

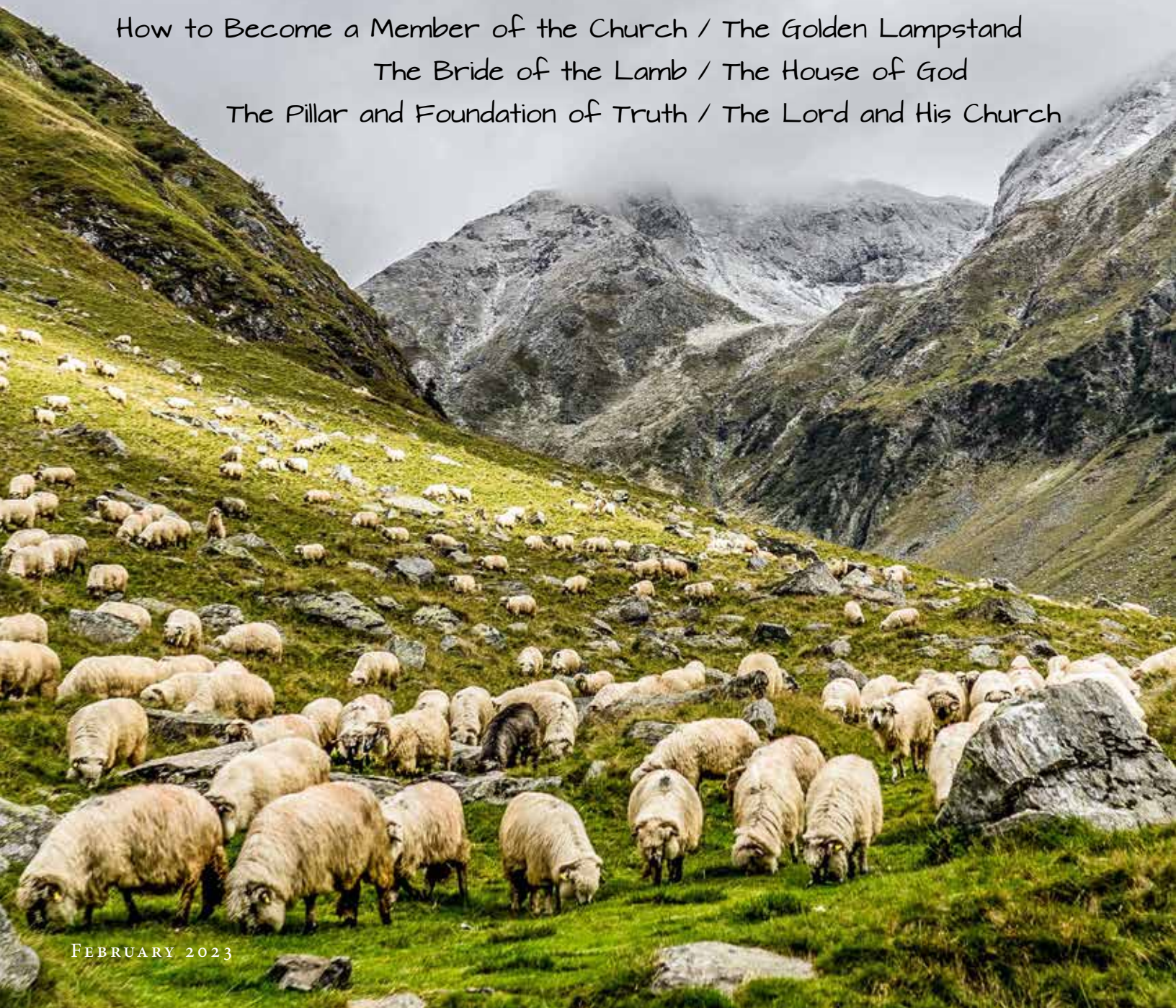


# Foundation of Faith

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## A Look at the Church . . . .

How to Become a Member of the Church / The Golden Lampstand  
The Bride of the Lamb / The House of God  
The Pillar and Foundation of Truth / The Lord and His Church



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## Editorial

*Dear Reader,*

*God's plan is for every family to have a mother and father. When children are born, they bear their father's surname.*

*God's Word precisely applies this illustration to His church, the family of God. For example, the prophet Isaiah states, "Doubtless You are our Father . . . our Redeemer from Everlasting is Your name" (Isaiah 63:16). Yes, God is the Heavenly Father of all His children—all who have been born again and are now part of His spiritual family. What a wonderful thought!*

*We were all lost. We were spiritually dead; by nature, we were children of unbelief and wrath. But God, through His great love, and through the reconciliation which Jesus made possible at Calvary, awoke us from the sleep of sin. We can come to the Lord, repent, and be born again. We were disenfranchised and disinherited of the New-Testament promises, but through salvation have now become citizens and heirs of heaven.*

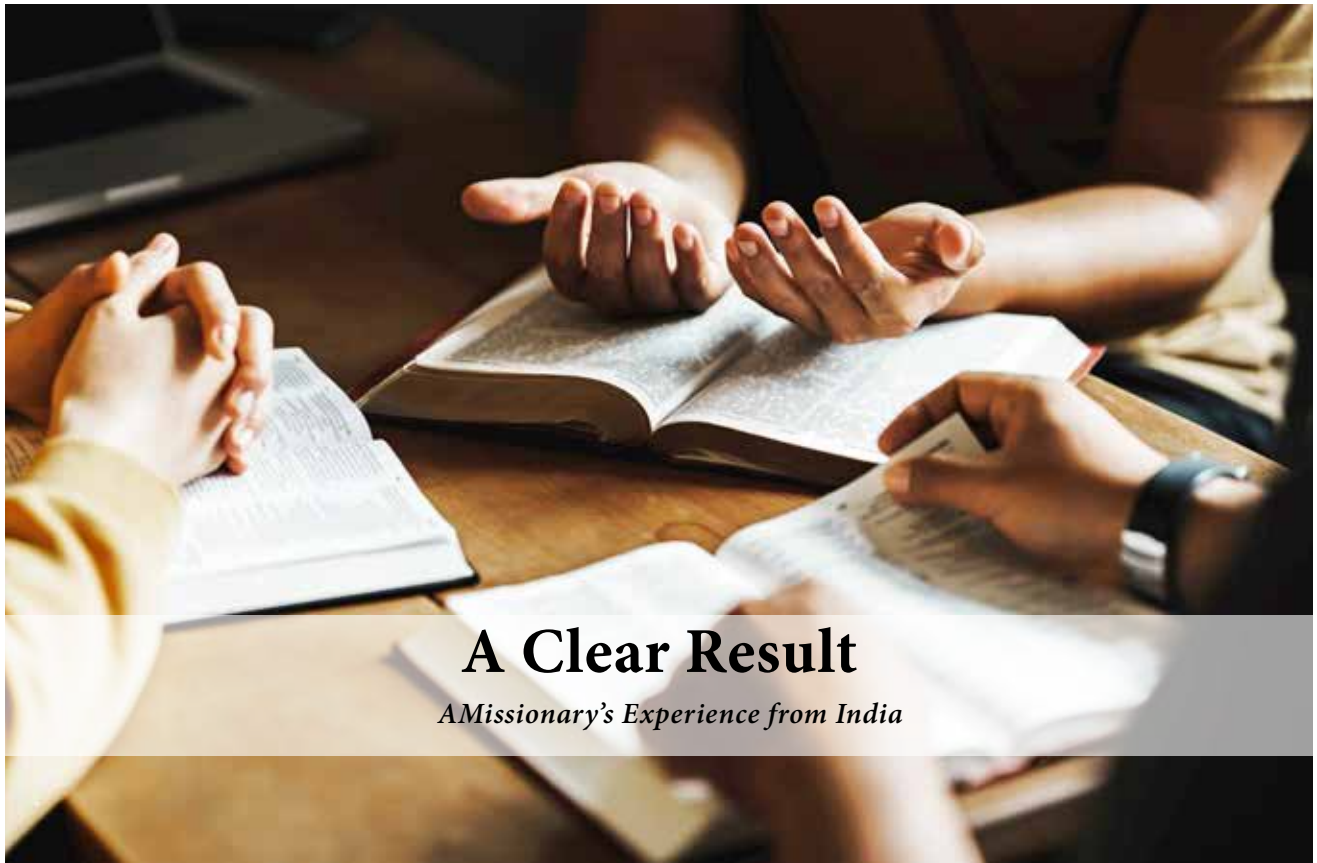
*What a miracle, what grace! We read, "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:19–20).*

*We are members of God's household and are now part of His family, the church of the living God. And, just as the children of a natural family bear their father's name, we also want to bear the name of our Heavenly Father.*

*Just as Christ honors the Father, we also want to give glory, thanks, and praise to nobody but God, praying, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. . . ."*

*Dear Reader, have you already come to understand the wonderful mystery of God the Father and Christ and His church? "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32).*

H. D. Nimz



## A Clear Result

*A Missionary's Experience from India*

One day while sitting on the veranda, Faith Stewart saw a group of ten Indian students walking slowly down the road. When they came to the entrance of the "Shelter," the name of the orphanage, they all turned in and entered the grounds. Faith very graciously invited them to be seated, and they all sat down, stating that they had come to call on her. She asked them,

"What do you want to know?"

