



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Issue 53

The Pauline Pattern of the Gathering of the Church

by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

While reading Paul's epistles we see a very clear pattern develop. The primary meeting place of the church is the home. This is the Pauline pattern.

"... the church that is in their house" (Romans 16:5).

"... the church that is in their house" (I Corinthians 16:19).

"... the church which is in his house" (Colossians 4:15).

"... the church in thy house" (Philemon 2).

Are these repeated phrases of any special significance or meaning? Or, are they just interesting historical "filler?"

Are we not to follow Paul?

"Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me" (I Corinthians 4:16).

"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (I Corinthians 11:1).

"Brethren, be followers together of me ..." (Philippians 3:17).

Were not Paul and his epistles given to us for a pattern?

"Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (I Timothy 1:16).

Shall we follow Paul as he follows Christ, or shall we follow some other man?

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES TO THE PAULINE PATTERN OF THE GATHERING OF THE CHURCH

We have identified the four "church in thy house" type phrases found in Paul's epistles. We do not believe that these phrases are insignificant. Quite the contrary, God has determined to emphasize them in His word.

Over the years, we have also come to understand that there are other references to this basic Pauline pattern, that should not be overlooked. Paul's pattern was quite simple: he established local gatherings of saints primarily around converted households. Here are passages that we believe refer to this natural gathering of the body of Christ.

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Dear Saints:

Beloved greetings to each of you!

New Church Series

Beginning with this issue of the BSN, we are running a new series of articles on the subject of the church. These articles will reflect the light that we currently have on this important subject.

These articles were first written and sent out through our "goodies" e-mail list. I want to let those of you who are on that list know how very much I appreciate the heartwarming encouragement that I have received from so many of you.

We rejoice to know that God had already awakened so many hearts to these wonderful truths before we even began this series. We also rejoice that others have received clarity, and/or mutual encouragement from us through these e-mails.

Others have been so helpful by offering many valuable suggestions. I am especially appreciative for this mutual ministry that we were able to share. Thanks to each of you for your assistance in bring this e-mail series to print. This is more of a group effort than many of you may ever realize!

In these articles we are simply attempting to stand in the light that we have. We also desire to encourage others who see these truths to stand in them as well. We believe that it is important to be faithful to the truths that we see.

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Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

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This biweekly publication (24 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7)
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from the law (Galatians 5:1)
- the organic nature of the church, the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12)
- the distinct ministry of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13)
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15)
- the recovery of *rich* Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13).
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with ...
 - total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6)
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4)

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any "Movement," "Organization," "Mission," or separate body of believers, but is sent forth to and for all "saints."

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PATRIARCHS

Remember that it is our responsibility as husbands and fathers to take the truths we learn from God's Word, the truths that we hold dear, and impart them to our families.

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(recompiled and edited)

“And a certain woman named Lydia ... and her household ... besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us ... And they ... entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them ...” (Acts 16:14-15, 40).

“But the Jews which believed not ... gathered a company ... and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And ... they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers...” (Acts 17:5-6).

“And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man’s house, named Justus ... And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them” (Acts 18:7, 11).

“... house to house” (Acts 20:20).

“And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching ...” (Acts 28:30-31).

“... Salute them which are of Aristobulus’ household” (Romans 16:10).

“... Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord” (Romans 16:11).

“Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them” (Romans 16:14).

“Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them” (Romans 16:15).

“Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you ...” (Romans 16:23).

“... them which are of the house of Chloe ...” (I Corinthians 1:11).

“... they which creep into houses ...” (II Timothy 3:6).

“... Salute ... the household of Onesiphorus” (II Timothy 4:19).

“... who subvert whole houses ...” (Titus 1:11).

This Pauline pattern of the church (i.e., the body of Christ) is not to be confused with Paul’s evangelistic efforts – the preaching of the gospel that was primarily public in nature. In this phase of Paul’s ministry he utilized many public places (“publicly” Acts 20:20), such as synagogues (Acts 13:5, 14-50; 14:1-7; etc.), open air (Acts 14:8-21; 16:13, 19-22; 17:22-31, etc.), courtrooms (Acts 18:12-16, etc), and schools (Acts 19:9-10, where he “disputed”). Again, these public activities are not to be confused with what Paul did when he “gathered the church together” (Acts 14:27).

