**The Church which is**

**His Body-**

**It’ Union, it’s Character, it’s Mission, it’s Destiny**

By

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**“GOD HATH SPOKEN"**

**Heb. 1:1**, **2**

**THE REPORT**

*of the*

**World Conference on Christian Fundamentals**

Philadelphia, May 25th to 31st, 1919

*THIS REPORT* contains twenty-five addresses delivered by Teachers recognized as leading Bible Scholars in the United States and Canada.

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**THE TREMENDOUS IMPORTANCE**

of this Conference, the far-reaching influence of its discussions and findings, the great value of its program, the vital nature of its proposals grow out of

**ONE MIGHTY FACT**

namely-that the teachers themselves, the subjects they presented, and the actions of the Conference are in perfect accord with the inerrancy and authority of the Bible and with the most exalted view of "our great God and Savior

Jesus Christ," in whom

**“GOD HATH SPOKEN”**

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THE CHURCH, WHICH IS HIS BODY ITS UNITY, ITS CHARACTER, ITS MISSION, ITS DESTINY

WILLIAM L. PETTINGILL

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"The church which is His body" is a Biblical expression, and it is "the church which is His body" that is to occupy our attention in this study.

There is a church which is the body of Christ, and there is a church which is not His body. Indeed, there are many of these latter, but there is only one church which is His body. It is made up of those, and only those, who are born again.

Churches there are-assemblies, that is, of individuals societies called out and called together for a common purpose, and often bearing the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, which nevertheless are not, and are not even related to, "the church which is His body, the fullness of Him that fills all in al1."

**I. The Unity of the Church which is His Body.**

"There is one body." The church of God always has been, it now is, and it always shall be one and indivisible.

In it there is no schism. In it there is unity. It may, and it does, take a degree of spiritual and priestly energy to sing

"We are not divided, all one body we;

One in hope and doctrine, one in charity,"

but it is the truth, and this truth is finding concrete illustration and heartening confirmation in this present Conference on Christian Fundamentals.

Whether men see it or not, there is one body and only one. The Scripture insists upon this everywhere, in type and symbol as well as by plain precept and teaching. There is in the world today a unique thing, unlike any other thing, and it is the church of God. I feel insulted every time I hear people compare the church with the world's organizations, such as lodges, clubs, societies. There is nothing in common between the church of the living God and these thing. They are organizations, the church is an *organism.* The church of God--in no figurative sense, but in a real and vital sense-is the body of Christ. It is made up of the "members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." Just as truly as that this human body in which I live and move, and through which I manifest myself. in *my* body, so is the church of God the body of the Christ-a living, throbbing, breathing vital organism. There is nothing else like that in the world. In **1 Cor. 12:12**, it is written, "For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are yet one body: so also is Christ." You would expect to read there, "so also is *the church."* He is plainly talking about the church, but He does not name it the church. He speaks of the church under the name of Christ, as you and I often speak of a man's body by the man's name.

And why not? It is not only true that I live in this thing which is my body, but it is also true that this body is myself, and it may therefore be referred to by my name. Just so, the church of God is the body of Christ, and therefore it properly bears His name.

The unity of the church which is His body is, as I have said, illustrated in such a gathering as this World Conference on Christian Fundamentals. Denominations are represented here, but there is no denominationalism represented here. Episcopalians are here, Baptists are here, Presbyterians, Methodists, Reformed Churchmen, Brethren (United, *Untied,* Open and Exclusive); but no one is here because he is an Episcopalian, or a Baptist, or any of these other things. We are here because we are members of the one body, having one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling, owning the same Lord, contending for *the faith* once for all delivered unto the saints, baptized into Jesus Christ by the one baptism of the Holy Spirit, worshiping one God and Father of us all, Who is above all, and through all, and in us all.

The English word *unity* occurs but three times in the whole Bible, and it always refers to the only unity that is real, namely, the unity of the Spirit. In the 133rd Psalm it is written: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life forever more."

That is just a beautiful picture of the unity which is more than uniformity, more than conformity, more than human, and which is brought about, "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord."

The other two occasions where the word *unity* is found are, both of them, in the 4th chapter of Ephesians. Here again the unity in view is the unity of the Holy Spirit the unity which is wrought in the church by the Holy Spirit of God. These passages will come before us at a later point in this study; they are mentioned here only to point out that unity, the only unity with which God is concerned, is "the unity of the Spirit," which we are exhorted to preserve "in the bond of peace."

**II. The Character of the Church which is His Body.**

Since the church is the body of Christ, it follows of necessity that the church has no character but His. Much is said in these days about Christian character, and the building of it. But, as a plain matter of fact, there is no such thing as Christian character, apart from the person of Christ.

We sometimes talk loosely about endeavoring, with the Lord's help, of course, to live a Christian life. There is no Christian life but Christ's. He alone can live the Christian life, and, even with His help, which by the way has never been promised to us for such a purpose, we can never for a single moment live a Christian life. I say He has never promised to help us do anything of the kind. He lives His own life, manifesting Himself, through His people; and wherever He finds a yielded vessel He occupies it, living in it, and showing Himself alive in it.

