

# The Significance of the Ground of Oneness

*The centrality of Christ*

**T**he oneness between believers and the practice of the church are both dependent on the centrality of Christ. Christ is the center. Indeed, Christ Himself is the reality of the Christian life and the church life. When Christ is my center, I am free from my self. I am free from anxiety. I am free from self-consciousness. I am free from self-condemnation. I am totally free because I died and my life is now hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3-4). And “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). Hallelujah!

Christ is our joy. Christ is our encouragement. Christ is our faith. Christ is our living. We interact with Him in everything in our lives. We only interact with Christ. Our interaction is not with ourselves — with self-reflection and self-condemnation. Christ is our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30). He is “all and in all” to us (Col. 3:11). Jesus Christ is the Christian life. We need to look away to Him. Look away from yourself. Look away from your failure. Look away from your bad mood. Look away unto Jesus. Hallelujah! Christ is the centrality of everything in our Christian life. He *is* the Christian life itself in every aspect.

*The church is Christ in His oneness with the Father*

Not only is Christ the Christian life, but He is also the reality of the church life. Christ is the centrality of the church (1 Cor. 12:12). Apart from Him there is no church. We must understand that the practice of the church issues from the centrality of Christ. Christ is our

relationship with one another (Col. 3:11). Because He is in all of us, we are all related to each other in Him. We do not need to “join” the church. We do not sign up to become members of the church. The church comes into our spirit when we receive Christ. The church is in all of us because the church is Christ. We recognize Christ! When we recognize Christ, we recognize the church! Wherever Christ is, there is the church! The reality of the church is a Person. It is not a doctrine. It is not a way. It is not a man. It is Christ Himself. So wherever Christ is, there is the church. The best we can do is simply see it, acknowledge it, receive one another, and say “Amen.”

We receive one another because we have all been received by God (Rom. 14:3). We have been redeemed by the same blood. We have the same one Father (Eph. 4:6). There is only one “Abba,” one Father, and He is in all of us (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). So what do we do? We say, “We are in the same family!” Hallelujah! This is the church. It is so simple.

There is something already existing between us. God put it into us. It is called the oneness of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3). We all keep this oneness of the Spirit because the Spirit dwells in us. We learn to recognize the Spirit in each other. We recognize the oneness of the Spirit between us. This oneness is so precious because it embodies the oneness of the Father and the Son. We have been admitted into Their oneness! The oneness of the Spirit is the oneness of the Triune God. The oneness between the Father and the Son now resides in the Spirit. There is no other oneness like this oneness. There is no other oneness in the whole universe but the oneness between the Father and the Son.

## IN THIS ISSUE:

- The Significance of the Ground of Oneness – Pages 1-3, 6-8
- The Kingdom of God – Pages 4-5

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This oneness is a flow of oneness and love circulating between the Father and the Son, and communicated to us through the Spirit. Hallelujah! Now the Spirit is in us. Look at what is in us! Look at the oneness! Our oneness is Their oneness. Their oneness has become our oneness. When we fellowship with one another, we recognize Christ, we recognize the Spirit, we recognize the Father. The Father is in us, Christ is in us, the Spirit is in us. Their oneness is in us! How precious is our oneness! Our oneness is the oneness of the Triune God. We do not create oneness. We do not negotiate to be one. We do not try to be one. We do not figure out how to be one. Brothers and sisters, we *receive* oneness. Oneness is a gift given to us. Oneness is the gift of life — eternal life (John 17:3, 21, 23). This eternal life consists of knowing the Father and the Son. To know the Father and the Son is to know Them in Their oneness. All believers have received this gift (Acts 11:16-18). All believers can enjoy this oneness.

