

F.B. Meyer:

No congregation, or set of congregations, can realize the sublime conception of the Church that rises before our vision in Ephesians. It is as if the apostle had been able to anticipate the glorious spectacle which John beheld in apocalyptic vision. Though he had founded more churches in the great cities of the Empire than any man of the apostolic band, yet none of these alone, nor all of them together, could realize his fair ideal of that one mystical body, the Church, the Bride, the Lamb's wife.

This Epistle is pre-eminently the Epistle of the Church; and the view held by men of the conception of it here presented, will largely indicate their mental and spiritual attitude towards their fellow Christians. There is no test like this. We must enter into God's thought when we speak about the Church; not as she now is, in broken bits, like a number of squares of painted glass lying in heaps at the foot of what is to be a window of marvellous beauty; but as she is to be when the mystery of God is finished, and she is presented to his Son, worthy to "answer to" Him, according to the ancient word of the Creator, when seeking a bride for Adam (Genesis 2:18).

THE CHURCH IS A BODY OF WHICH CHRIST IS HEAD. (Ephesians 1:22)

We repeat such words without emotion now; but there was a time when they could not be uttered save at the cost of much that men hold dear. It is as if we were passing over a battle-field, once raked with shell and soaked with gore; or were handling a banner torn and ragged, around which the conflicting foemen fought for half a day. Let us not forget the brave hearts that were harried to death amid the heather and gorse of Scotland, rather than confess that any but Christ might assume this august title.

The Church, as a whole, must take its commands for suffering or warfare from no other lips than Christ's. Whatever course may be dictated by expediency, policy, or human leadership, she dare not move until Christ gives the signal. But if He bids her advance, protest, or suffer, she has no option but to obey. Though every voice that can reach her may be raised in expostulation and warning, she dare heed none but his.

This position of our Lord is as much for each member of the Church as for the whole Body. Because as in the natural body each several muscle, nerve, and vein, as well as the more prominent members, have direct double communication with the head, from which they derive their unity, direction, and energy; so in the spiritual Body of which Christ is head, there is not one single redeemed spirit that is not connected directly with its Lord. It would not be in the Church at all if that relationship had not first been formed. We are related to one another, only because we are related to Him. We are first members of Christ, then members of each other in Him. First Christ, then the Church.

Each member is united to the head by the afferent nerves that carry impressions from the surface of the body to the head; and there is nothing which happens to any one of us which is not instantly communicated to our Saviour. In all our affliction He is afflicted; He bears our griefs and carries our sorrows; He is touched with the feeling of our infirmity. The glory with which He is surrounded does not act like an insulating barrier to intercept the thrill of pain or joy that passes instantly from the weakest and meanest of his members to Himself.

Each member is united to the head by the efferent nerves, that carry volitions from the imperial court of the brain to the extremities of the body, withdrawing the foot from the thorn, or compelling the hand to plunge into the flame. Thus should we receive the impulses of our life from Jesus Christ; not acting on self-prompted energy, or following our own plans, thinking our own thoughts, or doing our own works, but ever subordinated to his will.

In (Ephesians 5:23) the headship of Christ to his Church is compared to that between husband and wife; and we are reminded of one of those deep verses that reveal the unities of creation as they were present to the apostle's thought. As God is the head of Christ, the glorified Man, and as man is meant to be the head of woman, so is Christ head of each redeemed man, as an individual, and of all such together, in the Church. Thus amid the discord and anarchy of creation we are learning the Divine concords, and shall yet find harmony emanating from the Church to soothe, and still, and unify creation.

THE CHURCH IS ALSO A BUILDING. (Ephesians 2:21)

Deep in the weltering floods that surged around the Cross, God laid the foundation stone which none but He could lay, which is Jesus Christ. He had laid it in purpose before He set the foundations of the hills, but He laid it then in fact. On Him souls have been built through the ages, one by one. They were lifeless indeed when they first touched Him; but coming in contact with the Living Stone, though dead they began to live, and thus the building grew.

A building is for an inmate; and the Church is for God. Without Him it has no reason to exist. The universe itself cannot contain Him; but the spiritual house whose stones are redeemed souls is his pavilion, his habitation, his home.