The Holy Spirit, by whom the church is baptized into Jesus Christ, indwells every believer's body, seeking to reveal the Lord Jesus and make Him known. And just in the measure in which we are yielded to the indwelling, Holy Spirit, we bear the fruit of the Spirit-"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and se1f-control,"-and this is Christian character, the character of the church which is the body of Christ, because it is the character of Christ. It is His life, manifesting itself in and through His body, just as your life manifests itself in and through your body, or my life manifests itself in and through my body. There is no life, apart from Him: "In Him was (and is) life, and the life was (and is) the light of men." He is our life, and it is He Himself, living His own life in us, that produces love, joy, peace, and so on.

*Love'!* There is none, apart from Him. He is God, and "God is love." You know how impossible for you to love folks who are unlovely. You have tried it many times, and you have always failed. You have said, "I must love everybody. The Bible says I must love even my enemies. Now, I do not love my enemies." You have thought of one enemy in particular, and you have said, "No; there is no use trying to deceive myself about it, I do not love that man. I know I should love him, but I do not. But the Bible says I ought to love him. Well, then, since I ought to, I must. And if I must, I can. And if I can, I will. Now, therefore, go to, I will love that man!"

Do you remember going through something like that in your experience? And do you remember what a poor sickly thing it was that you brought forth out of all that struggle? I ask, "Do you love him now?" And you say, "Well, I don't wish him any harm," "Yes, yes, but do you *love* him?" Then you say, "Well, it's all right, but just let him keep away from me, and I will keep away from him." And you call that *love!* Itcannot be done; you cannot do it, even with the Lord's help, and He is not helping you; He will not help you that way. I will tell you what to do-just give that job up; stop *trying* and begin *trusting.* Trust Him. And the first thing you know, there will be a warm feeling in your heart for that fellow, and you will be praying for him.

MR. ALEXANDER: Do you love your enemies?

MR. PETTINGILL: No; the Lord Jesus Christ loves my enemies through me.

And then, there is joy full. *Joy?* there is none, apart from Him. It is only when His joy abides in us that our joy is full. "In His presence (and there only) is fullness of joy; at His right hand there are pleasures for ever more."

*Peace?* There is none, apart from Him. One day the world shall know Him as the Prince of Peace, and mean­while "He is our peace."

*Longsuffering?* There is none, apart from Him. He it is Who is pictured in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, Who "suffers long, and is kind."

*Gentleness?* There is none, apart from Him. It was a man of war who wrote of Him, "Thy gentleness hath made me great."

*Goodness?* There is none, apart from Him. According to His own testimony, "there is none good but one, that is God." In us, that is in our flesh, dwells no good thing; but in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and we are complete in Him; He is our goodness.

*Faith?* There is none, apart from Him. "He abides faithful."

*Meekness'!* There is none, apart from Him; He alone is "meek, and lowly in heart."

*Self-control?* There is none, apart from Him. He never spoke rashly with His tongue. He never had a rebellious or fretful thought. Be careful for nothing, since He is in charge.

This is His character, and hence His body's character; this is His life, and therefore ours. This is He, Himself-God- Who works in us, both to will His good pleasure and to do it.

**III.** **The Mission of the Church which is His Body.**

This may be put in a word: the sole mission of the church is its own completion. The Spirit of Truth goes into this matter very fully and clearly in the 4th chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians. I desire to go with you to that chapter; and here we return to the thought of the body’s *unity,* in connection with our inquiry concerning the bodies mission I read: I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (verses 1-3).

"Endeavoring" is not the right word here; "giving all diligence" is better: 'giving all diligence to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Then follows a description of this unity, the unity of the Spirit, to preserve which we are "to give all diligence;" it is sevenfold; that is, complete: "There is *one body,* and *one Spirit,* even as ye are called in *one hope* of your calling; *one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father* of all, who is above all, and through all, and, in you all" (verses 4-6).

Now, in order that the church which is His body may be completed, the risen Christ has bestowed upon it certain gifts. In that other gift chapter, the 12th of First Corinthians, the gifts are bestowed upon men by the Spirit of God-"the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." Here in Ephesians the gifts are these men themselves, already gifted by the Holy Spirit. The risen Christ gives these gifted men to His church, for its complete upbuilding: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (verse 11).

The apostles are gone, and they have no "successors." They need none, for we have their complete testimony in the New Testament Scriptures, constituting a sufficient and authoritative rule of faith and practice. The other "gifts" are still with us, raised up as needed by the risen Christ Himself as Head over all things to the church which is His body. The New Testament prophet is one who "speaks unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort" (**1 Cor. 14:3**). The evangelist is he that preaches the evangel, the good news, the gospel of our salvation. The pastor is the under-shepherd, appointed by the Chief Shepherd to feed and tend the sheep and lambs of His flock during His own absence from them. And the teacher is the one appointed from on high to expound and unfold the treasures of the Word of God, in order that the children might be fed with the Bread of God.

