

The Assembly Foretold: Founded: Formed: Furnished: Functioning

N. Anderson.

Table of Contents

Part 1.....	1
Part 2.....	3
Furnished and functioning	3
THE ASSEMBLY (PART 3).....	4
Its Future.....	4

Part 1.

Before proceeding with this blessed theme it may be necessary to justify the designation used at the head of this paper. It is customary to refer to the "church": such an appellation conjures before the English mind some material edifice used for religious purposes. Does the word in its Scripture usage justify such a thought? Decidedly not! The word is used some 115 times in the New Testament, even apart from the reference in Hebrews 12: 23. Three times it is used rightly in Acts — Acts 19: 32, 39, 41. That in Acts 7: 38 refers to the congregation of Israel in the wilderness. The use of the word in Acts 19: 37 is a mistranslation and should read "temple plunderers." The other three uses in the 19th chapter are related to the tumultuous gathering in Ephesus. The word from which we get "church" is "ecclesia" — meaning "called out." In this and the following papers we desire to speak of this unique company of people who are God's called out ones, under six headings:

(1) Foretold (2) Founded (3) Formed (4) Furnished (5) Functioning (6) Future. Numbers (1), (2) and (3) are the direct subject of this article. Numbers (4) and (5) will form the subject of Part 2; and Number (6) that of Part 3.

The first Scripture to which we turn is Matthew 16: 13-18 for there we have the first New Testament intimation of this "Assembly." Evidently we cannot expect to find it in the Old Testament, in spite of what theological teachers say. It was yet future when our Lord spoke of it in verse 18. Accordingly He said, "I *will* build My assembly" — it was not yet in being. We are indebted to Him for having "foretold" it there. This intimation came from His own lips.

He also foretold the "foundation" upon which it would be built, and that was the truth of His own Person. This was revealed in the confession of Peter in reply to our Lord's query, "Whom do ye say that I am?" Let us consider the circumstances that gave rise to this. He had asked, "Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?"

Obviously the official title "Son of Man" does not cover the whole truth of His Person. Titles are, in themselves, descriptive of offices which the bearer of them fills. Names are descriptive of the Person who fills them. So then, Son of Man is one of His official titles. "Son of the living God," as confessed by Peter, is His Name. Thus then the Assembly would be founded upon who He is. Peter had replied, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." "Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona," thus our Lord addressed him on the ground of what he was naturally in view of the fact that the confession had not emanated from some natural conjecture, rather was it the result of

divine revelation: — "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven." This unique revelation came from the Father, out of heaven.

The "Assembly," being founded upon the Son of the living God, is in the distinctive light of the present era — "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." This being so, it would also be true that the "Assembly" would be an heavenly entity, having an heavenly calling, hence the word of the Lord, "Blessed art thou . . . flesh and blood has not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven." Note how He equates Himself with deity (verse 18) "And *I say also* unto thee . . ." Who but God, manifested in flesh, dare to speak thus! "That thou art Peter (Petros — of the same nature as, but not the rock) and upon this rock (Petra) I will build My assembly." It is not built upon Peter but upon that which he had confessed, "the Son of the living God." This is the rock upon whom the "Assembly" is founded, hence it is incontrovertible, "Like a man which digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock; and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it; for it was founded upon a rock" (Matt. 7: 24, Luke 6: 48). So Petros is a piece of rock; Petra a mass of rock. In the course of history how violently the storms of persecution have raged from without against the assembly. How insidiously and persistently have the storms been raised by grievous wolves, entering in among the believers, speaking perverse things, endeavouring to displace Christ in the affections of His own, but they have failed of their purpose. Had not our Lord said, "And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Note the following Scriptures for the significance of "the gates": Joshua 20: 4; Ruth 4: 1-12; Acts 14: 13. From a consideration of these and other Scriptures we learn that the gates are emblematic of administrative authority and power. It would be well to mention at this point, that before the gates of hell are reached, the portal of death must be gone through. The Son of the living God has gone through death and has come forth in resurrection in order to build His assembly. Peter declared in the hearing of the crowds on the day of Pentecost the verity of the death of Christ and also the verity of His having been raised from among the dead (Acts 2: 23).

So far we have considered the Foretelling and the Foundation of the Assembly. We shall proceed to a brief consideration of the historical "Formation" of it. This actually took place on the day of Pentecost to which we have just alluded. Acts 2: 1, 44-47 give us some pointers to the blessedness of this occasion. We are led to the consideration of the momentous fulfilment of the prayer of our Lord: "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He might abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of Truth . . ." We read earlier, "For the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 14: 16 and John 7: 39).

We have arrived in Acts 2 at the giving of the Spirit. This was a direct attestation that our Lord had been glorified and Acts 1 gives us in no fewer than five declarations that our Lord has been bodily taken up into heaven, verses 2, 9, 10, 11 and 22.

