

Lecture 5 — The Body of Christ:

Ephesians 4: 1-16.

from 'The Church: What is it?'

Ten lectures on the church of the New Testament seen to be established, endowed, united and free.

W. T. P. Wolston, M.D., 1905.

The Body of Christ: The United Church.

The Assembly viewed as the Body of Christ is presented to us under that figure in four New Testament epistles — Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians; and I want, with the Lord's help, very briefly to indicate to you the salient points that the Spirit of God presents in these epistles, in so speaking of the Church of God.

Get the thought of the Body first of all in your minds. What is the body? My body is any part of me that is not my head. But of course the body would be of no use without the head, and the head would be of no use without the body. The Church when presented in Scripture as being the Body of Christ is the expression of a wonderful divine unity, and that unity is formed by the Holy Ghost. There is a thought in people's minds that we are *united* to Christ by faith. Such is not the case. Nor are we united to Christ by life — that is not the truth. We are *related* to Christ by faith, but that is not union; and we have the life of Christ, but that is not the thought that is presented in the expression here: "There is one body, and one Spirit" (Eph. 4: 4). The Holy Ghost is the formative power of the Church of God, and the Holy Ghost is that by which the saints of God on this earth are united to a Man in glory. I said once before, that the Head of the Church was never dead. I repeat it, because I think it will help us to understand what is meant by the Headship of Christ in this way.

He who is now Head of the Church was once dead, but it was after He was risen from the dead, and had passed into glory, that He then took this new place, as Head of that which is called His Body. The Messiah died, the King of the Jews; but never the Head of the Church, because He was never Head of the Church till He was alive from the dead, and ascended. Ascension takes you to the spot where Manhood is now in glory, and we shall see that what the Lord Jesus is as Man before God, He shares with all those whom, in His grace, He is pleased to call His brethren. What He was as God ever remains the same — He did not cease to be God because He became Man. He took human nature in conjunction with the divine nature in His own Person when He came to earth. But He needed to become man in order that any of us should be united to Him. More than that: He had to die, as, in words so deeply expressive of what was in His heart he says, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12: 24). Now that He is risen and glorified, we are united to

Him by the Holy Ghost given to dwell within us. We could not have been united to Him if He had abode in His Godhead glory. It is as Man ascended up far above all heavens that He has become "Head over all things to his body the church." In John 20 He could say to Mary, "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (John 20: 17). He, the true "corn of wheat," unique in Himself, and always alone till He had died, is now able, as alive from the dead, to associate His own with Himself on resurrection ground. The Sanctifier and the sanctified are all of one before God. But this is not union yet. In Acts 1: 5, we read that not many days thence, they were to be baptized with the Holy Ghost; and thus we know from 1 Corinthians 12: 12 the Body of Christ was formed.

There is a notion abroad in Christendom that because Christ became incarnate He took fallen humanity into union with Himself, and thus elevated manhood. That would be Christ becoming one with us in our fallen condition. No, that He was alone, as become Man, it cannot be too earnestly pressed. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12: 24). What is the rich harvest of fruit that sprang from that precious seed of corn falling into the ground in death? All who are Christ's from Pentecost till He comes. If you are a Christian you are part of it. He is risen, and now the truth is, not that Christ has become united to us, but that we by the Holy Ghost become united to Him. An old man once said to me, "Is it not glorious that He has become bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh?" I said to him: "That is a very wrong thought. It lowers Christ to our level. The truth is that He raises us to His level, and when risen from the dead makes us 'bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh.'" The one is false, unsound doctrine, that suits man in the flesh, because it is supposed to take up every man. The other is the truth of God, and applies only to those whom Christ can call His brethren, those who are born of the Spirit, washed from their sins in the Saviour's blood, and sealed by the Spirit, so that they can truly say, "Abba, Father."