Someone says: "Certainly! we understand about that. These are *(the clergy.'* They are appointed to look after *(the laity.'"* That is all quite right and perfectly clear "The *clergy-that* is, the reverends-are to 'conduct divine service', the *clergy* are to 'preach the Word', the *clergy* are to 'administer the sacraments', the *clergy* are to 'pronounce the benediction'; and the *laity-well,* the *laity* may pay the bills.

What a mischievous notion this is! Why cannot we rid ourselves, once and for ever, of these rags of Romanism? Why must we go on with these relics of Paganism, these inventions of Satan, tending to rob us of our common wealth in the Lord, our common brotherhood in Christ, our blessed fellowship in the Holy Spirit, and leading us to think of "the ministry" as something confined to the man in the pulpit, something apart from the man in the pew, something even denied to him, because he is "not ordained"? God help us! What confusion we have come to! What a condition of things! Let us get back to our Book Let us see "what saith the Lord."

I read on: "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (verse 12).

We must read this verse with care. It is a statement of the purpose of Christ in bestowing His gifts, that is these gifted men, upon His church. We must not read it as a threefold statement. It is not (**1**) for the perfecting of the saints: then (**2**) for the work of the ministry; and, finally (**3**) for the edifying of the body of Christ. No; it is a single statement. Christ's purpose in the bestowal of His gifts is, in a word, the edifying of His body, the church; and in order to this end He must have ministry; and in order that there may be ministry the saints must be perfected, or trained; and in order that the saints may be perfected or trained, certain men have been gifted by the Holy Spirit and then they themselves have been given by the risen Christ to His church. The Revision is a great improvement: "For the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministering;" and so is the **1911** Bible: "For the perfecting of the saints unto the doing of service." And always with this end in view: "the edifying (that is, the *building up,* the *upbuilding,* the *completion)* of the body of Christ," which is the church.

Thus, as we have already said, the mission of the church is its own completion. This becomes even more clear as we go on with this passage: "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (verse 13).

This present ministry-work is to go on until the body is completed. Then we shall all have come "unto a perfect man." The Man-child is not yet fully born; the moment He is fully born He will be "caught up unto God and to His throne" (**Rev. 12:5**).

The mystery of godliness includes the church which IS Christ's body.

When this is seen, the sequence of **1 Timothy 3:16** becomes clear: *"God was, manifest in the flesh:"* That is the incarnation, the Son of God in the Seed of the woman.

*"Justified in the Spirit.* That is His resurrection from the dead, by which He was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of Holiness" (**Rom. 1:4**).

*"Seen of anqels."* That is His present session at the right hand of the Majesty on high, our Advocate, our Intercessor, the great High Priest over the house of God.

*"Preached unto the Gentiles"* That is our present work, appointed of Him who is our Head, and it is by this means that the body is to be completed.

*"Believed on in the world;"* So He is; thank God! We believe on Him; thousands have believed and are believing on Him; myriads, millions, have believed and go on believing. So shall it be, until the Man-child is born. And then,--

*"Received up into glory."* When? The moment the Man-child is born.

"And when shall that be? The Lord, Who knows them that are His, has not been pleased to inform us of the times or the seasons. I know not when.

"I only know that He is near

And that His voice I soon shall hear."

The church is a people gathered out from among the nations for His name. The church is to build up itself, it is *to* come to completion, by obeying His command to carry the gospel to the nations. Ye shall be witnesses unto Me, \* \* \* unto the uttermost part of the earth." This is our task, and to this task we are appointed. This is the goal, to be ever before our vision; in order that we "may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body unto the edifying (that is, the building up, the upbuilding, the completion) of itself in love" (**Eph. 4: 15**, **16**).

**IV. The Destiny of the Church which is His Body.**

This, too, may be stated in a single phrase. The destiny of the church is to "be forever with the Lord." And what mortal man can begin to tell the meaning of that? Truly, it "passes all understanding." Wondrous things await the church of God, things which it is not possible for a man to utter. We do not know, we may not know-not now, for now we could not bear it-all that awaits us. But enough is known, enough is revealed, to wean us from the things of earth and time, and fill our soul with rapture on account of the entrancing vision. For He has "made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which he hath purposed in Himself: that in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him, \* \* \* that we should be to the praise of His glory \* \* \* and \* \* \* that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (**Eph. 1:9-12**; **2:7**).

We have read His will, His "last will and testament": "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou have given me; for thou loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee: but I have known Thee, and these have known that Thou have sent me. And I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou have loved me may be in them, and I in them" (**John 17:24-26**).

That is enough-quite enough! "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven \* \* \* and we shall be caught up \* \* \* to meet the Lord in the air. And so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

"'Forever with the Lord!'

Amen! so let it be!

Life from the dead is in that word,

'Tis immortality.

Here in the body spent,

Absent from Him we roam,

Yet nightly pitch our moving tent

A day's march nearer home.

"'For ever with the Lord!'

Father if 'tis thy will,

The promise of that faithful word

E'en here to us fulfil.

Knowing as we are known,

How shall we love that word,

And oft repeat before the throne,

'For ever with the Lord!'"