

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truth of the Church to a New Generation of Believers
Volume 01-49

Dear Younger Reader

There are still a few more terms which God uses to define His Church, which we want to review before going on to other questions. So we pick up from where we left off in last month's issue of the Messenger.

The Wife of Christ

Scripture uses both the expressions *bride* and *wife* when speaking of Christ and His Church. As with all other words of Scripture, this is not by chance. When the thought is freshness of first love, affection and display, the term *bride* is used. When the thought is relationship of dignity and of administration, the word *wife* is used. The Church is going to help administer the Kingdom (the Millennial reign of Christ). We will live and reign with Christ 1000 years (Rev.20:4). So when the administration is about to begin, the Apostle John is shown "*the bride* [because she will be displayed in love to the universe], the Lamb's *wife* [because she is about to reign with Him]" (Rev.21:9). Finally, when the millennial reign of Christ comes to an end and the eternal state begins, with a new heavens and a new earth, we see the Church as "a *bride* adorned for her Husband" (Rev.21:2). Reigning time is then over and a thousand years has not dimmed our blessed Lord's affection for us. "So shall we *ever* be with the Lord" (1 Thes.4:17). "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev.22:20).

The City

It is not so commonly known that the Church is viewed as a city, but that picture is needed at the time of Revelation 21 to wrap up the Church as the bride and wife of our Lord. We have in Revelation 21:9-10 an angel telling John, "Come and I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he ... showed me *the great city, the holy Jerusalem*, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God." The rest of chapter 21, through 22:5, describe that city which is a picture of *the Church in administrative rule*. Why the picture-example of a city? Two reasons. First, the false church of Revelation 17 is pictured as an *evil* city, Babylon the Great. Here in chapter 21 we have the true Church also as a city, but as a *holy* city. Second, a city (at least in theory) has everything that meets man's need. Just look at all the available resources in the Yellow Pages of any large city. In this millennial city, the Church is supplied with every need to administer, to reign with Christ, according to His will and to meet the need of the healing of the nations.

Much of the book of Revelation works in circles. It carries one forward in time and then goes back in time to pick up a new emphasis. But chapters 17, 18, 19, 20, up to 21:8 go in one smooth flow of action, carry us from some time in the last half of the "Tribulation" on through the Millennium, past the Great White Throne judgment, to the eternal state with the new heavens and new earth (See my little booklet *An Outline of Prophecy*, Believers Bookshelf). Then in chapter 21:9 the account goes back to the beginning of the Millennium and to the picture we have just studied in the preceding paragraph. But in 21:2, *in the eternal state*, the bride, the Church, is still pictured as a holy city, now called *New Jerusalem* (see v.5), coming down from heaven. This is the Church — ourselves — which will be in a love-relationship with our Lord forever as we continue to lovingly serve Him. Every need for every believer — all those Old Testament believers and all those saved during the Tribulation and Millennium — will be met through that city, the Church, the eternal Bride of Christ.

The House of God

Every picture-example that God has for the Church has a reason that requires our understanding and response. The Church is pictured as God's house; therefore, God insists on us maintaining the *order* which is according to His holiness, *the rules of His house!* Would you expect otherwise? Paul wrote that "you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the *house of God* which is the Church of the Living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim.3:15). Ancient pillars were like our billboards: messages were displayed on them for all to see. The Church is to *uphold* and *display* God's order and holiness, so *His* rules alone apply, regardless of how undemocratic or unkind or intolerant some may feel His rules are and thus want to ignore or change them. The *ground* gives support: the truth of

the house of God is the *basis* for our gathering together, and the Church is to secure and maintain that truth. See also Hebrews 10:21. Judgment begins at the house of God (1 Pet.4:17). God *must* have practical holiness in His house. This has been sadly neglected in the professing Church. Today, in one place or another, virtually every false doctrine and moral sin is tolerated, but that is no excuse for you and me to act in this neglectful, sinful way in relation to God's house, the Church, in our local assembly gatherings.