Let us now turn to the first epistle which speaks of the Body. "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. 12: 4, 5). You have Assembly truth alluded to here, but it is not unfolded. Here is the first teaching in the New Testament as to the Body of Christ, and the youngest believer can take in its meaning. "As we have many members in one body" alludes to our arms, fingers, and feet, etc. — the many members in the human body, which is the figure Paul is going to use. "All members have not the same office." There is a great lesson in that. Each has its own function. "So we, being many, are one body in Christ." Who are the "we"? All Christians. You must not think of it as a society, a club, a mere organisation, as men would say. Take the thought of the members of the human body, and then ask who compose the one body? "Many," in fact all Christians on earth today are of it, and compose the Body of Christ in its time aspect. What body do you belong to? In Scripture we only read of the one Body of Christ. All Christians are of it. "And every one members one of another" — I think that means, I cannot get on without you, and you cannot get on without me. Therefore what you see all around you today — the universally consented-to distinctions, differences, and dissensions among the people of God who are split up into numberless so-called "bodies" — is only the work of the enemy, and you will find that what had produced these things is not that saints rally round the truth, but round some little difference. The uniting bond is some doctrine, or creed, or ordinance — it is not the glorious, wonderful truth of the unity of the Body

of Christ, formed by the Holy Ghost here upon earth, and Christ, the risen ascended Man, the Head thereof in glory.

The "many" are one body in Christ, and surely if one be a member of that body that is quite enough. You say, But there are many "bodies" in Christendom today. True, but they are all going to be left behind by-and-by when the Lord comes for His own. They will all get their grave by-and-by, and be forgotten for ever. And what about the Body of Christ? It will be for ever with its Head in heavenly glory, its eternal destiny — everything else is to be left behind; and therefore I could not belong to any of these "bodies." They are not scriptural — they are not lasting enough, not good enough for one who enters into what the Body of Christ is. "We, being many, are one body in Christ," lets me know the body to which I and all Holy-Ghost-sealed saints belong. Every believing child of God today on the face of the earth is a member of that which He calls the Body of Christ. Every other membership, therefore, is superfluous, not to say false to the membership God has formed.

Now turn to 1 Corinthians 10: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (ver. 16). That is the cup for which we give thanks at the Lord's Supper; and the cup comes first because we can only get right with God on the ground of redemption by blood, and that is why the Spirit here emphasises the fact of death by putting the cup before the loaf.

What is the meaning of the breaking of bread? Do you break bread just to be refreshed in spirit? I have no doubt you will be that, through the infinite grace of the Lord, but that is not the primary thought. It is the expression of the fellowship of the Body of Christ; it is the way in which the Body of Christ expresses its fellowship here upon earth; and of course that does not embrace the unconverted. If he wants to be there, what would you do? I should try to make him feel he had no right there. Not being a member of the Body of Christ — not knowing Christ as his own personal Saviour — his true place is outside. If kept outside, he might learn his true state as unsaved, instead of being deceived by being given a position that does not belong to him; and, when awakened to that solemn discovery, he would want to get into the reality of what alone could meet that state, viz., finding Christ as a Saviour. It is not that I have no interest in men's souls — I have lived and laboured to win them for Christ for more than forty years — but God's Word makes it abundantly plain that no unconverted man has any right to be at the Lord's Table. How dreadful to thoughtlessly take in your hands the bread and wine that speak of a Saviour of whom you are utterly ignorant, and of a communion of His death in which you have no part. If you are a child of God, and a member of Christ, it is God's will you should be there, unless there be some grave disqualification in your life and ways that puts you, in discipline, outside, and there may be such. If not, it is the privilege, the portion, and the responsibility of every member of Christ to be there, expressing the communion of the Body of Christ.

