

THE ECCLESIA.

This is a Greek word which is translated church. It signifies a company, assembly, or body of people bound or compacted together.

To-day there are many organizations claiming to be the church, and having various bonds of union; but we wish to know, upon the authority of God's Word, what ekklesia, body, or church, Jesus established, and what are its bonds of union; secondly, we wish to show that every Christian should belong to that church; thirdly, the injurious effects of joining the wrong ekklesia or church; and fourthly, having joined the right church, what are the results of losing our membership.

First, then, the church which Jesus began to gather during his ministry, and which was recognized by the Father at Pentecost after their ransom price was paid, was the little company of disciples who had consecrated earthly time, talents and life, a sacrifice to God. They were organized and bound together as members of one society, and as such had laws and government, and consequently a head or recognized ruling authority. The bonds, were bonds of love and common interest. Since all were enlisted under the captaincy of Jesus, the hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, and aims of one were those of the other; and thus they had a far more perfect union of heart than could possibly be had from a union on the basis of any man-made creed. Thus their organization was of the Spirit; their law for the government of each was love, and all as a whole were put under obedience to the "law of the Spirit" as it was expressed in the life, actions, and words of their Lord. Their government was the will of him who said, "If ye love me keep my commandments."

Thus we see the early church organized, governed, and in perfect unity and harmony under the rulership or headship of Jesus. Contrast this church organization with what now affects to be a continuance of the same – viz.: the various denominational organizations, each of which binds its members to a mental union on the basis of some creed or dogma of its own (many of them anything but love-ly) and each having its own laws.

These laws emanate from their heads, and rulers or law-givers; so it is clearly seen that these present day churches, have and recognize as heads, or directing, ruling powers over them, the ancient founders of their various creeds, each contradicting the other, while their clergy, in conferences, councils, synods, and presbyteries, variously interpret and enforce the "traditions of the elders" which "make void the Word of God." These take the place of the true head of the church – Jesus – and the true teacher and guide into all truth, the Holy Spirit. Hear the prophet Isaiah express it. (chap. 9:15.) "The ancient and honorable, he is the head, and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail." And the whole nominal system is described in the Revelation as "Babylon" – confusion – Papal mother and Protestant daughters.

Will they own this to be so? No, for the lukewarm nominal church of to-day believes herself to be rich and increased with goods, having need of nothing; not knowing that she is wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. (Rev. 3:17.)

These are "hard sayings, who can receive them?" But these are not our sayings: it is the warning voice of the "sure word of prophecy...whereunto ye do well that ye take heed." And it is a loving voice, for again our Lord declares: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten."

There are two senses in which the true church of Christ may be considered: All who, like the early church, were fully

consecrated to the doing of our Father's will, amenable only to His will and government, recognizing and obeying none other – these saints, from the beginning of the Gospel Age down to its close, when all of this class are sealed, constitute the "CHURCH OF THE FIRST BORN," whose names are written in heaven. These are all one in aim, hope, and suffering, and in due time will be joint-heirs with Jesus Christ to the great inheritance – heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised for them that love him.

The other sense in which this same class is recognized, is by counting a part for the whole; thus all the living of this class may be spoken of as the church; or, again, any part of this class of living followers who may meet together may properly be called the church; for, by the word of Jesus we know that wherever two or three are assembled he will be among them, consequently that would be a church meeting – an assembly of the "church of the First Born." The general assembly will be, when all the church are made like, and glorified with, their head – Jesus.

Such, then, is our definition of the church of Christ; it is perfectly illustrated by Paul (Rom. 12:4,5) when he compares the church to a human body. In this figure Jesus represents the head, and all who are his constitute the body, over and through which the head rules. Jesus has been and always will be the head over his church as a whole; he is likewise the head and ruler of the entire living church, and in every assembly where two or three meet in his name he is the head, ruler, and teacher.

Is it asked, in what sense does he teach? We answer, by exercising the qualities of the head, or teacher; by using one or more of those present as his mouth-pieces in unfolding truth, strengthening faith, encouraging hope, inspiring zeal, etc., just as the head of your body can call upon one member to minister to another. But here a word of caution: If one becomes a useful

instrument as a right hand, he should take care that he aspire not to become the head. Be not puffed up; pride will paralyze and render useless. "Be not ye called Rabbi, (master, teacher,) for one is your master, (head,) even Christ, and all ye are brethren." And let not the least member despise his office, "for if all were one member, where were the body?" "Nay, those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary" – "God hath set the members every one of them, in the body as it hath pleased him."