The oneness of believers is in the realm of the Triune God. It is not like the unity of a social club. It is not like the unity of a political party. It is not like the religious unity practiced in a traditional way. John 17:23 reveals that our oneness is God Himself between us. The first part of the verse says, “I in them, and You in Me.” This refers to the Lord’s indwelling of us, the believers. But it is the Lord’s indwelling in a triune way. It is His indwelling *with* His relationship with the Father. The next phrase says, “that they may be [perfected into] one.” The word “perfected” is in the perfect tense in Greek. The perfect tense is a combination of the past, present, and future. It signifies that something happened in the past, continues to be a present reality, and will continue to be a future state. The Wuest translation of John 17:23 brings out the perfect tense: “I in them and You in Me, in order that they, having been brought to the state of completeness with respect to oneness, may persist in that state of completeness, to the end that the world might be understanding . . .” The word “perfected” means to be brought into a state of completeness, or perfection, and then to persist in that state.

Now we need to ask, what is this state of perfection? It is simply this: “I in them, and You in Me.” It is the Lord’s indwelling with His relationship with the Father that has become *our* state of perfection. Brothers and sisters, when the Lord is in us, the Father is in us, and we are in a state of perfection. This perfection is not something we work up or work out. It is the Triune God in His oneness dwelling within us and between us. Their oneness is our perfection. We are handling the oneness of the Triune God. To fellowship with a brother or sister is to touch the oneness of the Father and the Son within that person.

Consider who lives in the saints. In John 17:23 the Lord says, “I in them and You in Me, in order that they, having been brought to the state of [perfection] with respect to oneness, may persist in that state of [perfection].” This verse shows us that the state of perfection already exists. Ephesians 4:3 also reveals this existing state of perfection. When Paul exhorts the believers to “keep the oneness of the Spirit” in this verse, he is admitting that the oneness already exists. We cannot “keep” what we do not have. So “the state of perfection” in John 17:23 is the “oneness of the Spirit” in Ephesians 4:3. Thus, we are now in a state of perfection. How do we know that? Because the Father lives in us, the Son lives in us, and the Spirit lives in us. We have Them, in Their oneness, between us.

The way we keep this already-existing oneness is by remaining in peace. That is, the uniting bond of peace becomes the barometer of our oneness-keeping. For example, I may say something to you that seems so right to me, but it disturbs the peace between us. It creates a wall between us. Or I may say something to correct you, but the peace, like a dove, flies away. We have to take care of the peace. Rather than living according to our rightness, we learn to live according to the peace in our hearts.

Colossians 3:15 says, “Let the peace of [Christ arbitrate] in your hearts.” The Greek word for “arbitrate” is related to the umpire’s function in the ancient Greek games. The umpire was the one who made the decisions in those games. As believers we have an inner umpire, an inner decision-maker — the peace of Christ. We need to take care of the peace. If I frown at you, if I am mad at you, if I ignore you, or if I do not care for you, I offend the peace in my heart. When I offend the peace in my heart, I affect the oneness of the Triune God between us. So we have to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Always care for the peace. Wherever the peace is, that is the realm of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not about who is right and who is wrong. The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17).

Oh, what a oneness we have! We are handling this oneness. In this oneness Christ is everything. He is the centrality. He comes into us. He unites us to Himself. We are His very Body, organically joined to Him as the Head. We are members of the Second in the Godhead. Of course, this does not mean that we are deity, but it means that we are members of Christ by virtue of His life living in us and filling us (Eph. 1:23). As His members, we have the oneness that He, our Head, has with the Father. Their oneness becomes our oneness, and our oneness is an extension of Their oneness.

The church on this earth is an extension and continuation of the Father and the Son's relationship flowing in the Spirit. The Lord reveals this in John 17:21: "that they also may be *in Us*" (ASV). We have been brought into the Father and the Son. Their oneness has become our oneness. This is what makes the church the church. This is why the church is Christ — the church is simply the expression of all that He is. Christ, who is the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead (Col. 2:9), is *also* the Head of the Body, the church (Col. 1:18). As the Head He flows all the fullness of the Godhead into His Body. This is why it is not a matter of joining the church, but rather of seeing and recognizing the church. When we see the church in this way, we have genuine fellowship with one another.