WHY PAUL GATHERED THE CHURCH IN THE HOUSE: RELIGION

Paul’s pattern was to gather the church in homes. Why did he utilize this method and emphasize it so in his epistles? Let us consider a few reasons.

First of all, Paul could have easily done otherwise. However, Paul went against the grain of tradition.

The two firmly entrenched religions of Paul’s day both met in special buildings dedicated specifically for that purpose.

One of these was the only religion ever ordained by God (James 1:27). We speak of Israel. They had the temple (and the synagogues). Some of the Jews who believed and followed Paul undoubtedly “missed” this aspect of their past religious culture and lifestyle. How easy it would have been for Paul to have substituted a “church house” and a “worship service” for Israel’s religious temple worship; but he did not.

Then there were the various branches of the heathen Babylonian religious system which filled the world. They all had “sacred sanctuaries” for the sole purpose of conducting their religious activities. Paul could have made his former idol worshiping followers feel somewhat “at home” by mimicking

these meetings; but Paul disregarded these practices altogether. He did not give his Gentile followers a substitute for their possible religious withdrawals. He simply brought them home.

Paul's manner of life with the saints stood as a testimony that the body of Christ was not a part of Judaism or the multifaceted Babylonian religious system. In fact the body of Christ was not religious at all!

"The church in thy house" supported this truth.

WHY PAUL GATHERED THE CHURCH IN THE HOUSE: THE DOCTRINE OF OUR IDENTITY

Second, Paul's pattern and emphasis of "the church in thy house" stood in harmony with the doctrine that he taught concerning our true identity. Paul taught that we are the church (Ephesians 1:22, 23). He taught that we are God's building (I Corinthians 3:9), His temple (I Corinthians 3:16), His house (I Timothy 3:15), His habitation (Ephesians 2:22). That's who we are! That is our identity.

God obviously knew that the religious system would attempt to steal away our identity. Our true identity is confirmed and protected in the Pauline pattern of "the church in thy house." All around us there are those who would in practice and speech deny these great truths! Even most of those among us who profess to know in truth that we are God's building, His temple, His house, and His habitation will nonetheless deny it in speech and practice. Just listen to these endless phrases of denial:

"Where do you go to church?"
"Our church is over on South and Main."
"He invited us to his church."
"I really love going to my church."
"I see your church is getting a face lift."
"Hurry, we don't want to be late for church!"
"Would you stop by the church and pick up our offering envelopes?"

ALL of these are the WRONG church! Not a one in the bunch is God's! Do these phrases not trouble anyone?

Paul's "manner of life" (II Timothy 3:10) with the saints stood as a testimony that the body of Christ was the church building of God. The gathering of "the church in thy house" was in clear support of this important truth. Religious talk, like that listed above, is lost in the simplicity of home gatherings.

"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (II Corinthians 11:3).

WHY PAUL GATHERED THE CHURCH IN THE HOUSE: THE DOCTRINE OF OUR RELATIONSHIP

Third, Paul's pattern and emphasis of "the church in thy house" stood in harmony with the doctrine that he taught concerning our relationship to each other. Our relationship within the body of Christ is likened unto that of a family.

In the book of I Thessalonians Paul describes his relationship with the saints as that of a gentle mother (I Thessalonians 2:7-8), a concerned father (I Thessalonians 2:11), and a loving brother (I Thessalonians 2:1, 9, 14, 17).

To Paul, the saints were not "social acquaintances." They were not "parishioners." Paul did NOT view his relationship with them as a religious one. He regarded them as members of his family! He had a special and tender relationship with them (c.f. Acts 20:36-38; Ephesians 4:32; Titus 3:2; II Corinthians 2:4; 10:1; Galatians 5:22).

Paul calls us:

"... the house of God" (I Timothy 3:15).
"... the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10).
"... the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19).

Paul spoke of individual saints, at times as:

"... his mother, and mine" (Romans 16:13).
"My little children ..." (Galatians 4:19).

“With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother ...” (Colossians 4:9).

