testament saints were saved through faith, by the redemptive work of Christ. Christ dealt with the whole sin question – as John the Baptist said:

"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Among the mighty things which Christ accomplished in dealing with the root problem of sin were these:

- “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).
- “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).
- “... that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Hebrews 2:9).
- “And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:15).

These things were not done for one group of people during one selected period of time, but were carried out for God’s “elect”, the “whosoever will” of every generation.

That Christ’s sacrifice availed for Old Testament saints is clearly argued by Paul as he records:

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness **FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS THAT ARE PAST THROUGH THE FOREBEARANCE OF GOD**; to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:23-25).

God had not visited the Old Testament saints with eternal judgment for their sins. His “forebearance” in passing over these “sins that are past” was righteous because Christ was to die for them.

How striking is the clarity of some of the statements of some Old Testament saints regarding Christ.

Job said: “For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:25-26).

Peter, preaching on that remarkable day of Pentecost, quotes David in this manner. “For David speaketh concerning Him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: therefore did my heart rejoice and my tongue was glad, moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: because Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; Thou shalt make me full of joy with Thy countenance.”

“Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins,

according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on His throne, he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption” (Acts 2:25-31).

David had written these words in Psalm 16:8-11.

No New Testament saint spoke of Christ’s sufferings in any clearer terms than Isaiah did when he said:

“He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.”

“Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows, yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.”

“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.”

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:3-6).

One proof after another is laid before us in Scripture that we might know that the Church includes the Old Testament saints.

We in New Testament times are exhorted to go outside the camp to Jesus “bearing His reproach” (Hebrews 13:12-14). The same inspired writer reminds us that in Old Testament times Moses esteemed “the reproach of Christ” to be worth more than the treasures of Egypt.

Paul, when identifying true believers in New Testament times, says: “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Romans 8:9).

And Peter reminds us that the prophets in Old Testament times had their revelation by “the Spirit of Christ which was in them” (1 Peter 1:11).

It goes without saying that Scripture shows us:

(ii) THE CHURCH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

It was in New Testament times that “... the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

It was in New Testament times that Paul sent from Miletus to Ephesus and called the elders together to say to them, amongst other things:

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over 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).

Paul spoke of an accomplished work in New Testament times when he wrote to the believers at Corinth:

“And God hath set some in the Church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:28).

Paul was thankful for the grace of God when he thought of his past, for he writes to these same people:

“For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:9-10). In recording this statement he bears testimony to the fact that the Church was there to be persecuted.

When writing to the believers in Ephesus he again records how low he was in his own estimation, and goes on to show that in this very age God is showing His wisdom to the principalities and powers by the Church:

“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ; to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord; in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him” (Ephesians 3:8-12).

The truth that the Church is seen in the New Testament just cannot be missed, so I will not labour the point further.

What sometimes is missed, though, is that the Scriptures show us:

(iii) THE CHURCH IN THE TRIBULATION

The doctrine is not very popular, but it is, nevertheless, true. When Christ told His followers to expect tribulation He told them that they should not be alarmed about it. Victory was assured. Christ had already overcome the foe and those who follow Christ can experience peace in every situation:

“These things have I spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Christ's promise of tribulation came true. Nor did the tribulation end with the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:57-60), or persecution of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), or the killing of James (Acts 12:1-2), or the ill-treatment of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:49-52), or the suffering in Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11), but it continued down through the rule of pagan Rome to this very day. As I write there are countless thousands of the saints of God, members of the body of Christ, suffering under Communism, Romanism, Mohammedanism, Paganism, False Protestantism, and countless other isms.

It will continue and intensify as we pass on into that period known as the Great Tribulation.

The Church militant is seen to be on the earth until Christ comes for it at the end of the Great Tribulation.

It is seen as Scriptures speak of:

THE REVELATION OF CHRIST

As Matthew writes his gospel he warns against believing that Christ would come secretly, and then flatly states that Christ will not come until after the Tribulation:

“Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold He is in the desert; go not forth; behold, He is in the secret chamber; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.”

“IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE TRIBULATION of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken; and **THEN SHALL APPEAR THE SIGN OF THE SON OF MAN IN HEAVEN**; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:26-30).

We are left in no doubt about the fact that this is the Great Tribulation, for it immediately preceeds Christ's glorious coming and the predicted signs of the sun, moon, and stars. Matthew had already recorded in this chapter that it would be the time of tribulation which has no equal when he said:

“For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matthew 24:21).

