

6. THE REIGNING WITH CHRIST

We must all appear before the *dais* or *bema* of Christ to be requited for our deeds in the body, whether good or bad. Interestingly, Paul has not given us much information about what the outcomes of the bema will look like. What are the rewards? We are not told. Yet, like an artist painting a great mural, Paul has painted a most glorious mural of the destiny of the ecclesia, which is the body of Christ. At times, he presented this destiny as all in the future, and at other times, he presented this destiny in the present, as if we have already entered onto this most sacred ground. And yet, at other times, the light of his evangel shines so brightly and so victoriously that it seems as if all who will appear before the bema will receive the applause of God, and none will be shut out.

Two thousand years later, this beloved apostle of the nations continues to enlighten the eyes of our heart to see our on-high calling and the glory that awaits us in Christ. Consider *some* of what Paul has revealed in his epistles: the body is seated together among the celestials, in Christ (Ephesians 2.6); the saints have been transferred into the kingdom of the Son of His love (Colossians 1.13); the children of God are enjoyers of an allotment in the kingdom (Romans 8.17); the body of Christ is the complement of Christ and, as such, will join Christ in heading up all in the heavens and on the earth (Ephesians 1.10; 22-23); the saints have the expectation of glory reserved in the heavens (Colossians 1.5); the dead in Christ and those alive in Christ on earth when He comes will be taken up in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so they shall always be together with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4.13-18); in the twinkle of an eye all shall be changed to put on incorruption and immortality and to enjoy an allotment in the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15.50-57); the saints will judge the messengers (angels or celestial beings) and the world (1 Corinthians 6.2, 3).

All these things and more describe the destiny of the body of Christ because Christ is the Savior of the body, which He nurtures and cherishes that He should be presenting to Himself a glorious ecclesia (*out-called* body), not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that it may be holy and flawless (see Ephesians 5.22-33). Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass (1 Thessalonians 5.24 NASB). When we meditate on the glory of our destiny in Christ, it should bring forth from our innermost being love, adoration and worship of our God and Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Glory to God!

Perhaps, there is one phrase that best describes this glorious destiny, and it is *reigning with Christ*, which Paul seems to present as both a present and a future reality. But what does reigning look like? I propose that for the body of Christ, reigning with Christ is much more than sitting on literal thrones ruling over others, as if wielding great power and authority. This concept is appropriate on earth as man rules over man, but it seems to fall short of the glory for a people joined to the Head of the universe as His body.

THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

Reigning has to do with the very life, love and character of Christ being manifested throughout the heavens and on the earth through the ecclesia, which is His body made up of many members, until Christ is all in all. I propose that the concept of the body is an important key to understanding what it means to reign with Christ, as well as what the rewards are that will come forth from the bema of Christ. Christ will sit on His throne and so will His body. His promise to those who conquer is to sit down with Him on His throne as He conquered and sat down on His Father's throne (Revelation 3.21).

Now, to begin, let us look at the word *reign*.

Reign—“be-king.”

The word *reign* means “be-king.” Based on this meaning, most people probably envision a king seated on a throne. However, *reign* also can mean “to hold sway, to prevail or to predominate.” Another word that is applicable to the word *reign* is the word *ascendancy*, which means “to be in domination.” The word *ascend* means “to move from a lower position to a higher position, such as in rank.” The word *domination* should immediately bring to mind when Elohim created man and gave him *dominion* over the earth (Genesis 1.26).

We see this thought very clearly in Paul's epistle to the Romans where the word *reign* is used in relation to death [death reigned from Adam unto Moses (Romans 5.14)], to sin [sin reigns in death (Romans 5.12)], to grace [grace reigns through righteousness (Romans 5.21)], and to life [grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through Christ (Romans 5.17)]. We could say that death was king from Adam to Moses; sin is king in death; grace is king through righteousness; and grace and the gift of righteousness will be king in life through Christ. Each is in the ascendancy in its respective sphere. These are not literal kings; rather they are in the ascendancy, which refers to rising to a high level, as in rank or a superior or dominating position.

As we read his epistles, it as if we can hear Paul calling out “be-king,” “be in the ascendancy in life, for you will be in the ascendancy in the eons to come.” We must agree that reigning in life for the believer is both present and future. For example, in grace through Christ, we have every provision to live in the ascendancy over sin and the flesh. Paul alluded to this as he dealt with the many problems that existed among the saints in Corinth.

Already are ye filled, already ye are become rich, ye have come to **reign** without us: yea and I would that ye did **reign**, that we also might **reign** with you. (1 Corinthians 4.8 ASV)

Some translations insert the words *reigned as kings* [KJV] or *ascended your thrones* [WNT] in place of the word *reign*, but they all acknowledge that the words *kings* and *thrones* are not in the Greek manuscripts; that is, the translators added them. This is unfortunate, for it is adding interpretative bias to God's word.