"We are students who have come to Calcutta for the first time. We have never heard about these strange religions until we came here to Cuttack. We went to one temple and saw on it the name "Episcopal." On another we saw the word "Baptist," and so on, and here we see another called the "Church of God." We've been hearing about this God since we came

here, but we want to ask a question. We are all Hindu in our religious belief, but we all have the very same teaching. There is no difference among the Hindu teachers of doctrine. These Christians say they believe in the same God, yet they build separate temples with different names on them, and different beliefs are taught in them.

"Now, if you all believe in this one God and all are Christians, why do you have such separate groups, and why do you not stay together as one? Or which church among you is right?"

"Well," she answered them, "if you were to visit any one of these church groups and ask that question, each one would answer immediately and say, 'We are the ones who are true, and this is the right church.' If you would ask me that question, I would also say that. I

shall therefore not answer you at all. I have a small book here which will answer all your questions if you will faithfully read it through. Mark every scripture you find that mentions the church and what it says about it, and it will tell you the truth and what there is to know about it."

Then she presented ten New Testaments to the ten students who very graciously received them and went on their way.

Soon afterward, six of the students returned saying they had read through the little books. She asked them, "Did you notice any church mentioned in its pages?"

"Yes, there is but one name, and that is called 'the Church of God.' We believe it must be the true church because no other is mentioned and the teachings are true."

Sometime later, these six young men found the Lord Jesus Christ! ■

# Divine Didactics

*Didactics are the “art” and “science” of learning and teaching.*

**H**ow does the Creator reveal the depths of divine wisdom to man? How does God manage to explain the subject of greatest wisdom (Ephesians 3:8–10) to us limited human beings in such a way that we obtain more than a mere inkling of it?

For this, God has two particularly powerful methods: First, He makes it possible for us to become a part of this glorious creation ourselves (2 Corinthians 6:17). As born-again children of God (John 3:3), we are no longer external bystanders, but an organic part of a pulsating organism that reflects the glory of God. We experience in ourselves indescribable, life-changing developments and relationships that then find a theoretical explanation in biblical teaching.

The second method is the parable, the pictorial explanation of this truth. Jesus used an abundance of very practical parables to help explain spiritual truths. By using various images, the Bible shows us the church, which remains hidden to our natural eye and to our intellectual approach. Although we may perceive external characteristics of the church, the essential spiritual element may remain hidden from us. The Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2) also reveals this through many images in the Word of God (e.g. Hebrews 12:18–24).

Some important images are listed here. Collectively, they clearly show the essence of this divine creation. As we prayerfully search the Word of God, God will show us more images that reveal this subject matter even more fully.

*Hermann Vogt*

Some images and symbols God has given us to understand eternal truths.



**The Golden Lampstand**  
Rev. 1:20



**The House of God**  
1. Tim. 3:15  
Heb. 3:1-6



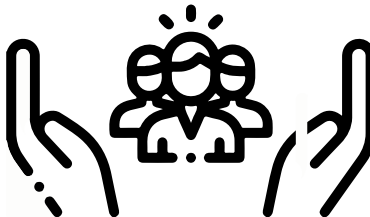
**The Pillar of Truth**  
1. Tim. 3:15



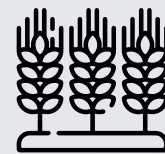
**God's Building**  
1. Cor. 3:9  
Matt. 16:18



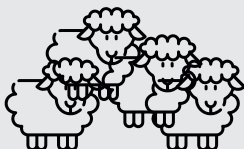
**The City of God**  
Psalm 46:5  
Psalm 48:2



**The Church (Assembly) of the Living God**



**God's Field**  
1. Cor. 3:9  
Matt. 13:24-30



**The Flock**  
Acts 20:28  
John 10:12-16



**The Bride**  
Rev. 21:2, 9  
John 3:29; Isa. 61:10



**The Body of Christ**  
1. Cor. 12:13-27  
Rom. 12:4-5; Eph. 1:23



**God's Holy Temple**  
1. Cor. 3:16-17  
Eph. 2:19-21

**More symbols and images of the Church:**  
Heb. 12:22-24

# How Do I Become a Member of God's Church?

When I think about the topic of church membership, I assume many people have had an experience similar to mine.

When I was about twelve or thirteen years old, I attended an evangelistic service where the Holy Spirit clearly showed me I needed salvation from my sins. I went forward, along with some other young people, seeking prayer. However, at that time, no one showed us the way of salvation while they tried to help us pray. Instead, we were kindly received into their fellowship as members. Through a process, common in that particular denomination, we became members of their community.

Although I had become a member of the church at that time, I soon realized that no change had occurred in my life, and I still lived in my sins. How disheartening and discouraging that was to me. Since I had acted according to the best of my knowledge and the teachings of my spiritual advisors, I finally consoled myself with the thought that I should not expect more. This state of mind lasted for sever-

al years, and it alienated me more and more from religion. However, the desire for a satisfying spiritual experience was still alive in me. I longed for peace in my soul.

At the age of 19, I became seriously ill. After long, unsuccessful efforts of many doctors, I was at death's door. Unless you've been in a similar situation, it is difficult to grasp what I felt as I faced death. I had no certainty whether or not I was right with God.

One night, I awoke and felt God speaking to me as He had seven years earlier. I knew it was God's Spirit convicting me of my sins. I got up, knelt down in front of my bed, and prayed. No one else was there to instruct me, but the Spirit of God guided me and helped me to receive salvation. I had been suffering deeply because of my sins. I had a strong desire for forgiveness as I promised never to sin again. Once I had reached this point in my commitment, I was finally able to grasp that God truly had saved me.

After this experience, I began to read the Bible. I read how Jesus healed the sick and of the power

that Jesus gave His disciples to heal. My faith was greatly encouraged by what I read. Through personal and corporate prayer and faith, God, in His grace, also healed my body.

After that, I began to search the New Testament for statements regarding the church. The first thing I came across was Christ's statement to Peter in Matthew 16:18: "On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." It occurred to me that if Jesus put such great emphasis on the church, it must have a greater meaning than I had previously assumed. It struck me that Jesus spoke of the church as something to come: "I will build." Therefore, I was greatly interested to know if this announcement ever found its fulfillment, that is, if "His church" had ever become a reality.

I discovered that the word "church" is not often mentioned in the gospels, but I had not gotten far in the book of Acts when I discovered the account of the New-Testament church. I found that the church proclaimed by Jesus had not only become a reality, but had also experienced its great



day of manifestation through the addition of about 3000 souls at Pentecost. By listening to Peter's preaching, the crowds were convicted and sought salvation. They repented joyfully and in this way became members of the church (see Acts 2).

Let's remember that this occurred only ten days after Christ's ascension. What Jesus had told them with such conviction came to pass. Although He was no longer with His disciples in visible form, He certainly had a great part in that event. In fact, He was preeminent in the building of His church. Peter did indeed preach the sermon on that memorable day, but the fact that it was Jesus Himself Who added members to the church remains an irrefutable truth. Acts 2: 47 literally says, "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

As I read this, new light dawned on me, and I realized that something fundamental was stated about church affiliation and church membership. If back then the Lord took people into the church through redemption, why

would He have a different method today? I was redeemed, I knew that. Based on this and other scriptures, I believed the Lord had also accepted me into His church at my conversion.