“... Phoebe our sister ...” (Romans 16:1).

“Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith ...” (I Timothy 1:2).

These are all family terms. Indeed, family terms are Paul’s greatest form of speaking of our relationship to one another. This subject does not get the attention that it should. This is probably because of its very familiarity (brother and brethren are used over 130 times by Paul in his epistles.)

To Paul, “brother” was not a formal description or title. It was an attitude of relationship, of personal commitment to genuine family ties (I Corinthians 8:11, 13).

Paul not only taught this, he lived it by example. One of the ways in which he manifested this great truth was through “the church in thy house.” After all, where is the natural place for families to gather?

Thus, in this family setting they were more naturally able to do family things, such as embracing each other with a holy kiss (Romans 16:16; I Corinthians 16:20; II Corinthians 13:12; I Thessalonians 5:26), eating together (Acts 20:11; I Corinthians 5:11) etc.

The Pauline pattern of “the church in thy house” is even at the root of the bishop’s qualifications. These home gatherings make it clear why a bishop is to be “given to hospitality” (I Timothy 3:2); after all, he is hosting the church!

The standard meeting place for families is the home. It is the primary place that family life is conducted. Is it not then the natural place for the body of Christ? Now, granted, on occasion there are family reunions. We get the extended family together at some rented location. These can be wonderful times of family fellowship. Still, this is the exception, not the rule of family life and activity!

So, it is with the church, which is His body. There are times when “the whole church be come together into one place” (I Corinthians 14:23). These could

be wonderful functions of family reunion (with special instructions from Paul on how to behave orderly), but they should not take precedence over the primary gathering of “the church in thy house.”

Paul’s manner of life with the saints stood as a testimony that the body of Christ is a family. “The church in thy house” is in clear support of this truth.

Thank the Lord for “the simplicity that is in Christ” (II Corinthians 11:3).

CONCLUSION

Paul’s pattern was to gather the church in homes. Someone probably could have argued with him that, “Your message is different enough without alienating people with your strange practices.”

Are we to suppose that building a special building never occurred to Paul or any of his followers? Or, did he completely reject such a firmly established religious practice?

Was not Paul a tent maker by trade? Was not Israel’s first building a tent? Could he not have made a tent in which to gather the church? A tent like Israel’s tabernacle?

This is not what Paul did! Paul was not founding a new religion. Neither was the body of Christ to be a part of one of the two established religious systems. The church, which is His body, was something new altogether, but it was not a religion!

Paul consistently lived so that his “manner of life” would reflect his doctrine. He taught us to do so as well. Paul’s doctrine is intended to have results.

“But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose ... Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (II Timothy 3:10, 12).

Think on these things.



Forsaking the Pauline Pattern

by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

The tradition of the Babylonian religious system has, for the most part, replaced “the church in thy house.” In the process, the organic nature of the church has been replaced by man-made institutions and organizations. This all comes from a failure to follow the simple Pauline pattern. Are we not to follow Paul?

“Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me” (I Corinthians 4:16).

“Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (I Corinthians 11:1).

“Brethren, be followers together of me ...” (Philippians 3:17).

Were not Paul and his epistles given to us for a pattern?

“Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting” (I Timothy 1:16).

The Pauline pattern has been forsaken!

Now, what shall those of us who profess to follow Paul do about this? Shall we faithfully follow Paul as he followed Christ, or shall we continue to blindly follow the traditions of men?

“Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (I Corinthians 4:2).

A LIGHT VIEW OF TRADITION

Tradition can be a very dangerous thing. It can nullify the effect of the word of God. It blinds us from seeing the actual truth of His word. I am afraid that believers have too long taken a light view of tradition.

Webster defines tradition as “that which is handed down from age to age; the act of delivering into the

hands of another.”¹ Likewise, Strong defines it as “transmission.”²

Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, warns the believer against these traditions of men.

*“And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words... Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after **the tradition of men**, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ”* (Colossians 2:4, 8).

The tradition of men is a dangerous opponent to the truth.

*“Making the word of God of none effect **through your tradition**, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye”* (Mark 7:13).

Paul, himself, had been caught up in tradition.