In one aspect, the house of God is seen as under construction. Each one of us, "as living stones, are *being built* up a spiritual house ..." (1 Pet.2:5). When the last stone is in place the Church will be complete and the Lord will come for her. What a day that will be!

The Temple of God

The Church is also spoken of as the temple of God. Paul told the Corinthians that they, *collectively*, "are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you" (1 Cor.3:16). In 6:19 we are also told that the Spirit dwells in each of our physical bodies, which likewise, *individually*, are the temple of God. But in 3:16 everything is plural. Here the emphasis is the wonderful fact of God dwelling in His Church by the Holy Spirit, and His Church is not to be defiled by disobedience. "If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will *destroy* him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you [pl.] are" (3:17). The thought in the Greek of *destroy* is to "reduce to inactivity; make of no further use" (Vine), not annihilation.

Like the house, we see a growth factor in one aspect of the temple. In the following verses we see both aspects — built and building. We are "fellow citizens of the saints and of the household of God, being *built* on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom all the building, fitted together, *increases* to a holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also *are built* together for a habitation of God in the Spirit" (Eph.2:19-22 JND).

One Flock

In John 10 the Lord spoke about the Jewish sheep and His shepherd-care and love. In verse 16 He continued, "And other sheep I have which are not of this [Jewish] fold; them also I must bring and they will hear My voice; *and there will be one flock and one shepherd.*" Note that the "one fold" of the KJV is in error: it is properly "one flock" (JND, NKJV, NASB), speaking of the Church which hadn't at that time been formed. The Lord has reached out to Gentiles, and Jew and Gentiles now are one flock with one Shepherd, Christ Himself. Although man has made a mess out of that one flock in outward testimony by dividing it up into literally thousands of segments, it is still *one* flock in God's eyes, just as it is *one* body, which *He* (not us) maintains.

One New Man

A similar thought to the above is found in Ephesians 2:14-16. "For He Himself is our peace, who has made both [Jew and Gentile] *one*, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that to create in Himself *one new man* from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God *in one body* through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity." The Church is a new living organism, created in Christ. Believing Jews and Gentiles now are *one* in God's sight. It is a *new* creation, never having existed before. It is a *man* because it is living, a living one-body of a living Head.

The Pearl of Great Price

"The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Mt.13:45). The Merchant is Christ. The pearl of great price is the Church whom Christ loves (Eph.5:25). He bought it by giving all He had, by His suffering and death on Calvary's cross. How those few lines in Matthew should touch our hearts and make us want to respond to Him in relation to His Church in our practical, daily, weekly "assembly lives." Think of how a pearl illustrates the Church. It can't be divided, is the result of suffering, is gradually built up layer by layer by an unseen process, lives in the sea (which pictures the

unsaved masses around us — Rev.17:15), and is ultimately displayed by its Owner for all to see in its beauty (Eph.2:7; Col.3:4; 2 Thes.1:10).

So you see there are more picture-examples of the Church than were asked about. What a wonderful Assembly we belong to! We trust this helps put together some confusing portions and will make your personal study easier.

QUESTION 32: THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS versus THE CLERGY SYSTEM

In Exodus 19:6, *if Israel kept certain conditions*, the Lord said Israel would “be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” The people boasted, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” So the Law of Moses with its hundreds of ordinances was given, and the people within days worshiped the golden calf (Ex.32), breaking the very first and foundational commandment of having no other gods (Ex.20:3). Thus they never became a kingdom of priests. Several thousand years later, Judaism having been set aside and Christianity introduced, the Apostle Peter wrote by inspiration, “You also as living stones are being built up a spiritual house, *a holy priesthood*, to offer up spiritual sacrifices You are a chosen generation, *a royal priesthood*, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet.2:5,9). *No conditions imposed here!* Every Christian *is* a priest both to worship and serve! There is no laity, no unspiritual common people in Christianity, although we may often act like a laity. In fact, the vast majority of Christians have willingly but wrongly taken the place of being spiritually inferior to a willing clergy-class who are hired or placed over the people to be their spiritual superiors. It is wrong, wrong, wrong!