To this day, I have not joined any denomination. God called me into His service at that time, and I pastored several local churches. During that time, I witnessed many conversions but have never attempted to open the "church door" and accept members. The preacher's job is to preach the gospel in such a way that people are converted and reconciled to God. The Lord's job is then to add them to His church. "And He is the head of the body, the church" (Colossians 1:18).

Adding people to the early church was God's business. "But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased" (1 Corinthians 12:18). The standard of the early church was that of the New Testament, which the Lord desires to be the standard for all time. The teaching of His Word on salvation and the church are unchanging.

By being born again, souls are made members and are placed into the church by the Holy Spirit. Just as by natural birth we become a member of a family, likewise, spiritual birth makes us members of the family of God. "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Many years before the birth of Jesus, the psalmist David wrote about the glory of the church: "And of Zion it will be said, 'This one and that one were born in her; and the Most High Himself shall establish her.' The LORD will record, when He registers the peoples: 'This one was born there'" (Psalm 87: 5-6).

The question arises: Is it possible to lose our membership in the church? We become a member through salvation; however, sin causes one to lose that membership. In Exodus 32:33, we read, "And the LORD said to Moses, 'Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.'" Clearly, we see that it is God Who adds members to the church and that it is likewise He Who puts them out. ■



# The Golden Lampstand

*“Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches’” (Revelation 1: 12–20).*

In this awe-inspiring revelation of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, His church is represented by a golden lampstand. Obviously, this is a reference to the seven-branched golden lampstand that stood in the sanctuary of the Old-Testament temple. The temple was a shadow of the New-Testament church of God. How perfectly God has represented it here in this image! The gold represents the church’s purity and high value in the eyes of God. Such a lampstand only serves its purpose when filled with oil and fire, the symbols of the Holy Spirit and God’s love.

In Matthew 5:14–16, Christ gives His followers the task of filling the world with His light. They can never do this on their own; they need the fullness of the Holy Spirit and must be filled with His love. Because God brings this about in His church, He alone should receive the glory for it. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). Yes, God’s church and His kingdom are always about Him.

## **How Gripping is this Thought of a Lampstand!**

When John received the revelation of Jesus Christ, he heard a voice behind him so powerful that he compares it to a trumpet. When he turned to look for the

voice, he saw seven golden lampstands with Jesus in the midst of them, Whom he can only describe in the most glorious images known to him. In verse twenty, the golden lampstands are described as local churches. But they only fulfill their purpose when Jesus walks in the midst of them. He stands in the center. He has purchased His own church and continues to build it until the dawn of eternity.

Jesus is the light of the world, and from His church this light must shine out into the darkness of the world! Back in his day, Isaiah already proclaimed it: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined brightly” (Isaiah 9:2). The light of the church does not consist in human radiance. Neither the abilities of the members nor outstanding programs illuminate the darkness. Nor is it an atmosphere in the congregation that gets people excited. Rather, it is a silent light deep within the human heart that ignites the desire for truth, for love, and for God. This light goes from heart to heart, and brings one soul after another into a pure and satisfying relationship with God. The golden lampstand is meant to illuminate hearts and lives even today, igniting them with divine fire.





### **The Golden Lampstand Symbolizes Life from God**

Immediately following this introduction of Jesus as the One Who walks among the golden lampstands are seven letters to seven local churches. In each letter, Jesus introduces Himself to the congregation with an appropriate greeting. In the very first letter, addressed to the church at Ephesus, the Lord uses the image of a lampstand in His introduction: “These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands” (Revelation 2:1). Considerable praise of many good works now follows. Then He addresses the qualities of the “angel” (preacher) and the church, but points out that they had left their first love. This love is precisely the fire that gives light to a lampstand. How shall the light be spread into the darkness? Through love. The greatest commandment is to love the Lord God above all things, and one’s neighbor as oneself. Jesus said in John 13:35, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Without the fire of God’s love, there is no life from God. The same is true of the oil of the Holy Spirit.

But the Lord goes one step further with His church. To the church at Ephesus He says, “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent” (Revelation 2:5). He still gives some time for reflection and grace, but if the church does not repent and rekindle the love on the lampstand, the Lord will come and execute judgment. How terrible this judgment would be!

A church is in danger of bringing God’s judgment upon itself when the oil of God’s Spirit stops flowing and its love for God grows cold and it becomes lukewarm. Who can then raise it up again? All human attempts to organize or to prop it up is of no help. Jesus must set up the lampstand and acknowledge it. But He gives the fallen church room to repent. He wants to help her so much, He gives the serious appeal to repent.

Only when the church enjoys the presence of God can it fulfill its function as a golden lampstand. May God keep us in the condition which John saw in his vision: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in the midst of the church.

*Ron Taron*

# The Bride of the Lamb

*“Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife’” (Revelation 21:9).*

In this scripture, the church is referred to as the bride of Christ but also as His wife. “Come, I will show you” is a necessity, since from a human perspective, it is impossible to see the church and grasp its beauty using only our natural abilities. “The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). However, the wonderful mystery of the church is revealed to us when the Holy Spirit enlightens us (John 16:13–14). If we are children of God and the Spirit of God lets us see the church, then we will not see ourselves as outsiders but as part of this divine creation (2 Peter 1:16; Ephesians 2:19). The two expressions, bride and wife, symbolize the church and show the relationship between Christ and the church. This holds from the resurrection of Jesus until His second coming. “Wife” also refers to the future union with Christ when we will be with Him eternally. The Bible speaks of a future wedding of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7), and today’s church is shown as the bride.

## The Church in the Present Time

After Jesus was baptized in the Jordan by John the Baptist, He called Jesus “the Lamb of God” (John 1:36). John also referred to Him as the bridegroom when He said, “He who has the bride is the bridegroom” (John 3:29). These words were spoken before Jesus gave His life and shed His blood for His church (Acts 20:28).

Christ left the splendor of heaven in order to redeem us. His bride, the people who wish to serve Him, must also leave former things (Ephesians 5:30–32). Their love for Christ is greater than their love for the world. Their love for Christ is even greater than the love for friends, relatives, parents, and children. When the disciples took this step, Jesus gave them a great promise (Mark 10:28–30). When the bride goes to the altar to be married, she is making a tremendously

significant decision. She is making a decision for her bridegroom and future husband in favor of all other possibilities. She decides she will love her husband more than all others in the world. This is the decision that Christ expects of His followers (Matthew 10:37–38). The redeemed are those called out of sin and the world to follow the Lamb. That is why the church is also called “assembly” or “ekklesia” in Greek.

The church appears in a magnificently spectacular light, “having the glory of God” (Revelation 21:11). Christ has cleansed her (Ephesians 5:26–27) and sanctified Himself for her (John 17:19). The heavenly Bridegroom has also given her a magnificent robe and provided her with precious jewels. “He has clothed [her] with the garments of salvation, He has covered [her] with the robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10). The quality of her dress and appearance matches His (Isaiah 59:17). The bride of Christ, the church, is also described as the Body of Christ. She stands in purity and holiness which comes from God (1 Peter 1:15–16). Her adornment does not consist of the cheap makeup of modern Christianity but rather is comprised of precious ornaments. God adorns the individual congregations of His church with the redeemed who are saved by His grace (Isaiah 49:18). Their spiritual adornment is internal. Therefore, the adornment is not to be “outward . . . but the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God” (1 Peter 3:3–4). It consists of holiness and righteousness.

In John 17, Jesus prays for the church that she be in the world but not of the world. He is the Head of the church. He cares for her and protects her (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 5:29). He supplies all her needs “according to His riches in glory” (Philippians 4:19). He takes care of every member of His body (Matthew 6:25–34), every child of God. He provides spiritual nourishment, gives wisdom and guidance in decisions,



He develops each member and gives sufficient grace daily (2 Corinthians 9:8). Even if we may have heavy burdens to bear, God helps us carry them (Psalm 55:22; Isaiah 41:10). As Christ's spouse, the church as a whole, as well as each individual member, is wrapped in His grace and His love.

The Bible describes the very special status Christ has reserved for the church. He is the center and source of the relationship. To Him be all the glory (Romans 11:36). He has provided all the prerequisites for salvation, and He draws us to Himself and leads His bride to glory. As the Head, He loves the church with abundant love.