“... being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers” (Galatians 1:14).

Could not this statement of Paul have been made by many of us? Have we not been exceedingly zealous of the traditions of “our fathers?” Then, should we not follow our apostle, in the abandonment of such bondage?

Have you ever questioned the traditions that we so willingly have followed? Why do we do the religious things that we do? Have we ever traced their origins?

Try this: the next time that you do something “spiritual,” something “for the Lord,” ask yourself why you do it. From where is its origin?

Now, be forewarned, this pathway will not be an

1. Noah Webster, American Dictionary of the English Language (1828), F.A.C.E. reprint.
2. James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* (various publishers).

easy one. The religious crowd will surely object to a lifestyle free from religious tradition. Most of the opposition will likely come from your closest friends and family members who are blinded by these very traditions of men, from which you seek and have found freedom.

Jesus Himself faced the same opposition and challenge from the traditionalists of His day.

“Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees ... saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? ... But He answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? ... Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition... In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:1-3, 9).

If we choose to abandon our own religious traditions, I'd say we'd be in good company with Paul, and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ!

A FORGOTTEN TRADITION

Often, when we speak of tradition, there is one that we have forgotten. It must be remembered that there is another tradition, a godly one that we are to follow: it is the Pauline tradition.

“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle” (II Thessalonians 2:15).

“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us” (II Thessalonians 3:6).

We are to receive the traditions of Paul because:

(1) He is our DIVINELY appointed pattern.

“Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting” (I Timothy 1:16).

A pattern is “that which is to be copied or imitated” (Webster), “a sketch for imitation” (Strong).

Therefore, Paul writes:

“And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us ...” (I Corinthians 4:6).

“Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus ... who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ ...” (I Corinthians 4:16-17).

“Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (I Corinthians 11:1).

“Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do ...” (Philippians 4:9).

“But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life ...” (II Timothy 3:10).

(2) He is our DIVINELY appointed apostle.

“For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office” (Romans 11:13).

(3) To him has been committed this current DISPENSATION.

“For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward” (Ephesians 3:1-2).

“Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God” (Colossians 1:25).

This current dispensation was committed to Paul as a trust.

“... a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me” (I Corinthians 9:17).

“According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust” (I Timothy 1:11).

“... the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me ...” (Galatians 2:7).

“But hath in due times manifested His word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour” (Titus 1:3).

The word commit means “to give in trust; to put into the hands or power of another; to entrust; to put into any place for preservation; to deposit” (Webster), “to deposit (as a trust or for protection), to entrust” Strong (#3908, #4100).

The word trust means a “charge received in confidence; that which is committed to one’s care; something committed to a person’s care for use or management, and for which an account must be rendered” (Webster).

As we receive the truth of this dispensation, we also receive the dispensation itself.

“... which is given me to you-ward” (Ephesians 3:2).

“... which is given to me for you” (Colossians 1:25).

“O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust ... And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (I Timothy 6:20; II Timothy 2:2).

Why was Timothy to commit his trust to faithful men?

“Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (I Corinthians 4:2).

We now have a trusteeship that has been committed to our own trust. We need to be faithful to Paul’s pattern – Paul’s tradition – and be ever so careful of the traditions of men!

Are we following Paul’s traditions, or man’s?

Think on these things. ■

What Is the Church?

by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

The word church is not, at first, easily defined or identified today because of the influence of centuries of religious tradition. If we would clear our minds of these traditions we would find that this word conveys quite a very simple truth.

Consulting dictionaries does not always prove helpful. This is because we naturally approach the definition of the word with our traditions firmly settled in our minds. And the producers of the dictionaries have usually done the same as well. This is not intended to be critical of them. After all, the word is being defined in the ways in which it is currently being used. That’s usually what most dictionaries are intended to do.

The Common Definitions

Among the common definitions of the word church, we find the idea of:

- ♦ a physical building, as in, “It’s our turn to clean

the church.”

- ♦ an organization, as in, “We are members of First Church.”
- ♦ a meeting, as in, “Church starts in a half-hour.”
- ♦ a doctrinal system, as in, “I’ve spent all my life in the Baptist church.”

