

## The Church

Eph. 4: 4.

W. Kelly.

There is one body." This is the church. Not that it is the whole truth of the church, which may be viewed in other aspects. We are not merely Christians, but also members of one body. Now the thoughts of Christians in general are vague as to this. They are apt to take their notions from what they have ever seen around them. But there is one unfailing standard, the word of God. A thorough acceptance of the place that God has given us according to scripture is here as elsewhere all-important.

The Son never raised the question of the church till the individual need is felt ; and we find this too even in the epistle to the Ephesians He says nothing about the body of Christ till we come to the last verse of the first chapter; and yet this is pre-eminently the church epistle. He develops the full blessing of the saint first. Nor is any one able to comprehend the church safely and rightly till every individual question is settled. The soul needs to be consciously delivered, and to stand in the presence of God in the full confidence of faith. When all this is clear, the Holy Spirit begins to open out the character and relations of the church.

At Caesarea Philippi, the remotest corner of the land, Christ's assembly to replace Israel on earth is first brought before the disciples; but the truth concerning Himself takes precedence. The Lord gave Himself the name of the Son of man; and in that very character He will return and take all the world to reign over it. Peter confesses Him as the Son of God, which drew out His statement, "I also say to thee, that thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my church" (or, assembly). Thus the soul must be in the light as to Christ before the church can be a seasonable truth. The Father in this scene gives fresh knowledge of the Son's glory; and the Christian like Peter, instead of being limited to believing Israel's faith, confesses Him as the Son of the living God. It is not what He became, what He will display or what He might do, but what He is in His intrinsic and eternal title, the Son of the living God. It is His proper dignity and personal relation in the Godhead.

Here we have a rock which cannot be moved. "On this rock," said He Himself, "will I build my church." Even when Israel shall bewail their own guilt and that of their fathers, they will not know or confess Him as the Christian does. Thus we find their type in Thomas, who was not with the rest on the resurrection day, when Christ stood in their midst as the risen Man, and breathed on them the abundant life from Himself. They were reconciled to God by His death; again, their sins were blotted out by His shed blood; and now He brought them into their new standing in Himself. Thomas was not with them till eight days after, confessing Him as "my Lord and my God." This is just what the Jews will do by-and-by, owning Him as their Jehovah God, rather than as Son of the living God. This as revealed by the Father suits those who were to be in relationship with the Father, as Christians now are characteristically.

Thus are prepared the individuals in order to form the church. There is a special revelation which lets the believer into that near relationship. Let us see to it that we have our thoughts formed from scripture and truly learn what is taught us by the Holy Spirit for our own place. First the individual should be peaceful and happy in the Lord. He is an object of heavenly favour; and only when he is consciously in that condition, is he fit to enquire what the church is. In the Catholic principle which prevailed before the Reformation, the first thought was always the church. So still, where it exists, the

great thing for a soul is to be in the church, as many besides Romanists would say today. A Protestant on the contrary likes to say, It is not the church but justification by faith and an open Bible we are now to care for: there will be one body in heaven, but not here. How beneficial the denominations are to stir up one another! Alas, very sad are the devious paths of error on both sides.

Here the scripture gives the truth fully and without a cloud. According to it the individual, even if ever so moral and surrounded by Christian associations, is arrested in his sins, and by the faith of Christ through redemption set at rest in the sight of God. If not like the prodigal in evil walk and ways, he needs no less to feel his ruin, and to be met by the Father's grace. He has to do with God about his sins, and by receiving Christ and His work enters into deliverance. Alone in both as it were, he is not alone in the communion of divine love, which is the issue. Joy can sing.

No doubt there are many elder brothers in Christendom; and it annoys them to hear of joy over any thus blessed, especially if once wretched wanderers, rejoicing in the Father's presence. It is here and now that such murmurers are found. And here too begins the divine joy of love.

The Holy Spirit shows us the church on earth. Certainly and perfectly it will be in heaven also; but it is revealed as now on earth. Your faith is small if you give this up. Scripture is plain.

What or who then founded the body here below, this heavenly corporation on earth? He that first came down from heaven to accomplish redemption, and then went up on high when there was a righteous ground, not for pardon only, but for so new and blessed a relationship. To effectuate it, Christ sent down the Spirit to dwell there as He never could before. The Spirit of God came to abide in Christ; and thus He calls His body God's temple; for the old temple was desecrated and soon to be left desolate. But the Spirit is come now to make the Christian's body a temple, and to form a body, the one body of Christ, on the earth. Believest thou this? If you doubt, search and learn. What is your standard of truth? Is it yourself or other men? It should assuredly be Christ: He only is the truth. The reason why the church of God is unknown or misunderstood is because self, in one form or another, takes the place of Christ.

