

that God has loved us and given His Son for the covering of our sins, and has sent His angels to work in our lives, should transform the way we make decisions in life.

All the males in Israel of old were commanded to appear before the Lord in Jerusalem three times a year (Ex. 23:17; Deut. 16:16). There were many reasons why such would not seem a sensible course of action humanly speaking, but if they trusted God and carried out His commands they would not suffer by showing such obedience and faith. Such is the faith that we must display in our daily living. It was the desire of

Paul that God would grant the believers in Ephesus “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints . . . His power to us-ward who believe . . . which He wrought in Christ, when He raised him from the dead” (Eph. 1:17-20).

Let us pray that God Who raised His Son from the dead will grant us that strength of faith that when our Master appears he will indeed find we have been worthy of our calling.

## “Made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13)

### The atonement and its influence

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#### ***This article seeks to:***

- *show that the saving work of Jesus Christ is based on the fact that, as one bearing our nature, he was our representative, not our substitute*
- *establish that this requires us to identify ourselves with him by belief, baptism and a wholehearted attempt to follow his example, that we might be at one with and in him*
- *expound this idea in Ephesians in relation to the following themes, which represent this great unity:*
  - the body*
  - the temple*
  - the bridegroom and the bride.*

**O**NE OF THE vital issues which separate Christadelphian beliefs from those of Christendom is the atonement, a word which has become a kind of Christadelphian shorthand to indicate God’s work of saving men and women from sin through the Lord Jesus Christ. The atonement is in turn closely linked with another such doctrine, the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The link is to be understood as follows. To Christendom Jesus Christ was a Divine being who descended from heaven and was manifest in human form on the earth, giving up his human life in exchange for freeing mankind from the consequences of sin, then resuming his previous Divine existence in heaven. The Christadelphian understanding of Bible teaching about

the matter is that Jesus Christ was truly of our nature, though (and essential to the success of his work) truly Son of God also by the circumstances of his birth. His work of salvation consisted in being perfectly obedient to the will of God, even to the extent of giving himself up to a cruel death upon the cross, where he was our representative, not our substitute. His resurrection to immortality was the result of the foregoing, and was a vital element of his work of salvation; others too could now be raised from the dead and made immortal.

This brings us to another vital doctrine that separates Christadelphians from Christendom: baptism. In order for Jesus Christ’s work of salvation to be effective for a person, that person must first believe and then identify him- or her-

self with Jesus Christ by immersion in water, the burial in water signifying the death of Christ, the coming out of the water the resurrection of Christ. All this is made clear for us in Romans 6:3,4 and expressed more concisely in an epistle which has close similarities to Ephesians, namely Colossians: “. . . having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, Who raised him from the dead” (Col. 2:12, RV)).

Here we reach the heart of our subject. Identification with Christ by baptism has its consequences for the subsequent life of the believer. This is the main theme of Romans 6, walking in newness of life, serving God and Christ and not Sin. The theme is also continued in Colossians, where, after some intervening verses, we read: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (3:1,2). There follow in Colossians 3 details of the earthly things which are to be avoided and the heavenly things which are to be cultivated.

### The theme in Ephesians

The idea of baptism being symbolic of identification with Christ’s death and resurrection is not so explicitly stated in Ephesians as it is in Romans and Colossians, but it is there. In Ephesians 2, Paul, after speaking of God’s great love and mercy (His work of salvation in Jesus Christ), goes on to say: “. . . even when we were dead through our trespasses, quickened us together in Christ, (by grace have ye been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus” (vv. 5,6, RV and mg.). This is surely speaking of what happened to us at baptism, when we passed from association with sin and death to association with Christ and life.

Likewise in chapter 4 the apostle urges believers to “put off concerning the former conversation [way of life] the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and . . . put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (vv. 22-24). He is speaking of the continuation of the process which began at baptism; it is an ongoing process, never completely accomplished due to the weakness of the flesh.