THE REIGNING WITH CHRIST

Given the wording, it is apparent that Paul was not making reference to a future reign, as if they would be kings on thrones. How could they come to reign without Paul and his companions unless Paul was referring to a present reign, such as reigning in life? They were boasting as if they were already reigning in life, as if they had ascended over the things of the flesh, and yet their actions and words were quite the contrary. They were boasting in the wrong things, and they had parted Christ and become sectarian. They had all the spiritual gifts, and yet they were fleshly, minors in Christ; that is, they were not spiritual (see 1 Corinthians 3.1-4). The flesh still dominated them; therefore, they were not in the place of ascendancy over the flesh.

Paul was making a point with the Corinthians and in no way meant that they were in fact reigning in the good sense of the word. He desired that they would reign in life with him and his companions, but to do this they had to grow up to be spiritual, which meant putting off the old fleshly ways. Isn't it interesting that they were not deficient in any graces (gifts), yet they were fleshly? The lesson is that graces alone will not make one spiritual.

So in these few verses, we see that reigning refers to something other than a king sitting on a throne, and that it can have a present application.

Enduring to be reigning together.

Curiously, Paul never used the phrase *reigning with Christ* or *reigning with Him*. Actually, there is only one reference to *reigning with Him* (Christ), and it is used exclusively for the conquerors (overcomers) that will reign with Christ for 1,000 years. However, Paul did use the expression *reigning together*,¹ which, according to the context of its use, is similar to *reigning with Him*.

Therefore I am enduring all because of those who are chosen, that they also may be happening upon the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with glory eonian. Faithful is the saying: "For if we died together, we shall be living together also; if we are enduring, **we shall be reigning together also**; if we are disowning, He also will be disowning us; if we are disbelieving, He is remaining faithful—He cannot disown Himself." (2 Timothy 2.10-13 cv)

Death for the saint leads to life together with Christ. Enduring in this life leads to reigning together with Christ in the future eons. If we fail and somehow disown the Lord, He will disown us. However, if we disbelieve along the way, Christ will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself, which means He cannot disown His own body, for He nourishes and cherishes it (Ephesians 5.29).

¹ Many translations use the phrase *reign with Him*, but they also acknowledge that the word *Him* is not in the original Greek manuscripts but was added by the editors. In these translations, it should read *reign with*. A few translations use the expression *reign together* [DNT, YLT]. One translation goes so far as declaring that *we shall share His Kingship* (WNT).

THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

Obviously, there are many things of great import that can be discussed in these few verses, but the discussion will be restricted to this faithful saying: *If we are enduring, we shall be reigning together also*. This is a conditional statement that requires us to endure in order to reign together. We need to take note of the words *endure, reign* and *together*.

Before looking at this matter of enduring to reign together, we need to consider the context of Paul's epistle, both before and after these verses. In all of his other epistles, he looked forward to continued service to the Lord, but in this letter to his beloved Timothy, Paul declared that he had finished his career, all the while keeping the faith. He had run the race of *the* faith. A wreath of righteousness awaited him in the day of his resurrection, for he loved the advent of His Lord who was saving him for His *celestial* kingdom (see 2 Timothy 4.7-18). There is no doubt that as his death neared Paul looked ahead to the day of Christ, to his resurrection from among the dead and entrance into the celestial kingdom of Christ. He was looking for Christ's advent and His kingdom (2 Timothy 4.1).

With his imminent dissolution as the backdrop, Paul left instruction to his beloved son in the faith to encourage him to continue in his service to the Lord. Paul had suffered much evil as he brought the evangel to the nations. He knew that his life would not be spared, but he also knew the greater power of God that had prevailed throughout his service and that would keep Him.

You may not be ashamed, then, of the testimony of our Lord, nor yet of me, His prisoner, but **suffer evil with the evangel in accord with the power of God**, Who saves us and calls us with a holy calling, not in accord with our acts, but in accord with His own purpose and the grace which is given to us in Christ Jesus before times eonian, yet now is being manifested through the advent of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, Who, indeed, abolishes death, yet illuminates life and incorruption through the evangel of which I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher of the nations. For which cause I am suffering these things also, but I am not ashamed, for I am aware Whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard what is committed to me, for that day. (2 Timothy 1.8-12 cv)

Paul suffered evil in his day, and he instructed Timothy to suffer it as well. The word of God that had been entrusted to Paul for the nations was under fire, and many were departing from it, and many were fighting against it. This did not deter Paul one iota but instead made him more determined to hold to the One in whom he believed. He was given revelation from the Lord, and no matter what others might have said or charged against him regarding this word, his answer was to hold to the word.

He instructed Timothy to have a pattern of sound words, which he had heard from Paul (2 Timothy 1.13); to commit to faithful men what he had heard from Paul through many witnesses (2 Timothy 2.2); to present himself to God, qualified, an unashamed worker, correctly cutting the word of truth (2 Timothy

THE REIGNING WITH CHRIST

2.15); to avoid those who swerve from the truth (2 Timothy 2.16-18); to be gentle toward all, apt to teach, bearing with evil, with meekness training those who are antagonizing, seeing whether God may be giving them repentance to come into a realization of the truth (2 Timothy 2.24-25); to remain in what he had learned in the sacred Scriptures, for all Scripture is inspired by God, and is beneficial for teaching, for exposure, for correction, for discipline in righteousness, that the man of God may be equipped, fitted out for every good act (2 Timothy 3.14-17 cv); and to herald the word, to stand by it (2 Timothy 4.2).

