

# THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truths of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

Volume 97-4

Dear Reader,

No book of the Bible proclaims the facts of God's Assembly as Ephesians. Many long and involved commentaries have been written on this most wonderful book, but we want to focus simply on the truths of the Assembly in Ephesians and condense its highlights down to the few pages of this newsletter. We pray that you will be thrilled at the blessings which are ours in the Assembly from the heart of an all-loving God, made possible through the great sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of His Assembly.

Remember, the words *church* and *assembly* are used interchangeably, although many believe the word *assembly* better characterizes the meaning of the Greek word *ecclesia* -- "called out ones." In every issue of the Assembly Messenger, our practice is to capitalize the word if it refers to the entire Assembly, at least the entire Assembly on earth at any one time. When not capitalized it refers to the local assembly, the local representation of the one true Church.

## The Assembly in Ephesians

The book begins with our (the Assembly's) spiritual blessings given by our God and Father. Unlike Israel these blessings, while enjoyed while we are physically on earth, are to be enjoyed spiritually *in the heavenlies* in Christ Jesus (1:3). We *already* have them all, but we need to *possess them* practically by faith.

First, God shows that the Assembly is not by chance in any aspect. Those who compose the Assembly -- each individual living stone -- have been personally, individually, chosen by the Father in Christ *before* the world's foundation (1:4) to be a love-gift to His Son (Jn.17:2,6,9). Those living stones (1 Pet.2:5) are saved to be part of the Assembly whom Christ loved, to be with Him forever. He gives heavenly blessings to those so chosen and saved, for the Assembly is heavenly in origin and has its future in heaven. This is in contrast to Israel whose promised blessings were earthly.

We are holy and without blame before Him (1:4) and are predestined (marked out beforehand) to the adoption (placing) as *sons* (1:5; Gal.4:4-5) -- the place of highest privilege, no longer mere children. We are *accepted* in the Beloved (1:6) and have *redemption*, the forgiveness of sins (1:7). As sons we have the privilege to share in the secrets of His will (1:9). We have an *inheritance* (1:11-12; 1 Pet.1:4) and are *sealed* with the Holy Spirit (1:13) who is the guarantee or pledge that we eventually will possess our inheritance (1:14). A seal is a mark of ownership and denotes security.

All the blessings which belong to the Assembly, in Christ, are a result of God's "mighty power

which He worked in Christ when He (the Father) raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places [*heavenlies* -- JND], far above all principality and power ... and every name .... And He put all things under His (Christ's) feet and gave Him to be Head over all things *to* the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (1:19-20). All through Ephesians we see the Assembly from God's viewpoint, so the Head is exalted. The heavenly character of the Assembly in its formation and character is constantly emphasized.

Instead of stating that Christ is Head *of* the body, the Church (which He is -- Col.1:18), we here see the Church along side Christ, sharing with Him in a future day, when we reign with Him for 1000 years (Rev.20:4). His headship here is *to* the Church. This is God's great aim -- when Christ and His bride and wife are together, the Church being the fullness or completeness -- the one perfectly and eternally fit for Him who, personally, fills all in all (1:22-23). The body is the complement of the Head. What a wonderful future awaits us. It is a great loss when we don't understand our exalted, heavenly future and simply have our eyes on earth and the "now."

## Chapter 2

In Chapter one we saw that the individuals that comprise the Church are personally chosen or elected out of a world plunging towards judgment and hell, for both salvation and great heavenly blessings. In chapter two we see *how* that election is accomplished from the divine side. We see the operation of the power of God on earth (2:4). We who were spiritually dead in trespasses and sins, have been made spiritually alive *together with Christ* and made to sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus (2:1,5-6). A dead person is in a terrible state, hopeless by any natural means. Most of us don't appreciate the terrible spiritual state we were in when unsaved -- children of wrath (2:3) -- or appreciate as we should, the great divine work in our souls. Neither do most of us appreciate how rich was the *mercy* because of God's great love towards His elect (2:4). Instead, we fight the great divine truth of "election" as unfair (see Romans 9:20-24), thinking there must be some little spark in ourselves that will respond to God if only the gospel is presented earnestly enough. But "the natural man *does not receive* the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; *nor can he know them*, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor.2:14). There is no spark! Fallen mankind is totally depraved spiritually: he is dead, *with no movement of the heart towards God* (Rom.3:10-12). But as Christ came forth from death, we come with Him. God has imparted eternal life to us (2:5-6)! Praise the Lord!

We are saved by *grace* (unmerited favor; love in action) through faith, but even our faith to believe is a gift of God, not based on anything natural of which we could boast (2:8-9). In fact we are *entirely* His workmanship, a *new creation* in Christ Jesus (2:10; 2 Cor.5:17). These terms show how we are saved from God's side. Yes, *we* are to earnestly preach the gospel and plead with people as if it all depended on us (Acts 3:19; 17:30; 1 Cor.9:16; 2 Cor.5:11), never giving up any other truth to do so. But we have to understand that "as many as had been *appointed to eternal life* believed" (Acts 13:48). God alone gives the increase, and "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen.18:25).