### *The centrality of Christ and the ground of oneness*

Now we must see how the centrality of Christ relates to the ground of oneness. The ground of oneness is a precious revelation. It is the practical means for a common expression of all the saints in the localities where they live. We live on this earth in various cities, and we recognize the Christ who is in all the saints where we live. Out of this mutual recognition of Christ, the church meets as one according to cities.

The ground of oneness is not a doctrine, a person, an organizational practice, or a deeper-life experience; nor is it a certain denomination. The ground of the church for believers to form one local church is a city. This truth about the local church is simple and corresponds to the conscience of all Christians. We do not want to be denominational; we simply want to be a Christian meeting with other Christians.

As believers we all have Christ. So we can all enjoy the peace of Christ between us, even with our different backgrounds and different understandings of the Bible. Though we do not agree about everything, we still recognize and appreciate Christ within one another. We take care of Christ. In the church as the new man, there is no more Greek, no more Jew, no more barbarian, no more Scythian, but Christ is "all and in all" (Col. 3:10-11). This means Christ is central in our relationships. The factor in receiving all the saints is that Christ is all and in all. This is very simple and without complications. Christ is all. He is the sum total of all our "spiritual math." There is nothing hard to understand. There is only one answer — Christ is all and in all! Praise the Lord! This is the reality of the Body. This is the reality of our oneness. So we must stand together on the common ground of Christ Himself.

In the early days of the church there were saints

living throughout the known world. There were saints in Jerusalem, in Antioch, in Ephesus, in Galatia, and so forth. James and Peter even addressed some saints who were sojourners in the Dispersion. They had been scattered to many places. When you read the New Testament, you observe that saints lived in all these various cities and regions.

Christ was in each one of these saints. There was no division in the way they met. The saints were grouped according to geography. They were simply identified according to where they lived. For example, in 2 Corinthians 6:11 Paul says, "O Corinthians!" He does not call them Baptists. He does not call them Presbyterians. He does not call them Charismatics. He just says, "O Corinthians." This is the way he identified the church there in Corinth. According to this thought, if you live in a particular city, you simply express Christ there. To say "the church in Corinth" is equivalent to saying "Christ in Corinth."

When the church was having a problem with division, the way Paul dealt with it was by saying, "Is Christ divided?" (1 Cor. 1:13). He did not say, "Is the church divided?" He said, "Is Christ divided?" To be the church is equivalent to being the members of Christ. We are not the members of a certain denomination. We are not the members of an association. We are not the members of a man-made organization. We are members and parts of Christ. This is the reality of the church. This is why the Bible stresses the centrality of Christ so much. It is because the church is not something other than Christ. We should not separate the church from Christ. When referring to the church, Paul said, "Is Christ divided?" This reveals that in his understanding the church is an extension of Christ. Thus, identifying the church in the New Testament days was simple. It was identified according to where the saints lived. The practical identification of believers was mainly related to geography. The saints met together, all receiving one another. These are matters related to the ground of the church. We stand as one with all believers where we live, and share our Christ together.

### *The relationship between the church and the kingdom*

In God's administration the churches today are the present reality of the kingdom (Rom. 14:17). This present reality exists for the ushering in of the manifestation of the kingdom over the whole earth. The Lord told us to pray, "Your *kingdom* come. Your will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). Thus, the

*(Continued on Page 6)*

# The Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God is a topic of great interest among believers today. There is a growing anticipation in the hearts of many for the coming kingdom through the return of our Lord Jesus. As a result, much attention is being given to the scriptural passages that relate to the kingdom of God. However, as numerous students of the Bible have found, the kingdom of God is not an easy matter to fully apprehend, even after many hours of study. Indeed, among believers there seems to be considerable confusion about the kingdom, which is largely due to the fact that there are many different aspects of the kingdom presented throughout the Word. It seems that these different aspects are difficult to piece together into one coherent whole. In fact, some of these aspects even seem hard to reconcile. Moreover, it is difficult to discern how the kingdom of God is related to the church. Though it is obvious that there is a close relationship between the two, it is hard to define exactly what that relationship is.

