

# christian

## WORKER



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

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## THE CHURCH: PLANNED, PURCHASED, AND PERFECTED

Tom Wacaster

The theme of Ephesians is 'the church of Jesus Christ our Lord.' Chapters 1-3 discuss the nature of the church; chapters 4-6, life in the church. Doctrine and Duty combine to provide us with a portrait of the glorious bride of Christ.

This first chapter draws back the curtain of time and gives us a wonderful glimpse into the recesses of eternity. After a brief introduction (1:1-2), the inspired penman enters into a discussion of our spiritual blessings in Christ. The vault of heaven's bank is opened, and after stressing the importance of being in Christ wherein are all spiritual blessings, the Holy Spirit guides Paul to write of those blessings that the child of God enjoys: they are (1) blessed, (2) chosen, (3) foreordained, (4) adopted, (5) accepted, (6) redeemed, (7) forgiven, (8) enlightened, (9) given an inheritance, (10) sealed, and (11) assured. This is followed by an earnest plea on the part of the apostle that those Christians living and laboring in Ephesus might have a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone of the church, which was purchased with the precious blood of our Lord (Acts 20:28). As the chapter closes we see Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, exalted to the right hand of the Father, and ruling over the church, which is His body.

Focusing on 1:3-14 we are provided a glimpse of the church as God's chosen. To the casual student, these verses contain a jumbled maze of disconnected words. But careful examination will unlock the maze that might trouble the novice, and provide rich spiritual treasures for those willing

to dig a little deeper. Consider the following.

### The Church: Planned by the Father 1:3-6

With these verses the apostle sets forth God as the architect of all spiritual blessings. The key word in this verse, and throughout the book, is this two letter word "in," and more specifically, "in Christ." In these verses the apostle (under guidance of the Holy Spirit), sets forth God's intention to bless a certain class of individuals, and provides us with the precise location of those blessings. Contrary to Calvinistic teaching, heaven's selection was not arbitrary, selecting certain

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# Editor

Cody Westbrook



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

## IDENTIFYING THE CHURCH

Cody Westbrook

A casual observation of the global religious landscape reveals thousands of different religious groups—Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, Adventist, Presbyterian, Non-Denominational, Inter-Denominational, and many, many more. These groups are known by different names, and believe and teach various doctrines, creeds, and traditions. Some are very old and have thousands of members, while others are relatively new and have only a small following. Regardless of size or influence, each one claims to be following Christ according to the biblical pattern. But, how can that be possible? God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33), so why would He sanction countless numbers of religious bodies with contradicting beliefs and practices?

The truth is, He has not. The church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23) and He only has one body (Eph. 4:4) that is governed by one faith, or, system of teaching (Eph. 4:5). Jesus promised to build one church (Matt. 16:18) and it is the only one He will save (Eph. 5:23). It is true, we live in a very postmodern and pluralistic time in which people seek to blur the lines and make every period a question mark. Regardless, truth is still truth, and it must be believed and obeyed for salvation to be possible (John 8:31-32). Even in a world full of confusion and convolution, the church that Jesus built and purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28) is alive and well, and can be identified. Note a few of the identifying markers of the church of Christ.

**It was Founded at the Right Time and in the Right Place** – Jesus’ intention to build His church was not a snap decision or an emergency measure. The establishment of the church was God’s plan from eternity (cf. Eph. 3:9-11). The prophets Isaiah, Daniel, and Joel (among others) saw the coming

Kingdom and announced various aspects of its arrival.

Daniel reveals the time period in Daniel 2:44. In the days of the Roman kings “shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed...” The kingdom of which Daniel spoke is the kingdom, or church, of Christ, which was established in approximately 33 A.D. during the reign of the Roman Empire (Acts 2; Col. 1:13, etc.).

Isaiah tells us where the church would be established. In Isaiah 2:2-3 the prophet said that the Lord’s house would be established in Jerusalem during the “last days.” A quick examination of Acts 1 and 2 confirms that Isaiah was indeed referring to the church of Christ, which was established in Jerusalem.