IT IS THROUGH THE CHURCH THAT GOD'S WISDOM IS MADE KNOWN. (Ephesians 3:10)

Men learn God's manifold wisdom in creation: in the limpet whose fragile shell may be pierced by a tiny insect, yet resists the blow of the mightiest wave; in the eye that is able to adjust itself immediately to the waxing or waning light; in the hand, so marvellously adapted to its myriad purposes, that the study of its manipulating dexterity has before now convinced infidelity of the being of God. But angels learn the manifold wisdom of God by studying the adaptation of his grace to the varied needs of his saints. As students discover the wonderful resources of the surgeon, who passes through the wards of the hospital adapting himself to the need of each sufferer; so do angels and the lofty spirits of heaven learn secrets they had never known, but for the infinite variety of sin and need and sorrow with which God has to deal, and which become so many prisms to break up the white ray of his character into its varied constituent hues.

THE CHURCH'S END IS THE GLORY OF GOD. (Ephesians 3:21)

At the close of this sublime doxology, in which the burning heart of the apostle rises to an almost unparalleled ecstasy of thought and expression, he seeks for voices that shall give utterance to the glory which is the due of such a God. And, according to the Revised Version, which accurately renders the best reading of the original Greek, he finds them in the Church and in Christ Jesus. "Unto Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus."

The juxtaposition of these two is very wonderful and suggestive. The thought seems to be passing from the comparison between the Church and a building or body, to trace a parallel between it and the bride, lifted by the love of the bridegroom to stand beside Him, on the same level with Himself. We know, of course, that glory must accrue to the Father, for ever and ever, from the work of the Lord Jesus. A revenue of glory will ever ascend from the cradle, the cross, the grave. The ages are to see repeated harvests accruing from the sowing of his tears and blood. But we had not realized, except for these words, that a similar wealth of glory was to accrue from the Church of the Firstborn.

Nevertheless, though our thought staggers with the conception, let us accept with reverent joy the assurance that in that great life which is opening before us, the Church of the redeemed shall stand beside Christ, and raise her voice, in unison with his, as the voice of one ascribing glory to the Father. And as the ages pass, they shall not diminish, but increase, the sweetness of her song and the volume of her voice.

THE CHURCH IS ONE. (Ephesians 4:4)

A sevenfold bond of unity makes her so. One Head; one indwelling Spirit; one blessed Hope; one Lord; one Faith; one Baptism; one God and Father. She is therefore one. Her members are scattered through heaven and earth. They are to be found in many different Christian communities and sects, or belonging to none. They may ignore one another, or even refuse fellowship, because blinded to their true kindred; as two brothers may meet in a mist and not know each other. But they are one; and in the light of eternity they shall recognize the unity, for it shall be patent to all the universe of God.

THE LOVE OF CHRIST TO HIS CHURCH IS INEXPRESSIBLE, SAVE BY THE TENDEREST HUMAN RELATIONSHIP. (Ephesians 5:32)

Here is a mystery indeed. That scene in Eden is also a parable. It was not good for Christ to be alone. He needed one to love and to give love. But there was none among unfallen angels that could answer to Him. And therefore God the Father sought a bride for his Son from among the children of men; yea, He took the Second Eve from the wounded side of the Second Man, as He lay asleep in the garden-grave.

Redeemed men compose that bride. The Saviour loves them, as a true man who for the first time loves a pure and noble woman. He does not love them because they are fair, but to make them so. He has approved his love by becoming man, and giving Himself to death. By his blood, and Word, and Spirit, He is sanctifying and purifying them for Himself. The process is long and severe; but He nourishes and cherishes them, as a man does his wounded flesh. And ere long, when the bride is complete in numbers and in beauty, the mystery that now veils her shall be flung aside, and amid the joy of creation, He will present her to Himself, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing; bearing his name, sharing his rank, and position, and wealth, and power, and glory, for ever and ever.

Then the Church shall cleave to Him for ever, and He shall cleave to her. And they twain shall be one spirit. And his own prayer shall be realized, offered on the eve of his agony and passion, "The glory which Thou hast given

The Church

Me, I have given unto them; that they may be one, even as We are one."