Of course, such a major topic as the kingdom of God could never be adequately treated in this short article. Nevertheless, we can at least cover some of the basic principles of the kingdom and, in so doing, see an overall vision of the kingdom, especially as it relates to the church.

## *When Is the Kingdom?*

To properly see the kingdom of God, we must first understand *when* the kingdom comes. At first glance this may seem obvious — the kingdom comes when Jesus Christ returns to this earth. It is a plain fact of Scripture that the kingdom of God is coming as a future event. The Lord Himself implored us to pray for its coming (Matt. 6:10). And the Bible clearly teaches that the kingdom will arrive at the second coming of Christ (2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Cor. 15:24; 2 Thess. 1:5-10; Rev. 11:15; 12:10). This seems simple enough to grasp. But then things become more complicated. Other verses in the New Testament indicate that the kingdom of God is *already here*. For instance, the apostle John states that Jesus Christ made us a kingdom (Rev. 1:6). The verb “made” is in the aorist tense, which means He made us a kingdom at a point in time in the past. Here the kingdom is not a future matter, but a matter accomplished in the past and thus experienced in the present. Similarly, the apostle Paul declares that God the Father has transferred us into the kingdom of the Son (Col. 1:13). The verb “transferred” is also in the aorist tense,

indicating that God has already accomplished it. In other words, we are already in the kingdom.

How then do we reconcile these two sides of truth as they relate to the kingdom? On the one hand, the kingdom is coming. On the other hand, the kingdom has already come and we are presently in it. How can this be? The answer to this seeming contradiction is actually quite simple. We must remember that the kingdom is inextricably related to its King, Jesus Christ. In fact, the very existence of the kingdom of God is fully dependent on its King. Without the King, there is no kingdom; as the King is, so is the kingdom; as the King goes, so goes the kingdom. So we must ask, how is the King? Is He coming? We would emphatically answer, “Yes, He is coming!” But then we must ask, is He already here? Just as emphatically, we would answer, “Yes, He is already here!” He lives in us and walks among us (Gal. 2:20; 2 Cor. 6:16; Rev. 2:1). Surely, He is present. Thus, we can say that Jesus Christ is coming and is already here. Both are true.

What then is the distinction between His coming and His being here already? The distinction is simply that in this age, Christ is here as the Spirit. He is living in us as the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:19; Rom. 8:9-11; Gal. 4:6). He is now our life (Col. 3:4). And the Bible tells us that He is our life in a *hidden* way. Paul puts it this way: “Your life is *hidden* with Christ in God” (emphasis added) (Col. 3:3). It is not that Christ today is unreal or illusory. He is simply hidden in us. He is not yet manifested for all to behold. Instead, He is here invisibly as the Spirit indwelling us as our hidden life. But when Jesus Christ returns to this earth, He will be hidden and invisible no longer. He will visibly appear in glory and power, and every eye will see Him (2 Thess. 1:7-10; Rev. 19:11-16). Hallelujah! And because He is our life, we too will be manifested in glory and power (Col. 3:4; 2 Thess. 1:10; Phil. 3:20-21; Rom. 8:18-21). Thus, we can say that Christ is presently here in a real, yet hidden, way. He is not at this time manifested in power and glory. But when He comes again, He will be here in reality *and* in full manifestation.

Now, let us return to our basic principle: as the King is, so is the kingdom. In other words, the kingdom mirrors the King. The kingdom is coming. Why? Because Jesus Christ is coming. The kingdom is here already. Why? Because Jesus Christ is here already. And in what way is the kingdom of God here? It is here in a hidden way. It is not yet fully manifested. It is not yet here in glory and power. But that does not mean that the kingdom is not real today. No. The kingdom of God is here as a spiritual reality. However, the day is approaching when the kingdom of God will come in its full manifestation. Jesus Christ will reign over the whole earth in glory and power.