### **The Church in the Future**

The words "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9) can be appropriately applied to the church. By establishing the church, God has made known His manifold wisdom to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places (Ephesians 3:8-10). How can the human intellect fully grasp the unsearchable riches of Christ and describe them with mere human words?

Using a metaphor, the mystery of the church is symbolized as a relationship of bride and bridegroom. The

church, Christ's bride, prepares herself here on earth for the next great phase in that relationship. The period of engagement is a weak comparison indeed. Even this period in the bride's life is wonderful and full of divine blessing and godly revelation. The apostle was very concerned to make sure the church is presented to the bridegroom as "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:27).

When the time is fulfilled, Christ the Bridegroom will come to take His bride home (Matthew 25:1-13). The church will experience an unbelievably wonderful marriage feast (Revelation 19:9) and will be united with Him in glory forever (1 Thessalonians 4:17). The joy and bliss will not end. There will be no more parting, no more tears, pain, or sorrow. Such will all belong to the past.

But let me ask you a personal question: Are you a member of this glorious church? Have you been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, and has your name been written in the book of life? Only those who belong to the redeemed and have become part of Christ's bride, His church, in this time of grace will enter into the joy of the Lord (Matthew 25:21-23) and thus be with the Lord forever.

*Hermann Vogt*

# The House of God

**T**he house of God is glorious and holy. There are so many biblical truths associated with it that a complete description is not possible in this article. My dearest wish, with God's help, is to give a little insight into this subject and to encourage the reader to reflect and investigate. First, the question of what the house of God is will be answered on the basis of Scripture. Then, based on 1 Peter 2:1–10 and with the help of other passages, the house of God will be examined a little more closely.

In the Old Testament, God gave His people precise instructions for the construction of the tabernacle, a meeting place, so He could dwell among them (Exodus 29:42–46). The tabernacle was called “the house of the LORD your God” (Exodus 23:19). Later, David planned the construction of the temple (1 Chronicles 22:2–16), while his son Solomon later executed his plans. This house of the Lord was filled with the glory of God (2 Chronicles 5:13–14).

The Old-Testament worship contains foreshadowings of the New Testament. Jesus came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17). When the Samaritan woman asked Him about the place of worship, He made it clear that what mattered in the future was not the place, but the manner of worship: in spirit and in truth (John 4:23). Hebrews 3:6 says, “But Christ [was faithful] as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.” In the New Testament the house of God is illustrated as the family of God. Yet this also denotes a physical place of worship, where believers should gather even today. The children of God are the temple of the living God. He wants to dwell in them and among them (1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16).

The following scripture passage from 1 Peter 2:1–9 describes the nature of the house of God, and we want to take the time to explore it more fully.

“Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord *is* gracious. Coming to Him *as to* a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God *and* precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. . . .

“Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.’ Therefore, to you who believe, *He is* precious; but to those who are disobedient, ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone . . .’

“But 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.”

## A Spiritual House

The word “spiritual” is fundamentally opposed to “material, natural” and even more so to “carnal, sinful.” In Romans 8:6, the carnal mind is said to die, and the spiritual mind is said to have life and peace. Whoever wants to belong to the spiritual house of God must experience a thorough conversion from the sinful and carnal to the spiritual, Christ-like way of thinking and living.

## Christ as the Cornerstone

A cornerstone is used in the construction of a building to establish its orientation and to fortify it. Jesus Christ is presented here as the cornerstone, rejected by men but chosen by and precious to God. In Him is eternal life. He is the great example of the children of God, and His Word is the guideline of their lives. Those who

believe in Him and are obedient to Him will not be put to shame.

### **Made of Living Stones**

Jesus says, “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life” (John 3:36). Through the Word of God, the incorruptible seed, regeneration occurs in a person’s heart (1 Peter 1:23). To then sustain this life and bear spiritual fruit, a constant abiding in Jesus is necessary (John 15:4). Life means growth. Paul writes in Ephesians 4:15 that by “speaking the truth in love, [we] may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ.”

Precisely when pondering growth, we notice quite clearly how the earthly, human way of thinking is contrary to the thoughts of God. Growth according to human standards almost always has to do with self-development and self-glorification. Unfortunately, this mindset is also found frequently among the ranks of believers. For example, there is often no lack of volunteers for tasks that are publicly visible, but when it comes to practical jobs that don’t have as much public recognition, it is much harder to find help.

The mind of Christ is shown by serving in secret (Luke 22:25–27; Matthew 6:1–18), seeking the glory of God alone (John 7:18), faithfulness even in the least (Luke 16:10), and genuine love for one’s neighbor (1 Corinthians 13). These are very simple, practical guidelines that will one day be relevant at the Last Judgment (please read Matthew 25:31–46). Therefore, let’s allow these godly principles to shape our lives and thoughts during this time of God’s grace.

### **A Chosen Generation**

In 1 Peter 2:9, the children of God are referred to as “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people,” regardless of origin, nation, gender, social standing, etc. The only common characteristic is accepting Jesus Christ by faith. All of God’s

children are heirs of the promise (Galatians 3:26–29).

Through Christ, they have been saved from the darkness of sin and eternal death and transferred to His heavenly kingdom (Colossians 1:13). Through Him, they have victory over sin and death (1 Corinthians 15:56–57). Nothing can snatch them out of His hand (John 10:27–28) or separate them from His love (Romans 8:37–39).

### **The Highest Calling**

This high standing is connected to a special dignity and responsibility. The family of God is called to fellowship with Him (1 John 1:3; 1 Corinthians 1:9). The redeemed keep God’s commandments, live in His light, and have fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7; 5:3).

For a victorious life, complete devotion to God is an absolute prerequisite—the reasonable worship of God according to Romans 12:1. The children of God are to stand as priests before God for those around them (1 Timothy 2:1). They are called to proclaim God’s praises (1 Peter 2:9). This means recognizing His benefits in our own life, thanking Him for them from the heart, and doing everything without grumbling or doubting (Philippians 2:14–15). Then God also gives opportunities to be a witness of His love.

The call to fellowship with Christ also includes the hope of eternal glory with Him (John 12:26; 14:1–3). Paul describes the goal of his life: “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. . . . forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:10–11, 13–14).

*Helene Rotfuß  
Calw, Germany*

# The Church—a Pillar and Foundation of Truth

*“These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so 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 Timothy 3: 14–15).*

What would our lives look like without church? Not only, but especially on Sunday, it would probably mean a big change. The church is a great blessing for every Christian, for every child of God in the whole world!

Paul wrote to Timothy what was important to him: “[B]ut if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God.”

The church is the house of God; this is where God dwells. We know that at the time of the old covenant the temple was considered the house of God. When the temple in Jerusalem was completed, the building was sanctified with a special dedication day. On that day, an exceedingly large number of sacrificial animals were brought and countless prayers were sent up to God. As Solomon prayed, the glory of God appeared, testifying that God would dwell in that special place from then on.

Many promises from God were associated with the temple in Jerusalem, as God’s dwelling place among His people. But there came a point in time when God ended His special relationship with a geographical place.

God’s dwelling place in this New-Testament age is His church, as our text also testifies. He has not tied Himself to any particular place, nor does His church consist of a building, a temple, or an assembly house. His church is formed through those born-again. They have experienced Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Redeemer. As His children, they know and serve Him. God dwells in the company of His children who form His church here on earth.

Jesus Christ says, “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18: 20). This isn’t just a nice statement or an assumption; it is indeed reality! He dwells in the community of God’s children who gather in one place in His name.

When we come together, we obviously can’t see the Lord Jesus with our physical eyes. But because we

come together in His name, He dwells in our midst and blesses us.

## **The Church is a Pillar**

The church is compared to a pillar, a supporting column that absorbs and supports the static load.

The image of a pillar directs our thoughts to an experience of the people of Israel during their exodus from Egypt.

During that time, there were no roads or paths to follow through the desert, and no maps, signs, or directions. This was probably the first time many Israelites were walking through this barren landscape, full of dangerous animals and all kinds of other dangers. In Exodus 13: 21 we read that God showed them the way to go by day with a pillar of cloud and by night with a pillar of fire.