The prophet Joel answers the question, “how.” In Joel 2:28-32 the prophet said that the time would come when the Spirit of God would be poured out upon all flesh and people would be able to call upon the name of the Lord for deliverance. This prophecy references the coming of the kingdom, or church, of Christ with power. In Luke 24:49 Jesus said to His apostles, “And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high.” The apostles obeyed that command (Acts 1:4) and received the promise of power on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). In Acts 2:16-21 Peter confirmed that the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit had come to usher in the church, and that this event was exactly what Joel had in mind by quoting Joel’s prophecy from Joel 2:28-32.

Any religious body that was established by anyone other than Jesus, at any time other than Pentecost in AD 33, at any place other than Jerusalem, and in any way other than by the power

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of God, cannot be the church that belongs to Jesus.

**It Worships in Spirit and Truth** – Jesus said, “God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). There are two ways to worship God—correctly and incorrectly. Worship is a very serious matter and God expects His people to give it their utmost attention (cf. Lev. 10:1-7). God commands that we worship Him in truth but He has not left us without direction as to what that is. The New Testament identifies 5 actions of worship that must be present within the church of our Lord. The church assembles on the first day of the week to partake of the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7), sing without the aid of mechanical instruments of music (Eph. 5:19), give of their means (1 Cor. 16:1-2), pray (Acts 2:42), and proclaim God’s word (Acts 2:42). If a religious body deviates from the biblical pattern of worship, it cannot be the church of our Lord.

**It Preaches the Biblical Plan of Salvation** – What must I do to be saved? That is the most important question a person could ask, and thankfully God provides the answer. Salvation is possible when one hears the word of God (Rom. 10:17), believes in Christ (John 3:16), repents of sin (Acts 3:19), confesses faith (Rom. 10:9-10), and is immersed in water for the forgiveness of sin (Acts 2:38). Many religious groups teach that salvation is possible by other means. Most commonly, that one may believe in Christ and pray “the sinners prayer” in order to be saved. The Bible, however, teaches something very different. If a church teaches that salvation is possible through any means other than what the Bible prescribes, it cannot be the church of Christ.

God wills that all people be saved (2 Pet. 3:9), but salvation is not found just anywhere. It is found only in Christ (Acts 4:12), His blood (Eph. 1:7), and His body (Eph. 5:23). Therefore, God has called all people through the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14) to leave the life of sin and be added to the body of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:47). That body is not a mystery, it is perfectly defined for us in the New Testament.

CW

## THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

Trent Kennedy

**C**ountry, culture, society, even the entire world seems to devise new ways to divide ourselves up all the time. We divide over race, political affiliation, citizenship, economic status, social class, attractiveness, and more. Unfortunately, this is not a new phenomenon of humanity. The Bible describes how mankind has done this to ourselves for ages. John 4 is a prime example of racial tensions, gender status and norms, and misconceptions; Abraham was called a Hebrew; even God divided out Jew from Gentile in the Old Testament.

Considering this human and even divine tendency, it should be notable to the Bible student the strict lack of division in church revealed to us in the New Testament. God distinguishes this group as “the Way” (Acts 9:2, 19:23, 22:4, et al) which is singular in its very nature (cf. Matt. 7:13-14). God would describe His church as a body (Rom. 12:4-5, 1 Cor. 12:12-27, Eph. 1:22-23). Recall that Ephesians 2:13-16 shows that a divided body was conquered at the cross! Not only is the physical body singular in its nature, but the very idea of multiple physical bodies belonging to a singular human being is grotesque. God is very clear concerning the nature of this body; it is one and is as divided as the (one) Father, the (undivided) Son, or the (singular) Spirit (Eph. 4:4-6).

God’s church is described as a singular kingdom (Matt. 16:18-19, Col. 1:13, Rev. 1:9, et al). Furthermore, Christ had a few words about the inability for a kingdom once divided to endure (Matt. 12:24-30). There is another description of God’s church that is used: a bride or wife (John 3:28-31, Eph. 5:22-33, Rev. 22:17). Certainly, a singular bride will not be split into two or more pieces and remain that same bride. God’s word is, in fact quite direct as to what picture God expects man to paint of marriage itself: one man with one woman for life (Matt. 19:1-9). God expects His body, His way, His kingdom, His bride to never be divided.