These are all NON-BIBLE churches.

Dictionaries and other manmade reference tools can be of only so much assistance as we study the Bible, but we should always keep in mind that they are just that – manmade. Ultimately, the premiere reference tool for any Bible study is the Bible itself! The Bible has a way of defining its own words.

In all languages, it is usage that determines the meaning of words. And since usage determines meaning, Biblical usage, certainly, always should determine Biblical meaning. Therefore, we must acquaint ourselves with the Scriptures. The more we read, study and learn the Bible

itself, the more we will be equipped to know the meaning of Bible words.

Let's let God define the church!

THE CHURCH, WHICH IS HIS BODY

Let's look at some BIBLE definitions of THE CHURCH! When writing to the Ephesians, Paul tells us precisely what the church is:

"... the church, which is His body ..." (Ephesians 1:22-23).

Isn't that clear? The church, *which is ...* and here comes the definition: "His body."

We can now say, with all authority and confidence, just what the church is! The church is the body of Christ!

Isn't that so very simple? Just taking God's definition, taking God at His word!

Now, Paul shows us that the reverse of this is also true:

"And He is the head of the body, the church ..." (Colossians 1:18).

"... for His body's sake, which is the church" (Colossians 1:24).

There is that "*which is*" again! We have here the body of Christ defined. The body, "*which is ...*" and here comes the definition: "**the church.**" The church is the body, and the body is the church. That locks things up with clarity, doesn't it? God has provided a clear definition and then back defined it, to make it an iron clad truth. This double ended definition leads us to even more truth concerning the church.

How many bodies does God have in this dispensation?

"There is one body ..." (Ephesians 4:4).

One means one. God has one single body in the dispensation of grace. This body is "the church, which is His body." And since God has clearly taught us that the body is the definition of the church, and the church is the definition of the body, then we can say with all divine confidence:

God has but one church in this dispensation! Only one! His church is the body of Christ!

The church is THE ONE BODY OF CHRIST. God has no other church, or body today!

MEMBERSHIP IN THE ONE CHURCH

We have learned from God that the church is the body of Christ. In this definition we were also able to learn that this church is, therefore, the one true church of our dispensation.

How can one become a member of this one true church? How do we become members of the body of Christ? Let's again consult the only source of ultimate authority – God's word!

"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body ..." (I Corinthians 12:12-13).

This passage tells us that the *one body* has a membership. One does not "join" this church. One is "joined" to it by baptism. This is not water baptism. This is spiritual baptism, where the Holy Spirit places us into Christ's body. Thus, the *one Spirit*, through the *one baptism*, places us into the *one body*.

Look at the passage again, with emphasis upon these truths:

*"For as **the body is one**, and hath many members, and all the members of that **one body** being many, are **one body**: so also is Christ. For by **one Spirit** are we all baptized into **one body** ..." (I Corinthians 12:13).*

We also see these truths in Ephesians:

*"There is **one body**, and **one Spirit**, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Ephesians 4:4-6).*

Here we have the seven-fold oneness that we have in Christ. This unity we have with Christ, and with every member of His body. The one Spirit, by the one baptism, placed us into the one body. There is no other Spirit, or baptism, or body of God today!

This is at the heart of Paul's message about who we are in Christ:

"... many members in one body ..." (Romans 12:4).

"... members of Christ ..." (I Corinthians 6:15).

"... members of that one body ..." (I Corinthians 12:12).

“... *members of the body* ...” (I Corinthians 12:22-23).

“... *members of His body* ...” (Ephesians 5:30).

One cannot “join” this church. One becomes made a member of it by trusting the finished cross-work of Christ. This church is made up of all the saved of this dispensation. What a wonderful privilege to be “members one of another” in Christ, His body, which is the church!

*“For as we have many members in one body ... So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one **members one of another**”* (Romans 12:4-5).

*“... for we are **members one of another**”* (Ephesians 4:25).

We are gloriously blessed with membership! God has made us church members! If you have membership in any other “church,” you stand in competition and contradiction to God’s present purpose: His one church, His one body!

Quite a conflicting position to be in, isn’t it?