In the passage quoted from Ephesians 2 above we have the phrase, “in Christ” (according to the

AV margin translation). There are many occurrences of this or like phrases, “in Jesus” or “in him”, in Ephesians, about thirty in all. Sometimes it is the RV which brings them out, as in our title, which reads in the RV: “made nigh *in* the blood of Christ”. The phrase “by Christ” is consistent with Christendom’s view of Christ and his work; the phrase “in Christ” fits much better with our understanding of the matter, whereby we are “in Christ” by our identification by belief and baptism with the one who was our representative, who went before us.

One of the characteristics of New Testament teaching that strongly supports our theme so far is the number of different metaphors which speak of Christ and the saints as a unity. These could only be applicable if he was truly of our nature, suffering upon the cross as our representative, the forerunner who leads his followers to eternal life and eternal fellowship with the Father. Three such metaphors are used in Ephesians, and we will look at them in turn:

- Christ as the head and the saints as the rest of the body
- Christ and the saints as a temple for God’s glory, with Christ as the chief corner stone
- Christ as the bridegroom and the saints as the bride, who become “one flesh” (5:31) in the spiritual marriage to come, according to the pattern laid down in Genesis 2:24.

We shall look at these in turn, for the logical implication of each one is that believers should be separate from the world and separate to Christ.

### The body

The idea of Christ as the head and the ecclesia as the body occurs first in Ephesians at the end of chapter 1. The emphasis here is on the exalted position of Christ now: “He [God] put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of Him That filleth all in all” (1:22,23, RV).

The theme is developed in relation to the ecclesia in chapter 4, where verses 1-16 are based on the idea of the ecclesia being the body of Christ. The chapter begins with a call to appropriate behaviour: “I . . . beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called”; and this soon leads to an appeal for unity: “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (v. 3). The apostle then presents seven doctrines which make up this unity, the first of which is “one body”.

Paul goes on to make it clear that this one body is attached to Christ as the head. The work of the Spirit-gifted elders was “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect [fullgrown, RV] man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (vv. 12,13). But in this picture of the ecclesia as a mature man Christ is the head, and so Paul goes on to say that God’s purpose in Christ is that, “speaking truth in love, [the ecclesia] may grow up in all things into him, which is the head, even Christ; from whom all the body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love” (vv. 15,16, RV). The ecclesia is, then, as inextricably linked to Christ as is the body to the head; it cannot exist independently. And all this is based on Christ’s work of salvation and each member of the body’s identification with that work by belief and baptism.

The apostle then goes on to give some powerful teaching about the need for saints to be separate from the world in their behaviour, which he begins with a clear reference back to what he has just said about the head and the body: “This I say *therefore*, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk [repeating the ‘walk’ figure from verse 1] not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind” (v. 17). It is in this context that the words occur which are quoted above about the need continually to put off the old man of the flesh and put on the new man of the spirit, a daily attempt to apply the principles first acknowledged at baptism.

It is not for this article to give detailed attention to the teaching of these verses. We note that there are both negative and positive things to attend to, things to avoid and seek to eradicate from our lives, things to cultivate and develop. There must be an application of these principles to our daily lives, which we are left to do for ourselves, although there are some very specific instructions in places (vv. 25-29).

All the while, however, there is the link back to Christ, who applied these principles perfectly in his life. Having spoken of the wicked ways of the Gentiles, Paul says: “But ye have not so learned Christ”. Instead, Jesus Christ is the perfect example of the Truth in action (vv. 20,21). The chapter concludes with the appeal for be-

lievers to forgive each other, “even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you”. The words “Be ye therefore . . .” at the beginning of the next chapter show that the same principles are being taught: “walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us” (v. 2).

The idea of the body occurs also in Ephesians 2. Here the theme is that of Jew and Gentile brought together through Christ’s work of salvation, in which he removed the curse of the Law and made “in himself [note the expression again] of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross” (vv. 15,16). The Jews as a nation were separated to God, Gentiles were “by nature the children of wrath” (v. 3) in their sins; but when Gentiles believed and obeyed the Truth they became separated to God also.