Why? "For *we*, being *many*, are one loaf, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one loaf (as it really is)" (ver. 17). What does our partaking of the loaf express? The unity of the Body of Christ of which each and every saint is a member — it is the company that has been formed by the Holy Ghost, of which we own that we are part, in partaking of the one loaf. But in 1 Corinthians 11 you pass from the thought of the Body of Christ mystically to the human body of the blessed Lord, given for us in death. Thus you meet His wish, so touchingly expressed to

His own the night He was betrayed. "And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22: 19). That is to say, God combines in the Lord's Supper two thoughts — first, the Lord's death is shown forth, and next, that which has been the result of that death, viz., the Holy Ghost coming down and the Church being formed here — one body — as it is of one loaf we partake. You eat in fellowship with all the saints of God, as you take that which is the memorial of Christ going into death for you, in necessary separation from and judgment in yourself of all that had to be met by that death in the judgment of God.

We must not confound the Lord's Supper with John 6. There we read: "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life" (vers. 53, 54). There we have the substance — of which the Supper is the shadow. It is really knowing Christ as the One who has died, and then in faith, and in the affection of your heart, you turn back to the cross where Jesus suffered. You can say, I shall never be there, because He was there. I eat the bread, and go back, in memory, in heart and affection, to the spot where He was once, but where He never will be again; and when you break the bread it is the memorial of a Christ that does not exist — there is no such Christ now. He liveth now and is alive for evermore, if He were dead. The broken bread and the cup tell us of Christ in that condition in which He once was, and never will be again — they tell us of a dead Christ: we know and love, and delight in a living Christ. The oneness of the Body is truly expressed in the breaking of bread — if the truth thereof be fully apprehended by our souls.

Now turn to 1 Corinthians 12. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12: 12, 13). Note the language Paul uses here. He is talking of the Church, the Assembly of the saints of God down here, and when he has brought in his figure of the human body having many members, and yet forming but one body, he says, "So also is *Christ*" — I should have said, "So also is the *Church*" - no one else would dare to write what Paul wrote — "So also is Christ." There is a Man in glory, and He has sent down the Holy Ghost, and gathered out of this world for God, and redeemed by His blood, a company of sinners, saved by grace; He has put them together by the Spirit, and they belong to Him; they are thus united to Him, as being His body, and He is the Head of that body; He is one with them, and they with Him; hence He said to Saul, "Why persecutest thou me?" In persecuting His people Saul was persecuting Christ. He says, You are touching Me — My people and Myself are one.

I can understand now why he says, "So also is Christ." What a wonderful thing the Church is. You say, The Church is only composed of men. Wrong. It is composed of men, but what of the Holy Ghost? You say, Is not Christ the Head, and are not men the Body? It has for its head Christ, and its unity is formed by the Holy Ghost, who is in each member; you must not forget that. You say, Oh, I did not think of that wonderful bond. There would be no Church but for the Holy Ghost. He indwells you, if a believer, and me also, and unites us to that ascended One in glory; and that same Spirit binds you and me together — "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (ver. 13). What could be simpler? What puts a believer into the Body of Christ? The baptism of the Holy Ghost. That does not mean that there is a new baptism every day.

Before the Holy Ghost came down, the Lord said to His own, as we have seen: "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts 1: 5). The Holy Ghost came, this baptism took place on the day of Pentecost, and the Body of Christ was formed. For the moment it consisted of Jewish believers only; then in Acts 10 the Gentiles were brought in, not by Paul, but in the wisdom of God, through Peter. This was beautifully confirmed by what took place later in Jerusalem (see Acts 15), when the question was raised as to whether the Gentiles, who were not under law, should be put under law. It was decided at and promulgated from Jerusalem, that since they had received the Spirit, they were set free from everything that the Jew was under as such. The Body of Christ was to walk in subjection to its Head.

Why does the apostle elsewhere say, "Give none offence, neither to the Jews nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God"? (1 Cor. 10: 32). The Church of God is a totally new structure, that has been brought into the scene, as formed out of both Jew and Gentile. It began at Pentecost, as we have seen, and since that day countless souls have been baptized into the One Body. You do not hear of a new baptism or a second baptism of the Spirit in Scripture, though people often speak in this fashion unintelligently, as though it were repeated. It is not. When people have got out of the seventh of Romans, and are free and happy before God, they speak of a second baptism. Most probably they are just tasting the first. The man in Romans 7 is full of himself, and therefore wretched; but a man who is in the liberty of the Spirit of God is very happy, for "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3: 17).

