

Sailing With Paul

Simple Papers for Young Christians

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Chapter 10

The Assembly As the Body of CHRIST

At the time of his conversion on the Damascus turnpike, the germ of a great truth was revealed to Paul, which later became the chiefest in the galaxy of doctrines which it was his mission, as an apostle, to make known "**for the obedience of faith.**" It was involved in the challenge of the Lord of glory, "**Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?**" For the first time it was then declared that CHRIST and His saints of this age of grace are one. To touch the feeblest of them is to touch Him; for they are all members of one body of which He is the glorified HEAD in Heaven.

But this doctrine of the one body is never referred to by any other apostle than Paul. He calls it "**the dispensation of the mystery**" which he had especially been entrusted with. Indeed it was the characteristic truth of his large and varied ministry.

It is this that he is speaking of in Romans 16:25-27: "**Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets (or, by prophetic writings, i.e., his own), according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.**" The nature of this mystery is unfolded in Ephesians 3:1-12. There he writes of the dispensations of the grace of GOD given him toward the Gentiles, and he adds: "**How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by**

the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (verses 3-10).

It is a passage of wondrous scope and blessedness, and I cannot attempt to expound it here, but what I would have the young believer note is that the truth of Jew and Gentile being formed by the SPIRIT into one body, upon being born of GOD, and by that same SPIRIT linked up to CHRIST as HEAD in Heaven, was a truth never before made known. The Old Testament will be searched in vain for it. It is not there, because it was **"hid in God."**

It was the secret purpose of His heart, only to be revealed after the rejection of His Son. It actually became a fact when the HOLY SPIRIT was given on Pentecost. To this Paul refers when he writes: **"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, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit"**

To this one body every believer in the Lord JESUS CHRIST belongs. The gift of the HOLY SPIRIT, who indwells all saved people, makes us one with every other Christian on the face of the earth. This is the only true "Catholic and Apostolic Church." At the beginning there was none other. **"The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved"** (Acts 2:47). There was no thought of any other membership, though until the special revelation given to Paul, it was not seen that this involved membership in the body of CHRIST.

The fact existed prior to the knowledge of it. Now, every saint should have clear light as to it, because it is everywhere declared, or taken for granted, in Paul's epistles.

Ephesians is largely occupied with it; setting forth the purpose of GOD to head up all things in CHRIST, and, preparatory to this, the formation of the one body. Then Colossians gives us the other side, magnifying CHRIST as HEAD, and pressing upon Christians their responsibility to own no other head, but to be in all things subject to Him. I Corinthians takes all this up in a practical way, showing what the outcome should be in our daily walk as members one of another and members of CHRIST.

Now, in what sense is this great truth **"made known for the obedience of faith?"** Manifestly it can only mean that it is a truth each believer is expected to hold in a practical way. And this surely involves the recognition of but one body and one HEAD, which necessarily leaves one outside of all human systems, and apart from all recognition of human heads. "The Church must have a head!" was the Romanist's challenge to Luther, as he began to set forth the claims of the Papacy. "Yes," replied the mighty champion of the reformation, "and that HEAD is CHRIST!"

This is what I would commend to you. When GOD saved you He put you in the body of

CHRIST. You are a member of the Church of GOD, the Church of the First-born, whose names are written in Heaven. **"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers"** (Acts 2:41, 42).

Nothing else is needed for faith to-day. GOD's word remains, and it is for each believer to act upon it, regardless of the ever-increasing apostasy. If only two or three do so, there is fellowship, and CHRIST will be enjoyed as He cannot be when His place as HEAD is forgotten and the truth is ignored that **"there is one body."**

~ end of chapter 10 ~
