

The Church

The church of Jesus Christ is His people, and described by Paul the apostle in the book of Ephesians as 'the whole family of God who are named after His Father'. *"The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole **family** in heaven and earth is named"*. For the church, the concept of family is a very good one as it indicates a closeness of the relationships within that family and the blessedness of communication between the members. That, of course, means primarily the relationship every member of the church of Jesus Christ has with the Father and the Son. *"And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ"*, but also the loving fellowship between the members of the church.

The word family comes from the Greek, **patria**, the word for 'father'. We get the English word **patriarch** from **patria**, which is the father who is the head of a family. This indicates all members of the family come from the one father; even when looking into the history of Israel, they are the descendants of their father Abraham, then Isaac and Jacob, renamed Israel. They are then divided into families according to their fathers, the sons of Jacob: so, we have the children of the tribes, for example of Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Benjamin and so on. Fatherhood is vitally important, and to be a member of the church of Jesus Christ, God must be our spiritual Father, and therefore Jesus is our brother, and wonderfully we read that *'He is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters'*. *"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth **his Son**, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the **adoption (position) of sons**. And because ye are **sons**, God hath sent forth the **Spirit of his Son** into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore you are no more a servant, **but a son**, and if **a son**, then an heir of God through Christ"*. All members of the church of Jesus Christ are sons of God, He is their spiritual father. *"He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created."* JAMES 1.18 NIV

This wonderful body of people are the 'called out ones', **eglesia**, is the Greek word, and Paul describes the 'called out ones,' when writing to the Corinthian church, as those *"Who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with **all** that in every place call upon the name of **Jesus Christ our Lord both theirs and ours**"*. The church consists of 'holy ones' (saints), called to be holy, called to be separate, and have, among many other things, one vital thing in common, that wherever they are in the whole earth they call on the "Name of the Lord". Jesus is their Lord, as much as Paul says Jesus is his own Lord.

This all agrees with the apostle Peter who, in his general letter to many Christians, describes them as **"A chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a peculiar people (special people), a people for God's possession"**. So holy, royal, chosen, and special, and indeed for God's possession, God's ownership; a possession in that the church is His dwelling place and His inheritance bought with the blood of Jesus Christ. The church are the '**redeemed**'. We begin to see how special this body of people are, at least from God's point of view; *"The world knows us not, because it knew Him not"*. This special people have God as their Father, Jesus as their Lord, and it is the Holy Spirit who has baptised (Immersed) them into the body of Christ, making them members 'in particular' of that body. The whole Godhead is involved in this work. *"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body", Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular"*. Each member has been especially chosen and is of great value to Our Lord Jesus; every member has been bought with a price, with the price of the precious blood of Christ, and to those who have believed on Him, and indeed received Him, Jesus is very precious.

The church is all one body, Jesus Christ is the head. *"And He is the head of the body, the church, that in all things He might have the preeminence"*. The church is Jesus' body, His spiritual body, which is why

every member is baptised into the body by the Spirit of God. Every member is to 'hold', have a relationship with, the 'head'; *"Holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands has nourishment ministered"* (this passage talks of those who do not hold the head but describes what the 'head' provides which is why this phrase is quoted here). So, the church of Jesus Christ is His spiritual body, His people, His holy ones. His called-out ones, they belong to Him. He is their brother and their Lord and has laid His life down to redeem them. Jesus provides spiritual nourishment for every member of His body. He is their strength, and He is their life. This is Jesus' great prayer for all that will believe on Him through the preaching of the gospel, which was first preached by the apostles on the day of Pentecost.

"And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; 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. And the glory which you gave me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and you in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that you have sent me, and has loved them, as you have loved me".

We see the love of Jesus for all His people and His desire that they should be one, one in heart, mind and purpose to glorify Him, and therefore Paul the apostle's exhortation to the church in Ephesus, *"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"*. The unity is a spiritual one, not based on anything of this world, race, colour, culture, riches or poverty, education or lack of education, but solely on our belonging to Jesus and therefore to each other and our love for the Lord Jesus, our Saviour, and our desire to do His will and to please Him.

We have said the church is the '**eglesia**', 'the called-out ones' and Paul reminds the Corinthian church, and us 2000 years later, to see our calling *"For ye see your **calling**, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the **foolish things** of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the **weak things** of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and **base things** of the world, and things which are **despised**, hath God chosen, yea, and things **which are not**, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence. But of Him **are you** in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glories (boasts), let him glory (boast) in the Lord"*.

