



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume IX
Issue 213



Select Readings on God's Ecclesia (Part 6)

"Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach" (Hebrews 13:12-13).

BODIES OF MEN, OR THE BODY OF CHRIST

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto you were not able to bear it [or, to receive it], neither yet now are you able. For you are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are you not carnal and walk as men [marg., according to men]? For while one says, "I am of Paul;" and another, "I am of Apollos:" are you not carnal? (I Corinthians 3:1-4).

The great central truth of the whole argument is that these Corinthian Christians were taken up with "Bodies" of men, as we now call them, and they were therefore totally unfitted to receive the truth of the "one Body" of Christ.

While they were putting the members in the place of the Head, they were carnal and not spiritual, and therefore not in a position to have the truth concerning God's "mystery" declared to them.

Hence when the apostle went to Corinth he determined not to go beyond the simplest elementary gospel teaching, to feed them with milk, to proclaim a crucified Savior; for they were

not in a condition to hear about the glorified Savior – "the glorious gospel of Christ" (II Corinthians 4:4) – and all the glorious things which are freely given to us of God, and which He has prepared with a view to their glory, the glory of the members of the Body in Christ their glorified Head in heaven.

Have we not here a practical subject for our own hearts? What is our condition before God? Are we taken up with "bodies" and divisions which men have made, and called by their own names, or the names which man has given them? If so, we, too, are not spiritually in a proper condition to hear or receive "the mystery of God." No wonder the blessed truth so early dropped out of the creed of the Church of God!

No wonder, when, in our day, it has been revived, so few care to know it. No wonder that many resent its revival; for it judges our *Ecclesiastical* position to the very core. It makes nothing of the sects and denominations for which the majority are contending; it writes folly upon our most cherished idols. No wonder Christians are torn and divided and scattered, when they are "not discerning the Lord's Body" (I Corinthians 11:29). No wonder the air is filled with false schemes for re-uniting the scattered sects when such gross darkness prevails as to what is, subjectively, "the unity" of the Spirit, and objectively, the union of the members with ►

the one Head of the Body in the glory which is about to be revealed.

Oh, to get back to this primitive truth! Here, and here alone, is the secret of reunion; for though scattered amongst the sects, and regarded by men as totally separated, the members of this Body are already and really “*one in Christ.*” This is the only real union that exists in the world, and the more truly believers can now realize their position as “*dead with Christ,*” “*risen with Christ,*” and thus “*one with Christ,*” and “*in Christ,*” the more real unity will there be amongst the members themselves, one with another.

E.W. Bullinger (1837-1913)

The Mystery: Secret Truth Revealed

THE SUPERNATURAL CHARACTER OF THE CHURCH

The nature of the Church is quite supernatural. It is not something of men, of this world, or in any sense ordinary. This is a wholly spiritual thing. The Church – the *true* Church – never was, and never is, a man-made thing. It is something created, not made.

T. Austin-Sparks (1888-1971)

A Witness and a Testimony (September 1965)

SCATTERED TO THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE EARTH

The members of the church we belong to are scattered to the four corners of the earth. No organization claims us.

Martin Zender

Clanging Gong News

Vol. 1, No. 13

THE TRUE ECCLESIA

The true “Ecclesia”... scattered throughout the land, some nominally in every branch of the Christian church, some *outside* of all of them. They have no outward organization, no visible bond of union, but “*the unity of the spirit*” binds

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This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7)
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the “preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began” (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from the law (Galatians 5:1)
- the organic nature of the church, the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12)
- the distinct ministry of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13)
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15)
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13).
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with ...
 - total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6)
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4)

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any “church,” “denomination,” “movement,” “organization,” “mission,” “creed,” “meeting,” “school,” “conference” or “fellowship.”

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Remember that it is our responsibility as husbands and fathers to take the truths we learn from God's Word, the truths that we hold dear, and impart them to our families.

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them together in inseparable fellowship ... We may be sure that, whatever human institution may fail, “*nevertheless the foundation of God stands sure, having this seal, The Lord knows them who are His*” (II Timothy 2:19).

Arthur P. Adams (1847-1925)
The Spirit of the Word (1885)

THE BABYLONIAN SYSTEM

The further removed I am from the Babylon system, and by this I definitely mean the existing church system with all its vaunted orthodoxy, the more I am convinced that for the most part all its teachings are inside out, upside down, and backward.