### *What Is the Kingdom?*

Having answered the question, when is the kingdom, we now come to the question, what is the kingdom? The kingdom is the realm in which Jesus Christ exercises His rule and reign. It is where He is the Lord and King. It is where He exercises absolute and unquestioned dominion. Of course, we know that in this universe rebellion toward God is rampant. Satan, an archangel, rebelled against God long ago and influenced myriads of angels to join him in his rebellion (Isa. 14:12-15; Ezek. 28:11-19; Rev. 12:3-4). These angels are referred to as the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies, the world-rulers of this darkness, and the spiritual forces of evil (Eph. 3:10; 6:12). In addition, the Bible speaks about demons, which are also under the rebellious hierarchy of Satan (Matt. 12:24-29). Hence, we can see that in this universe, there is a resistance to the rule of Jesus Christ. There is a fight against the kingdom of God. Indeed, spiritual warfare is raging at this very moment.

How does God intend to deal with this rebellion? Obviously God cannot allow such rebellion to go unchecked and undealt with. He must defeat Satan and all his hosts. But how? God could directly eliminate him in a moment. After all, He is the Almighty God. But the Bible reveals that God, in His majesty, has chosen not to deal with Satan directly. Rather, He has chosen man to be the agent through which He will defeat Satan. In fact, this is one of the great purposes for His creation of man. The Bible states that God created man to exercise His dominion (Gen. 1:26; Psa. 8). Man is the agent that God created to deal directly with Satan — to defeat him and to extinguish his rebellion in this universe.

However, we know what happened soon after man's creation. Satan tempted Eve, and then Adam. Deceived by the serpent, they disobeyed God, and sin entered into the world (Gen. 3:1-13; Rom. 5:12). Hence, instead of defeating Satan and terminating his rebellion, man was defeated by Satan and joined in his rebellion. And ever since, the entire Adamic race has been in rebellion against God (Rom. 3:10-18; 2 Tim. 3:1-9).

Now what is God to do? Apparently, Satan has thwarted God. Man, the very creature that God made to defeat Satan, has been badly marred by Satan and appears to be useless for becoming the representative of God's dominion. But we must remember that God is the all-wise God, and that He is never defeated. Immediately after the fall of man, God spoke to Satan and declared, by means of a promise, that the Seed of the woman would bruise his head and that he would bruise His heel (Gen. 3:15). What is this Seed of the woman? The Seed of the woman refers to a man (a descendant of Adam) who

would one day defeat Satan. This man would bruise Satan's head, and in the process Satan would bruise this man's heel. In other words, Satan's head would be crushed under the foot of this man. But in the act of crushing his head, the man's foot would be bruised.

Now we must ask, who is this man? To whom is God referring? The clear revelation of the Bible tells us that this man is Jesus Christ! One day, thousands of years after God uttered those words to the serpent, Jesus was born in Bethlehem. He was God incarnate, which means that God Himself had become a man. Jesus Christ was fully God. Not only so — He was also fully man. This is most significant, because as a man He began to fulfill God's original purpose for man. We must realize that God did not give up His purpose for man, and His purpose for man still needed to be fulfilled. During all those years, from Adam until Christ, God's purpose for man was "pending," waiting to be fulfilled. Thus, the Son of God became a man to fulfill God's original purpose for man. And as we have seen, included in God's great purpose for man was the defeat of His enemy, Satan. Adam failed God. But Jesus did not. There were many instances where Satan did his best to defeat this man Jesus, just as he had defeated Adam and every one of Adam's descendants. But this man Jesus was different. He met and conquered every temptation, every trial, and every test. Never for a moment did He succumb to Satan. Whenever Satan came to tempt or deceive Him, such as during the forty days of testing in the wilderness or the agony He passed through in the garden of Gethsemane, Satan was defeated again and again.