There is no doubt that Paul had one thing in mind; it was the word that was entrusted to him and that he had entrusted to Timothy. The only answer in the day of departure is to herald the truth, which requires correctly cutting the word of truth. If we do, we can be assured of one thing; we will suffer evil at the hands of many detractors who will stand against the truth. They can have many appearances; even the appearance of being very religious and pious with knowledge of Scripture, being very learned, having a form of devoutness, yet denying its power (see 2 Timothy 3.1-7).

Dear brethren, we too are in a day of departure, perhaps even greater than in Paul's waning days. Many do not hold to the truth and Scripture is cut in many ways, but often not in the correct way. When Paul told Timothy to endure, he was telling him to endure in the word of God, the sacred Scriptures and what he had been taught by Paul, which is what we have been given in his epistles that have become part of our holy Scriptures. By extension, those who endure in the word and suffer evil must also endure through the times of evil. In other words, there is an enduring in the word and an enduring in service to the Lord. In our service to the Lord, we are called to endure and not give up.

Endure means "to under-remain," which, we could say, refers to sticking with something. We are to remain under it or to remain with it. We are to remain with the truth of the word of God; and if we do, although we might suffer evil in a day of apostasy, our endurance in holding to the word, as well as living by it, will lead to reigning together with Christ.

In the context of Paul's faithful saying, we must assume that the word *together* applies to being together with Christ. Salvation is *in* Christ, for we died with Christ, and we shall be living with Christ. In addition to dying with Him and living with Him, if we endure, we shall be reigning together also. Why? Because He is remaining faithful!

Now, although he clearly stated that those who endure will reign with Christ, Paul did not tell us what this will look like. Will the enduring believers be sitting on thrones as kings and lords, or does it mean that they will simply be in the ascendancy over all things as our Lord is? With this question, let us continue on with the matter of judging angels.

THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

Judge angels and the world.

Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? **Know ye not that we shall judge angels?** how much more things that pertain to this life? (1 Corinthians 6.2-3 KJV)

It is undeniable that Paul wrote that the saints will judge the angels and the world. What does this mean? The word *judge* could be taken to mean ruling over, but perhaps the better way to view it is in the sense of being above in position or rank in the kingdom of God. The writer to the Hebrews, in considering the world to come, quoted part of David's Psalm 8.

But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? **Thou madest him a little lower than the angels;** thou crownedst him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hands.... (Hebrews 2.6-7 KJV)

Man was made a little lower than the angels, which has to mean lower in rank or position. After all, mankind is restricted to this earth and has no ability to interact with the celestial beings, unless God allows it. After the one transgression of Adam, mankind fell even lower, for death passed through into all mankind (Romans 5.12). Angels do not die (see Luke 20.36).

In like fashion, when the Son of Mankind walked this earth, He subjected Himself to His Father as one who was lower than the angels. He willingly emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, being made in the likeness of men, and He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death (see Philippians 2.7-8). But now we see Jesus who was made for a little while lower than the angels crowned with glory and honor. He is no longer lower in rank but is far above all rule and authority and power and dominion (Ephesians 1.21), having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him (1 Peter 3.22 NASB). He is far above all! Also, death is no longer master over Him (see Romans 6.9), for indeed He abolishes death.

Consequently, just as Christ is far above all, so will His body be far above all, no longer a little lower than the messengers and no longer having death as master over them. The body of Christ will rise above the angels in position in God's kingdom and will judge them, which is not judging for condemnation but rather judging as in making determinations as in to set things right. We could say that the body will set things right with the angels. This thought is more in line with what Paul wrote the Corinthians about being ambassadors of God in heralding the word of the conciliation. *"Be conciliated to God!"* See 2 Corinthians 5.19-21.

Interestingly, Paul did not state that judging the angels or the world was a reward for faithful service. He stated it to the fleshly saints in Corinth that will be confirmed unimpeachable in the day our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1.8 CV).

THE REIGNING WITH CHRIST

As we continue in our consideration of the word *reign*, the matter of being seated on thrones comes into view.

Seated on thrones.

Obviously, there are many references in Hebrew Scripture that refer to kings sitting on thrones. After all, the Lord sits upon a throne (Isaiah 6.1) and Christ, as King of the earth, will sit upon a throne (Matthew 25.31). In the Greek Scriptures, there are a few references to ones sitting on thrones, but without exception they are believers who conquer or overcome through the life of Christ.

John through his Patmos vision of Christ was told to write to the messengers of the seven ecclesias to encourage those who conquer during the great affliction. He later perceived thrones and ones sitting on them.

