THE EKKLESIA.

This is a Greek word which is translated church. In the N.T. 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 *head*ship 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 or rulers and 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 while their clergy in conferences, councils, synods and presbyteries, 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*."

Will they own this to be so? No, for Babylon the great--the mother of harlots, and all her daughters, the complete nominal church in this evil day, represented in ***Isa. 4:1***as the seven women, take hold of the one man (Christ Jesus) saying: "We will eat our own bread (which the world supplies) and wear our own apparel (the filthy rags of their own righteousness), only let us be called by *thy name,* to take away our reproach." And so they *assume* the name of Christ and call their organizations Christian churches. Theirs is a union of hands but not a union of hearts.

"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 Christ's 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 and the door to the high calling closes, 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 to them that love him. **[R295 : page 9]**

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. If it be asked: In what sense does he teach?--we answer, by exercising the qualities of the head, or teacher; using one or more of those present 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 as useful an instrument as a *right hand,* take care that you 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 (***Mark 7:13***) and bring you under a bondage which will hinder your growth in grace and knowledge, and against which Paul warned you to "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free, and be not entangled with the yoke of bondage." (***Gal. 5:1***.)

But say some: 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 childlike 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 upon them the reproach of the world?--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, 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, and says they 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. Then again, ***vs. 14***: If after you have warned such a one and he "obey not company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not an enemy but admonish him as a brother."

Again Jesus gives explicit directions where there is a matter of offence between two brethren, ***Matt. 18:15,17*** --If thy brother shall **[R296 : page 9]** trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between him and thee 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 neglect 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," etc., (***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. Oh, 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 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.

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