How simple, beautiful and effectual is God's plan of organization!

This brings us to our second proposition, viz.: that all Christians should be joined to this organization. In the light of what has just been said as to the class constituting the Church which Jesus organized, it is evident that if you have given up all your will, talent, time, etc., you are recognized by Jesus as a follower, and member of the ekklesia, or body of which he is the head, whose names are written in heaven. Thus we join Jesus' Church and have our names recorded as members by consecration. But, says one, must I not join some organization on earth, assent to some creed, and have my name written on earth? No; remember that Jesus is your pattern and teacher, and neither in his words nor acts will you find any authority for binding yourselves with creeds and traditions of the elders, which all tend to make the word of God of none effect, and bring you under a bondage which will hinder your growth in grace and knowledge, and against which Paul warned you, saying, "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." (Gal. 5:1.)

But some say: If it is not proper to unite with any of the present nominal churches, would it not be well to form a visible organization of our own? Yes, this is what we have – an

organization modeled after that of the early church. We think we have come back to primitive simplicity. The Lord Jesus alone is our head or lawgiver; the Holy Spirit is our interpreter and guide into truth; our names are all written in heaven; we are bound together by love and common interest.

Do you inquire – how shall we know one another? We reply, how could we help knowing one another when the Spirit of our Master is made manifest in word and act and manner and look? Yes, the living faith, the unfeigned love, the long-suffering meekness, the child-like simplicity, coupled with the constancy and zeal of maturity, make manifest the sons of God, and we need no earthly record, for the names of all such are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Do the sick need visiting or assistance? – these stand ready with consecrated time. Does the Lord's work require money? – these stand ready with consecrated means. Does His work bring the reproach of the world, and of a degenerate nominal church – these have also sacrificed reputation – all – all to God.

But again, do you inquire how shall we deal with one who walks disorderly in our midst; if we have no organization such as we see about us, how can we free ourselves from such, as the Lord requires us to do? We answer, Do just as Jesus and Paul directed.

Now, as in the early church, there are various degrees of advancement among the individual members; and Paul says, (1 Thes. 5:14,) some are feeble-minded, comfort them; some are weak, support them; but while you should be patient toward all, you should warn the disorderly, (those who are drifting away from the true spirit of Christ). Don't mistake the disorderly for the weak, and comfort them; nor for the feeble-minded, and support them; but patiently, lovingly, warn the disorderly. Whom does he call disorderly? Doubtless there are many ways of walking disorderly,

but in 2 Thes. 3:11, he speaks of some who work not at all, but are busy-bodies, these he says should do as he did – work, that they be not chargeable to any; and if any will not work, neither should he eat. Thus he said he did, that he might be an example to others. He warns us also against immoral and unjust persons, and those who wrest (twist) the Scriptures, and thus turn the truth of God into a lie. Then again, vs. 14: After you have warned such a one, if he "obey not,...note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet, count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

Again Jesus gives explicit directions where there is a matter of offense between two brethren, (Matt. 18:15,17): "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother; but if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church, (the company of brethren who assemble together,) but if he neglects to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." If, under the organization of our Head, we heed his commands, which we will do if we love him, how few will be the misunderstandings and difficulties among the brethren.

This organization has its evangelists, pastors and teachers appointed and directed by the Lord. They need no laying on of hands by the so-called "Apostolic succession"; for the "Spirit of the Lord" hath anointed all the members of the body "to preach," (Isa. 61:1,) and it is the duty of every member of the body to exercise his office for the edification of the other members. How complete is the organization of the Church of Christ with its heaven-written, love-bound and Spirit-ruled membership, and how sad the error of mistaking the nominal for the real Church!

The importance of our fourth proposition need not be urged. It would, indeed, be a dreadful calamity to lose our membership in the true Church or body of Christ. And no member is out of this danger except when keeping a vigilant watch over the old nature, counted dead, lest it come to life again, and assert itself in the form of pride, selfishness, envy, evil-speaking – or what not? But if filled with love (the love that prompts to sacrifice) and clothed with humility, and under cover of the redeeming blood, we are safe in the Church (body), having the assurance that it is our "Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom."

Yes, the kingdom is the glorious destiny of the true Church – the "little flock" – now treading the pathway of humiliation and drinking the bitter cup of death. The glory that shall be revealed in us, doth not yet appear except to the eye of faith, but the temptations and trials are very apparent on every hand. "Let us, therefore, fear lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." (Heb. 4:1.)