The dwelling with and in them (that is the Holy Spirit) was in consequence of His (the Lord Jesus) leaving them and going to the Father. We further read, "For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body" (1 Cor. 12: 13). Obviously, our Lord needed to be glorified in order to the Spirit being thus given. He "being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear," so says Peter in the course of preaching in Acts 2: 33. Christ being where He is at God's right hand, of necessity — as He had done on the cross — must accomplish redemption. Praise Him! This is just what He did by His dying and blood shedding. As raised from the dead and glorified He has given the Spirit. There are, in consequence, three things true which never could be before; there is a Man in the glory; a divine

Person, the Holy Spirit here upon earth; and a new company in union with Christ where He is and that in the power of the indwelling Spirit.

The "Assembly" is now formed — a substantive reality in the very world from which Christ has gone — having been expelled so ignominiously by way of His cruel and shameful death of crucifixion. We have now viewed three of the features which we set out at the commencement of this paper — the Assembly Foretold, Founded and Formed.

Part 2

Furnished and functioning

Having considered the Assembly Foretold, Founded and Formed in our last issue we would say a little now about the Assembly "Furnished and Functioning." For the former we turn to Ephesians, especially chapter 2. Here we learn that this unique company is comprised of Gentile and Jew, erstwhile estranged and at enmity with each other, religiously and racially. Added to that condition they were both alike children of wrath by nature, Eph. 2: 3. The enmity existent between them having been abolished in the flesh of Christ (verses 14, 15), the middle wall of partition has been broken down and, of the two, He has made in Himself, one new man. The believing Gentile not elevated to Jewish ground, nor the believing Jew demoted to the lower level of the Gentile but rather both elevated to new creation ground. Then, too, in consequence of their mutual enmity being abolished they have been reconciled in one body to God by the cross. We also learn that additional to their being one new man, and one body, they have a united place of blessing as growing together to an holy temple in the Lord. This springs from the fact they are no longer strangers and foreigners — how could they be who have "through Him access by one Spirit to the Father," and now are "fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets."

How does this fit with our earlier consideration of Matthew 16, where we made so much of the Assembly being founded on the truth of the Son of the living God? Here in Ephesians 2 we have the doctrinal basis laid upon the foundation of the Person of Christ. Let us also remember that Paul in 1 Cor. 3: 9-11, while referring to that which is built by men in their responsibility, speaks plainly of the foundation which he had been used of God to lay, through the preaching of the glad tidings, in the souls of believers in Corinth. Here, in Ephesians 2, we are being taught that the foundation, apostolically laid in doctrine, has produced a building "fitly framed together." It grows with the day of display in view, having "Jesus Christ Himself" as its "Chief Corner Stone." while we are carried in affection to the coming day of glory, we are instructed that even now in this day of grace we "are builded together for an habitation of God in the Spirit." Just as God has been pleased to speak "Sonwise" so He dwells "Spiritwise" in the Assembly as His house. There His pleasure is secured and from it His testimony goes out.

The Assembly is viewed in its *corporate* aspect as the one Body of Christ; *collectively* as the House of God, covering all who have believed the gospel of their salvation and in consequence have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (Ephesians 1: 13). These are *individually* in the blessedness of sonship with God, and of acceptance in the Beloved (Ephesians 1: 4-6).

In a measure we have referred to the "Function" of the Assembly while speaking of its being "Furnished" by the teaching of the apostles. In this connection let us recall that those early converts of Acts 2: 42 have this commendatory feature, "they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and

fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." We are not surprised, then, to read in an Epistle which speaks of "the last hour" (1 John 2: 18. N. Tr.) "We are of God; he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (1 John 4: 6).

The Function then of the Assembly is to be obedient at any time to the Word of God, the Scriptures of Truth. To the apostle Paul was committed the administration of the mystery — that Christ and the Assembly are one. This fact was implicit in the word of the glorified Lord at God's right hand when He apprehended Saul of Tarsus while exercising his zeal against the disciples of the Lord, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?"

One "Function" of the Assembly as the Body of Christ is to give expression to the life of its Head. As the House of God it is its privilege and responsibility to minister to the pleasure of God and to witness for Him in the world in which it is. He is a Saviour God and the testimony to this truth goes out from those who form His House. The witness of piety, as governing our practice, that is, due reverence to God in all things and at all times, will give moral power to the testimony that the God of the House of God, being a Saviour God, would have all to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. This is a crowning privilege to give a true representation of our God. How blessed to enjoy fellowship in this. This fellowship was inaugurated by the apostles teaching, just as surely as it is regulated by it. It is expressed in the breaking of bread; "We being many are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1 Cor. 10: 17).