The grand object of this divine work that has us confess Jesus as Lord and to believe (Rom.10:9)

is "that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us in Christ Jesus" (2:7). This blessing is not only for the Jews. The Gentiles "who once were far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (2:13). That divinely-set wall of separation of Judaism between Jew and Gentile has been broken down in the great work of Christ; so much so that the Jew and Gentile are seen as "one new man," making peace. This is the great outcome of God's love and Christ's work! It is the Church, the Assembly, comprised of Jews and Gentiles "called out" (the meaning of the Greek word *ecclesia*) from all the nations of the world! We now are "fellow-citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (vv.14-20).

The Church is built on the foundation of God's apostles and New Testament prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone, for it is His Church. Christ Himself is *the* foundation of all foundations (1 Cor.3:11). Here in 2:20-22 the Church is viewed as God's house (where order is to be maintained -- 1 Tim.3:15). This is another proof of the recent origin of the Church. It did not exist before the apostles and the coming of Christ. This building is under construction as seen in 1 Peter 2:5. Every person saved becomes a *living stone*, divinely fitted together with every other believer, and this house *grows* "into a holy temple in the Lord." So, as summarized in verse 22, we all "are being built *together* for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." *Togetherness* is one of the great thoughts concerning the Church. It is *one* body, *one* house, *one* flock, *one* bride, *one* new man, etc. Another great truth is that the Church, *collectively*, is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. "Do you not know that *you* (plural) are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you" (1 Cor.3:16)?

### Chapter 3

Chapter 3 is a remarkable diversion. The Holy Spirit abruptly stops Paul from moving to the response-side of the truth of the Church (which begins in 4:1) and has him write more about the beginnings and facts of the Church or Assembly. Paul was given a *dispensation*, an *administration* of the grace of God for us (3:2) -- the ordering or arrangement of the Church, of Christ's chief interest today! That God would give us the blessings connected with the Assembly is a great, great favor, truly divine love in action!

The truth of the Church was made known primarily to Paul by divine revelation: there was no other way he could have discovered it. Why? Because it was a *mystery*! A *mystery* in Scripture is something always in God's mind but which was hidden until the time appointed for its revelation. So, "in other ages [it] was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets" (3:3-4). And what is the mystery? "That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, *of the same body*, and partakers of His promises in Christ through the gospel" (3:5-6). Such a thing -- Jews and Gentiles of the same body -- was unheard of in the Old Testament! Paul was specially given this message, once "hidden in God," to preach to all people (3:9). It was not hidden somewhere in Scripture, but in the heart and mind of God. These truths were never out of His thoughts, but He simply kept them to Himself until the appointed time.

The Church has the unique privilege to show forth the manifold (many-sided) wisdom of God to

angelic beings (3:10). Angels desire to seek out the many ways of God (1 Pet.1:12). The Assembly was new to them too -- a wonderful unfolding of God's wisdom. Perhaps verse 10 has a double meaning. The angels see God's great wisdom in the formation of His Church; they also see His wisdom as the Church functions on earth for His glory. In this latter respect, the giving up by so many believers of so many of the truths of the true Church in practice must be very sad to these heavenly beings -- at least to the elect angels. All of these truths as to the Church are "according to the *eternal purpose* which He [God] accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (v.11). This is an astounding statement! The Church, the body of Christ, now revealed, is (or, part of) the eternal purpose of God! Yet, how careless we often are as to it.

"To Him [God the Father] be glory *in the Church* by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (v.21). So Paul ends his inspired parenthesis. *Glory* means *displayed excellence*. The Church should so shine as to display the great excellence of God by Christ Jesus throughout its existence. From the divine side that has been and is true; from our side, that display has been sadly dimmed. What is our generation learning and practicing as to the Church? Does it show the wisdom and glory of God, or display the "glory" of all sorts of man's ideas?

## Chapter 4

As a result of all the teaching about the Church in the first three chapters, we are to walk worthy of our calling (4:1). We have seen what a unique and great calling it is! But in this issue of the newsletter we don't want to get into the our *practice* concerning the Church, but keep to the *facts* of the Church, with a few practical remarks. Even though chapter 4 begins our *response* to -- the practical side of --the former teachings, there are still further facts for us to look at in this chapter.

In verses 4-6 we have three concentric circles (like a bulls eye) with verse 4 giving the inner circle, the circle of reality, the Church. There is *one* body. The Church is *one*; it is the body of Christ. There is *one* Holy Spirit who has baptized (immersed, entered) us all "into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free -- and [we] have all been made to drink into *one* Spirit, for in fact, the body is not one member but many" (1 Cor.12:13-14). There is *one* hope of our calling. That hope is Christ (1 Tim.1:1).