The baptism of the Holy Ghost took place once, and once only, so far as I read of it in Scripture. How then do believers now receive it? may fairly be asked. I will reply by seeking to illustrate. I take you down to a park where there is a lake. It is a beautiful summer day, and there is not a ripple on the water. In that water for fifty yards all round the margin of the lake there are scattered rushes springing up, which approach nearly to the centre of the lake. I take up a pebble, fling it, and it drops into the centre of the lake. There is a little commotion — a circle forms on the surface; that circle spreads and widens out, and soon the nearest rushes get taken in. It widens further, and by-and-by the movement reaches to the very edge of the pond, and every rush is in. Now, as each soul is saved, by faith in Jesus, and is then sealed by the Spirit, it is embraced in the baptism of the Spirit, as the rushes were embraced in the ever-widening circle. This will go on till the latest and last member of Christ is brought into the Church, and then it will be caught up. There is no new baptism, but each believer, in his or her turn, gets into the circle. No illustration is perfect, but that is the best I know. The Spirit of God has come, and thus "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles . . . and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." Before the cross the Jew was bid to hold aloof from the Gentile, but now they are united, for they are brought into one body by the reception of the Holy Ghost, and are to walk in happy fellowship, since they have been made to drink into one Spirit.

In John 17 the Lord prayed to the Father, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (ver. 21). Did the world ever believe that the Father sent the Son? I think at the beginning, when they were all "of one heart and of one soul" (Acts 4: 32), and were walking in the joy and love of Christ, the testimony to the world was so powerful that they were compelled to bow to the truth in multitudes, and this might have gone on so as to embrace the world, if the saints had been faithful. Those who did so were real and genuine. Easy-going lip-profession was not in

vogue then, and, as I have before remarked, in Acts 5 people were not in such a hurry to "join the Church" as they are today. Would you join the Church if you thought God would cut you off by death for telling a lie? That is what it was then — unholiness in His House He would not stand, and Ananias and Sapphira died; but for the moment there was a beautiful testimony, and a lovely answer to the Lord's prayer — they had one object, they were delighting in Christ, seeking to serve Him, walking in love, and blessed, holy fellowship, and there was a oneness and unity that were not simulated. It was the oneness of love and of the Spirit that filled their bosom and controlled their life; but to our shame be it told, that did not last, and this testimony to the world broke down.

It is a great thing for every Christian to get into his soul the sense that there is "one body," and one only, and that — whether hitherto aware of it or not — he is a member thereof. Why did Paul say to the Corinthians, "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Cor. 12: 27)? just to teach them and us this truth, and preserve us from accepting membership of anything that is not the local expression of this wonderful Body. You may perhaps have asked yourselves, What is meant by "The Body of Christ — its Local, Time, and Eternal Aspects"? which was the subject I announced for this afternoon's address. Here is the answer in part. This is the *local* aspect of the Body of Christ. Paul writes to the Corinthians, to all God's people in Corinth, "*Ye* are the body of Christ." They were not all the Christians in the world at that moment. No, but the local Assembly at Corinth was the expression of the greater truth. As my body is under the direction, the control, and will of my head, so was it to be in that day. The Assembly at Corinth being united to Christ in glory, and drawing all its supplies from Him, was to walk according to the figure used here, and so with the aggregate of the saints in every other place then and today also. The human body is sometimes afflicted with a disease called chorea, where the muscles are all in motion, and they will not keep quiet although the head desires they should. I think the Church of God has got that kind of disease today. The members are all doing their own will. It ought not to be so with the Body of Christ, but, alas, so it is.