By the one Spirit were we baptized into that one body. We are by Him brought as Christians into this new relationship now: and our new duties flow from that relationship. No rite could effect it, nor any act of human will. It is a divine, not a mere voluntary, society. As the Head is one and a living Head, so is the body formed by the Holy Spirit. It makes an immense difference to know whether we belong to it now; for right walk, service, and worship largely depend on that fact.

God has been blessing individuals since the day of Adam, but no such body existed then. Even Abel therefore could not be of Christ's body, nor was Abraham, David, or any O.T. saint. Let us cultivate subjection to the word, and give up popular as well as peculiar views. Is it not the path of faith to believe God's word? When our Lord was about to depart, He said, "Tarry in Jerusalem," etc. The same divine Spirit that dwelt in Christ dwells in His own, the same Spirit that anointed Him anoints them too. Gentiles or Jews, they are brought into anew and united position as the one body of Christ; for the Spirit sent down by the ascended Head baptized them into one. Faith in Christ beyond a doubt is the first question: till this is settled in your soul before God, you have nothing to do with the church; you are still in your sins till then; and no sponsor can believe for you. The Spirit was and is "given" to believers. Of course He first operates in and by the word to make us believers. How could the Spirit come and dwell in a man yet in his sins?

Moreover, and as long as the Lord Jesus remained here, instead of ascending, there could not begin any such new and heavenly relationship. Nor could any basis be laid for it short of Christ's coming down to die atoningly before He rose and ascended to heaven. Hence we see the force of the

well-known symbol of the Spirit in the oil that followed, first the water, and then the blood; as is plain enough in Lev. 8, and also in Lev. 14. Thus Christ becomes the Head there; then only begins the body. As long as He is above, the body is here; and adding to it goes on by the Spirit given.

But the Lord is coming quickly not only to receive us, but to judge the habitable earth; and all the convulsions that are and threaten around us point to this fact by the moral call for His intervention. God has revealed both beyond controversy in His word. Those that do not believe in His future are not to be depended on with regard to the past or the present. Him that does not believe in God's word you will soon find as unreliable on Genesis as on the rest of the Bible. But the Lord is coming quickly, and if we are profiting by Him in peace, other parts of revealed truth will by degrees fall into their proper places.

Are you members of that one body? Are you able through the grace of the Lord Jesus to say, "Abba Father," when alone with God? If it be so, He has fitted you to dwell in the light of glory; surely also to have communion with the saints on earth as members of Christ's body. Scripture shows us therein a clearly defined walk and worship. Never was such a unity, even while our Lord was here. It is a relationship founded on His death, resurrection, and ascension. Our Presbyterian friends like others confound the Head of the body with the King of saints" — itself a spurious reading and false idea. A King necessarily supposes a people governed by him and, however loyal, bound to keep their distance from him. But as members of the body united to its Head, you cannot insert the finest gossamer between; and this I fear is not really believed. It is a question of living faith in Christ and His word, whereby we understand the closeness of the tie, and live, as we are, a heavenly people, while still on earth. Let us first receive the truth as it is: then let it deal with our hearts and ways that we be not earthly-minded.

A body without a Head would be a monster; but Christ the Head gives by grace a suited character to His body, the church, and to each member in particular. Here we have the perfection, as of glory, so of grace, in meekness and humility; and God's call is that this be made good in every member of it while here on earth. No believer doubts that the Head is in heaven; but are you a member of His body? For His own glory God has formed it, and the Spirit of God draws us out in obedient walk, as also in the expression of thanksgiving and praise; and this is worship.

Long before Israel is ready to sing the Psalms, God has these songs ready for them: they have not truly sung them yet; but they will do so in the days of the displayed kingdom, which will differ widely from this actual day. But the body must be completed first, and the Lord come. There are no Psalms written for us in the New Testament, but the church can sing her own "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs"; she is already in peace and happy; she has the Spirit to give requisite power. Everything is future for Israel. Meanwhile we come in, saved and blessed to the utmost, yet nothing but poor bankrupts in ourselves. For God has united us to Christ in heaven; and out of us flow rivers of living water, as it springs up in us unto life eternal: so the Lord promised in John 4 and 7.

Are you thus worshipping, and thus bearing witness to Christ on high? Do you know what it is now to share the Father's joy? to be in communion with the Father and the Son? If sorrow of conscience likes to get alone with God, nothing so fills with divine joy as that fellowship which grace gives in Christ. To know that we are members of the body of Christ makes all the difference for our souls and our ways. Now is the time of this responsibility. Sovereign grace alone gave us to be of Him.

W.K.