In passing, we note that verse 5 is the circle of profession, which we call the *kingdom* -- all who claim to belong to one Lord, who claim to have the Christian faith, who are baptized in water. This circle includes the Church, for we have made profession, but it also includes many thousands who, as pictured in Matthew 7:21-23, say "Lord, Lord," but the Lord has *never* known them as His own sheep. Then verse 6 is all the rest. God by creation lays claim on all.

Verses 7-11 explain that God has provided for the spiritual growth of His Assembly. He does two things. He gives men certain spiritual abilities they do not have otherwise, to build up, strengthen, His body, and (as particularly emphasized here) He also gives certain *gifted men* to the whole Church universally, not just to some local church/assembly, "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (v.12). I'm not going to say more on this here, for, the Lord willing, we will have an entire newsletter on gifts and

Christian ministry.

## Chapter 5

Chapter 5 continues our response to the great truths of the first three chapters, but when we come to verses 22-33 we get some unique ministry concerning the Church. At first glance it would seem we are getting some very practical help on how husbands and wives should act to be pleasing to the Lord. That is certainly true, but verse 32 shows us the deeper side. "This is a great mystery, *but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.*" Let's look at these verses from that standpoint.

Wives submitting to their own husbands is a wonderful picture of the reality that Christ is the Head of the Church and the Savior of the body (5:22-23). Being the Head does not mean ordering around the body. Rather, *headship* has the idea of direction, control and sustenance. *Lordship*, on the other hand, has the thoughts of supremacy, rule, authority, and we have taken Jesus as our *Lord* (Rom.10:9). A body without a head (if such a thing were possible) would just wander about aimlessly. Likewise our *directions* for the proper functioning of the Church come from our Head and we are to submit to Him. Our own ideas, no matter how effective we think they might be (and they may be effective in getting crowds and making certain people happy and content), have no place in Christ's Assembly. Also, the Church in its daily functioning is to be *in control*. "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor.14:40). That 14th chapter shows that many things had gotten out of control in the Corinthian local assembly and they were rebuked for it, and given instructions from the Head as to how the local assembly was to function in an orderly fashion.

Finally, spiritual food is needed for proper growth, and we have just seen that the Head provides for that food through the use of spiritual gifts. The Lord also is the Savior of the body. Not only, as we've seen, does He provide everything for its eternal salvation and divinely saves its members, He protects it from all the dangers and evils all around. Nothing will prevent Him from finally bringing the body to glory to be with Him forever. So the Church should be always subject to Christ (v.24) -- in everything!

"Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (vv.25-27). It is the Lord's great purpose as a result of His great love for the Assembly, to have her with Himself in perfection. The Assembly is His fullness, His future bride, and He so deeply loved her that He gave Himself at the cross for her. This is the source of all our blessings. His love seen here is the deepest love one can possibly imagine. Further, it was not because we were so lovable! Just the opposite! Romans 5:8 tells us that "God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that *while we were yet sinners*, Christ died for us." Even further, Romans 5:10 says that "we were *enemies*."

Today the Lord is carrying on the work of sanctifying and cleansing the Assembly by use of the Word of God. *Sanctify* always means in Scripture *to set apart* -- usually *from* something, *to*

something. He desires to set her apart *from* the great world-system of evil all around us, *unto* Himself -- to fit her for Himself. The Word of God has the power to set us apart to our Lord and to cleanse from all the pollution of this world. Someone has well said that the Bible will keep us from sinning or sin will keep us from the Bible. Yes, there certainly is a huge amount of failure in the Church, both personally and collectively, but the moral difference between our brothers and sisters in Christ, and the unsaved, is vast, thanks to the on-going sanctifying and cleansing daily work of our Lord.

In the future we (the Church) will be presented to Christ by Himself, as His bride and wife (Rev.21:9) at the marriage of the Lamb (Rev.19:7-9). At that future time, she will have "made herself ready" (19:7). The Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor.3:11-15, etc.) has passed, where the believers' works are discerned, and the Church is seen arrayed in white robes which are defined for us as "the righteous acts of the saints" (19:8) -- everything that was according to the Lord's will. So, when presented to Christ (Eph.5:27), she will be a *glorious* Church: she will display the excellency of Christ: He will be "glorified in His saints" (2 Thes.1:10) -- in His sanctified ones, in us! She will have *no* spot, blemish or wrinkle. A *spot* appears to speak of something added beyond what is given us in the Word. Man has done this in almost every aspect of the Church. Much of what is today called "church" or "church function" has no scriptural authority! A *blemish* appears to speak of something missing, something out of order. How much of what the Lord has asked us to do in relation to His Church is left undone! *Wrinkle* speaks of age, of infirmity, of slowing down. The Assembly, when with Christ, will be in full vigor, ready, willing and able to reign with Him and carry on her responsibilities, whatever they may be, forever.