THE ONE CHURCH AND ITS ONE HEAD

We have seen that membership in today’s one true church is through: the one Spirit, by the one baptism, placing us into the one body. That *one body* has a name.

“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body ...” (I Corinthians 12:12-13).

Look at that little phrase in verse 12:

“... so also is Christ ...”

The one body is called Christ. He is the head and we are the members. Thus, we are in living union with the Lord Jesus Christ.

“... the church, which is His body ...” (Ephesians 1:22-23).

Why is the church called “His body?” Because the Lord Jesus Christ is its living head!

“... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the saviour of the body” (Ephesians 5:23).

“And He is the head of the body, the church ...” (Colossians 1:18).

This then, brings us to another aspect of the definition of the church. The one true church has but one head, and that is Christ. There is no other head of God’s church. This is how we can identify the true church – by its headship.

Now, the question is, who is the head of “your church?” Are you satisfied with the headship of Christ over His church? Or, do you desire to belong to another “church” that has another head?

GOD’S CHURCH

As we study through Paul’s epistles, we are able to glean even further fullness to the definition to the church.

Paul identifies the church, as God’s church:

“... the church of God ...” (I Corinthians 1:2)

“... the church of God” (I Corinthians 10:32)

“... the church of God ...” (I Corinthians 11:22)

“... the church of God ...” (II Corinthians 1:1)

“... the church of God” (I Timothy 3:5)

“... the church of the living God ...” (I Timothy 3:15)

We now find out who the church belongs to. The one true church of this dispensation is the sole possession of God Himself. It became His possession through legitimate means – He purchased it!

“... the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).

Who purchased “your church?” If it wasn’t God, then it’s not God’s church!

Over and over in the verses above, the one true church is clearly identified as “the church of God.” Believers commonly join the world in using such phrases as:

“my church”

“our church”

“his church”

“her church”

“their church”

“Jeff’s church”

“Mary’s church”

“Brother White’s church”

“Reverend Smith’s church”

Whose churches are these? They obviously are not God’s. Then they must be in competition and contradiction with God’s true church. Does this not bother anyone? How long will we pursue such an obstinate course?

THE HOUSE OF GOD

Another way that Paul refers to the one true church of this dispensation, is:

“... *the house of God, which is the church of the living God ...*” (I Timothy 3:15).

All who are saved are God’s house. The living God lives in His living church. Is this not a glorious truth?!

Paul goes on to say that we are:

“*an habitation of God*” (Ephesians 2:22).
“*God’s building*” (I Corinthians 3:9).

Paul was working on a divine project: *Habitat for Divinity!* What a thought. “God’s building” -- just think of it! God has a *church building* in this dispensation. It is made up of those of us who have been saved by His wonderful grace. Praise the Lord for the church building of God!

Are you satisfied with this truth? Or, do you embrace another “church building” instead?

Are you the house of God? Or, do you attend a man-made building that has been fraudulently pawned off as the “house of God?”

THE TEMPLE OF GOD

Another way that Paul describes, or defines the one true church is that it is God’s temple:

“... *ye are the temple of God ...*” (I Corinthians 3:16).
“... *your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost ...*” (I Corinthians 6:19).
“... *ye are temple of the living God ...*” (II Corinthians 6:16).
“... *a holy temple in the Lord ...*” (Ephesians 2:22).

In fact, this is the concept of the etymology of our English word church. Sometimes you can learn a lot about a word from its etymology. Webster’s 1828 gives the etymology of the word church as “a temple of God ... pertaining to ... our Lord Jesus Christ.” Now, there is a wonderful definition! – hid away in the much overlooked etymology.

That the church is the temple of the living God is clearly borne out by Paul in the portions of Scripture referred to above.

We are the temple, we are God=s sanctuary! Not a man-

made building, but a God-made building, made up of people!

Notice how clearly Paul preached, contrasting the human and the divine in this regard.

“*God ... dwelleth not in temples made with hands*” (Acts 17:24).

Simple truth, isn’t it?! God does not dwell in man-made places!

Now consider the common language of the average Christian:

“It is good to be in the Lord’s House today.”
“Please do not bring food or drinks into the sanctuary.”
“It is nice to have God’s House full today.”