G.R. Hawtin (1909 -1994)
Creation, Redemption, and the Restitution of All Things, p. 64

GOD’S PLAN OF USING “DIVINE NOBODIES”

What if God is actually fond of abnormal “normal” people like me ...?

What if God’s plan to save the world is hidden beneath the radar, behind the scenes, and among the everyday lives of nobodies? ...

I’m beginning to see how the secret ways and deepest mysteries of God and His kingdom are often revealed off the beaten path of organized religion and frequently missed by the too-smart. Sometimes it’s not the professor or preacher leading you to divine truth but the commonplace people God sticks right in front of your face. The Bible says something about jars of clay being fit vessels for carrying eternal treasure and God using foolish, weak, lowly, despised people in profound ways (see II Corinthians 4:7; I Corinthians 1:27-28).

Jim Palmer
Divine Nobodies: Shedding Religion to Find God, pp. xv-xvi

WHICH IS THE TRUE CHURCH?

The Bible, and it alone, can determine this question, and no matter how long a denomination has been in existence, or who its founders were, the Bible is the court of last resort.

Certain it is that age cannot sanctify an error, nor names of great men authenticate a delusion. Hence we ask, What says the Bible? Did Christ establish a denomination? Is any human organization the church of Christ?

It is certain that we cannot go outside the Bible to seek the truth, for nothing is so clouded with the mist of tradition, error and deception as early church history. The historian, Dr. Dowling, said:

There is scarcely anything that strikes the mind of the careful student of ancient ecclesiastical history with greater surprise, than the comparatively early period at which many of the corruptions of Christianity which are embodied in the Romish system took rise. – *The History of Romanism*, Page 67

The church of Jesus Christ has no form of human organization. Believers in Christ are one in Him. The word “church” is from the Greek word “ekklesia” and means “the called out ones.” The Holy Spirit is the only bond of union and the church membership is kept in heaven ...

The church of Christ, having no human organization, cannot, of course, have a human head. All who hold positions as heads of “churches” are interlopers. Jesus Christ, and He alone, is the Head of the church; for it is written of Him:

And has put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him Who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:22-23).

... Christ is the Head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body (Ephesians 5:23).

He is the Head of the body, the church: Who is the beginning, the Firstborn from the

dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence (Colossians 1:18).

The headship of man is a repudiation of the Headship of Christ, and every "church" which has a human head says in effect: "We will not have this Man (Christ) to reign over us."

The whole human system of human church organization and federation is derived from the Greeks, who patterned the church after their governmental systems.

We still have this old Greek system with us, in the multiplicity of sects and denominations, and at the same time there are many, many honest Christians today who are the "called out ones" who have withdrawn from human organization. The writer is one of these, and glories in liberty from human, denominationalism and sectarian bossism.

While the slogans, "Loyalty to the church," "Loyalty to the cause," "Loyalty to the denomination" are heard so often, the writer with many others is proclaiming "Loyalty to Christ," the Head of the church.

This writer has no disposition to trace the workings of human church organizations and federations. Suffice it to say that through the councils and conferences of humanly organized churches, all the errors and deceptions which give rise to the much divided state of Christendom are due, and God's people will never be free from these errors and delusions until they repudiate human organization, and human leadership.

The history of organized Christianity is extremely bad. It is the history of corruption, error, blood and butchery. Error has always been in the ascendancy and truth has always been the slaughtered lamb.

The church is the body (Colossians 1:24; I Corinthians 12:27), and Christ is the Head (Colossians 1:18). The church is controlled by the mind of Christ, as the human body is controlled by the human mind. When a man loses his mind (becomes insane), then he is incarcerated and others control him.

And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increases with the increase of God (Colossians 2:19).

The very selection of a human head shows that the moral sensibility of the church is gone, and harsh as it may seem, it is a fact that denominationalism is spiritual insanity.

Sad as the divided state of denominational Christianity is, there is also the happy thought that God is calling His people out of all sects and denominations, and away from all creeds, to the simplicity of faith.