It is really very important to see that when the Assembly of God is spoken of in any locality, it is viewed as being "the body of Christ" in that locality, and is responsible to walk as such. It is because this is not seen that Christians consent to the confusion now existing on every hand. If you admit membership of any one of the many ecclesiastical bodies on earth, it must necessarily shut you out from the others, hence I want that we should learn from God's Word the all-importance and divine sufficiency of simply recognising the membership which, in the case of every believer, now exists as to the Body of Christ. If you have not got hold of the truth as to the Body of Christ, and that you are a member thereof, you will allow yourself in many things that the Word of God does not warrant.

Not long ago I was speaking to three Christian young men. One said he was a member of the Established body; the second, of the Free Church; and the third, of the United Presbyterian. I said to the first, "Now, who is the Head of your body?" "Oh, Christ," he replied; and the other two likewise claimed Christ as the Head of their respective bodies. "Has Christ then three bodies?" I asked. "Oh no, that would never do," they replied, in chorus. "Then you are each members of a body without a Head, and that is merely a trunk, a corpse." They then turned their queries on me, and asked what body I was a member of. My reply was easy. "I have never been a

member of anything but the Body of Christ, and never mean to be. That is the membership which God in His grace accords me, and that surely is enough, and it takes in all that are His."

It is high time we Christians looked at Scripture, and judged ourselves by Scripture, as to this matter, for otherwise we must make a great mistake as to the mind of Christ. Where and what is the Body of Christ, say in Edinburgh, today? It is composed of all the saints of God in the town. Are they walking in unity, love, and order, according to the figure of the "one body" to which they all belong? Alas! no. Then what are we to do? I will tell you what I should like to do — I want to walk according to the truth, *i.e.*, according to the principle of the one Body of Christ. I do not suppose I shall get all the saints to act on ' this truth, but that is the real principle in Scripture, and I want it to have, effect upon my life and ways, and I give you credit for the same.

"The body of Christ" then has a local aspect, which ought to be in evidence, while, at the same time, the truth of the whole Assembly on earth being regarded as the Body also, is clear from what the apostle immediately adds: "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues" (ver. 28), which manifestly refers to the whole. These are chiefly spiritual gifts which were needed for the whole Church at the beginning, not all of which are found now. There are no apostles and prophets now. Why? They have done their work and passed off the scene; they were used administratively and by their teaching to lay the foundation, and on their written ministry we now repose — so we cannot give up a line of Scripture — nor is aught more to be expected. A man having dug out his foundation, lays his foundation stones, and then he goes on building. All that is wanted for God's work, in carrying on the rest of the building, we shall find in Ephesians 4, which chapter presents the body in its *time* aspect.

Let us now pass on to that epistle, and see how the truth comes out. The apostle is there occupied with developing the truth of what the Body of Christ is to the Head. The difference between Ephesians and Colossians is this — in Ephesians you have what the Body of Christ is to the Head; in Colossians you get what the Head is to the Body, even as in Romans and Corinthians you had the relation of the members to one another, in and as united to the Head. The danger of the Colossians was not holding the Head. Our added danger today is not seeing what it is to be an Ephesian — a person who knows himself to be in the counsels of God; and is then instructed how to walk according to his vocation, so as to correspond to what God in eternity predestined, and then in time called him to be.

The epistle opens with a lovely doxology: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph. 1: 3, 4). There is the elective choice of God. The Church was the thought of God in eternity, before the foundation of the world; but the individual relationships are treated of first before the corporate are unfolded. You will never learn the truth corporately till you have learned it individually. God thinks of the individual believer first. God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Long before there was a world, upon which the first man sinned, the believer was chosen in Him to be "holy and without blame before him in love." You say, I am not holy. But look — is not He holy, and without blame, and in love before God? Oh yes. Well, I am in Him, that is the point.