It must be noted that the Lord Jesus did not defeat Satan as God, but as a man (Matt. 4:4). It was a man that was defeating Satan day by day. It was a man that was bringing in the kingdom of God. The King Himself had arrived! So wherever He went, there was the kingdom of God. Wherever He traveled, the kingdom of God had drawn near. Finally, at the cross Jesus Christ destroyed Satan. The book of Hebrews tells us that He shared in blood and flesh "that through death He might destroy him who has the might of death, that is, the Devil" (Heb. 2:14; cf. John 12:31; Col. 2:15; 1 John 3:8; Rev. 1:18). That destroying of Satan at the cross was the crushing of his head that God had promised in Genesis 3. Yes, the Lord Jesus was "bruised" at the cross. But Satan's head was crushed. Hallelujah! Hence, as a man, as the Seed of the woman, the Lord Jesus thoroughly defeated Satan. He broke the power of Satan's domain, eradicated his rebellion, and brought in the reality of the kingdom of God.\*

— Kirk Eland

\* *To be continued*

(Continued from Page 3)

churches have to do with God's plan for the earth. This is *why* the churches on the earth are so crucial to God. So we can see that now is the time for the recovery of the proper practice of the church life in order that Christ may head up all things into His kingdom.

There is a direct correlation between the church and the Lord's kingdom on the earth. Knowing this helps us put into perspective why the church meets in a geographical way in the New Testament. For example, you read of "the church which was [in] Jerusalem" (Acts 8:1); "at Antioch, in the [local] church that was there" (Acts 13:1, ASV); "the church of God which is [in] Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2); and "the churches of Galatia" (Gal. 1:2). The practical expression of "the mystery of Christ" through the church corresponds to God's will for His kingdom to come "on earth as it is in heaven" (Eph. 3:4-6; Matt. 6:10). This is why "the keys of *the kingdom* of heaven" are mentioned immediately following the Lord's declaration, "I will build *My church*," in Matthew 16:18-19. Thus, we must ask, What kind of church is found in the New Testament? Why is it significant that the churches meet according to cities? (Titus 1:5). To answer these questions we need to see that God's "administration of the mystery" in the form of local churches is directly related to His kingdom on this earth (Eph. 3:9, NASV; Rev. 1:4a, 6a).

#### *God's original purpose for the earth*

To understand the significance of the kingdom, we must know God's original purpose for the earth. This purpose is revealed in Genesis 1:26-28. Verses 26-27 say, <sup>26</sup> "Then God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. <sup>27</sup> So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." Here God defines His image in man as "male and female." This is a picture of Christ and the church making up the one image of God. We must notice that the male and the female compose a singular image. It is God's "*image*," in the singular. Although the image is singular, it consists of male and female (cf. Gen. 5:1-2). This typifies the intimate union between Christ and the church that makes them one (Eph. 5:32).

It is *the oneness* of the male and female that makes up the singular image. The oneness is the reality of the image! This is the expression that God desired for the whole earth. He wanted this image. The picture in Genesis 1 and 2 is a type of what God desired from the

beginning (Rom. 5:14). He wanted Christ and the church as His image to fill the earth and subdue it. This corresponds exactly with what He predestined before the foundation of the world — that we would all be "conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29).

Genesis 1:28 reveals more of God's purpose: "Then God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over . . ." God's original thought for the earth was related to man — a corporate man — subduing the earth. This typifies that Christ and the church would have not only the image but also the dominion. But why did God speak of subduing in Genesis? Because there is an enemy in the universe — a serpent, the devil. Lucifer rebelled in the heavenly realm, becoming the devil (Isa. 14:12-15; Ezek. 28:12-17). So God's original thought and purpose in Genesis 1 was that the earth would be the place where His enemy would be subdued by man.

Understanding the church and how it meets is altogether related to God's original thought of having His image and dominion over the whole earth. His desire was that everything on the earth would be subdued by this man created in His image. By this male and female together expressing Him, He would have dominion. Under this dominion were the creeping things that were upon the earth, including the serpent. Thus, in Genesis you see the type of Christ and the church treading on the enemy and having dominion over the whole earth. This is the picture in the beginning.