“The one who is conquering, to him will I be granting to be seated with Me on **My throne** as I, also, conquer, and am seated with My Father on **His throne.**” (Revelation 3.21 cv)

And I saw **thrones**, and some who were seated on them, to whom judgment was entrusted. (Revelation 20.4 WNT)

These thrones will be set after the King of kings and the Lord of lords (Revelation 19.16) takes the scepter of the kingdom to reign for a thousand years on the second earth and for the eons of the eons (Revelation 11.15). These, most likely, are the thrones Jesus promised to His twelve disciples.

Yet Jesus said to them, “Verily, I am saying to you, that you who follow Me, in the renascence **whenever the Son of Mankind should be seated on the throne of His glory, you also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.**” (Matthew 19.28 cv)

Scripture also tells us that in the coming eon there will be a kingdom of priests that will reign on the earth; the conquerors who loved not their lives even unto death.

They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and **shall reign with him a thousand years** (Revelation 20.6 KJV)

“You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and **they will reign upon the earth.**” (Revelation 5.10 NASB)

So in these few verses, we can see the connection between being seated, thrones and reigning with Christ. As Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords, we can assume that these thrones do refer to kings and lords. In fact, there will be kings, lords and priests in the kingdom of Christ.

THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

Seated among the celestials.

Now, it is interesting that Paul, who was given revelation of the body of Christ, does not mention the body sitting on thrones but rather seated among the celestials or, according to most translations, in the heavenly places.

Yet God, being rich in mercy, because of His vast love with which He loves us (we also being dead to the offenses and the lusts), vivifies us together in Christ (in grace are you saved!) and rouses us together and **seats us together among the celestials, in Christ Jesus**, that, in the oncoming eons, He should be displaying the transcendent riches of His grace in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2.4-7 cv) ²

According to Paul's evangel, God blesses us (the body of Christ) with every spiritual blessing among the celestials, in Christ (Ephesians 1.3). In other words, all the blessings that are found among the celestials are ours in Christ. Not only does the Father bless us with every spiritual blessing among the celestials in Christ, but He also seats us together among the celestials in Christ.

This raises the question of whether this is ours in the present or is ours all in the future. Surely, Paul presented it as having a present application. It seems that Paul's vision was so clear that he looked beyond this earth and the time in which he lived; he looked into the oncoming eons and entered onto this sacred ground as if he, along with the entire body of Christ, were there. In some measure, one could say that Paul even looked outside of time and space. Just as John was caught up to the Lord's day in spirit, it was as if Paul lived continually caught up in spirit to the new creation in God's day.

Some might answer the question by stating that Paul's vision of being among the celestials was all in spirit and all in the present. Granted, there may be some element of the present for us as our eyes are enlightened to see more clearly and as we are led by the spirit. Undoubtedly, we touch upon some of the blessings. However, who of us can truly state that we are living in the realm of the celestials today, even in spirit? Are there any among us who think we are literally seated among the celestials while our bodies are firmly fixed to this earth? Obviously, we are not seated on thrones today, as if we are kings. ³ We would have to have a mighty good imagination to come to such a conclusion. Who of us can even state that we fully relate in our daily lives to what Paul saw? As we come into the place of ascendancy in our lives, we may sense that we have touched something of the

² Paul used three verbs to describe our position in Christ, and they are presented in the present tense: In God's vast love by which He saves us in grace, He *vivifies* us together, *rouses* us together and *seats* us together among the celestials. According to the concordant method, *vivifies* refers to making alive, especially the spirit; *rouses* refers to bringing forth the soul from death; *seats* refers to ascending to be with the Lord in His exalted position among the celestials.

³ Paul presented being seated among the celestials as something for all the body of Christ. He did not bring it onto the ground of reward for faithful service; rather, he presented it as a reality for all the body.

THE REIGNING WITH CHRIST

celestials. But, the fact of the matter is that we are not there yet. At best, we can only taste it in some small measure. We need spiritual, glorified, celestial bodies that come about through the out-resurrection.

The other way to view Paul's vision is in light of his great positional statement of being *in Christ*. Believers are *in Christ*, forever secure *in Christ*, who is our Life. Where Christ is, we are. Our life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3.3). When He died, we died in Him. When He was raised, we were raised in Him so that we might walk in newness of life (see Romans 6). We do not see all this in our day, but we hold to it by faith.

Simply, as the body of Christ, we have ascended to the superior position among the celestials. However, we must wait for the Savior to come from heaven to deliver us to His celestial kingdom, at which time we will enter into our destiny *in Christ*.

Can you imagine anything more glorious and sacred? Seated among the celestials in Christ means that Christ's ecclesia (*out-called* body) has entered onto the sacred ground of the finished work of Christ in a way that mankind has never known and that reveals to the sovereignties and authorities among the celestials (i.e., angels or messengers) the multifarious (manifold) wisdom of God, in accord with the purpose of the eons (see Ephesians 3.10-11).

Now, this leads to the heart of the matter. I have proposed that reigning with Christ is far greater than sitting on a throne with underlings doing our bidding or, for that matter, even judging angels and the world. As I have considered this matter, I have concluded that *another* way to consider the whole matter of reigning with Christ is to see it as more a quality of life, and this quality is intimately related to being members of Christ's body.

Eonian life.