This image shows us an important task of the church today. It is to give people orientation and guidance in difficult and perilous times. Of course, even today not everyone is willing to follow this pillar. Often the voice of the church is even deliberately ignored. Yet the church is there, with its foundation of biblical truth. Children of God, who are in their place as a part of this church are also a part of this “pillar.”

## **The Congregation is a Foundation of Truth**

In the church, biblical, clear truth is proclaimed as the foundation of doctrine. The truth is founded on the apostles and prophets, on Jesus Christ, Who was set as the cornerstone.

The church proves to be the “foundation of truth,” because here the children of God are built up. Its greatest treasure is its relationship with Jesus Christ. He is the cornerstone the builders rejected, yet chosen and precious in the sight of God.

He is the One Who builds His church. Paul writes in Ephesians 4: 11, “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.”



Why did God set this up this way? To equip “the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (Ephesians 4:12–14). He had already dealt with a similar thought in chapter 2:19–22.

God Himself gave His Word to His children in order to edify them through it, to help them develop toward maturity. The Word of God is supervised and made alive by the Holy Spirit. Thus, it is able to penetrate the innermost part of the human heart and touch us.

What a blessing God gives us as a local church, that in every meeting He prepares for us a table of delicious food at which we may feast and refresh ourselves!

The impact of the church as the foundation of truth is also demonstrated when God’s gathered children are convicted by the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul writes to the brethren in Ephesus (Ephesians 4:1–3): “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

God’s Word urgently warns us to be watchful, sober, and ready: “Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. . . . Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Matthew 24:42, 44). Dear Children of God, let us be alert and sober so we are ready to meet our God.

The blessedness of the church as foundation of truth is also demonstrated when children of God are encouraged.

For every child of God living in this world, there are many things that seek to take away our courage. It may be unfavorable circumstances, influences of this world, cunning propositions of the enemy, false accusations, or many other things.

But the church, the community of God’s children, is the place where children of God are encouraged and strengthened in service to the Lord. Through the Word of God in Hebrews 12:1–3, we are encouraged to look up to the Lord Jesus Christ, so as not to grow faint in our courage and leave the faith. Looking to Christ, to His sufferings, His death, and especially also to His resurrection encourages us. Likewise also the fact that He is now at the right hand of the Father, representing us as our advocate. He Himself encourages us to serve Him with full power, full commitment, and with all our heart.

*Alexander Gross  
Eppingen, Germany*

# The Lord and His Church

*He gave His life for them in order to present them gloriously. Therefore, He also has a special relationship with His church and they with Him.*

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus makes a significant statement: “I will build My church.” The attentive reader will notice at least three revealing facts which can be discerned from this simple statement:

- Jesus is speaking here of only one church.
- He clearly confesses Himself to be the Founder of this church.
- He promises He will build it.

When Jesus made this statement, the church was not yet visible. Jesus, however, was already in His official ministry and was seeking the first “stones” for this special spiritual building.

According to Matthew 4:18–22, He had already called Peter and Andrew, as well as James and John, from their nets by the Sea of Galilee to follow Him. They, and many others, believed Jesus was the Son of God and followed Him. But only as the time of His suffering approached did He reveal to His disciples that He wanted to build His church. Although Jesus already had many followers, the actual visible church was yet to follow; therefore, “I will build My church.”

Jesus taught His disciples about His sufferings, His death on the cross, His resurrection, and His return to the Father. He made it clear that as the Lamb of God, He was destined to be the sacrifice and atonement for the sins of mankind. The disciples were very sad about this declaration. Jesus compassionately comforted them, telling them about the promised Comforter. We read, “It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do

not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you” (John 16:7).

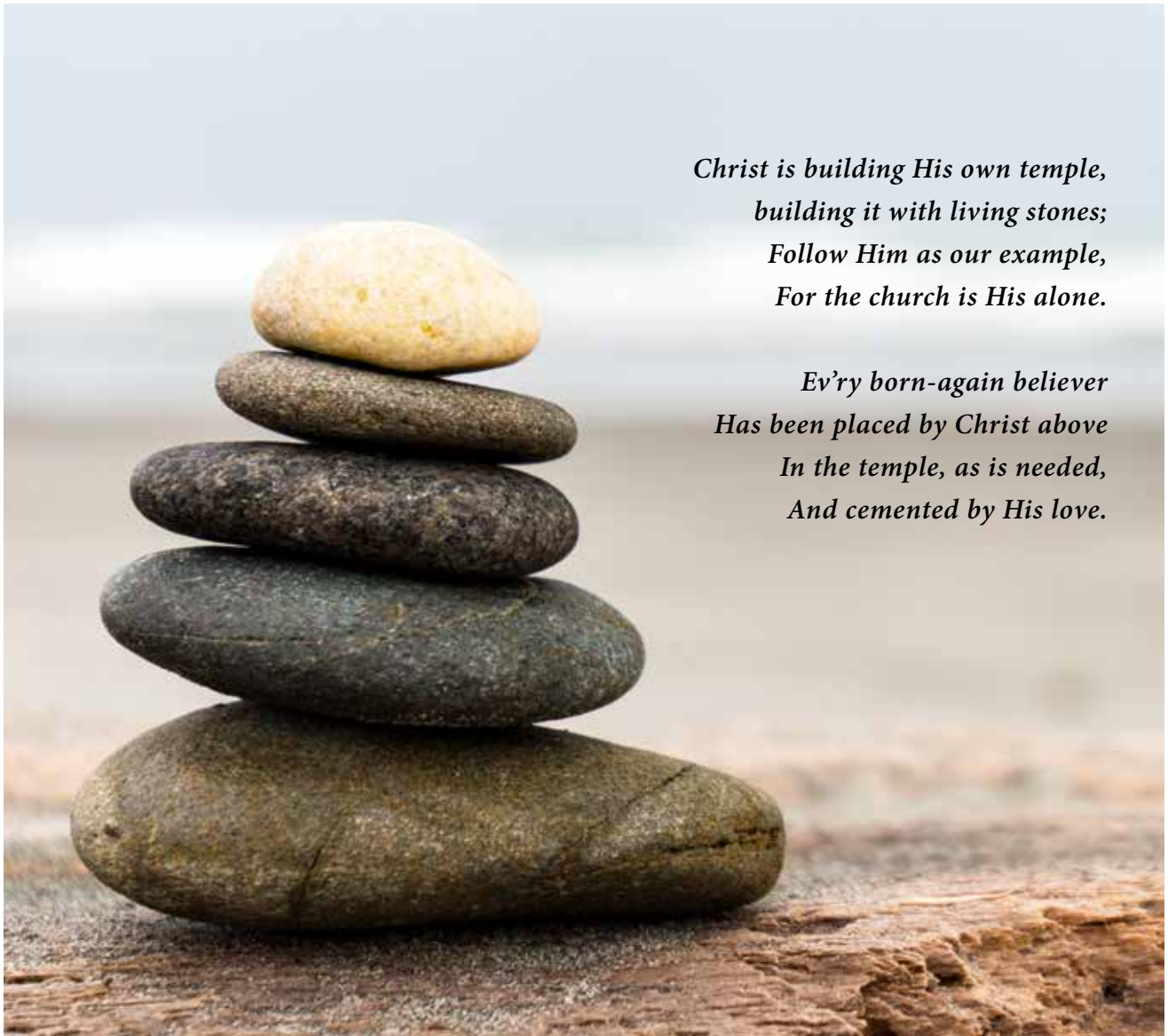
This promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost and ushered in a new era, the age of the Holy Spirit. At that moment, the church of our Lord became visible. This marks the beginning of the church’s literal and historical path through times of light and dark. Since that time, the church is continually mentioned in the Book of Acts, as well as in the apostles’ letters.

Acts 2 reports the great revival that occurred on Pentecost, brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit. Many accepted the Word, repented, were baptized, and continued in the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. In Acts 2:47 we read, “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” This reveals the following important facts:

- The church was visible and became the first local church in Jerusalem.
- The Lord added the people; He Himself built it.
- Those who were added believed, repented, were baptized, and remained true to biblical teaching and in fellowship with the redeemed.

These facts clearly show us the true nature and character of this church. It came out of the redemptive act of Jesus. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:20, “For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” For this reason, it is His church. Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say





*Christ is building His own temple,  
building it with living stones;  
Follow Him as our example,  
For the church is His alone.*

*Ev'ry born-again believer  
Has been placed by Christ above  
In the temple, as is needed,  
And cemented by His love.*

to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain” (John 12: 24). The church is truly the fruit and consequence of Jesus’ sacrificial death.