This vision and revelation in Genesis never changes or fluctuates. God does not move on to something different but continues in the same purpose. Now let us go to the end of the Bible to look at the final accomplishment of what God purposed in the beginning.

#### *God's final accomplishment on the earth*

Revelation 11:15 tells us what will happen at the end of the tribulation, which is at the close of this age: "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The [kingdom] of this world [has] become the [kingdom] of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" The kingdom of the world is under the usurpation of Satan, who is deceiving the whole earth (Rev. 12:9). One day the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. This will take place when the Lord visibly and personally descends from the heavens with a shout. The trumpet of God will sound, and the kingdom will be manifested on this earth in an

outward, visible way (1 Thess. 4:16-17; Rev. 11:15).

What God originally desired in Genesis 1 is fulfilled in Revelation 11 when the earth becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. This means that God's image and dominion are on the earth. Revelation 20:1-3 tells us what takes place at the beginning of the kingdom: <sup>1</sup> "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. <sup>2</sup> He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; <sup>3</sup> and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while." From these verses we see that during the thousand-year, or millennial, kingdom, God's enemy, who has deceived the whole earth, is bound. Hallelujah!

Verse 4 continues, "And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded [because of the testimony of] Jesus and [because of] the word of God, who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years." This is the revelation concerning the destiny of the earth when the Lord comes and reigns for a thousand years in the kingdom. He is going to take over the earth.

In the beginning God said that image and dominion should "fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). But in Genesis 3 the serpent came in to frustrate God's purpose. His goal was to ruin humanity. He created a cosmos, a world, in order to catch man in purposes other than God's and waste his life in vanity, emptiness, and meaninglessness. This was Satan's frustrating work over the whole earth. But at the end of this age we see a totally different picture. Christ is coming to this earth, and His kingdom will be here in power. He will put the enemy in the bottomless pit, and then eventually into the lake of fire for eternity. Thus, we see that God never abandons His great purpose for the earth. He never turns from it. It is here and it is before us. Now in light of this purpose for the earth we must understand the significance of how the church meets.

*How the church meets and  
God's purpose for the earth*

In order to work out His purpose for the earth, God has to have an administration. Yet the majority of mankind had been spoiled by the time of Noah. Indeed,

in his day the earth became so corrupt that God could find only one righteous man and his family (Gen. 6:5-13). So He flooded the earth to start all over again. By saving a remnant — Noah and his family — God is telling us that He has a purpose with man. Someone must live for His purpose. If the whole earth forsakes His purpose, He will find another family and begin again with His purpose in view.

Even after God flooded the earth, the enemy came in again. Mankind was carried away in idolatry. The earth was filled with immorality and division (Gen. 10:25). Yet God needed to find someone for His purpose. So He went down to Ur of the Chaldeans to a man called Abraham. There, as the God of glory, He appeared to Abraham. All the promises that God gave to Abraham could be summed up in this way: "Abraham, come out of your country. I am going to take you to a certain part of the earth. Since I cannot have the whole earth right now, I will take a piece of it. I will take a part. This land is a place that you and your seed are going to possess. There I will put My name. I will set up a little scale model of My image and dominion — what I have wanted from the beginning and what I am going to have in the end. Even though I cannot have it in full at the moment, I am going to have it in miniature form. I will have it in the temple in Jerusalem. I will do it by sending you to Canaan and giving you and your descendants a piece of land. It will be My administration. It will be tangible, visible. The queen of Sheba can come and visit, losing her breath when she sees it all (1 Kings 10:1-5; 2 Chron. 9:1-4). It will not be an invisible temple. It will be *visible!* I will work it out."

But eventually the temple was destroyed. Then the entire Old Testament history revolved around God's people returning to that piece of land and rebuilding the temple. This is because God had to have a place for the soles of His feet on this earth (Ezek. 43:7), and that place was the temple. God just needed a little piece of the earth.