Consider Paul's exhortation to Timothy to get hold of *eonian life* (1 Timothy 6.12 cv) or to get hold of life really (1 Timothy 6.19 cv). *Eonian life* is not only the life that reigns in life while in our body of humiliation, but the life that will reign with Christ among the celestials in the eons to come. Even this life in the eons must be seen as more than a position of ruling in the kingdom of God. What is the quality of eonian life? It is the life of Christ. It is life really! After all, we are called to be the complement of Christ. Surely, being His complement is reigning with Christ. But we cannot stop at this point because being His complement is not an individual matter but a body matter, that is, it relates to the entire body of Christ, all the members united as one. Consequently, reigning with Christ has to do with the very life, love, and character of Christ being manifested throughout the heavens and on the earth through the ecclesia, which is His body made up of many members, until Christ is all in all. I believe this is the key to understanding what it means for us to reign with Christ.

THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

If we want to understand reigning with Christ, we need to understand the nature of the body, both individual and corporate.

The individual body.

First, there is the individual body, namely, our human body. Paul referred to our earthly tents or homes as bodies of death (Romans 7.24) and the body of our humiliation (Philippians 3.21). Death passed through into all mankind; consequently, the bodies occupied by mankind, whether a believer or unbeliever, are bodies of corruption destined to die. However, the good news for us who believe is that a day will come when, in the resurrection of the just, we will put off corruption and put on incorruption; this mortal will put on immortality.

The major difference today between the believer and the unbeliever is that the believer has the resurrection life of Christ within and the unbeliever does not.

A day is coming when all believers will be changed in the twinkle of an eye as they put on spiritual bodies fully transfigured into the likeness of Christ. Today, we have His life, but we are not like Him in the fullest sense, for we continue to reside in bodies of death; this can only be remedied through resurrection, transfiguration, immortality, and glorification. We are waiting for our Savior to come out of heaven and transfigure the body of our humiliation, to conform it to the body of His glory. In that glorious day, our body will be even better than Eve's body when she was first fashioned out of Adam and before she was deceived by the serpent. The first woman was of the soil, just like Adam. Our new body will not be constituted from the soil, for it will be constituted a spiritual body in the image of the Celestial or Heavenly One (see 1 Corinthians 15.42-49). Our celestial body will be in the image of the Son of God, the Creator of all, and as such will not be limited to this earth or to the three spatial dimensions, plus time. ⁴

The corporate body.

As presented to us by Paul, there is what many call the *corporate* body of Christ, with Christ as the Head. The word *corporate* means "to make into a body"; and the body of Christ is a joining of all the individual believers into one body, which is called the body of Christ. In other words, the body of Christ is the sum total of all the individual believers. Each individual is a member of the body of Christ; all are joined with one another and united in spirit to the Head, Christ. In Christ, there is only one body but with many members.

Another way of looking at the body of Christ is to see it as an organism made up of many members, just as the human body is. All the members are joined

⁴ Today, science states that we live in a space-time dimensional universe. It is referred to as a "space-time continuum" comprised of three dimensions of space (i.e., height, width, and depth, or longitude, latitude, and elevation, or the coordinates x, y, and z), and one dimension of time. However, God and those among the celestials seem to be in another dimension not restricted by any of these dimensions or by time. We will be constituted to live in the realm of the celestials.

THE REIGNING WITH CHRIST

together under one Head, which is Christ; and all are to function together as one body with each member having a function within the body, based on the graces given by the spirit of the Lord.

For the body also is not one member, but many. ... Yet now there are, indeed, many members, yet one body. (1 Corinthians 12.14, 20 cv)

Paul likened the body of Christ to the human body by describing it as one body with many members. In fact, the body of Christ is *the* Christ. In other words, metaphorically speaking, from head to toe, the body is representative of Christ Himself.

For even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the one body, being many, are one body, **thus also is the Christ.** (1 Corinthians 12.12 cv)

The body of Christ is a spiritual body, which means that our oneness comes through one spirit, and that is the spirit of God. We could say that the spirit of God outside of us unites all of us together by the spirit of God within us.

God is spirit, and the body of Christ, today and in the future eons, will be a corporate, spiritual body in the likeness of the Son of God. As such, the body of Christ is so constituted that all the members are mutually dependent on one another. Each member is called to perform certain functions as given by God. It is not our choice but God's choice. It is a serious mistake to take on a function for which one is not divinely suited. It matters not whether the function is in a place of public prominence or is hidden. What matters is that we discover what we have been endowed to do and then do it to the honor and glory of God. This is just a thought, a proposal; but perhaps the reward we receive will have to do with our position or function in the corporate body of Christ. Like the function of our human bodies, every member will have a place in the corporate body that is necessary for the entire body to function as the complement of the Head as He gathers all unto Himself. No one will be left out, and all will be enjoyers of an allotment in the kingdom. Every one will be well-suited for their place and will receive the blessing of every spiritual blessing among the celestials.