The **church** is to realise that God has **chosen** the weakest, the least noble and the least wise of this world so that He can show the wonder of His salvation in His body, in His church. Then those who glory, those who boast, only boast of Jesus Christ, being aware that they owe Him everything and He has given them everything. Jesus becomes wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption to every one of His members. Wonderful church, wonderful body, and wonderful Saviour. Jesus said, *"Unless you become as little children you cannot enter the kingdom of God."* Those who think they know in this world never become humble enough and straightforward enough to believe the word of God and receive Him and know Him as their redeemer.

God has great purpose for His church. He gave it eternal life, so each member will live for ever. We see the purpose in this verse from the book of Ephesians. *"To the intent that **now** unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the **church** the manifold wisdom of God according to the **eternal purpose** which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord"*. An eternal purpose for God's people, for now, for this time and at any time until our Lord Jesus returns, to show that His wisdom is greater than all their works, that they are foolish by comparison. Yes, we see the works of Satan in bringing in sin and trying to spoil the most wonderful aspect of God's creation. (Sin spoiled everything, but worst of all human beings). But here is the wisdom of God, Christ the wisdom of God, that through the death of His Son, God could redeem a people. He could forgive their sin and put His eternal life in

them, so that they could live for ever and not die for ever. He could so change human lives that had experienced sin in their living, putting His eternal life in them, so that they could know the righteousness of God, that righteousness working in them every day for God's glory, looking for the return of the Lord Jesus. That is the NOW, it is real and the purpose of every true Christian. Every member is to 'hold the head' from which all life comes, to trust Him with all their heart, and not be conformed to this world with all its religion and seeking after wealth, fame and fortune, and allow the 'meek and lowly' life of Jesus to work in them. Christ is then their/our life, and for each one 'to live is Christ and to die is gain'. Oh! that every member would catch the vision of this great purpose and lay aside all other things to Almighty God, who has provided *"So great salvation"*.

We read in Genesis 2, *"And the LORD God said, it is not good that the man should be alone"*. The same principle applied to His Son. God had made a wife for Adam, and the church is the wife for the Son of God. There is a sense in which the way God made human beings was to enable them to eat of the 'tree of life' and live for ever. Jesus is the 'tree of life,' and by eating of that tree, 'Jesus', the life of God would have entered into them, into their spirits, (human beings are body, soul, and spirit) and they would have received eternal life and lived for ever. Sin spoiled all that, and God had to cut off access to the 'tree of life' so that sin would not be for ever. But the need for a bride for the Lord Jesus still remained, a body of people into whom He could put His life, that they could be one in Spirit for ever.

The **church** is described as the **bride** of Christ and is seen as New Jerusalem, a **bride** prepared for her husband descending out of heaven. *"I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a **bride** adorned for her **husband**"*. Jerusalem was the city of God on the earth where the temple of God was built. It is the same place, geographically, where Abraham offered up Isaac, and outside of which our Lord Jesus was crucified. It was to be God's dwelling place, that is why the temple was there, but in Revelation chapter 21 we read, when New Jerusalem is seen, *"Behold the dwelling place of God is with human beings"* (paraphrased from KJV). God dwelling in each member of the **church**, each **His possession**, each **His beloved**, each in **His likeness**, each having **eternal life**, each **ready** for her husband and yet together making the glorious **church of Jesus Christ**.

We read in Ephesians, chapter 5. *"Christ also loved the **church** and **gave Himself** for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a **glorious church**, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be **holy and without blemish**"*.

Jesus gave Himself for His church. He bought her with a price, in order to be able to present her to Himself. *"By Himself He purged our sins"*. He is the 'father of the bride', giving the bride away and then the 'bridegroom receiving her to Himself'. Jesus all in all. The church is ready, she has made herself ready. The church has gone from glory to glory and is dressed in white clothing. She is prepared because *"Of God, Jesus is made unto her wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption"*. He is all she needs, she can and must be holy and without blemish, having no spot or wrinkle. No spot as she is clean, she is washed, through the 'blood of the Lamb'; we are saved by the 'washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost'. And, with no wrinkle, as wrinkles are the sign of aging, and this glorious church, you and I, if we are members, has eternal life and there is no aging in eternal life. Jesus has done everything for us, and we can be found in Him having the righteousness of God and everlasting life, taking on the glory of God, being sons brought to the glory of God.