God has organized His church better than it can possibly be one by human agencies. What holds the worlds in space? Can any man, or set of men, or all the men in the world united change the course of one of these worlds? No. Can one of them be stopped in its mighty march through space? Never, and why not? Ah, because, He is,

... Upholding all things by the word of His power ... (Hebrews 1:3).

The same God Who holds the worlds in space can and does hold His people together without any human bonds or federations, and He does so by His Spirit.

Elmer E. Franke (1861-1946)
Which is the True Church?

TRUE WORSHIP

When people talk of worshiping in some building on earth, and think of a ritualistic service as worship, and talk of worshiping God in music, it simply shows that they do not understand what is involved in the rending of the veil. The worship that is acceptable to God is the music that rises up to Him as His Spirit touches the heart-strings of His redeemed people and we bow before Him, the Holiest of All, singing and making melody in our hearts unto the Lord.

That is the place where we should be abiding

in spirit constantly ... in every moment of the believer's life, he is sitting in Heavenly places in Christ Jesus. The place of our abiding is inside the veil, in the immediate presence of God with nothing between. All that once shut God in and shut man out has been removed in the death of Christ.

H.A. Ironside (1876-1951)
"Charge That to My Account"

UNAUTHORIZED INTERMEDIARY AUTHORITY

... *The head of every man is Christ* ... (I Corinthians 11:3).

When someone else comes in between a man and his true Head (Christ the Lord) as some intermediary authority, that entity assumes portions of the roles belonging to each. Such an authority relieves a man of the responsibility God gave to the individual. In turn, such authority then denies God His direct authority over the man.

Ross Purdy
I Will Have One Doctrine and One Discipline
Bible Student's Press, 2008

POWER OF DARKNESS

To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God ... (Acts 26:18).

Who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son (Colossians 1:13).

In the book of Colossians the authority of darkness refers not to evil things, but to religious observances, Gentile ordinances, and Gnostic philosophy. In chapter two Paul linked idolatry, the worship of angels, to philosophy, mysticism, Gnosticism and asceticism ...

When Paul says that the Father has delivered us out of the authority of darkness, he means the darkness of these very observances, ordinances,

philosophies and ascetic practices.

Witness Lee (1905-1997)
Life-study of Colossians, pp. 27-28

REPUDIATE ORGANIZED CHRISTIANITY

Wherefore, Christ also ... suffered without the camp. Let us therefore go to Him without the camp, bearing His reproach.

The camp was Judaism, and He suffered without the camp because He repudiated Judaism and stood for the realization of all God's thoughts as in Himself personally ... It is the Christ Who is the full sum and embodiment of all God's thoughts and ways, and that takes the place of Judaism, and He, therefore, repudiated Judaism and suffered without the camp. Let us go to Him without the camp.

If you are going to take this line you are going to repudiate organized Christianity, going to repudiate Christendom as a traditional system, going to repudiate that order of things which is made, and going, therefore, to suffer reproach and be outside of the camp suffering His reproach. In other words, in line with what we have said earlier, we are immediately going to come up against that force of antagonism to stop what has come in through the death and resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus, the heavenly thing ...

Organized Christianity as it is today cannot understand anything that is not organized, that is not advertised, that is not run. It must have names that carry weight, that mean influence. If you can get people with some title you are going to have the guarantee of success for your Christian enterprise. And so the letters and the titles strung on are a necessary requisite for the success of the Lord's work. You must write it up in the press, you must give a report of it, you must be able to make some kind of return that people can read, and say, "This is a successful thing." If you cannot do that the whole thing is doomed to failure.

They say, you must advertise, you must have publicity, you must organize, you must bring in all

these things to support it, to carry it on. If you did none of those; if you were never heard of in the press; if you never had a report; if you never had any names; if there was nothing at all that came out in a public way for people to take account of, what is the verdict of organized Christianity? Nothing is being done. You are doing nothing. It is a-hole-in-a-corner sort of thing. Is that true? What must we say about that? ...

That may leave you perhaps in a vague, perplexed position, not knowing where you are, but I have no doubt about the truth of the message. If you do not feel you can accept it; if you disagree; if you revolt; if you feel it cuts clean across all your training, all your acceptance; if you feel that it runs counter to all that you know, all I ask of you is honesty with God ... Have honest dealings with the Lord. Please do not go away hot in spirit, antagonistic; do not lay this at the door of any man. At least give God a chance. It may be costly, it may be that you will have to be prepared to accept the position that God's greatest work through you is something hidden, something secret, something that no one can read about, perhaps no one can discern what is going on; and it is the mightiest work that God is doing.