Equally we are left in no doubt about the fact that the Church is still on the earth in the midst of it, for he follows on to say:

“And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved, but for the **ELECT'S** sake those days shall be shortened” (Matthew 24:22).

These are the same “elect” members of the Church who, during this time, as at other times, are able to tell false prophets from true messengers of God:

“For these shall rise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch, that, if it were possible, they should deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24:24).

The term “elect” is used quite freely in Scripture concerning that saints of God who constitute the Church. Christ says that it is the “elect” who will be gathered at the rapture.

“And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:31).

Christ told His disciples that He would avenge his “elect”:

“And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry night and day unto Him, though He bear long with them?” (Luke 18:7).

Paul talks about the justification of God’s “elect” as he writes to the believers at Rome:

“Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth” (Romans 8:33).

And as he writes to Timothy he tells of his willingness to suffer for the “elect’s” sake:

“Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Timothy 2:10).

We could also call to witness the inspired writings of Peter and John to show that the term is used of members of the Church of God.

The Church in the Tribulation is seen as Scripture deals with:

THE RESURRECTION

of the members of the Church who die before Christ’s second coming.

Paul tells the believers at Thessalonica that when the Lord returns there will be a resurrection:

“For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

This resurrection is described by John as he records the revelation received on Patmos:

“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them; and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark on their forehead, or in their hands, and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. **THIS IS THE FIRST RESURRECTION.** Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4-6).

From this we learn that the “**FIRST**” resurrection is after the Great Tribulation. If it is the “**FIRST**” then there is none before it, so the Church will not be raptured any earlier than this. The teaching here is, then, absolutely consistent with what we read in Matthew 24. The church goes through the Great Tribulation and is raptured at the end of it.

Again we see the Church in the Tribulation as Scripture deals with:

THE REVENGE

God will deal with those who have rejected His gracious provision, resisted the pleadings of His Spirit, and refused to obey His commands in the gospel.

Jude makes it clear that Christ is coming:

“To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him” (Jude 15).

As Paul writes to the believers at Thessalonica, he says:

“... it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power; when He shall come to be glorified in His saints and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day” (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10).

The day that He returns to take vengeance on the ungodly will be the same day in which He comes to relieve His saints and be glorified in them, thus showing that the people of God remain on earth until Christ terminates the Great Tribulation with His glorious return to earth.

It follows quite naturally from this that the Church is seen in the Tribulation as Scripture reveals:

THE RAPTURE of the saints

The term “rapture” in this connection is used to denote the “catching away” or catching up of the people of God at Christ’s Second Advent. Paul deals with the subject in very clear terms as he writes to the Thessalonians:

“For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: for the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Paul immediately continues to point out that this same day will take the ungodly unawares. It will be the day of their destruction and they will find no means of escape. The children of God need not and should not be taken by it unprepared, but they will remain on earth until it comes and can thus be seen to pass through the Tribulation:

“But of the times and the seasons brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a women with child; and they shall not escape.”

“But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-4).

Whilst an abundance of Scripture could be brought to bear on the subject of the Church in the Tribulation, and proof could be heaped upon proof that the saints will be here on earth during that troubled period, we will consider only one further point in this regard. Let us note what Scripture says when it deals with:

THE REWARDS

which Christ will distribute to the members of His Church.

John writes concerning the “seventh trumpet”:

“But in the days of the voice of the seventh trumpet, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished and He hath declared to His servants the prophets” (Revelation 10:7).

The events which precede the sounding of this seventh trumpet are clearly shown to be the predicted happenings for the Great Tribulation. The trumpet then sounds and John records the immediate reaction thus:

“And the seventh angel sounded, and there were great voices in heaven saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces and worshipped God saying, We give Thee thanks O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because Thou hast taken to Thee Thy great power, and hast reigned.

“And the nations were angry, and Thy wrath is to come, and the time of the dead that they should be judged, and that Thou shouldst give reward unto Thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear Thy name, small and great; and shouldst destroy them which destroy the earth” (Revelation 11:15-18).

It is therefore evident that Christ is not coming to reward His servants, the members of His Church, until He comes to take the reins of government, to deal with the nations and to destroy those who destroy the earth. His servants, the members of His Church, will therefore be on earth until the Great Tribulation is over.

We can then pass on to point out that Scripture shows us:

(iv) THE CHURCH IN THE MILLENNIUM

The Millennium is that period in the not-too-distant future when Christ will reign on the earth for a period of one thousand years.