John the apostle was invited, *"I will show you the bride, the Lamb's **wife**"* *"And showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem"....."And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it..."* John sees New Jerusalem as *"Having the glory of God"*.

In chapter 21 of Revelation, as we have said, we read of New Jerusalem, *"Behold the dwelling place of God is with human beings"*. The wonderful and glorious church, showing God's ultimate triumph, that He should dwell in every one of His people and they together as His church, His habitation through the Spirit, should be a wife for His Son who then will not be alone but be with His church, His people, for ever and ever.

Of course, this is nothing to do with buildings on the earth, although it is good to have a building to meet in, and gives a very clear testimony that God's people meet here. That can be significantly important in countries where Christians are persecuted. However, in some countries Christians meet secretly, and yet Jesus said, *"where two or three gather in my Name I am in the midst"*. The early church met in the houses of members; there is no set rule as long as the building does not become more important than the people, and indeed the Lord Himself. The church is God's building, and the members are His dwelling place. They are clothed in the righteousness of God, for which vestments made by human beings, however glorious and elaborate and however much there are attempts to copy the clothes of the Jewish High priest, can never be a substitute. The things of Jesus' church are not to be worked out by the minds of human beings, devising systems, ministries, buildings, and hierarchies, or even an elite priesthood, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. Even the original tabernacle had to be made according to the pattern showed to Moses, how much more this 'spiritual body' needs to be instructed in its workings by the Spirit of God.

The church is to meet together in its local place. ("Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together".) It is to meet for worship where every member of the body in that place has a role to play. Every member is a royal priest and free to worship God. Priests principally minister to God and on behalf of God, and even as they minister in their calling to their fellow brothers and sisters, they do so UNTO the Lord,

So, every member has a role within the church. Ministry is not exclusively for vicars, priests, pastors bishops or whatever title men are given. We read "But the manifestation of the **Spirit** is given to **every man (human being, men and women)** to profit everyone..... when ye come together, **every one** of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let **all** things be done unto edifying". *"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ"*. Everything has to be done to build the members up and must not be done 'through strife, arguments, or vain glory.' There must be NOTHING for self or the promotion of self. Everyone must 'hold the head', and to do that everyone must be submitted to the Lord Jesus and do His will.

So, we see this wonderful church, for the glory of God, every member equal, but with God giving to the church in every place those to minister within the body, and from within the body those to watch over the flock. It is so well organised by the Spirit of God and yet human beings have so often re-organised the church in a way that suits them.

Meetings are for comfort, for fellowship, for building up the body of Christ, for building up every member. *"Until 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 maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love"*. It is all in the love of God and the goal is that all become more and more like our Lord Jesus, in faith, in love, and in life. This is the church, and this is how it grows, ready for Jesus' return. It is His body on the earth to which anyone, the last, the least, and the lost, but anyone can come to have their needs met, they should be able to touch the 'hem of Jesus' garment' and be made whole. They should find salvation, healing, deliverance, peace, comfort and wholeness in the local church, which holds forth the word of life to the people where they live.

It is clear that all the writers in the New Testament understood the preciousness of this church to Almighty God, and wrote for its protection, its wisdom and that all in the body of Christ should know the greatness of their salvation. Paul says that, above all the things he suffered was the "care of the churches", which was laid on him daily. He would pray, minister, serve, advise, write letters. or what ever was required, so that the church would remain pure and ready for its Lord, not only His coming again but on a day-by-day basis.

He writes to Timothy about knowing how to behave in the house of God which is the church of the living God. Not how to behave within a building but as a member of the church, the body of Christ, and how to act to promote and build up that body and to maintain the 'unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' Not to do anything as a member to damage or harm the body, or any member. Not to bring the church or its people into disrepute or harm its reputation. Paul understood the great value of God's **church** to Him, and we need to learn that too, then we will only want to be a blessing to every member of the church.