But man... whether by human tendency or just direct rebellion, man, in his own pride, has done the very thing which the physical world would call us not to do: divide the body of God. Man had done what which Jesus says cannot stand, attempt to divide His kingdom, His way. Man has done that which is unacceptable, made every stride to

divide the precious bride of Christ. The early church attempted this (1 Cor. 1:10-13) and was met with stiff rebuke. Man has attempted to denominate, divide with names, the church which belongs only to God.

But man...in pride and arrogance, under the banner of tolerance and union, has attempted to denominate, divide out using different names, doctrines, and practices the church which belongs to Jesus. It is here that those individuals and their followers deny one of the most basic principles of simple New Testament Christianity. Denominationalism of the Christian faith (the one faith - Eph. 4:5, Jude 3) is an attack on nature itself (one body), is an attack on the simple teachings of Jesus (the Way), is an attack on plain logic employed even by Abraham Lincoln (a kingdom divided cannot stand), and is an attack on God's institution of marriage.

Instead, the church belonging to and pertaining to Christ is united in love, mind, accord (Phil. 2:2). This body will speak the same thing no matter age, language, culture, gender, or anything else (1 Cor. 1:10, Gal. 1:6-9, 2 Tim. 2:2). This bride and body will follow our King on His way by holding to His pattern (John 12:48-50, 2 Thess. 2:15, 2 Tim. 1:13). When the church of Christ is maligned, attacked, and divided, Christ himself is under siege (Acts 9:5). Denominating the bride and body of Christ, perverting the Way, and dividing His kingdom is an assault on the Christ himself!

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CW

## THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

Johnie Scaggs

**E**very institution must have a system in place to help ensure that it runs properly. Even in our government, a system is in place by which each person has a role to perform. Whenever that system is disregarded, or if it breaks down, chaos will be the result. This is true even in the Lord's church. God has designed the organization of the church; we must not disregard His decree on the matter. It is unfortunate that many churches have no desire to follow the pattern given to us by God as it relates to the organization of the church.

After Paul gives us the qualifications of both overseers and deacons in 1 Timothy 3, he writes,

These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth (vv. 14-15).

This is not speaking about Timothy's house, but God's house—the church. In the place where God dwells, things need to be in order; there must be organization within His house. When we think about the church being God's house, this should remind us of the Temple under the Law of Moses, and how it was God (not man) who decided the organization of the Temple (His dwelling place).

In Paul's salutation to the church in Philippi he mentions the overseers and deacons (Phil. 1:1). The church in Philippi understood the need for overseers (elders) and deacons and had already ordained these men to serve in the church. As Paul went about preaching the gospel and saving souls, he was at the same time establishing congregations of the Lord's people. Along with this, he wanted to set things in the proper order. To Titus, he said,

For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee (1:5).

Paul sent Titus to Crete to set things in order: by ordaining elders in every city. That is, where the church was in a city, Titus was to set things in order within the church by ordaining elders. This is God's plan for every church in every city, where ever she may be found.

Whenever the Lord's church is set up in a community, one of the first things that needs to be examined is in organization. The first order of business should be to search for men who are qualified to be elders in the church. Once they have been ordained, the process of finding qualified deacons should be next. If it is the case that no one is eligible to be an elder, then the church must begin the process of teaching how God wants the church to be organized. That church should begin working toward one day having men who can meet the criteria to be an elder.

I firmly believe one of the reasons we have many of the problems in the church today is because many

congregations have decided that they do not need elders. I recall years ago while working with a congregation that many of the men realized that we needed elders. Upon speaking to the men about the matter in a “men’s business meeting,” one of the men asked, “Brother Scaggs, what better way could we do it than the way we are doing it now?” To which I replied, “How about God’s way!” Many are content to have men’s meeting for several reasons. Men’s meetings are not how God wants His house (church) to be structured. Every church must look to a time when they can develop strong, competent elders, which is pleasing to God. If a congregation does not have men qualified to be elders and deacons, then they should begin promptly working toward one day training men to work in these areas.

A spiritual house must have spiritual leaders to guide her in spiritual matters so that each of the congregation’s members may grow up to be spiritually-minded people. As the church moves forward in this age we need men who can serve as elders and deacons. We need great leaders! May God help us as we work within each congregation of the Lord’s house to set things in order according to His plan.