This would answer why building the saints upon the foundation of Christ is a very serious matter for those graced to be builders, whether for planting or watering. Paul admonished all who build: *Are you not aware that you are a temple of God and the spirit of God is making its home in you? If anyone is corrupting the temple of God, God will be corrupting him, for the temple of God is holy, which you are* (1 Corinthians 3.16-17 cv). The building of today is in preparation for the eons of the eons. Each member of the body of Christ must be trained and encouraged to function in the body as graced by the spirit of God in preparation to function as a member of Christ's glorified, celestial body in the oncoming eons.

THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

Perhaps, how we function among one another in the body today will determine our place in the body among the celestials.

The natural, then the spiritual.

Let us be clear that describing believers collectively as a body is more than a metaphor, which is likening one thing to another thing. We might be tempted to think that in the mind of God the human body came first and then when the Son of God died for humanity and brought forth a people unto Himself, it seemed good to call this new creation the body of Christ because it was similar to a human body. However, as revealed through Paul, God has a principle that governs how He works in bringing about His purpose and plan through the eons.

However, **the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual.** (1 Corinthians 15.46 NASB)

In other words, in relation to the purpose of the eons, God first works in the natural realm and then in the spiritual. We could say that the natural is the type of the spiritual. However, God is spirit and all that He does is with a spiritual pattern in mind; that is, the natural is a reflection of a greater work He is doing and will do in the spiritual realm. We clearly see this in relation to the human body.

The human body was fashioned after the body of Christ, which was in the mind and heart of God before the disruption of the world, even before the eonian times. We could say that our physical bodies are a type of the body of Christ. When He created man, Elohim had the body of Christ in mind.

This can be seen in the account of Adam and Eve. Adam was formed out of the soil of the earth, and Eve was fashioned or built out of Adam's body. In other words, Eve was actually part of Adam's body. The Lord God (Yahweh Elohim) took a part from Adam and built Eve around this part. We see this fact in Adam's response when he looked upon the first woman and said: *"This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man"* (Genesis 2.23 NASB).

The woman was of the very bone and flesh of the man, and she became his helpmeet, a helper suitable for him. In what way was she to help Adam? She was fashioned so that Adam could have dominion or rule over the earth (Genesis 1.26). In other words, Adam had to have a helper in order to rule. Adam and Eve are a type of what would come, namely, that God the Father would bring forth another creation fashioned out of the life of His Son.

In like fashion, the Son of God, the second Man, the last Adam must have a helper in order for Him to rule in the eons of the eons. This helper is what Paul collectively called the body of Christ, for this body is fashioned out of the life of the One who is the Resurrection and the Life.

THE REIGNING WITH CHRIST

If we remain with the figure of a body, we will see that during the eons of the eons when the body, which is the complement of the One completing the all in all (Ephesians 1.23 *cv*), is seated among the celestials in Christ, it will remain a body connected to the Head. With the heading up of all in view, Paul confirmed this fact by declaring that Christ, as the Head over all, is the Head of the ecclesia which is His body (Ephesians 1.22-23). In other words, the body of Christ will continue to be constituted as His body in the next eon and beyond.

This is an important point, for it may give us some indication of how the body will operate among the celestials in the eons of the eons. Keep in mind that the body of Christ refers to the collection of many bodies all joined together; namely, the body is comprised of individual members (believers). Each member will have a new body fashioned after Christ, and all the members together will make up the corporate body of Christ.

When we believe, we become a new creation in Christ, which means all earthly distinctions cease in Christ. Paul no longer knew Christ or any one else according to the flesh (see 2 Corinthians 5.16-17). However, there is much more to this new creation that waits to be manifested when Christ comes for His body. We have only arrived at this new creation in the spiritual sense, for in the eons to come, our new body will not be a remake of the old, something of the flesh. It will be a completely new entity fashioned out of entirely new materials that are spiritual and celestial (heavenly). Paul called it our habitation out of heaven (2 Corinthians 5.2; also see 1 Corinthians 15.42-57).

Although this is all future, we have a representation of the body on earth today in what many call the “church,” which I have preferred to call the *ecclesia*, based on the Greek. All who believe in Jesus are members of the one body of Christ. There are no rites or sacraments to perform, no membership rolls to put your name on, no covenant statements to sign, no special creeds to recite, no special procedures to follow to become a member of the body of Christ. When we first believe, we immediately become part of the body of Christ. Whether we truly function as a member in very practical ways is another matter altogether.

Until our Lord comes, we are to be joined together in love for one another.

Now, being true, in love we should be making **all grow into Him, Who is the Head—Christ**—out of Whom the entire body, being articulated together and united through every assimilation of the supply, in accord with the operation in measure of each one’s part, is making for the growth of the body, for **the upbuilding of itself in love**. (Ephesians 4.15-16 *cv*)

But we shall lovingly hold to the truth, and shall in all respects **grow up into union with Him who is our Head, even Christ**. Dependent on Him, the whole body—its various parts closely fitting and firmly adhering to one another—grows by the aid of every contributory link, with power

THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

proportioned to the need of each individual part, so as to **build itself up in a spirit of love.** (Ephesians 4.15-16 WNT)

But speaking the truth in love, 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 supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the **edifying of itself in love.** (Ephesians 4.15-16 KJV)

As revealed in these three translations, the body is to grow up, to be built up in love. First, notice that the purpose of this growth is to grow up into the Head, which is Christ. In other words, the Head should always be in view in the growth of the body. Second, notice that it is the body itself that is to build itself up, and it is to do it in love. The love of God has been poured out into the heart of each believer through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5.5) so that each of us has been given a divine ability to do this labor of love.