There are the letters to the seven **churches** in the book of the Revelation. They are Jesus' words from the throne of heaven, as He sees and says, "I know your works". Each church is addressed by their geographical location: 'Each who in every place call on the Name of the Lord'. The care of those churches was upon the Lord Jesus as He seeks their blessing, with words of correction, words of encouragement and words of wisdom. The aim for each church was 'to overcome,' with wonderful promises for those who do, and offers of repentance and restoration for those which have gone wrong, and support for those suffering persecution. We have seen that the **church** is the **family** of God, God is their spiritual Father, they are the sons of the living God, and in Revelation 21 we read "*To him that overcomes I will be a Father and he shall be to me a son*". Jesus wants to ensure all the sons, all His brethren, overcome just as He did, so He speaks to them. How He loved them and how he cared for them, this special, holy, royal, and chosen people whom he had redeemed, having paid the price in His own blood. How He loves you and me; His chosen people in this generation. We are His special, holy royal and chosen people; the redeemed, who 'will come with singing to Zion and everlasting joy shall be on their heads'.

We have seen the value of the church, and the price paid, and the love Jesus has for His people, giving His life and shedding His blood for His people. It had always been in God's purpose to redeem a people for Himself from among human beings, whom He has made in His own likeness and yet whose perfection was so dreadfully spoiled by sin, when Adam and Eve succumbed to the temptation of satan. Paul tells us that the church was 'chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him'. (See how holy keeps coming up about this wonderful body of Christ, His glorious bride). So, God, Father and Son, seeing the end from the beginning, chose us even before sin came into the world. He chose us in heaven, before the world began. 'The stone which the builders rejected, Our Lord, was to become the head of the corner', (the one on whom everything depends) of God's building. The plan in that choosing was that Jesus would come and live and die and rise again on the earth, and His church would be His people for ever and ever. 'This is the Lord's doing and it was marvellous in their eyes', and it should be in ours. We get taken up in the love of God to serve Him and His church, His people in this world, so we do so for ever.

Finally, we read in Proverbs chapter 9

*Wisdom hath built her **house**,
she hath hewn out her **seven pillars**:
she hath killed her beasts;
she hath mingled her wine;
she hath also **furnished her table**.*

*She hath sent forth her maidens:
she cries upon the highest places of the city,
Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither:
as for him that wants understanding, she saith to him,
**Come, eat of my bread,
and drink of the wine which I have mingled.**
Forsake the foolish, and live;
and go in the way of **understanding***

Wisdom is Our Lord Jesus; He is personified as such in the book of the Proverbs. He has built His house, it is the church, the habitation (that is what a house is) of God through the Spirit. The fulness of Him that fills all in all. He, our Lord Jesus has hewn out seven pillars. Hewing is an old English word which means very hard work. Isaiah 53 helps us, *"He shall see of the **travail** of his soul and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities"* Travail too is hard work, hard work of the soul of our Lord Jesus through the death of the cross to life. *"He sweat as it were great drops of blood"*. Jesus produces seven pillars, seven is the number of perfection: a total and full salvation. Each living stone, each member of the body of Christ made perfect for ever in the work of the cross and the travail of Jesus' soul. *"For by one offering he has perfected for ever them that are sanctified"*.

Jesus has provided a meal, food for all His people to eat. All members are invited to eat of the bread and drink of the wine; to eat Jesus' body and blood, in the Spirit. *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you. This is my flesh which I shall give for the life of the world. Whosoever eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, has eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him"*. Jesus is the 'beast sacrificed', the Lamb of God. He is the 'wine mingled', the blood of Christ shed for many. We are to eat of Him and drink of Him, then we will understand His work, His sacrifice, His love, and His church. *"O taste and see that the Lord is good"*. We will have a spiritual understanding, and go with that understanding in life, into living unto God. We will no longer be ignorant of God's eternal purposes.

We will know that Jesus' work is a perfect work, He has built a perfect building which will endure for ever. No wonder when the Lamb's wife, the church, is seen it has the 'glory of God'. It is the glorious church of Jesus Christ, the redeemed. The seven pillars may be *"There is **one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all"***. Here is the foundation on which we are all built, it is the work of Jesus Christ. Paul continues, *"But unto **every one** of us is given **grace** according to the **measure of the gift of Christ"***. Each member having all they need, they have received the gift of Christ, they have received Him, they have the authority to be called sons of God, God is their Father and so are members of the whole family which in heaven and in earth which is named after Him, they are members of His church with all who call on Him as Lord.

Let us live in the truth of the gospel, with understanding of the purpose of the church, and do all to serve that church and our Lord Jesus, so the church, all of us wherever we live, should be ready for His coming, to take His people home to be with Him for ever. Amen