Since Pentecost, the church is the place where the Bible is proclaimed. The church Christ built has gone through periods of light and dark. Acts 9:31 says, “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.” The church went through stormy and peaceful times. It had to endure many tribulations, but the Lord also blessed it with His nearness and healing comfort.

More important and far more crucial than external circumstances is the inner condition of the

church. If it is to be and remain the congregation of the Lord, it will always depend on its position toward Christ: its love for God, its purity and holiness, its state of faith, its prayerfulness, its fear of God, its devotion and faithfulness in service, its separation from the world, and its unity in spirit. Perhaps in this sense, Paul expressed his deep concern: “But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11: 3). But Paul had the firm intention to bring “a chaste virgin [church] to Christ” (verse 2). May the Lord also give us this state of mind.

*Friedrich Krebs  
Kitchener, Ontario*

## THE TWELVE DISCIPLES SIMON PETER

### Peter's Character

We have many details about Peter in the New Testament, and we will briefly summarize his character traits. Like every human being, he had both positive and negative character traits, strengths and weaknesses. Jesus wanted Simon to become Peter, and He saw in him the potential to do so.

Peter had a tendency to be talkative and brash. This characteristic stands out in particular. Since he was the spokesman for the twelve, he was also influential. Whenever there was something to ask or answer, he was usually the first. Read the following Bible passages: John 6: 66; Matthew 15: 15; 16: 21; 17: 4; 18: 21; 19: 27. Peter was often unpredictable. Though he had good intentions, he was often misguided, as he stepped into action. The Bible shows him quite humble at times, and sometimes completely optimistic or overconfident. He was overwhelmed by Jesus' greatness and divinity. I think of the confessions "You are the Christ" and "You have words of eternal life." Yet other times he wanted to prevent Jesus from having to endure suffering, so Jesus had to rebuke him sharply: "Get behind me, Satan!" (Matthew 16: 23).

Peter was impulsive and passionate. He was always ready to act and got excited about something very quickly. He was the first to be ready to try something new. But often he was also the first to give up again.

In John 13: 6–9, we find a classic example of this. When Jesus wanted to wash his feet, he firmly waved Him off: "You shall never wash my feet!" This "never" didn't last a minute with Peter, and already he exclaimed, "Lord, not my feet only, but also *my* hands and *my* head!" He was impulsive: "Never Lord, absolutely not!" But then he rashly stated the opposite: "Lord, if you are going to wash me, please wash everything!"

The denial of Jesus is a dark chapter in Peter's life. But it confirms, like no other story, how he loved Jesus

passionately, but at the same time, his loyalty wavered. He stands behind Jesus enthusiastically, impulsively, and full of love: "I will never be made to stumble. . . . Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" (Matthew 26: 31–35).

But in the hour of temptation, it was, "Jesus? I don't know him." But his bitter repentance and tears show us how much he actually loved Jesus. He still lacked constancy, but his love for Jesus was absolutely true.

Peter's sanguine personality gave him courage with a zest for action. He often threw himself into situations from which he could not extricate himself. But he had the courage for them and had more daring than all the other disciples.

One night, Jesus came to meet His disciples on the Sea of Tiberias. In the middle of a violent storm, He walked on the water. Which disciple jumped out of the boat? Peter! "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water" (Matthew 14: 22–33).

"There's Jesus!" Peter must have thought, "and I'm here; I must go to Him, where all the action is happening!" The other disciples were still anxiously clinging to the boat so as not to fall overboard in the storm and waves. Peter, on the other hand, was already walking on the water.

Peter's lack of faith is often mentioned in this story. While it is true that his faith was not quite enough, we should also acknowledge his courage to act, because of the faith he did possess, which caused him to get out of the boat in the first place. No one else dared to do that.

Peter was a leader with influence. He is always in the forefront, listed first, and is the spokesman for the twelve. His natural disposition was to lead. Jesus also chose him to be a leader. After his denial, Jesus restored him to his calling: "Do you love me?"

"Yes, Lord!"

"Tend my sheep" (John 21: 15).

Peter had the necessary qualities to be a leader, but he had to be transformed. His quick speaking, his courage and drive, his passion, his enthusiasm, his leadership skills—all these had to be directed into the right channels. Jesus Himself shaped and trained him and the Holy Spirit continued to guide him so that Peter became a spiritual shepherd according to God's good pleasure. His work in the Acts of the Apostles and his letters were and are a lasting blessing.

#### **Peter at the Goal**

We could speak about Peter being at the end of his life, but I deliberately say, "Peter at the goal." Yes, at the end of his life, through his death, Peter reached his goal—namely, to be with his beloved Savior again.

What was the end of his life like? That is not written in the Bible. However, Jesus predicted that he would die a martyr's death. Early church history records that he was crucified. Apparently, he first had to watch his wife being crucified. Then, when it was his own turn, he asked to be crucified upside down because he did not consider himself worthy to die in the same manner as Jesus. In this way he was nailed to the cross. Nevertheless, through Peter's painful and bitter death, he came to the goal of his life.

If we take a closer look at Peter's life, we see that our character can never be an excuse for poor service to God. Some people hide behind their excuses: "This is just how I am; what can I do?" But this should not be.

Despite Peter's dismal failure when he denied Jesus, Peter's character was vibrant and quick to grow under the Lord's teachings. God wonderfully transformed Peter, used him, and made him a true rock. Whatever our character looks like, God wants to and can change us and make us a blessing for others!

*Eduard Albrecht  
Eppingen, Germany*

#### **General:**

- Most well-known and prominent disciple of Jesus
- Is always named first wherever the twelve are listed (can justifiably be called the leader/speaker of the twelve)

#### **Name:**

- Simon was a common name
- Jesus gives him the beautiful nickname Peter (John 1: 40–42)
- Important: not just a new name
- Peter comes from the Greek word "Petros" = "rock/stone"

#### **Marital Status:**

- Married (Jesus healed his mother-in-law)

#### **Origin:**

- Originally from a small village called Bethsaida (John 1: 44)
- Later moved to the larger town of Capernaum (about 5 km [3 mi] from Bethsaida), where they had their home (Mark 1: 21,29)

#### **Occupation:**

- Professional fisherman in Capernaum (together with his brother Andrew)
- They fished not only for their own needs but it was also their trade from which they earned their income
- They owned their own boats and nets (Luke 5: 2ff)
- They were probably not alone and probably had employees (Luke 5: 7)
- The brothers spent their nights fishing

#### **Special Character Traits:**

- Tendency to speak quickly
- Impulsive
- Enthusiastic
- Passionate
- Courageous, sanguine, part of the action
- Leader, influential

## “Healed by God’s Almighty Hand”

**H**ow quickly life can change! On September 19, 2022, I was seriously burned. Mistaking gas for diesel, I poured it in a wood-burning stove used to heat a kiln. When I went to light it, it basically exploded in my face and over both my arms. Initially thinking I was not much affected, I examined my hand and found that it looked like it had shriveled up. That made me think I needed to get help. (For me, help comes from the Lord and His promises.)

I started calling on the Great Physician and those whom I trust to pray the prayer of faith. While calling on the Lord, we started a cooling off process for five or more hours. We dunked rags in water and applied them to the burned areas, changing them frequently to cool the skin, all the while praying and even singing a song of praise, until victory over intense pain was achieved. The Lord is truly the Great Physician, and I am so thankful for His healing touch.

He not only took the pain away, but He also allowed me not to go into shock. That night I slept as if nothing had happened, except that I had to wear bandages on my arms.

My wife started the process of taking care of the burns and put me on a nutritional regimen that would be helpful for a burn victim. Many were concerned and showed me love, called, and stopped by. I’m thankful for all of them. Many people shared that they were continuing to pray for me. I believe many were sincere. I needed people who would earnestly seek the Lord with the “prayer of faith.”

In Luke 8, we read of a woman who pushed through a crowd to touch the hem of Jesus’ garment. In that crowd, many were calling on and touching Jesus, but the woman who had faith was the one whom Jesus healed. In times of testing, true faith is what matters—

the kind of faith that touches the hem of His garment and the heart of Jesus.