Do you ever talk this sort of religious jargon? Such talk denies the truth of the Scriptures that we have just considered!

TEMPLE WORSHIP

Let’s consider an important implication from our last definition. We have seen that the church, the body of Christ, is the temple of God today. One of the key features of a temple is *worship*.

“... *measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.*” (Revelation 11:1).

This identity of the temple with worship is why Paul says:

“*God ... **dwelleth not in temples** made with hands; **neither is worshipped** with men’s hands, as though He needed anything ...*” (Acts 17:24-25).

Now, a question comes to mind. Are you *time* and *place* oriented when it comes to worship? Do you need to go somewhere to worship God? Do you need to go somewhere, at a certain time?

Do you attend a Sunday morning “Worship Service?” If you do, does this mean that you stand upon the ground of church truth delivered to us by Paul, or are you by your actions denying it?

Again, the question is a simple one: Are you *time* and *place* oriented in your worship?

Paul worshipped the Lord in the temple! But he believed what he taught about the temple. He believed that he was the Lord’s temple! So, guess where Paul worshipped God?

“For we ... worship God in the _____ ...” (Philippians 3:3).

In this verse Paul tells us where we worship! Do you know what goes in the blank?

“For we ... worship God in the spirit ...” (Philippians 3:3).

In the spirit.

That's *where* we worship the Lord. This means that *every day*, in *every place*, and in *every action* we have been called upon to enter into worship. After all, we *are* the temple of God, God lives in us, and we therefore are to worship God with and in *every detail* of our lives.

It's no wonder that Paul made statements like:

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (I Corinthians 10:31).

“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's” (I Corinthians 6:19-20).

“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him” (Colossians 3:17).

When Paul wrote, *“For we ... worship God in the spirit ...”* he quickly followed that truth with a negative:

*“For we ... worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, **and have no confidence in the flesh**”* (Philippians 3:3).

Did you notice that there were two realms in that verse? – *“in the spirit”* and *“in the flesh.”* Two different ways of worship, in the same verse! What stands between these two realms? – *“in Christ Jesus!”*

If you go somewhere to worship the Lord, are you not – in reality – denying the truth of who you are *in Christ Jesus*? Are you not worshipping the Lord *in the flesh*, rather than *in the spirit*? Hasn't someone corrupted your mind *“from the simplicity that is in Christ”* (II Corinthians 11:3)?

Are you enjoying true temple worship? Or, just a man-made imitation?

GOD'S CALLED OUT PEOPLE

Looking at the Greek word used to translate our English word church, Strong gives the etymology as “a calling out.”

So, as we study Paul's writings, looking for the church of this dispensation, we have some additional idea of what we are looking for – “a calling out.” Can we locate this concept in Paul's epistle?

Let's take a look at Paul's first letter to the Corinthian saints:

*“Unto the **church of God** which is at Corinth, to them that are **sanctified** in Christ Jesus called to be **saints** ...”* (I Corinthians 1:2).

Paul identifies the church as *“them that are sanctified.”* Sanctified means “set apart.” Believers are a called out people, set apart unto God.

Paul goes on to say that they have been *“called to be saints.”* He did not just call them “saints” here, but said that they were *“called to be saints.”* The church is a called group of people! The word saint means “one who has been set apart unto God.” Once again, the church is a called out people, set apart as holy unto God.

If we are God's *called out* people, what is it out of which we have been called?

Let's take a look at Paul's first letter to the saints at Thessalonica:

“For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had among you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (I Thessalonians 1:9).

Paul spoke these words to a people that he had just identified, only a few verses earlier – in the greetings – as “the church” (I Thessalonians 1:1).

Now, the Thessalonian believers were called out of something. What were they called out from? “From idols!” They were Gentiles called out of their *heathen religious system!* Yet that's not all: they were also called *unto* something – *“the living and true God.”* That's why Paul called them *“... the church ... which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ ...”*

The true church is God's called out people. We have been called out of the Gentile religious system. And we have been called unto God. What a wonderful privilege to have such a calling, to be delivered from the bondage of such religious oppression.

Think on these things.