CW



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## IMAGES OF THE CHURCH

Kevin W. Rhodes

Most Christians, when asked to describe the church, immediately begin citing specific behaviors that contrast the church described in scripture with the concepts so familiar in the denominational world. Thus, within the church people

understand its identity according to the plan of salvation that provides entrance (Rom. 10:17; Heb. 11:6; Acts 17:30; Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 2:38, 47), the organization described by scripture (Phil. 1:1-2), the activities of the assembly (John 4:24; 1 Cor. 11:17-14:40), the mission and work assigned by God (Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 4:11-16; Gal. 6:10), the unity expected in doctrine (1 Cor. 1:10; John 17:21-23), and, by implication the respect for the inspiration and authority of scripture that leads to these conclusions (2 Tim. 3:16-17; John 12:48). Christians therefore tend to see the church and understand the church in terms of its doctrinal characteristics. However, in the book of Ephesians the apostle Paul described the church using three images that, upon proper reflection, encourage God’s people to view themselves not only through the cold scope of doctrine but also through the warm lens of relationship.

In the first chapter of Ephesians Paul describes the church as the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23), a metaphor intentionally designed to invoke images of a living organism, placed between paragraphs referring to the resurrection of Christ (Eph. 1:20) and the new life in Christ (Eph. 2:1-7). The relationship between the head and the body appears self-evident. The body is nothing without the head. The head provides the identity, the thinking, and the soul. But when the body responds properly to the head, it is able to live and move and accomplish great things. Similarly, when the church follows Christ’s lead, it will be active and alert. But more than that, every part of the body will interact seamlessly and feel uniformly, identifying itself not by each individual limb or function but by the head.

A few chapters later, in the process of exhorting the Ephesians regarding the respective roles of husbands and wives, Paul returns to the figure of the body of Christ but also incorporates another, comparing the church to the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:22-33). A Christian bride vows to submit to her husband, to keep herself pure for her husband, to nurture her relationship with her husband throughout the marriage, and to give her partner priority through respect and love. The church, as Christ’s bride, vows all these as well. We should know our own faults well—all too well. That Jesus would love us still, sacrifice for us still, and care for us still is the magic of marriage as God designed it. These are facts we accept, but when viewed through the imagery of marriage we should not simply accept them but also feel them deeply.

Paul's love of metaphors for the church shines brightly in the closing section of Ephesians 2, alluding to the church using the triad of a building, a nation, and a family (Eph. 2:19-22). While the figure of the temple and the comparison to a kingdom receive ready attention, Christians do not always consider the full impact of the church as God's family, despite regularly referring to one another as brethren. Family dynamics can be difficult because they require a consideration of one another, a commitment to one another, and interaction with one another (Col. 3:12-15). Jesus did not die for a group of strangers to meet together on Sunday. Jesus died so that God the Father could adopt an innumerable host of unrelated children and turn them into a loving family (Rom. 8:15).

The Holy Spirit did not inspire the gospel as a systematic theology divided into various doctrinal positions because God demands more of His people than simply theological agreement. The imagery of the church Paul presents in his epistle to the Ephesians creates a stirring portrait of God's people as a living, breathing organism full of vigor and moving with energy. He sees the church as a bride—beautiful and pure, strong yet submissive, cared for and loved—a young wife joyful in her decision, ready for a lifetime of growth, respectful and responsive to her Husband's lead. More than that, the apostle calls on Christians to embrace not only the language of family but also the closeness. The inspired imagery given in scripture not only shows how different the New Testament church is from man-made models but also offers powerful reminders of the personal commitment and individual relationships Christians should develop and hold dear.

CW

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## **MEMBERSHIP**

Joseph T. McWhorter

**T**he word “membership” is a muddled and misunderstood concept for many Christians today. When we talk about membership in a body, we often conjure ideas of social organizations, extended families, or political parties, but membership in the church of Christ is so much more. Holy Scripture teaches us about church membership in terms of the human body. Just as your toes, fingers, and ears are all distinct members of your body, so every Christian is a member of Christ's body (Eph. 1:22-23). Paul made the comparison clear,

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another (Rom. 12:4-5).