Then we read: "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in *the beloved*" (vers. 5, 6). The eternal thought of God was to take up poor sinners, bring them to Himself, turning foes into friends, and enemies into children. It does not say that He has taken us into favour in Christ. Why? It is not warm enough. Nor even in *Jesus*. No — it is "*in the beloved*." Fathom that for me, tell me how much God loves His blessed Son — tell me the depth of the love of the Father to that blessed Son, of whom He spoke twice when He was on earth as "My *beloved* Son." That love is infinite, and He has taken us into favour "*in the beloved*." Did not I tell you that the Church was heavenly in being? She belongs to heaven, though she has to live on earth for a while.

Next we are told: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (ver. 7). Who are the wonderful people who are chosen in Him? Are they unfallen angels? No, they are sin-stained sinners, who have been the servants of sin, and the slaves of the devil; them God has picked up and redeemed, and they are going to be the companions of Christ in glory. God's thought regarding Him, as also of Adam, was this, "It is not good that the man should be alone." The Church then is to be Christ's companion in eternal glory. Could any blessing be higher? Impossible, and nothing lower than that will content the heart that has grasped this truth. Sometimes I am asked if I am a "High Churchman." I always say, Yes, and quote Ephesians 1.

This first chapter gives us the purpose and counsel of God, and at the end of the chapter the apostle prays, "That ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (vers. 18-23). Christ is there seen as "head over all things to the church," which defines His position in relation to "all things," *i.e.*, absolute supremacy. In that position His Assembly is His fulness, since it is "his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." It is He who fills all in all, but His Body then forms the complement of the Head. It is He who fills the universe with His glory; but, wondrous thought, He is not then alone, not isolated. The Head without the Body as its complement would be incomplete in glory. It is the Body that completes the Head then, and this gives us the *eternal* aspect of the Body, and the way we, as the heavenly Eve, come into the inheritance of all things that pertain to Christ as the last Adam. What a comfort to our hearts to know that He would not be happy in glory without us. Then will the blessed Lord's prayer be fully answered: "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one. . . . Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (John 17: 22, 24). We have not yet reached the glory, but we have already tasted what is better than the glory — the love which will bring us there.

The Church then is the complement — the fulness of Christ. What would the Head be without the Body? The organism is not complete, hence Christ must have His Church with Him

in glory. I do not doubt that what is brought out here includes the *whole Church*. This embraces every child of God, from the day of Pentecost right on to the Rapture of the saints. All will be there by-and-by, and then the Assembly will be "the fulness of him that filleth all in all." There I repeat is *the eternal aspect* of the Body.

In Ephesians 2 we have the counsels of God carried out in power, and we see how we are "quicken together with Christ, and raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (vers. 5, 6).

Ephesians 3 develops the mystery, giving us Paul's part in the work. "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (vers. 1-5). What was the mystery? The revelation of this wonderful new structure that he calls "Christ and the church" (Eph. 5: 32), viz., that Jew and Gentile should be absolutely one, united by the Holy Ghost to Christ in glory and to one another in a co-equality of privilege, so that they should both belong to Him, and be His Body here upon earth. You cannot find this in Old Testament Scripture.

People have an idea that the Old Testament saints formed part of Christ's Body, the Church. Impossible — because there was no Body till the Head was in glory, and He was not in glory, as a Man, in Old Testament days. The very existence of the Church as the Body of Christ depends upon the ascension of Christ on high and the coming down of the Holy Ghost. This purpose of God, so long concealed, and therefore called "the mystery," was "now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets," of the New Testament clearly, not Old Testament prophets. You may search the Old Testament from end to end, and you will find nothing about the Church. I know that in your Bible there is a great deal interpolated about it at the tops of certain chapters of Isaiah and the prophets; but that forms no part of God's Word. It was added by translators and commentators, *i.e.*, put in by men who were not intelligent, and people have been misled by it. Those prophets of the Old Testament wrote only of Israel and the Gentiles, who will come to the front by-and-by, and come in for blessing on earth in due time.