My son and his wife both helped us as I was healing, he by running our sawmill and she by putting out a call to the community for my affliction. The people in my community were so kind, responding by sending my family dinner for over a week. As people saw the state I was in, the word of my testimony of God’s hand was being expressed. May the Lord bless their kindness.

After a week, the burns on my face and neck had scabbed over, and the burnt skin on my arm began loosening. On the tenth day, just before we got hit by Hurricane Ian, I already had new skin and was able to get back to work by September 30.

Some may question how bad my burns were, but I have pictures that tell the story. God healed me! Divine healing will always be scrutinized by unbelievers, but this doesn’t change the fact that “the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up” (James 5:15).

Exercising biblical faith is the only way to experience divine healing. The Lord has given us the gift of faith for His glory alone and for our benefit so we won’t forget Whom we serve.

“Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, *bless* His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good *things*, so *that* your youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (Psalm 103:1–5). I can testify of His goodness, and to God be all the glory!

Bob Gruner  
Eustis, Florida



## The House on Solid Ground

A house was being built on our street. The first thing the builders did was to dig a deep hole to make a firm foundation. This would make the house strong and stable.

Not far from the construction site, some children were playing in a park. They imitated the workers and also built a house but out of sand. When a child carelessly bumped into it, it collapsed.

We are all builders, just not with bricks and cement. We build our character. Every good or bad deed, every thought is a brick that builds our character. How we build is very crucial. The foundation is of utmost importance. The most secure foundation is Jesus. With His help, we can build good deeds, good words, and good thoughts every day. It will give us much joy when we make sure our “building” is solid.

The children who built on sand did not enjoy their house very much because it always collapsed. That’s how we would feel if we built with defective and poor-quality materials.

Building with Jesus when we are young is a beautiful start. Our character-building will make progress and become strong and attractive.

Jesus once gave an example of two men, one who built a house on the rock and the other a house on

sand. The most important thing was the foundation on which the houses were built. When the rains and the storms came, the house on the sand collapsed. The other house remained standing. No matter how the storms and waves raged, it did not move because it was built on Jesus Christ, the Rock.

In the golden days of youth now,  
While I’m healthy, young, and strong,  
I want to thrive and want to know how  
To live right and shun the wrong.  
I want to build on a foundation  
That’s strong and lasts eternally,  
To take ahold of God’s salvation  
And live a life that’s full and free.

Every good deed that is fashioned  
Is another building stone.  
Victorious living is my passion  
As I live by faith alone.  
The life I’m building is intended  
To bring glory to my Lord.  
When the last test has been ended,  
Eternal bliss is the reward.

*Gertrud Tarutis*



## *Seniors and Church Fellowship*

**T**he church of our God is comprised of people of all ages. Looking at the congregation of a local church, you see them all, from the youngest to the oldest.

We who have turned to the seniors' page have already passed through the years. A carefree childhood and challenging adolescence are already long behind us. We have already been where others want to go. Words like school, vocational training, marriage, family, and building a house are known to us. What has remained are memories. The fact is, we have experienced a lot, learned a lot, and consequently are able to speak about it.

Considering the broad spectrum of a community, we are already in the last category, the senior group. No, we are not just sitting around, nor are we necessarily waiting for death, although we are waiting with hope for the Lord. As far as the church is concerned, we are still there, and we belong, and are not to be overlooked.

In the life of the church, we have been there over the years and have witnessed the various stages, from

Sunday School to where we are now. For many years we have worked, prayed, contributed, been concerned, and hoped. We have tried to fill our place conscientiously and faithfully. We have accepted the burdens placed upon us and, wherever required, carried the necessary responsibilities. Looking back on the past, some often speak of "the good old days." We owe our thanks to the Lord for everything.

Meanwhile, younger people have embraced the responsibilities in the congregation and are filling the positions we once occupied. This change is not easy and even becomes a challenge for us, right when our advanced age dictates the time to give up our place, despite our insights, knowledge, and experience. At this point, we have to be careful not to let the hand-off of the baton be an embittering experience. Over the course of history, the passage of time always involves accepting new responsibilities or letting go of old ones. We must not forget that when we were entrusted with specific positions, we were also young and probably had neither experience nor maturity.

Time has passed. We no longer hold positions today. We are no longer on the church trustee board, no longer teachers of the Sunday school children, no longer sing in the choir, are no longer in charge of the church kitchen, and so on. No longer. We have had to come to terms with that. Sometimes we feel like spectators, just sitting on the sidelines. Our advice is no longer sought, and for the most part, we are no longer in the picture. Someone once described it like this: "We are kind of on the small 'side-track.'" But this should not make us sink into melancholy. On the contrary, we want to make the most of the time still given to us and be a blessing (Ephesians 5:16).

You ask what else we can do. This is already a good question, and whoever asks it takes the first step in the right direction. The question expresses that not only do we want to exist, and to be there; we also want to make a difference. That's as it should be. Let me give a few pointers of how this can be practically done. And by the way, it's not only what we do, but sometimes also what we don't do.

**Beware of Criticism**—In a youth meeting, we were covering the topic of temptations, and specifically temptations within various age groups. When I asked if older believers had temptations, the young people had to think first. Then someone said, "I think older people must struggle with the temptation to criticize." None of us wants to go down in history as critical or complaining; we would not want to be remembered as being a negative person. Of course, there is also an uplifting critique that should be lovingly given at the right moment and to the right person. Negative criticism rarely changes a situation. There are better methods, such as prayer.

**Support the Church in Prayer**—We probably have more time than ever before; we have so much time, we are often bored. This is an opportunity to participate.

*Prayer accomplishes more than criticism.* Never underestimate the power of prayer. I once read, "Prayer is an opportunity beyond compare, because through prayer we can change everything: people, matters, hardships, circumstances—prayer has infinite power!" The lyrics of a song are, "Turn your worries into prayer." Pray for God to bless the pastor, Sunday school teachers, board members, choir director. Pray for a deepening spiritual life in the congregation.

**Be a Role Model**—We are being watched. People watch us and observe our reactions and behavior. It is a good opportunity to lead by example and thereby make a good impact. It is useless to complain about the lack of prayer in church life and not pray. Be an example in praying, in offering, in giving thanks, in attending church services, in supporting others, in trusting God, in living out the Word of God—indeed, in virtually all areas.

**Don't Lack in Giving Encouragement**—This can be done by things that seem almost incidental, like a handshake, a smile, a kind word, a short note, or even a phone call. I was holding church services at a location when an older sister, while saying goodbye, said, "I still need to talk to you." She drew me aside as if to tell me a great secret. I heard these words: "I just wanted to tell you that I pray for you every day." Through one sentence, she encouraged me tremendously. At a church, a brother gave me a sum of money and asked me to buy the young people an ice cream after youth meeting and tell them how grateful he was for them. The youth understood.

Brother, Sister, we still have opportunity to be a blessing. You are needed. You could make a difference in the lives of the coming generation. Why don't you talk to your Lord about it and let the Spirit of God guide you.

*Harry Semenjuk*



# Wayward Children

Part 2

Markus Schmelzle

## God Knows Your Pain

**I**n every situation, God can understand us very well. Scripture shows us many parents who lost their child. Let's start with Adam and Eve, who even lost their first two sons. They physically lost Abel, who was murdered by his brother Cain. Similarly, however, they also lost Cain, who chose the path of sin, turned his back on God, went his own way, turned away from his parents, and left them alone in their pain.

We read about Samson. He was a chosen one of the Lord. His parents hoped the Lord could use their son as His instrument. Although God used him again and again for His purposes, the scriptures show us that Samson had practically broken all the commandments that were required of him, especially as a Nazarite (which means "consecrated" to God). He touched dead things, drank wine, and put himself into the position to have his hair shaved. Additionally, he had relations with pagan women in defiance of the counsel and commandments of God. He was hot-tempered and unpredictable. Not much is said of his parents. Yet they must have observed their son's behavior with weeping hearts.

Let's think of King David. Almost all of his children turned from him. Absalom even went to war against his own father. Even as a child, I was deeply moved by this passage when David received the

news, weeping, that his son Absalom had died: "O my son Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!" (2 Samuel 18:33).