Thus Paul warned others, and thus he **[R664 : page 8]** feared, lest (even after) having preached to others, he himself should be a castaway. (1 Cor. 9:27.) We may have our names cast out as evil by those of the nominal Church, and yet "rejoice and be exceeding glad because our names are written in heaven." They may frown upon you and despitefully use you and say all manner of evil against you falsely, or they may seek to win you back by flattery, saying they cannot afford to lose your influence – you could do so much good by remaining among them. Oh, how necessary in this "evil day" is the faith –

"That bears unmoved the world's dread frown,
Nor heeds its flattering smile;
That seas of trouble cannot drown,
Nor Satan's arts beguile."

Dearly beloved, let us again repeat the warning: "Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free, and be not again entangled with the yoke of bondage" – not even in the slightest degree. Make sure that you are of the Church which alone is recognized in Scripture and cut loose completely from all the Babylon systems which it condemns – "Come out of her my people."

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THE CHURCH WALKING WITH THE WORLD.

The Church and the World walked far apart
On the changing shores of time,
The World was singing a giddy song,
And the Church a hymn sublime.
"Come, give me your hand," said the merry World,
"And walk with me this way";
But the good Church hid her snowy hands
And solemnly answered "Nay,
I will not give you my hand at all,
And I will not walk with you;
Your way is the way that leads to death;
Your words are all untrue."

"Nay, walk with me but a little space,"
Said the World, with a kindly air;
"The road I walk is a pleasant road,
And the sun shines always there;
Your path is thorny and rough and rude,
But mine is broad and plane;
My way is paved with flowers and dews,
And yours with tears and pain;
The sky to me is always blue,

No want, no toil I know;
The sky above you is always dark,
Your lot is a lot of woe;
There's room enough for you and me
To travel side by side."

Half shyly the Church approached the World
And gave him her hand of snow;
And the old World grasped it and walked along,
Saying in accents low,
"Your dress is too simple to please my taste;
I will give you pearls to wear,
Rich velvets and silks for your graceful form,
And diamonds to deck your hair."
The Church looked down at her plain white robes,
And then at the dazzling World,
And blushed as she saw his handsome lip
With a smile contemptuous curled.
"I will change my dress for a costlier one,"
Said the Church, with a smile of grace;
Then her pure, white garments drifted away,
And the World gave in their place,
Beautiful satins and shining silks,
Roses and gems and costly pearls;
While over her forehead her bright hair fell
Crisped in a thousand curls.

"Your home is too plain," said the proud old World,
"I'll build you one like mine;
Carpets of Brussels and curtains of lace,
And furniture ever so fine."
So he built her a costly and beautiful house;

Most splendid it was to behold;
Her sons and her beautiful daughters dwelt there
Gleaming in purple and gold;
Rich fairs and shows in the halls were held,
And the World and his children were there.
Laughter and music and feasts were heard
In the place that was meant for prayer.
There were cushioned pews for the rich and the gay,
To sit in their pomp and pride;
But the poor, who were clad in shabby array,
Sat meekly down outside.

"You give too much to the poor," said the World,
"Far more than you ought to do;
If they are in need of shelter and food,
Why need it trouble you?
Go take your money and buy rich robes,
Buy horses and carriages fine,
Buy pearls and jewels and dainty food;
Buy the rarest and costliest wines:
My children they dote on all these things,
And if you their love would win,
You must do as they do, and walk in the ways
That they are walking in."

Then the Church held fast the strings of her purse,
And modestly lowered her head,
And simpered, "Without doubt you are right, sir,
Henceforth I will do as you've said."
So the poor were turned from her door in scorn,
And she heard not the orphan's cry;
But she drew her beautiful robes aside,

As the widows went weeping by.
Then the sons of the World and sons of the Church
Walked closely hand and heart,
And only the Master, who knoweth all,
Could tell the two apart.

Then the Church sat down at her ease and said
"I am rich and my goods increase;
I have need of nothing, or ought to do,
But to laugh, and dance, and feast."
The sly World heard, and he laughed in his sleeve,
And mocking said, aside –
"The Church is fallen, the beautiful Church,
And her shame is her boast and her pride."

The angel drew near to the mercy-seat,
And whispered in sighs her name,
Then the loud anthems of rapture were hushed,
And heads were covered with shame.
And a voice was heard at last by the Church
From Him who sat on the Throne,
"I know thy works, and how thou hast said,
'I am rich;' and hast not known
That thou art naked, poor and blind,
And wretched before My face;
Therefore from My presence, I cast thee out,
And blot thy name from its place."

– Selected.