The blessing of the cup and the breaking of the bread identifies all who do so — as to their responsibility — with the death of the Lord. As they do so they practically say "amen" to the judgment of God expressed in the death of the Lord as to all that they were, and also endorsing His judgment of the world. We would cite, just now, the words of the apostle in Galatians 6: 14; "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

This fellowship, so expressed, can only be sustained by prayers. Those in the fellowship are in it by the calling of God — 1 Cor. 1: 9, and as they join in prayers they are at once confessing their own inadequacy and owning their confidence in the absolute sufficiency of their faithful God.

We believe, in the light of the forgoing truth, they have been thoroughly "Furnished" by the teaching of the apostles.

THE ASSEMBLY (PART 3)

Its Future

In the two previous papers we have looked at the Assembly under 5 headings: — Foretold: Formed: Furnished and Functioning.

We will now consider the Future of the Assembly, Foretold by our Lord and Founded on the truth of Who He is, having been Formed on the day of Pentecost by the downcoming of the Holy Spirit and completely Furnished by the apostolic teaching, with a view to Functioning correspondingly. To those who form the Assembly the Future is viewed with glad anticipation. They know, from the Scriptures of Truth — received in faith and in the power of the Spirit's application of them — that they possess a sure, steadfast, blessed, purifying hope (Hebrews 6; Titus 2; 1 John 3: 3). When our Lord comes to

reign — for He must reign (1 Cor. 15: 25) — they shall be brought with Him by God (1 Thess. 4: 14). In order to this "the Lord Himself" shall first come for them. Those who sleep through Jesus and those who are alive and remain unto His coming shall be caught up together to meet Him in the air. Then shall be realised the change spoken of in 1 Cor. 15: 51-54. The Scriptures also teach that we must all "stand before the judgment seat of Christ (God)" (Romans 14: 10; 1 Cor. 3: 13, 1 Cor. 4: 5; 2 Cor. 5: 10).

Our responsible history in life and service shall then be reviewed. Remember that when we read of reward or loss — 1 Cor. 3: 14, 15 — there is no thought of punitive judgment, for we shall be like Him Who is the Judge (1 John 3: 2). There will be no raising of the matter of guilt there, for that has been dealt with satisfactorily in the God glorifying work of our Saviour in His sacrificial death for sin at Calvary. We can say with absolute assurance: "God will not payment twice demand, Once at my bleeding Surety's hand and then again at mine." As to the judicial matter of our sins the apostle Peter has written, "Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2: 24).

Note — He did not bear them *to the tree*, as some erroneously teach, but "On the tree." Who bore our sins? Jesus! What did He do? Bore our sins! Where? *On the tree!* we repeat, not *to the tree*. How did He bear them? In His own body! the judicial work is done — for ever done — gloriously done. The matter of sins or sin will never be raised again! "Praise Him again, again, for us the cross He bore." 1 John 4: 17-19 declares plainly and unequivocally "Herein is our love (love with us) made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love (Him) because He first loved us."

When the judgment seat review is over we read "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth" and "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness(es) of the saints."

The assembly shall then be brought into marital union with Christ, the Lamb. This, in view of sharing the administration of the kingdom with Him. The assembly is here described as making herself ready, such is the outcome of the review at the judgment seat of her course in the world. In Ephesians 5: 25-27 we learn that Christ had loved and given Himself for her that He might prepare her for the day of presentation. Then shall He present the Assembly to Himself, all glorious, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. Then shall be realised that which he had mentioned in His memorable prayer to His Father, "and the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou has sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me" There shall be displayed in glory such a unity and love that the world shall know beyond the slightest shadow of doubt that the Father had sent the Son.

After the one thousand years of kingdom glory with their righteous rule have run their appointed course, the Assembly — the only New Testament company that will retain its distinct and unique identity for eternity, shall be seen as the holy city, New Jerusalem, eternally fit for the new heavens and the new earth, coming down out of heaven from God. The Assembly shall still possess the dual character which has been hers since the commencement of her history. She will be seen as a "Bride adorned for her Husband" — proof, were it needed, that Christ abides a Man for eternity. She will no longer be seen in the administrative character of wife, in which she has been active for the duration of the kingdom reign: rather will she be seen for eternity as the object of the satisfied affections of Christ,

who had loved and given Himself for her.

The Assembly shall also be introduced for that period which Peter describes in the last verse of his second epistle as "The day of eternity" (New Translation) — in these words, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men."

We have looked at the Assembly in these several and blessed ways: FORETOLD by our Lord; FOUNDED upon the glory of His Person as Son of the living God; FORMED, historically in the world; FURNISHED by the apostolic teaching; and FUNCTIONING as the Body, the Bride, and the Wife of Christ; also, as the House of God now, and growing to an holy Temple in the Lord for the day of display. Finally, in the eternal future, as the means of contact by God, not with Israel nor the nations, but with men. May we have grace and teaching by the Spirit so that, with divinely formed intelligence as to the master-piece of God, we may stand apart in sanctification and separation from all that which, in the religious world, is a denial of it. "Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach."