

## OUR BODY, NOW AND HEREAFTER

"For our conversation [lit. community – the government or polity in which we are sharers] is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile [ignoble] body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." – Phil. 3:19,20.

There is a very general misunderstanding among Christians with reference to the *body* here mentioned by the apostle. He is here supposed to teach that these human bodies are to be changed and made like Christ's glorious body; and that the promise is to all of mankind who will be saved. But, while it is true, and elsewhere taught, that the "little flock" shall be changed and given spiritual bodies like that of Christ, and that they will thus be *like* him, yet, this is not what the apostle is here teaching. It should be noticed that the word body is not plural, but singular; and that this letter is addressed to *the saints in Christ*. And since the apostle likens the church to a human body, the head of which represents our Lord, and the various other members the individual members of the church, we are warranted from the context in believing that the body to which he here refers, is the church, and that this is another instance in which he employs this figure.

The body or the church, in its present condition, is called a vile body, not because it is actually vile, but because it is so considered by the world. In the Emphatic Diaglott it is translated, "the body of our humiliation." And this body, the church, which in God's estimation is a holy body, a body justified, and consecrated to his service, and therefore acceptable to him, and by him anointed for the glorious work of carrying into execution his great plan of salvation by the restitution of all things, is to be changed from its present condition of humiliation

to a glorious condition – to a condition suitable to its real character, and the high position it is destined to fill as the bride of Christ.

While, in God's estimation, the church is now regarded from the standpoint of her future exaltation as a glorious body, yet now, in the estimation of men, she is despised, rejected and hated, as was her Lord; because the world knows her not even as it knew him not. The world does not realize that this body, now in humiliation, is a body of kings and priests who shall by and by bear rule over angels and men. If they thought so, the saints would be very differently regarded and treated. They have found their Lord's prediction fully verified in their experience, – "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." (Matt. 10:22.) They must, however, be patient in their humiliation and suffering unto the coming of the Lord. Their exaltation and glory is not due until then.

Though our Lord was changed from his condition of humiliation, and highly exalted to his present glorious condition nearly two thousand years ago, mankind in general is not even yet aware of his exaltation. Though they hear the church speak of it, they see no evidence of it, and have no faith in what they hear. The time when his glory will be manifested to all, so that none shall fail to recognize it, will be at his second advent; and we are further assured that the church's exaltation and glory shall occur, and shall be manifested at the same time – "When Christ ...shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." (Col. 3:4.) **Then**, the church shall in reality be a glorious body, a body suitable in every way for the high position she shall fill as the bride of Christ – the companion of the Son of God for all eternity, his joint-heir in all things, and his efficient and thoroughly capable co-worker in the great mission to which Jehovah hath appointed the Christ – head and body – bridegroom and bride. Together they shall constitute the great Prophet, Priest and King whom Jehovah hath anointed; and their glory shall appear to all intelligent creatures in heaven and in earth.

But before this glorious exaltation, must come the deep humiliation of every member; and if we have no part in the humiliation, we have no share in the glory; for only the meek, the humble, faithful ones who prove their loyalty to the divine will by most severe and humbling tests, will be worthy. They must manifest their disposition toward God by obedience even unto death; strengthened while walking down into the very depths of humiliation, by faith in the promise of God, to exalt them in due time. We must close our eyes and ears to the world, let them think and talk of us as they will, only giving no real occasion, by any actions which our enlightened conscience cannot approve. We must be willing to be counted a "vile body," the refuse and dross of society, the offscouring of the church, and as fools and fanatics to be persecuted for righteousness sake. We must be willing to do good, to forward the truth and to suffer for it, and to continue on in the course directed by God, regardless of the losses and sufferings it will cost; through all waiting patiently, until in his own good time, God shall make our righteousness to shine forth as the noon-day, and silence all our opposers. – Psa. 37:6.

Not forgetting that there is but one such body let us look about us to discover it. Is it the great Roman Catholic Church? – Or the Episcopal, or the Lutheran, or the Baptist, or the Methodist, or the Congregational, or any of the numerous other religious "bodies" or organizations known by distinctive names? Are any of these organizations despised, rejected and counted "vile" by the world? No, not one of them. From the least to the greatest they are all respected, and thought and spoken well of; but the measure of their respect and esteem among men, is always in proportion to their numbers and wealth. Some of the smaller organizations, comparing their own with the larger and more influential, might say they are lightly esteemed and less favored by the world, but this does not answer the description of the true church. God's Word points out the true church, not by naming the organization, but by naming certain features by which it can be recognized.

First of all, he would have us bear in mind that there is but one true church (Col. 1:24; Heb. 12:23), and that other organizations called churches are not so recognized by him. Secondly, that this one church which God recognizes, is only a "little flock." (Luke 12:32.) So we need not be on the outlook for the largest organization as the true church of Christ. Thirdly, we are informed, that this "little flock" does not contain many of the rich, or great, or wise according to the wisdom of this world. (1 Cor. 1:26.) It may contain some of the rich and learned, but not many. The rich and learned generally esteem the honors of this world (which their riches and learning secure), too highly to associate themselves with the humble and despised. Fourthly, it is shown that while the church does not contain many of this class, it is composed almost entirely of the poor of this world. (James 2:5.) And though they are not generally learned, neither are they ignorant; for they are close students of God's Word and learned in the Scriptures; and the heavenly wisdom derived therefrom, gives them an education to which the wisdom of this world can never attain.

Fifthly, all the members of this little church are to be known, chiefly, by the spirit they manifest, which is the spirit of Christ; for, "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." (Rom. 8:9.) He is not recognized of God as a member of the church, however much he may profess to be. But here there is some danger of being mistaken, unless we observe very closely what the spirit of Christ is; for the world and nominal [R1103 : page 3] Christians have, and very positively assert, *their idea* of the spirit of Christ, and bitterly oppose those who truly manifest his spirit. Their idea of the spirit of Christ, is simply that of a tranquil, peaceful disposition, which manifests itself always and only in kind deeds and kind words which the world can recognize as such – a disposition which can never be roused to indignation, and to words and actions manifesting it. Study carefully the spirit manifested by our Lord, and you will find that while he was courteous and kind, he expressed his righteous indignation against evil-doers, and particularly against hypocritical evil-doers, who pretended to be faithful servants of God, and exemplary keepers of the

law. He never avoided declaring the truth, even though it placed him in direct opposition to all the religious teachers of his day. And so far from maintaining peace and order, was the course which he pursued, that to those who had the same idea now so prevalent – that his words and actions should always be for peace – he said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword; for I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me is not worthy of me." (Matt. 10:34-37.) Mark also, that the spirit of our Lord was one of meekness and humility, and that so he taught his disciples, saying, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart." In him, truth, humility and love found an exponent, who at the same time was bold as a lion in their true defense. Though we will not find the spirit of the Master exactly duplicated in the members of the true church, we will at least find in every member a measure of that spirit, and an effort and progress toward a fuller development of it, some being much more advanced than others.

Finally, we are told, that the true church is to be found walking in a very narrow way which few find, and in which fewer yet care to walk. It is the way of sacrifice, of suffering for righteousness' sake, and of humiliation even unto death.

This class with such experiences as we have described, would be esteemed by the world a very miserable "body" as well as a very ignoble one; but in this they are mistaken also, for not only is it very honorable and destined to exceeding glory and honor in God's due time, but it is also a very happy, joyful "body." Those of its members who sacrifice, suffer and endure most in the cause they serve – the Lord and the truth – are "always rejoicing" and "in everything giving thanks." They have a "peace which passeth all understanding" and a

"joy which no man taketh from them;" because, having *done* the Father's will, they *know* of Christ's doctrine (John 7:17), and "the light of the knowledge of God as it shines forth in Christ, hath shined into their hearts (2 Cor. 4:6), giving beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness (Isa. 61:3), for as much as they "know that their labor is not in vain in the Lord," and that what he hath promised he also will perform. Hence these, outwardly buffeted, have the greatest peace at heart; and these, outwardly troubled, have the deepest real joys – the joys of the Lord.

Here is the description of the church. But comparing it carefully with every organization great and small, we find that not one of them answers the description. The true church is not a visibly organized body, and is not known among men as a church at all. Many of its members have been, and some still are, in the various nominal churches, and others are separate from all of them, so that you cannot point them out as a visible company and say to the world, This company is the true church. But, "The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Tim. 2:19), and they know each other wherever found, by the description which God has given. During this entire age it has been in existence, and has always been known and loved of God and nourished and sustained by him, though its scattered members have grown up as wheat in the midst of tares. Now, in the time of harvest, they may be more readily discerned as a company than ever before (except in the beginning of the age, before the tares began to mix in with them and to overshadow and hide them), because the Lord is calling them out, and separating them from the tares; and the table he has spread before them in the very presence of their enemies – the glorious truths now in due season revealed to them – is attracting them – in person so far as possible, and into sympathy and co-operation, however far separated personally.

Bear in mind, then, fellow-Christian, that this body, the church, which is to be changed and made glorious like her Lord, at his appearing, is now a vile (ignoble) body in the estimation both of the

world and nominal Christians; that her present condition is as the body of humiliation; and that her chief ambition and effort now, is to use all her powers to the best advantage for the Master's glory, in the advancement of his cause and in the interests [R1103 : page 4] of his kingdom, rejoicing even in the midst of present persecutions, in hope of the coming glory, now shortly to be revealed. And if any Christian would make his calling and election sure, he must see that he is one of this "vile body," bearing some of the reproach of Christ. The present humiliation and sacrifice of the church, as well as her more glorious future work, is all for the grand purpose of subduing all things unto Christ. It is the indirect means which has for its grand ultimate object the restitution of all things.

Such being the hope of the church, her interests are not in the things of this present time – what shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed? – how shall we plan for the future comforts and good things of this life, etc., etc.? These are not the questions of chief interest among the saints. The King and kingdom to which they owe allegiance are heavenly, and wherever the forwarding of their interests requires the sacrifice of earthly good things, that sacrifice for that object becomes a pleasure; and hence the saints have no interests here which they do not expect to sacrifice for the interests of that kingdom in which they shall be sharers, and to which they are even now heirs and reckoned of God as sharers. They count that already their citizenship is in that heavenly kingdom, and that here they are merely aliens and foreigners.

Therefore, under the kingdoms of this world they have a right to expect only such rights and privileges as are accorded to aliens and foreigners, yet they know that even such rights and privileges may in many cases be denied them; for now "the kingdom of heaven [represented by the church] suffereth violence," and it shall continue to suffer violence to some extent until it is set up in glory and power.

The "body" of Christ in its present condition of humiliation, is actually a very imperfect body, though reckoned perfect through the imputed righteousness of Christ; for we have the heavenly treasure – our new, transformed mind – in earthen vessels, full of imperfections inherited through the fall. These we strive continually to overcome; yet we shall never be fully able to eradicate them all. Our weaknesses of mind and body and bias of disposition, must be fought down, and kept under, every inch of the way. Inherited, and formerly cultivated, sinful dispositions, such as pride, love of display and praise of men, love of ease, selfishness, indolence, and every other sinful propensity, will prove a means of discipline to us in our efforts to overcome them, and to oppose them by doing the will of God. And the patience with which we bear with each other, as we gradually grow up into Christ, will prove the measure of our love both for each other and for our Lord, whose we all are.

The various members of the body of Christ, knit together in love, should bear with each other, giving and receiving reproof in the spirit of meekness; each being careful not to put a stumbling-block or cause of offence in his brother's way; or if he has unwittingly done so, to quickly remove it as soon as he is made conscious of it. We are not to judge one another after the flesh but after the spirit, remembering that the flesh warreth against the spirit, and that it requires a desperate struggle in many cases to keep it down. If a brother through the weakness of the flesh has stumbled, remember it was through his weakness, and be patient and helpful, unless he manifests no disposition to regret it or to reform, in which case he needs counsel and reproof; for unless he reform he will be considered by the Lord as unworthy and will be cut off from the body.

In the preceding verses, Paul speaks of some in his day, who after identifying themselves with the church, became the enemies of the cross of Christ by walking after the flesh and minding earthly things, and shows that the end of such a course is destruction. He warned the church against such, that they might not assimilate with, or recognize



them, or be deceived by them into the idea that we can mind the earthly things, giving our effort and time and attention and interest to them, and still be of the little flock which God recognizes as his church, the body of Christ.

Our citizenship is in heaven and all our interests are there, while here we are mere strangers and pilgrims, living only for that which is beyond.