### **We Could Cite Many More Examples.**

However, I would especially like to remind that God also knows this sort of pain. He had lovingly created man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, which He had created especially for man. He looked forward to having fellowship with Adam and Eve, who were made in His image. He looked forward to the evening when He would personally seek them out in the "cool of the day" to speak with them. But one evening, Adam and Eve were not to be seen. They tried to hide from Him. God called out to Adam, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9). What had happened? Those whom He loved dearly and for whom He had done everything had turned away from Him, rebelled against Him, and taken the path of sin. Now let's pay attention: It's not just that God, from His perspective, has done everything, but He has also never made a mistake! He could not blame Himself as if He had behaved wrongly here or there or should have acted differently. No, He had done everything right and well, and still "His children" had turned from Him. Why? Because they gave the voice



of the enemy greater credence and allowed themselves to be beguiled.

Even if the memory of the Fall may not really comfort us as parents, we can know that God knows our pain very well. His pain was so great that He did everything possible to win back “His children.” Not in an unrighteous way; He did not bend His holiness or the law. Never! But what was possible for Him, He did. Thus, in the end, He gave His beloved, only begotten Son, Who died innocently in place of the lost, taking their guilt and offenses upon Himself, thereby paving the way back to the Father’s heart. Everyone who wants to return to the Father has the opportunity to do so. Then what does the Father do? He looks out and waits to lovingly receive everyone.

**Luke 15: 11-32**

The parable of the prodigal son teaches us many things. We are made aware that, first and foremost, we have an image of God, the Father, waiting for His prodigal children who have become entangled in sin. Again and again we will return to this theme, having this time looked at this scripture primarily from the parents’ perspective of their lost children.

- To be continued -

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# A Revelant Question

**N**ot too long ago, somebody asked me which church I belonged to. When I said that I belong to the church of God, he asked, “What is the church of God? I’ve never heard of it.” This showed me once again how many believers do not recognize the Body of Christ and do not know what the church is. I want to give a brief answer here.

## **The Church is a Godly Institution**

Daniel already foretold, “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2: 44). Among these earthly kingdoms, therefore, a godly kingdom would appear, not created by people but by God. This prophecy came true. By coming to Earth, Jesus established this kingdom. His own words show that He was well aware of His purpose on Earth: “On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16: 18).

There is no doubt that the church began with Christ, meaning it was founded by Him. When He had completed His work on Earth and ascended back to the Father, He gave His church the stamp of God’s approval by sending the Holy Spirit. The church continued its activities with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and it was through

the Spirit that the limbs were integrated with the body, the church. The church originated with God and is led and governed by God Himself.

## **The Church is the Body of Christ**

“And He . . . gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, which is His body” (Ephesians 1: 22–23). Everyone who belongs to Christ is part of the Body of Christ, meaning the church. You become a member by receiving salvation through Christ. Anyone who has been born again is part of God’s family, the church of God.

## **Christ is the Head of the Church**

“And He is the head of the body, the church” (Colossians 1: 18). The founder of any institution is generally also its head and leader. As the founder of the church, Christ assumes these roles as well. He is the head of the whole church, and every individual member has access to Him. Everyone is equal before Him.

## **The Bible is the Constitution of the Church**

The founder is also entitled to issue laws and establish rules. “There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy” (James 4: 12). “For the LORD *is* our Judge, the LORD *is* our Lawgiver” (Isaiah 33: 22). The Word of God is therefore the only constitution valid for the church. If people read God’s Word, understand the commands of Christ

in the New Testament, and accept the free gift of salvation offered through the gospels, they too can come to Christ. By obeying God’s Word, their relationship with God and others will be properly governed. No other rules are necessary.

## **The Church is Partially in Heaven and Partially on Earth**

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect” (Hebrews 12: 22–23). The men and women who have accepted Christ join together in local congregations to advance God’s work where they live and to worship God. However, uniting to do God’s work does not make them members of the church; they became members by being born again. Conversely, people who are not born again are not members of the Body of Christ, regardless of how active or involved they are. Only salvation through Christ makes us members of the church.

## **The Church Books**

“Rejoice because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10: 20). “[W]hose names *are* in the Book of Life” (Philippians 4: 3). Only those names recorded in the Lamb’s Book of Life are accepted before

## A Sign from God

God. Any membership lists we make here on earth are human and have no eternal value.

### The Name of the Church

God thought His people, the spiritual Israel, should have a new name (Isaiah 62:1–2). He decided to use His own name. Jesus recognized this and kept the disciples true to the Father’s name (John 17:12). The first Christian congregation continued on just as the Lord had begun, which is why the name used in Acts and the epistles is “church of God” (Acts 2:28, 1 Corinthians 1:2). This term is used thirteen times in the New Testament to refer to the church. Other names are used only when referring to children of God or to their relationship with each other but not as a name for the church. “Church of God” is the only biblical name, and all true Christians should bear it.

### It is a Unified Church

“Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul” (Acts 4:32). The church is to be unified, both within local congregations and in the universal church. All disunity is abhorrent to God. The family of God, whose members are now dispersed throughout many varied communities worldwide, is not in its intended state. May the Lord lead His people out of all confusion and schisms and into the glorious light of His truth and presence! ■

I want to write a testimony to the glory of God. I have been thinking about the verse from Psalm 33:4, “For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does” (NIV).

I’ve been praying for divine healing for a long time because I’m always in pain, day and night. I have osteoarthritis and fibromyalgia.

In 2019, I unexpectedly got cancer in my thyroid. I had to have two surgeries. After the first surgery, the doctor said they almost got to the nerves where I could have lost my voice. He didn’t want me to wake up without a voice, so they operated on my other gland six months later. Everything went well. The surgeon said I had a two-inch tumor with aggressive cancer.

I had to have iodine treatments. I thought everything was fine. But after that, I had to go for an examination again. They realized the cancer was growing back. The growth was only the size of a pea.

Then we started praying to God very earnestly that He would heal me if He wanted me to stay here longer.

I had been praying for a sign from God for a long time. Then, on February 13, 2022, Brother Kehler preached about divine healing. His theme was “God heals all infirmities!” from Isaiah 53 and Psalm 103. He ended the message by saying if there was anyone who wanted to be anointed, there would be an opportunity next Sunday. Sunday came, and I still had no assurance because I had been praying for a sign. Suddenly, the Lord gave me the conviction that I should be anointed. Then I became calm inside. I went forward and was anointed by three pastor brothers. God heard the prayers. I had to wait a while before I got my results from tests again. Two doctors said everything looked fine. I have had to go for ultrasound scans every six months since. I recently had another check-up, and today I found out from the doctor that everything is still fine. “Praise the Lord!” I said inwardly right away. I had already told my doctor that I was anointed and that the Lord healed me.

I am so thankful and praise the Lord that He counted me worthy of His touch. It’s such a sacred act. I would advise every reader to pray earnestly for divine healings. We need them more than ever and also to encourage others.

United in love for Christ, your sister in the Lord,

*Annie Thiessen,  
Winnipeg, Manitoba*

# The Church of God

*It is not a church that was started by man;  
Conceived by our great God is how she began.  
Her solid foundation is Christ without fail;  
Hell rages against her but will not prevail.*

*The chief cornerstone is Christ Jesus alone;  
He died on the cross, for our sins He atoned.  
He grants us salvation through His own dear blood,  
And He reconciled us with our God above.*

*The church is a temple comprised of God's own,  
Built up for His glory as spiritual stones;  
And love is the mortar that binds us together  
From near and from far, love unites us forever.*

*The church is Christ's Body; each member is placed  
By God as is needed and strengthened by grace.  
Each name has been written in heaven above  
In the book of life. Praise the Lord for His love.*

*Though we are many, the Body is one;  
The head of the Body is Jesus, God's Son.  
Holy and sanctified through Christ's precious blood,  
We are kept by His word for God's glory above.*

*Apostles and prophets and martyrs and all,  
The saints of the ages have followed the call.  
Yes, they were the church as they travelled this sod,  
And now we join with them as the church of God.*

*How can I join denominations of men?  
I belong to God's church if I'm born again!  
Though doctrine of man is like sinking sand,  
If Christ's the foundation, yes, then faith will stand.*

*On Jesus alone, yes, on Jesus alone  
We anchor our faith and our spiritual home.  
Salvation is ours! It is not a façade.  
Through faith we are members of the church of God.*