Then the Old Testament history ended, and the economy of God with His Son came in. Christ lived and died for man's fallen situation. Now in resurrection He enters into us and makes us members of His Body. It is through His Body, the church, that He has a way to administrate His purpose, which He planned from the beginning and which will consummate in the kingdom on this earth.

The way God brings in His administration is by gaining cities where a testimony of the kingdom can be displayed through the church. This administration happens according to cities — through the church in Ephesus, the church in Jerusalem, the church in Philadelphia,

*(Continued on Page 8)*

and so forth. Thus, the local churches are the administration of the mystery and a testimony of the kingdom.

*The significance of churches  
being identified with cities*

Why is it meaningful for the church to meet according to cities? What is the significance of the churches being identified by geographical locality? Why does God specify one church in one city? Why is a church identified as simply the church in a locality? At first glance, meeting according to cities may seem like just another way of meeting. Or, you may label it as “the New Testament way” of meeting. But the Bible reveals that the meeting of the church according to these localities is not only *based upon* God’s original purpose for the earth but will also *issue in* the consummation of that purpose.

From the time God declared His purpose in Genesis, to its consummation in Revelation, while the enemy is usurping the earth, God gets a church *in* this city and *in* that city. In this part of the earth and in that part of the earth, the believers are gathered, enjoying Christ. By this enjoyment together they are transformed into His image. What God is obtaining in these localities is image and dominion. These parts of the earth have a testimony to the universe that “the earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness” (Psa. 24:1). Amen! Hallelujah! This is the significance of “the ground of the church.”

The ground of the church is not just one church, one city, as a philosophy of meeting. It is the revelation of God’s heart for this earth. It is the church *in* this city and the church *in* that city that terrifies the enemy. He is not threatened when believers meet as a Baptist church, a Pentecostal church, a Presbyterian church, a Lutheran church, because these ways of meeting do not testify of God’s purpose for the earth.

As born-again believers, you and I are part of the church on this earth. We are here to experience Christ together and see the enemy defeated. This kind of church life is a miniature of the kingdom on the earth right now. With the reality of the kingdom among us, the Lord has a way to one day bring in the full manifestation of the kingdom.

Meeting as the church in a city is not according to my thought or your thought. It is according to the divine revelation, which is that the earth is the Lord’s. When the Lord comes in Revelation to speak to the saints, He unveils Himself for the purpose of ushering in the last events for His coming. Revelation 1:4-6a says, <sup>4</sup> “John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to

come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, <sup>6a</sup> and has made us [a kingdom,] priests to His God and Father.” Notice the phrase in verse 4, “*to the seven churches* which are in Asia.” Then notice the phrase in verse 6, “*and has made us a kingdom.*” Together these phrases clearly reveal the relationship between the churches and the kingdom.

Brothers and sisters, the churches *are* a kingdom. They are testifying that on this present rebellious earth, where the rulers and the principalities are trying to ruin humanity, the Lord has churches, practical churches, meeting according to the cities *on this earth*. To meet according to a city is an awesome thing in God’s government. We are meeting according to revelation. It is not my church, your church, or anyone’s church. We are on the earth as the church for God’s original purpose, which will consummate one day in His kingdom over the whole earth.

It is significant to meet as the church in a city because God’s purpose consummates in a city. In eternity, in the new heaven and new earth, the holy city, New Jerusalem, comes down out of heaven from God (Rev. 21:1-2). This city is composed of all God’s chosen and redeemed people. We will not be invisible spirits. We will have resurrected bodies (2 Cor. 5:1). We will be visible. There will be a display — a glorious expression of God in man — in this city, New Jerusalem, for eternity. God’s purpose of obtaining His image and dominion in man is going to be realized in full on the new earth.\*

— Bill Freeman

\* This article, the third of a series on Romans, is part of chapter 7 of a new book entitled *Our Common Oneness*, by Bill Freeman. The book may be ordered directly from *Ministry Publications*, P.O. Box 12222, Scottsdale, AZ 85267 (602) 948-4050. The cost is \$7.50, postpaid.

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