The same apostle wrote more about membership in the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 19.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many.... As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

We learn two facts about membership from these verses. First, Scripture speaks about only one body of which we must be members. That does not mean that other religious bodies do not exist, but it does mean that God only recognizes one (cf. Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23). Second, we are admitted into this body by means of baptism. In baptism we contact the blood of Christ, which washes away our sin, and God adds us to the church (cf. Acts 2:47; Gal. 3:27). But, while baptism is the point of initiation, the Bible teaches that much more must take place in order for us to become members of the body.

Membership in the body of Christ cannot be possible without hearing the saving message of the gospel. Paul asked the question,

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are

they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching (Rom. 10:14)?

The gospel is God's power for salvation (Rom. 1:16), and when it is preached it cuts the heart (Acts 2:36) and prompts people to ask the most important question—"What shall we do" (Acts 2:37)?

Additionally, we must believe in the deity of Christ (John 8:24). That does not mean that we merely believe, then we are suddenly saved, nor does it mean we can simply acknowledge Jesus in our heart and He will wash our sins away. The kind of belief that God requires is one that includes obedience. Jesus told Nicodemus that He came to the world to give mankind eternal life with God. He also said that eternal life was for those that believe in Him (John 3:16). Fundamental belief and understanding are necessary for membership in Christ's body. Based on Jesus's words, ignorance is no excuse for disobedience.

With that belief must also come eagerness to repent (Acts 2:38). Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of action. It is a trajectory change for our lives in which we choose to stop living in sin and live based on God's wisdom and instead of our own (Acts 3:19; Rom. 6). We must also be willing to confess with our words and our actions that we believe what God has done for our salvation (Rom. 10:9-10; 1 Tim. 6:12-14), and like the Eunuch declare, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37, KJV).

The final step is baptism. The bible teaches that baptism washes away our sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Baptism is complete immersion in water (Rom. 6:4). One who believes in the deity of Christ, repents of sin, and confesses their faith, is then buried with Christ in the waters of baptism, and arises to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:5). Upon baptism God adds us to the church of Christ (Acts 2:47).

Membership in the church of Christ is a blessing. The church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23) and Jesus has promised to save His body (Eph. 5:23). All spiritual blessings are found in the Christ (Eph. 1:3), and in Him is hope (Rom. 5:1-5). Have you become a member? If not, why not?

CW

*continued from page 1*

individuals to be lost and others to be saved. Instead, God designated a certain class of individuals whom He would adopt, and it is up to each individual as to whether or not he wants to enter into that group through obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When men believe, repent, confess the name of Christ, and are buried with the Lord in baptism, they are then added to the church (Acts 2:47), and granted entrance "into" the body of Christ (Romans 6:3-5).

### **The Church: Purchased by the Son 1:7-12**

In half a dozen verses Paul (the Holy Spirit) sums up the wonderful redemptive work of our Savior. We cannot imagine another passage that so describes the work of our Lord in the saving of the souls of men in so few words and yet so rich in spiritual truths. Space does not allow us to elaborate on such words and phrases as "redemption" (vs. 7), the "mystery of his will" (vs. 9a), "his good pleasure" (vs. 9b), "we were made a heritage" (vs. 11a), "him who worketh all things after the council of his will" (vs. 11b), "praise of his glory" (vs. 12a), and "hoped in Christ" (vs. 12b). All such blessings are referred to as the "riches of his grace" (vs. 7b). Heaven's wealth is made available to God's chosen, deposited in the bank of heaven, secured by heaven's promises, and purchased with "precious blood, as of a lamb without spot, even the blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:19).

### **The Church: Perfected in the Spirit 1:13-14**

The Holy Spirit served as the organizer in the physical creation (Gen. 1:2). "Sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is an earnest of our inheritance" (vss. 13-14), the saints of every age have marched forward with the perfected word and the promise that Christ will be with us "even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). The Holy Spirit has forged the armor adequate unto the task at hand (Eph. 6:15-17), and thereby perfected the church in each and every generation.

### **Conclusion**

If men would read and study this wonderful epistle, they would walk away with a concept of the church far different than modern day denominationalism. It is to this end we labor; it is to this end we preach and teach the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ.

CW



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