We don’t realize how hateful this clergy-class is to God. Two verses in Revelation 2:6, 15 speak of the Lord hating the deeds and doctrine of the Nicolaitans. People have searched history to find this supposedly-obscure sect, but with no real success. The fact is, the word *nicolaitane* is composed of two untranslated Greek words meaning “victorious over the people” (Strong’s). So if the translators had realized this word wasn’t a proper name, verse 6 would have been translated something like, “You hate the deeds of those who conquer the common people, which I also hate.” *Laitan* is where we get our word *laity*, the spiritually-inferior common Christian. Now there are many gifted and dedicated men mixed up in the clergy-system as so-called “pastors” and “reverends,” men of God, truly called and gifted by God to evangelize and teach. They *should* be in the ministry. God does not hate *them*. But they are working through two sinful systems — clerisy and denominationalism (which divides up the true Church, substituting other names than Christ’s as gathering-centers). And He hates the *doctrine* that allows this clergy system to operate supreme, and He hates the *system* itself.

To be found fully pleasing to the Lord the men truly called by God to preach should leave the wrong systems and simply go forth by faith to preach the Word as the Holy Spirit leads, in fellowship with those who are gathered on God’s true ground. That’s the step Edward Dennett took as seen in His book, *The Step I Have Taken*, Christian Update Series, Believers Bookshelf. Yes, God will still use such men if they stay in denominationalism as clergymen, for the gifts and the calling of God are *irrevocable*” (Rom.11:29), but there is still the *personal reckoning with God* at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom.14:10; 1 Cor.3:11-15; 2 Cor.5:10) regarding rewards for faithfulness. *We take that Judgment Seat far too carelessly*. On the other hand, those not divinely called and gifted, who have other motives for being “in the ministry,” would do far better for all concerned to find other employment. We will discuss Christian ministry next.

QUESTION 8: GOD’S PROVISION FOR THE CHURCH (AND LOCAL ASSEMBLIES) TO FUNCTION

This is a question that could be answered in a few sentences, but we believe the subject is so important that a longer answer will be helpful. Here goes; first with the simple answer. The Church can operate spiritually because the Lord as Head provides spiritual gifts (Eph.4:7-8, 11-16) and the Holy Spirit operates those gifts (1 Cor.12:11). It is how we get ministers and Christian ministry according to the Bible. People don’t become preachers by graduating from divinity school and being ordained! We *all* are servants (Rev.1:1, etc.) to do the Lord’s work as He directs. It is also a mistake to think of only those called of God to preach full time as servants of the Lord. That would tend towards a clergy which we have seen is wrong!

Romans 12 — Spiritual Gifts

God has given *each of us* at least one spiritual gift which varies both in degree and type. After telling us that we are individually members of one another, Romans 12:6-8 goes on to say, “having then gifts differing according to the grace [undeserved favor] that is given to us, let us use them; if *prophecy*, let us prophesy *in proportion to our faith*; or *ministry*, let us use it in our ministering; he who *teaches*, in teaching; he who *exhorts*, in exhortation; he who *gives*, with liberality; he who *leads*, with diligence; he who *shows mercy*, with cheerfulness.”

As the Lord sees fit, He gives all believers one or more *undeserved favors* that we didn't have by natural means. This is the *type* of spiritual gift. There is also a *proportion* given: not all have the same degree of gift. One might be very helpful in small discussion-groups, but inept in large groups or from the platform. Sometimes we speak of teachers' teachers — a few with a most remarkable grasp of almost every aspect of Scripture and who are able to *clearly* teach “the deep things of God” in most circumstances. This is what we mean by *degree* of a gift. Both the type and degree of gift are “according to his own ability” (Mt.25:15). God gives certain natural abilities, sees that such abilities are cultivated, and then gives one or more *spiritual* gifts that complement the natural ability. For example, the Lord probably wouldn't give a teacher's gift to one who couldn't organize his thoughts, or an evangelist's gift to one who had difficulty meeting and speaking to people.