In 5:28-29 we see that Christ loves the Church as Himself, for we are the *body* of Christ, so He *nourishes* and *cherishes* her. He supplies all her spiritual needs. Anything we find lacking is our fault, not the fault of our loving Lord. He holds us dear; He keeps and cultivates us with care and affection. Do we bask in that love and care? These things are written, not just to increase our head knowledge, *but to reach our hearts, our affections, that we might respond in kind to Him.* Verse 30 explains His care and love, "For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones."

The marriage union (5:31-33) speaks of Christ and His Church, as seen in Adam and Eve (Gen.1-2), Isaac and Rebekah (Gen.24), Joseph and Asenath (Gen.41), etc. For example, God formed Eve and then presented her to Adam. She was perfectly according to God's own thoughts, but also perfectly suited to Adam, adapted to his nature and condition. She was his fullness, his helper, his complement. Christ loves the Church: there is no failure on His side. But the wife is to respect her husband. At that future time there will be no failure on our part either, but today ... how we need to hang our heads at how careless and indifferent we can be to the One we already are engaged to (2 Cor.11:2). May this study in Ephesians encourage us and turn our affections towards our glorious Lord and Head -- this One who has done so much for us in the forming and administration of the Assembly.

RPD

**Suggested Reading**

A number of commentaries are available on Ephesians through Believers Bookshelf, from easy reading to much more technical and in depth. Ask the Bookshelf staff for suggestions. You will never have peace in your heart as to a scriptural balance between evangelism, doctrine and Assembly walk until you have a clear understanding of the doctrine of election. Perhaps no other doctrine generates more "heat" and less searching of the Scriptures than this doctrine. This is the time to lay aside personal feelings and just rely on the previously-mentioned fact that "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right" (Gen.18:25). I recommend the small pamphlet, *The Sovereignty of God in Salvation* by F.W. Grant and the paperback booklet, *The Gospel and a Path of Separation: A Study of Election* by R.P. Daniel, both available through Believers Bookshelf USA and Canada.

### IN CHRIST JESUS

Ephesians uses the expression "in Christ Jesus" numerous times. Bob Costen gives us an explanation of this interesting term.

"In Christ Jesus" means that everything is established in the anointed, risen, exalted, glorified Man, the Man Christ Jesus. Outside of Peter using this expression once in 1 Peter 5:19, Paul uses the term exclusively. It does not mean "in Christ," although both are wonderfully true; nor does it mean "in Jesus Christ," as meaningful as this is. "In Christ" has a wider scope than the expression "Christ Jesus" because it embraces *all* who have expressed faith in Him, regardless of the dispensation in which they live. "In Christ Jesus" is limited to our Church dispensation.

Just before the Lord Jesus Christ went to the cross, He said, "For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in Me. And He was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning Me have an end" (Luke 22:37, KJV). However, the *Lord* didn't end but was raised up from among the dead by "the glory of the Father," and He now lives in the power of an endless life, heading up a *new* order, a *new* creation.

The term "Christ Jesus" was first used by the Apostle Paul when writing to those at Thessalonica, linking the churches in Judea, *as in Christ Jesus* (1 Thes.2:14). In Chapter 5:16-18, he connects "in Christ Jesus" with the will of God. In Galatians 3:28, "in Christ Jesus" shows that all national, social and natural distinctions are done away, "for ye are all *one* in Christ Jesus." "But *now* in Christ Jesus..." (Eph. 2:13) tells us that God does not leave us in the realm of the flesh.

"In Christ Jesus" in Romans 8 contrasts our position from being in Adam with the features that characterize those who have been brought into this glorious new position -- a new standing before God, no condemnation, no separation from the love of God, etc. Also, "in Christ Jesus" links every Christian to Himself at God's right hand, *which is a unique portion of the saints of this Assembly period*. In 1 and especially 2 Timothy, "in Christ Jesus" comes to the forefront when there is defection even among believers (2 Tim.1:15). In spite of this, Paul tells Timothy to "Be strong in the grace that is *in Christ Jesus*" (2 Tim.2:1).

### Editor's Notes

- We already are getting returns from changed addresses. If you move please let us know. Mail to Roger P. Daniel, 22240 Morley Ave. Dearborn MI 48124
- The Assembly Messenger is now on the World Wide Web (the Internet) thanks to Joe Alberts of Grand Rapids, Michigan. If you want to search for it there, the address is <http://www.iserv.net/~jalberts/assm-msg/assm-msg.htm>
- We pray you will encourage and help young people to study the truths of the Assembly using the Assembly Messenger, and make copies for them to keep for future reference.

### **NOTES**