But we are speaking of Christ's Assembly, and it was not made known before Paul's ministry, "that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (ver. 6). The Gentiles are to be joint-heirs, joint-body, and joint-partakers with the Jew — the word is the same in each case. Jew and Gentile are to be welded into one, only the Jew ceases to be a Jew when he is brought into the Church, and the Gentile likewise ceases to be a Gentile. They are both on new ground, with new life, and new relationships altogether, being united to Christ and to each other in Him. This new structure needed a special vessel to reveal it, hence Paul says, "Whereof *I was made a minister*, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. 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" (vers. 7, 8). By "the unsearchable riches of Christ" I apprehend that he means the mystery of Christ and the Church, and all the wonderful blessings

which accrue to those who are now united by the Holy Ghost to the One in glory, in whom all those riches are treasured, who is Head of His Body here upon earth.

Paul was selected by the Lord "to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid (not in Scripture but) in God" (ver. 9). Though you may get many a shadow, type, or figure — which you can now apprehend as seen through New Testament spectacles — the truth of the mystery was never revealed in the Old Testament.

And now we get God's present object in the existence of the Assembly. It has its being "to the intent that *now* unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (ver. 10). What is the idea presented in this wonderful mystery? In chapter 1 our blessings are in heavenly places; in chapter 2 we are seated in Christ there. In chapter 3 the created intelligences in heavenly places who never saw God till they saw that lowly Babe in Bethlehem, and then saw the world get rid of Him, see now a company of people having the life of Christ, the Holy Ghost uniting them all together — out of the most opposed conditions of nationality and the like — and then through them the life of Jesus manifested here upon earth. They have a very interesting lesson-book. It is the Church; but I am afraid they are getting a very distorted view of divine things in these days, unless, as doubtless they can, they distinguish God's work, to carry out His own counsel, from our failure of realisation of it.

How wonderful is the grace that can take up men and women, mould and shape them, put Christ into them and bring Christ out in them, and then make them the exhibitors of that blessed Man whom the world would not have. It makes Christianity a very serious thing.

Passing now to Ephesians 4, Paul says, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4: 1, 2). If we get these graces in our souls, what the Lord enjoins on us is very easily carried out, viz., "Endeavouring to keep *the unity of the Spirit* in the bond of peace" (ver. 3). This unity of the Spirit is not similarity of sentiment, but the oneness of the members of the Body of Christ which the Holy Ghost formed, and which we have to seek to maintain in the power of the Spirit. How contrary to this would it be to allow things the Word of God does not warrant, the effect of which is to divide me from my fellow-members. There is one Body, and only one, and you and I, dear fellow-Christian, are members of and belong to it. Then if we would be faithful to this truth, we must certainly disown membership of every other, though that is far from all that is included in the exhortation. Anything that is not framed and formed according to the pattern and doctrine of the unity of the Body, is not of God, and it is not glorifying the Lord, or for his own real blessing for a saint to go on with it.

Notice now the three circles the apostle presents: "There is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling" (ver. 4). That shows us the circle of divine reality. That one Body and Spirit embrace every Christian, every child of God upon earth at this moment, even as the hope is one, of which the Spirit is the source and power.

Further, there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (ver. 5). That is the circle of public profession and acknowledgement of Christ as Lord. That is wide enough, and large enough. Many are baptized, but are their sins forgiven? If not, they are merely in the circle of profession, and that is a sad condition to be in.

Finally, we read that there is "one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (ver. 6). Three wondrous bonds of unity are here presented — the Spirit of God, the Lordship of Christ, and the omnipresence of God the Father. The apprehension of those mighty truths would form all believers into one.

The care of the Head for the Body is then developed in relation to the gifts which Christ bestows for the blessing and help of His own. "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men" (vers. 7, 8). After He went up on high, we are shown the way in which the Body is nurtured and cared for. When Christ came into the world Satan ruled everywhere, drove his chariot through the world, and had every man chained to its wheels. Then Christ went into death, bore the judgment of God, overcame Satan, annulled his power, and now that He is risen from the dead, it is no longer man the vassal of Satan, but Man the blessed Victor over Satan. Jesus overcame him morally in the wilderness, and absolutely in death; and now He has picked up the very people that used to be the slaves of Satan, has put gifts into them, and sent them out to do the same blessed work He did Himself, *i.e.*, deliver men who have been under the power of Satan. He overcame Satan Himself, and now He fills these vessels with His Spirit according to His grace, and the sovereignty of His choice, and deposits in them spiritual gifts that enable them to preach the Word, and men are delivered, and brought to God.