### The temple

The figure of the temple occurs in Ephesians 2, the chapter from which our title comes. One of the themes of the chapter is how, in Christ, Gentiles, previously with no part in the covenants of promise given to the Jews, become heirs to those promises, “no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God”. It is then that the figure of the temple comes in: “. . . and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (vv. 19-22).

Again we have a unity, “an holy temple”, but with Jesus Christ in the supreme position that he rightfully deserves, “the chief corner stone”. We recall that it was only after being rejected by the builders that Jesus became “the chief corner stone”, an idea occurring in Psalm 118:22, which is picked up by Jesus and applied to his rejection by the Jewish leaders, who caused him to be crucified (Lk. 20:17). Only through his death and resurrection did Jesus become the foundation of this spiritual temple.

Believers are thus separated from the world to become joined to other believers, that they might grow together into a holy temple. Besides Jesus Christ, the foundation of the temple is the apostles and prophets (probably the New Testament ones), who together witnessed to Christ, and wrote the New Testament, which brings others to Christ.

At the very end of Ephesians 2 we have the words, “builted together for an habitation of God through the Spirit”. Is this referring to the Spirit at work in God’s Word? The RV rendering is “in the Spirit”, and a comparison with Isaiah 57, which is quoted in Ephesians 2:17, suggests a different interpretation. In Isaiah 57:15 we read that God, “the high and lofty One That inhabiteth eternity”, Who “dwell[s] in the high and holy place” (note the connection with Ephesians 2:6), so dwells “with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit”. This surely is the spirit referred to in Ephesians 2:22. The Lord Jesus was, of course, of a humble spirit, though he had no sins to be contrite of, and it was in such a spirit that he subjected himself to his Father’s will, and to the worst that men could do to him. It is such a spirit that his followers must show if they are to be prepared for a place in that spiritual temple to come, a spirit very different from that of the world.

#### **The bridegroom and the bride**

This theme is to be found in Ephesians 5:22-33 in a section concerning husbands and wives. The basis for right relationships in this area is the fact that marriage is a type of the relationship between Christ and the ecclesia. And the relationship between Christ and the ecclesia is in turn based upon Christ’s great work of salvation: “For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the saviour of the body . . . Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it” (vv. 23,25, RV).

The theme of separation comes across strongly in this passage, as one would expect, for a bride is separated from all other women to enjoy a special relationship with her husband. In the case of Christ and the saints, the marriage does not take place till the Kingdom, at the time when Christ has returned to the earth, raised the dead and separated those to be given immortality from those condemned to eternal death.

The present is the time when individuals, by belief and baptism, indicate that they wish to be part of the bride, to enjoy that wonderful relationship with Christ in the age to come. But there is a consequence; the saints who make up the bride now have to be prepared for their exalted role in the future: “Christ . . . gave himself for [the church]; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word” (vv. 25,26). So now each saint is being cleansed from the ways of the flesh and made holy by the application of the principles of the Word to daily life. The aim is that the ecclesia, the bride, becomes “a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (v. 27).

It is, of course, in the area of marriage that the difference between the behaviour of the world and the Divine standards is increasingly seen. The need for believers to be separate from the behaviour of the world is clear, and flows from the principles above. To develop this theme would be to trespass on the ground of others, but the teaching in this passage of Scripture shows how we can, indeed must, prepare for the Kingdom in the everyday relationships of life.

#### **Points for thought and discussion**

- Consider the frequency of phrases such as ‘in Jesus’ in Ephesians and the extent to which they refer to the relationship between Jesus Christ and the believer which comes about at baptism.
- What were the implications for Gentiles, growing up in a corrupt pagan world, of being part of the body of Christ, as expounded in Ephesians 4?
- What other figures of the unity of Christ and believers are used in the New Testament, and do they carry the same implications as those in Ephesians?

Comments on this Special Issue are welcome, and may be sent to either of the two editors responsible for producing it:

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