It should go without saying that the Church will be here with Christ at that time. We noted that Paul told the Thessalonians that when Christ comes for us we will from that moment and for all eternity. We shall “ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

However, we can look to many portions in the Word of God to see with perfect clarity that the Church will be there.

We could note, for example, the promise which Christ made to His immediate followers:

“Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations. And I appoint you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me; that ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:28-30).

These disciples were certainly part of His Church and they were assured that they would be with Him in His earthly kingdom.

As we turn to what Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth, we find that the promise of sharing rule with Christ in His earthly kingdom is expanded to cover all saints:

“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?”

“Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?” (1 Corinthians 6:1-2).

This is in complete accord with the promise given by God the Spirit:

“And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers; even as I received of My Father” (Revelation 2:26-27).

In dealing with the resurrection of the saints we saw that many members of the Church were killed during the Great Tribulation, but were raised again at the end of it. These members are raised to join their fellow members of the Church in reigning with Christ in the Millennium:

“And I saw thrones and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands, and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4).

When the Millennium has ended and all time has run its course, we will see:

(v) THE CHURCH IN ETERNITY

Scripture gives us some wonderful glimpses of this perfected state of the Church.

Paul assures us that God has “purposed in Himself”:

“That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth: even in Him” (Ephesians 1:10).

This great plan for the gathering together of His Church sees its fulfilment in eternity, and as John received the revelation on Patmos, he was permitted to see something of the glory of it. He records what he saw thus:

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea” (Revelation 21:1).

He continues to catch the unfolding scene in eternity, and as he watches, he says:

“... there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither and I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife” (Revelation 21:9).

So John, having been offered the chance of seeing the Church gladly accepts. (The bride, the wife of the Lamb, is of a certainty the Church, for Christ is identified as the Lamb (John 1:29), and referred to as the Bridegroom (Matthew 25:1-13), and Paul gives teaching concerning Christ and the Church as he speaks concerning the relationship of husband and wife (Ephesians 5:22-33).

John continues:

“And He carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal” (Revelation 21:10-11).

John then takes in the splendour of this city, which is surely the city which Abraham sought:

“For he (Abraham) looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10).

The writer of the Hebrews epistle goes on to say that those who follow faithful Abraham are looking for a better place to dwell in: “But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly, wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He hath prepared for them a city” (Hebrews 11:16).

The same writer goes on to mention this city in its eternal setting with the Church in the verses from which I have taken the title to this chapter:

“But ye are come to Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect” (Hebrews 12:22-23).

John describes this city in all its magnificence as it appears from outside; then he looks inside and remarks:

“And I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it and the Lamb is the light thereof” (Revelation 21:22-23).

He then tells us of those who will inhabit it:

“And the nations of **THEM WHICH ARE SAVED** shall walk in the light of it; and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour to it. And the gates of it shall not be shut by day; for there shall be no night there. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, but **THEY**

WHICH ARE WRITTEN IN THE LAMB'S BOOK OF LIFE" (Revelation 21:24-27).

"And there shall be no more curse; but the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him: and they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light; and they shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 22:3-5).

"Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14).

When John had first seen the city he recorded these blessed truths concerning the people of God who would dwell in it:

"And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:3-9).

What blessings there are in store for the true people of God in eternity. No wonder Paul said:

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

John, in one of his visions, gives us some conception of the almost countless number who will constitute the Church as it will be in eternity:

"After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

"And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen, blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen."

"And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?"

"And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest."

“And he said unto me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Revelation 7:9-17).

Even though there is such a host of people (man could not number them, but God has each one counted and knows each one by name), still they are but ONE company.

Even though they are from all parts of the earth, they have been assembled in ONE place.

Even though they come from different backgrounds and speak different languages, they all praise the ONE Saviour, for there is but one.

They are all there for ONE reason only – because they “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”. Nothing else is effectual in washing away sin but the blood of Christ. His sacrifice alone can satisfy the Father and make atonement. The rebirth of the Spirit of God which occurs when an individual, by the grace of God, repents of sin and seeks refuge in God’s offer of mercy, made available by Christ’s death and resurrection on our behalf, is all that will avail.

They all inherit the same blessings for the same unending eternity.

This perfect oneness in eternity will bring to fruition the assertion of Christ when He said:

“I am the good shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine.”

“As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down My life for the sheep.”

“And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be ONE FOLD AND ONE SHEPHERD” (John 10:14-16).