"(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)" (vers. 9, 10). I look up, and I see a blessed Man at God's right hand, and He is going to fill all things. The whole scene will yet be filled with the glory of Christ, and that is why Scripture speaks of the day of Christ. You read of the day of the Lord, — that is when all will be *subject* to Him. The day of Christ is when all will take colour and *character* from Christ. But before and till that day He is the source and spring of all true ministry to His Church. Hence we read: "And he gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some, evangelists; and some pastors and teachers" (ver. 11).

These are the gifts necessary for the gathering together of those who are to be the companions of His glory, since they are the members of His Body. Apostles and prophets we have already considered; the others we will just glance at. The evangelist loves souls and brings them to Christ, and it is a blessed thing to go out with the gospel. An evangelist, however, should be like a pair of compasses — one leg fixed, and the other as long and wide-reaching as you like; but he is always centripetal — he brings the soul to the door of the Assembly, and says to his brethren, You had better see if he is genuine.

The pastor is occupied with the sheep — the saints in all their need; the teacher with the book — the Scriptures. They are put together. They are usually joined in the same person. These then are the gifts that Christ gives. There are no apostles now, nor prophets either, save as they

exist for us in their writings; but the others He still continues to give while His Church is in this scene. Everything that is now needed for the growth and the upbuilding of the Body is still furnished. But they are for the *whole* Church — not a Church — there is no such thought as that in Scripture. This is quite plain from the next verse of our chapter, which says these gifts are given "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 fulness of Christ" (vers. 12, 13). The saints individually are to be perfected — this then branches out into the work of the ministry and the edifying of *the* (not *a*) Body, by which the perfecting is carried on. There is to be growth and upbuilding in the knowledge and apprehension of the Lord. And the effect is that God's children are not "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" (ver. 14). It is most deplorable to note the way saints are carried about with every wind of doctrine. It would not be the case if they went to Scripture, and to God for light, and believed that the Holy Ghost was here to lead, guide, and teach them all the truth.

The object and effect of divinely given ministry is to so act on the hearts and consciences of the saints that they are not carried into error, "but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (ver. 15). Love is ever active, and if you are in the enjoyment of God's love, you will speak the truth in love. But all blessing is derived from "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" (ver. 16). Everybody has his or her part in God's Assembly, the ministration of each member in its place tending to the edifying of the body in love. Perhaps you are nobody where you are, as a member of some unscriptural "body." You get a sense of what it is to be a member of the Body of Christ, and you will find you have your niche, your part. Perhaps you will say, My part is a very small one. Never mind. Do the thing the Lord gives you; it might be only to give a cup of cold water — that would be a very useful thing to a thirsty soul; and the result is increase now and reward by-and-by.

In Colossians the great point is that Christ "is the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1: 18), and the saints are urgently exhorted to hold the Head, derive from the Head, and draw from the Head. Forgetting to do that, rationalism and ritualism would be sure to affect them (Col. 2). That chapter puts man out absolutely; man is set aside and (Col. 3) love reigns, while the peace of Christ rules in the heart "to the which ye were *called in one body*" (ver. 15). This is what love effects — the love of Christ: "For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church" (Eph. 5: 29). Nourishing is food, and cherishing is warmth — that is what babes want. Warm the saints with the love of Christ, and feed them with the truth of God, and they will grow. If "we are members of his body," I cannot get on without you, dear fellow-Christian, and you cannot get on without me. We are one in Christ. God help us to understand something of the blessed truth of the oneness of the Body of Christ. It is indeed a UNITED CHURCH in Scripture, and will be so seen in glory shortly.