This leads to a question: Given that there are millions upon millions of believers scattered across the globe today, how is it possible for the body to build itself up in love? The answer lies in the local ecclesia. We are to be part of the building up in love with brothers and sisters in our community or locality. It is through routine or daily contacts with one another that we will have opportunities to be built up in love. Each of us has been given graces or gifts which are to be used in this building process (see Romans 12.3-21; 13.8-10; 14.19; 1 Corinthians 12-13). Of course, in our modern world in which travel and communication have grown by leaps and bound, it is also possible to be built up with brethren in other parts of the world, but the primary building is to be done in the local ecclesia.

But what is the goal of the building up in love? According to Paul, the goal is to become a mature man that is the complement of Christ.

And the same One gives these, indeed, as apostles, yet these as prophets, yet these as evangelists, yet these as pastors and teachers, toward the adjusting of the saints for the work of dispensing, for the upbuilding of the body of Christ, unto the end that we should all attain to the unity of the faith and of the realization of the son of God, **to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the complement of the Christ,** that we may by no means still be minors, surging hither and thither and being carried about by every wind of teaching, by human caprice, by craftiness with a view to the systematizing of the deception. (Ephesians 4.11-14 cv)

Today, pastors and teachers are the ones gifted to bring adjustment to the saints so that they can serve effectively in the body. These are not titles but rather are gifted responsibilities. Servants of Christ are given to adjust the saints through pastoring and teaching. Some translations use the words *equipping* or *perfecting* instead of *adjusting*. The purpose is to help the saints to do the work of upbuilding, to equip them or to perfect them for this work.

THE REIGNING WITH CHRIST

Unfortunately, today many groups of believers place all their emphasis on their “pastor;” however, Paul was doing nothing of the sort. The emphasis was and should be on the purpose or the end, and that is the upbuilding until we all become a mature man that is the complement or the fullness or the exact image of Christ. The body of Christ is not to be like a bunch of children who need coddling and who are easily influenced by others. Rather, the body is to mature so that it is not carried about by every wind of teaching and the craftiness of the adversary who has done a mighty good job of deceiving the masses through a system of deception. If we are maturing in Christ and through the truth of His word, we will not be tossed to and fro with every new teaching or emphasis that comes along.

The truth of the word is essential for us to attain to the unity of the faith, but the only way that this upbuilding can effectively take place is through the love of God. Without love, there can be no building up of the body.

There are many things that could and should be said about this matter of building up, and it is most aptly expressed through the phrase *one another*. However, this is not the point to which I am driving. What I want you to see is the emphasis Paul placed on the body of Christ and the end or purpose of the upbuilding. It is to be a mature man, to be full of Christ so that we will function or operate truly as a body, which is a highly integrated system of members that operate in love, without conflict, without rancor, without discord, namely, without anything of the old humanity that hinders the very life of Christ from being expressed.

Just consider our physical bodies, which are nothing less than a miracle of God. When our bodies are working as they were designed to by God, they operate effortlessly and without our having to do anything to make the members function together. The physical operation of our body from the cells to the organs is a highly mechanized process that proceeds without our mind consciously telling the body what to do to function. The heart, the lungs, the kidneys, the liver, the mind and many other parts all work together so that we can go about our lives without telling each part what to do. Can you imagine what it would be like if we had to tell each part what to do throughout the day? “OK heart, keep pumping blood; and lungs, now breathe in and out.” Do you get the point? We would be occupied our entire day with managing the members of our body. Thank God; our bodies do not operate this way. Instead, when they are not ill, they operate almost flawlessly, seamlessly (without interruption), and effortlessly.

However, there is one aspect of our being that is somewhat different, and that involves our mind from which come our reasoning, our thinking, our decision-making and many other things related to what makes us human beings in the image of God. Of course, this deals with our spirit and soul, and as new creations in Christ, we are to be led by the spirit and not the soul. The spirit is to take command of the soul and the body and direct them in the ways of the Lord. We are to have the mind of Christ, and this mind is discovered in the spirit. Unfortunately, as long as we live in bodies of death and humiliation, we will

THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

continue in battle with the flesh of our old humanity. We need to be transfigured into the spiritual body to come into the perfection of the body as God designed it.

All this is presented to drive home the point that our physical bodies, led by the spirit, are a type of the mature man because this is how the body of Christ is to operate. This is the end to which the Lord is driving, and the end that is essential in the eons of the eons when the body of Christ enters the celestial realm to traverse both the spiritual and the physical realms, or the earthly and the heavenly realms.