T. Austin-Sparks (1888-1971)
The Kingdom That Cannot Be Shaken, chapter 2

THE REMEDY FOR DECEPTION

The book of Colossians focuses on Christ as our everything ...

If we take Christ as life (3:4), hold Him as the Head of the Body (2:19), know Him as the mystery of God (2:2), experience Him as the hope of glory (1:27), and walk in Him (2:6), then we shall not be deceived by anything or by anyone.

Those who do not experience Christ in these aspects can easily be deceived. If you analyze the situation of those who have been deluded and carried off as spoil, you will realize that they did not experience Christ in these five ways. They did not realize that Christ alone is everything in God's economy, and they did not take Christ as their life or as their Head.

Furthermore, they did not experience the indwelling Christ as their hope of glory, nor did they live, move, and have their being in Christ. As a result, they were defenseless, and eventually were deluded and carried off into captivity. Our defense against deception is the Christ who is our life, our Head, the mystery of God, the hope of glory, and the good land in which we walk.

Witness Lee (1905-1997)
Life-study of Colossians, p. 175-176

HIS ONLY LIVING TESTIMONY

The Church abiding in the Word of God is His only living testimony on planet earth in the grace dispensation. If we lose our identity as the church, this testimony becomes muddled. If we do not recover Paul's manner of life, we will never clearly testify to this identity.

This testimony is challenged by the barnacles of tradition that now cling to the institutional church:

... You are God's building ... Know you not that you are the temple of God? ... If any man defiles [mar, deface] the temple of God, him shall God destroy [mar, deface]; for the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (I Corinthians 3:9, 16-17).

Buildings that bear the title "church" deface God's real building. Consider our testimony as unsaved men gather, just as we do, to a building that they call "church," just as we are wont to do, and move through a liturgy, just as we do. Our testimony is communicated not only by our practices but also *by that from which we abstain*. In this practice, we form an unequal yoking with the world. We are to be separate, a peculiar people (see II Corinthians 6:14-17).

... the church, which is His body ... (Ephesians 1:22-23).

We do not go to church. We are the church. Going to church is a ritual. Being the church is our blood bought identity.

... Seek that you may excel to the edifying [building up] of the church (I Corinthians 14:12).

Beware lest any man spoil [capture] you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And you are complete in Him ... (Colossians 2:8-10).

God is building something and encourages us to build with Him a building made with human stones, His church.

The Colossians passage cautions us not to be taken captive by traditions, philosophy and the rudiments (Strong's definition: the orderly arrangement) of the world. Are you and I *incomplete* without building ownership, church programs and Sunday morning rituals? No! We are complete in Him! Should we build according to the world's orderly arrangement as men both saved and lost have done, calling their finished product "a church"? We believers are all to build up *the church* not "a church." Can God's church and man's "church" cohabit in the same space without producing confusion, identity crisis and a marred testimony? Is your Lord and His body enough for you or do you require more?

Keith Baldwin
Crystal Lake, IL

BODY LIFE AND FIRST CORINTHIANS

When God had Paul pen I Corinthians chapters 11-14, He knew that the gifts would cease within 10-15 years. Do those passages only have 10-15 years of relevant application?

I suggest that there is something there beyond the obvious "pneumatikos" (spiritual gifts, Lit. spirituals). If we remove those gifts from the context, we are still left with: praying for one another, feeding one another, teaching one another, edifying one another, encouraging one another.

The completed Word does not shift the burden from the saints to one man (the "pastor") but from "gifted" saints to **all of the saints** (who are equipped to interpret and apply God's word, because Christ in the believer is every Christian's on-going spiritual gift). There should be more "one anothering" not less. God never moved us from the personal care and concern of the living room to the antiseptic, sterilized environment of the classroom. That is man's arms-length notion of spirituality.

Unbelief inside the institutional model directly challenges two of God's insistences about the body:

- 1) Christ is Head and no other, and
- 2) Christ indwells the saints – all of them.