These verses in Romans show that *having* the gift is God's authorization to *use* it but not *abuse* it. We thus are *His*, not man's servants. But we are “not to think of [ourselves] more highly than [we] ought to think, but to think soberly, *as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith*” (Rom.12:3). Preaching is not an ego trip, but the solemn and awesome responsibility of *speaking for God* as led by the *Holy Spirit*. The same should be said of every other gift, small or great.

Let's now look at what things are called *gifts* here in Romans. Prophecy, ministry (service), teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, showing mercy! A New Testament prophet is not one who *fore*-tells the future, but one who *forth*-tells the mind of God at a particular moment for a particular audience. Prophecy *edifies* (builds up, strengthens) the believers, it *exhorts* the saints to increased godliness, and it *comforts* the saints — makes them feel comfortable in the assembly and in the truths of God (1 Cor.14:1,3). *Ministry* has the thought of *service*, not necessarily preaching. There are hundreds of ways we can serve each other, and some are gifted in this ability. Their work may be very much behind the scenes, but nevertheless the work is of God and for God. Such more-hidden spiritual gift is just as important to the Lord as the more public gifts.

Teaching is the *logical, systematic* presentation of truth so we grow in the knowledge of the Lord and His things. The teacher keeps things in order and connects together the doctrines of Scripture so they weave one marvelous tapestry of truth, keeping in proper perspective the three great divisions of Scripture — the Jew, the Gentile (Greek) and the Church of God (1 Cor.10:32). Not everyone who knows even quite a bit of Scripture is a God-gifted teacher, so we need to soberly consider our gift before God if we seek or take a public teaching/preaching place. While Scripture plainly indicates there should not be one-man ministry/preaching (a clergyman who does it all), there equally is not every-man ministry/preaching/teaching.

Exhortation is not bawling someone out as if the person doing the exhorting was a spiritual superior. Rather, a gifted exhorter has the ability to both gently correct and lead on (encourage) to greater heights of appreciation of our Lord and service for Him. *Giving*, although the responsibility of all, appears to be a gift to some whom the Lord enables to have and cheerfully use comparatively large sums of money for Him. A well-known industrialist gives 90% of his multi-million income to the Lord. God raises up spiritual leaders who *lead* (not boss, order or force) the Lord's people in the right direction. *Mercy* has the idea of meeting a need. Some are gifted in the ability to meet the many physical, emotional and spiritual needs of the saints when many others might intentionally or unintentionally turn a blind eye to the hurting saint.

1 Corinthians 12 — Spiritual Manifestations

This chapter's theme is “spiritual gifts” (v.1) or “spiritual *manifestations*” (JND) — that which is produced as a result of the gift. It is a spiritual ability which the Holy Spirit gives to whomsoever He wills. There are “diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit” (v.4). These *charisma* (gifts involving grace) are used as directed by the Holy Spirit. The *Lord* gives direction and controls the service of each believer's spiritual manifestation to fulfill His ultimate purpose (v.5).

To meet the many needs, many “activities” are needed as directed by God (v.6). God is in charge of what we do: He exercises us. So the entire Trinity is involved in the spiritual operations of the members of the Church of God.

The “manifestation of the Spirit is given *to each one* (not to a few select clergymen) for the profit of all” (v.7). The Holy Spirit sovereignly operates in the life of every Christian so the power, the gift, He gives can be used to the profit of those who are touched by the person’s service. The Holy Spirit doesn’t look on the outward qualities of the person, but on the gift or manifestation He gives — an ability that makes each of us a potential powerhouse in serving our Lord. I say *potential* because we may fail to use what He has given us, as a result of carelessness, worldliness, personal sin in our lives.

The Lord willing we will continue with the spiritual manifestations of 1 Corinthians 12 in the next issue. We are aiming to get these issues out monthly so they will better flow as a continuous series for the young people, so please pray for us. Please be sure to read these last few paragraphs over when you get your next issue.

RPD