When our bodies are transfigured to spiritual, glorified bodies like our Lord's body, we will truly be that mature man, the new creation in Christ. The corporate, celestial body of Christ will operate effortlessly as directed by the Head. It will operate as a perfectly harmonized body. After all, as stressed many times already, Christ will *present to Himself a glorious ecclesia, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that it may be holy and flawless* (Ephesians 5.27 cv).

Now, I need to get to the point of all this. The point is that Paul's emphasis is on a mature, functioning, harmonized body that is seated together among the celestials in Christ and that is equipped to be the helpmeet of the Son of God as He heads up and sums up all things in the heavens and on the earth. As a new creation in Christ, we are called to be a body today, and we will be a glorious, flawless body in the eons of the eons. Personally, I think that the body of Christ trumps even being a king or a lord, for it is far more intimate and relational. The body is much closer to the heart of the Lord.

How will this body operate in the oncoming eons? Most likely, it will operate just as our bodies operate today. Each member will do its part to fulfill the goal of the body, which, in this case, is to fulfill the goal of Christ or, more explicitly, the purpose of the eons.

But this leads to a question: Are there kings in our human body, that is, are there parts that rule over others? Some might say that the heart rules for without the heart operating, we die. However, the same argument could be made for all the major organs. For example, we cannot live too long without the liver, the kidneys, or the brain. A better way to look at it is that some members have more important functions and as such are more vital to maintaining life. Nevertheless, they all must operate together and in a harmonized fashion if the body is to be healthy and vibrant. Even the more unseemly or weak members are vital for health. Simply, this is the way that God designed the physical body, and it is the way that the body of Christ is designed to operate. How do we know? Paul tells us so.

But it was God who built up the body, and bestowed more abundant honor on the part that felt the need, that there might be no disunion in the body, but that **all the members might entertain the same anxious care for one another's welfare**. And if one part is suffering, every other part suffers with it; or if one part is receiving special honor, every other part

THE REIGNING WITH CHRIST

shares in the joy. As for you, **you are the body of Christ, and individually you are members of it.** (1 Corinthians 12.24b-27 WNT)

Nay, much rather, those members of the body supposed to be inherently weaker [less honorable] are necessary, and which we suppose to be a more dishonored part of the body, these we are investing with more exceeding honor, and our indecent members have more exceeding respectability. Now our respectable members have no need, **but God blends the body together**, giving to that which is deficient more exceeding honor, that there may be no schism in the body, but the members may be mutually solicitous for one another. And whether one member is suffering, all the members are sympathizing, or one member is being esteemed, all the members are rejoicing with it. **Now you are the body of Christ, and members of a part....** (1 Corinthians 12.22-27 CV [NASB])

Consequently, the body of Christ is more than the concept of kings and lords; there are only members of the whole. Kings and lords only can be in relation to ones outside the body but not those within the body. The body of Christ will be an integral part of Christ's reign over the universe, but we will have to wait to see how this will be manifested, or what it will look like.

As a result of the bema of Christ, perhaps some members will be given more honorable places (responsibilities) in the body and others less honorable places; nevertheless, each will be assigned as determined by our Lord Jesus, and each will be well-suited for their place. This is essential if the body is to operate as a flawless, perfect body in the image of the Son.

We will reign because our Head reigns; however, reigning with Christ is not governmental but relational. Each member will remain related to all the other members, and as a harmonized body, we will help Christ head up all things.

We will reign because we are related to the reigning Head of the universe and whatever He is doing we will be doing as our Head directs. He is the King of the universe, and we will reign with Him in this capacity.

I cannot tell you what reigning will look like but I know one thing; it will be based on love. **Reigning is the ascendancy of love.** The body of Christ is a vessel of love that is in a love relationship with the Son of God, for Christ loves the ecclesia, which is His body (Ephesians 5.25, 30). Of all God's creatures, the body of Christ will be the closest to the heartbeat of God for the eons of the eons. Perhaps, those who endure in the word and suffer evil will reign closest to the very heart of the Lord. They will be like the organs of the human body.

We could say that love will be king and as a vessel of love and grace, we will express this love as the complement of the Son of God's love. I can envision the body being an ambassador of love and reconciliation, with all the members of the body working together to bring the love of God in His Son to the far reaches of

THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

the universe and to all His creatures therein, as an expression of His lavish grace. What a glorious thought!

Until our Lord comes for His body, what are we to do? Endure in the word of truth, suffer evil and...

Walk in love.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and **walk in love**, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. (Ephesians 5.1-2 NASB)

We know no greater love than the love expressed at Calvary. God is love, and we are to walk in love as His children. Love God, love the Lord, love one another, and love the sinner. Love is practical; but more than this, it is sacrificial.

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (1 John 3.16 NASB)

This is walking in love. Christ manifested the love of God on the cross, and He now sits far above all. Be imitators of Christ, and you, too, will sit far above all with Him in the eons of the eons.

We are transported into the kingdom of the Son of His love for a reason. We are to be the Father's vessel of love that expresses His love and His grace throughout the entire empyrean.

This is the multifarious wisdom of God in accord with the purpose of God that will be made known among the celestials. Praise God!