Tradition has this old habit of "*making the word of God of none effect*" (Mark 7:13).

Keith Baldwin
Crystal Lake, IL

HEADSHIP OF THE CHURCH

Christ alone is the Head over His church ... To introduce another head *over His body* is blasphemy ...

Do you really believe in the practical headship of Christ, or do you think that we must have a human "head" in order to make decisions and "break ties"? Do you believe that His Word is sufficient to govern our practices, or do you believe that God has abandoned concern over our practices and has left us to our cultural preferences? Is your sense of oneness with all believers increasing, or do you tend to divide the body into factions based on peculiar doctrine or practices? Do you entertain the notion that oneness will occur when more believers come around to your viewpoint? Is this God's view of unity?

The common practices of believers today which lie outside of the bounds of Scripture are inherently divisive. Most of the practices of the institutional

“churches” are designed to set them apart one from another: encouraging personality followings, competitively marketing themselves based on programs or teaching content, building-centered approaches to ministries, a focus on numbers rather than on relationships, teaching which often accommodates rather than challenges life-style, a drivenness to achieve attendance records and larger contributions and, ultimately, a focus on the differences between groups of *believers* rather than our oneness in Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ heads His body by His Word. Every other agenda is extra-biblical.

Keith Baldwin
Crystal Lake, IL

THE “I AM OF CHRIST” DIVISION OF THE BODY

To say “*I am of Paul*,” or “*I am of Cephus*,” is obviously sectarian; but to say “*I am of Christ*” is sectarian too, though less obviously so. The confession, “*I am of Christ*,” is a good confession, but it is not an adequate basis for forming a

separate church, since it excludes some of the children of God in a given locality by including only a certain section who say, “*I am of Christ*.” That every believer belongs to Christ is a fact, whether that fact be declared or not; and to differentiate between those who proclaim it and those who do not, is condemned by God as “carnal.” It is the fact that matters, not the declaration of it.

To take one’s stand as belonging to Christ alone is perfectly right, but to divide between Christians who take that stand and Christians who do not is altogether wrong. To brand as sectarian those who say, “*I am of Paul*,” or “*I am of Cephas*,” and feel spiritually superior as we separate ourselves from them and have fellowship only with those who say, “*I am of Christ*,” makes us guilty of the very sin we condemn in others. If we make non-sectarianism the basis of our fellowship, then we are dividing the church on a ground other than the one ordained of God, and thereby we form another sect.

Watchman Nee (1903-1972)
The Normal Christian Church Life



Here are additional responses which we have received regarding our series of *Daily Email Goodies on II Timothy – The Church in Ruins*.

Each of these Timothy installments is laden with meaning. Every paragraph, every line, every word. And there seems to be new revelation in it for me. I think God is giving you to see into the marrow of this church deception. Thank you for writing this. I can’t wait to have this in book form. – **OH**

The ongoing series ... has really opened my eyes to some super important understanding about who and what makes up the Body of Christ. Clyde, may our God continue to bless you in the marvelous understanding of His Word. – **MS**

Impressive summarization of the state of affairs within Christianity. I liken it to a dysfunctional family hooked on a self-perpetuating religious welfare system. The cycle continues generation after generation. Breaking it requires a hope that

there is something better, a desire to be educated, and the will to act responsibly.

In this case, I believe the “hope” is the Good News, the education needed is found in the Gospel of Grace and Peace (Paul’s gospel), and the desire and will to act responsibly are a gift from God. The knowledge of this hope in combination with a little study in the Word will develop a people whose reliance switches from a man-made system to a people who depend solely on God’s provisions.

However, weaning ourselves from the mother church will take us away from our warm, cuddly, comfort zone – I’m sure you get the picture. It’s probably a bad analogy, but maybe God’s plan all along allowed for a brief time of suckling because of our weakness. Maybe He designed it this way as part of our development. It sounds like something He might do.

Thanks for you teaching; it makes me hungry. – **TX**

This series is very very interesting. I was once there and I’m happy that God removed me. Keep up the good work. – **MD**

Priceless. No doubt, Clyde, you will suffer more persecution for this Timothy series. I hope so; you’re really “racking up points” for your celestial allotment. We know that all this has been graciously granted to you. – **OH**