

DID THE TWELVE APOSTLES BECOME MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST?

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For many years we have discussed whether or not the kingdom believers who lived until after the raising up of Paul became members of the Body of Christ, the Church of the heavenly calling. Usually this question has been asked particularly with regard to the twelve apostles, since our Lord specifically promised them that they would occupy twelve thrones with Him in His reign on earth.

For more than twenty years the writer has refrained from making an issue of the subject, feeling that it is always easy to cause division over matters which neither affect our basic doctrines nor our practices, but it is not so easy to restore unity once it has been broken.

Therefore, we trust that this treatise will be accepted in the spirit of Christian love in which it is written.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

We believe that when God ushered in the dispensation of grace and began to form the Body of Christ all believers were included in it, just as all the children of Israel came under the dispensation of law when the law was given at Sinai, even though they had previously lived under another dispensation. God's dispensations are not dependent upon degrees of human understanding, but upon His own sovereign will.

Nevertheless, the truth of "the mystery" was gradually revealed to and through the Apostle Paul (Acts 26:16; II Cor. 12:1) so that there was a gradual transition from the old program to the new. The old program did not immediately disappear, to be replaced by the new, thus:



Figure 1

Rather; the kingdom program gradually disappeared, as the program for the one Body emerged, thus:

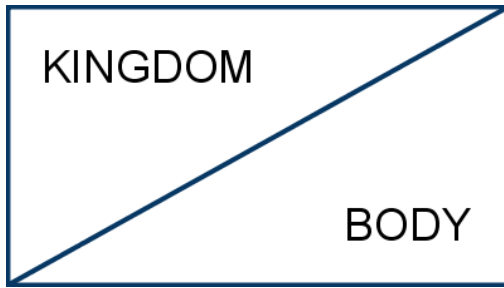


Figure 2

We do not mean to say that there were not those among the Judean believers who tenaciously held on to the old program. There were, in fact, many such believers. There were even some who sought to bring the Gentile believers under the old program. But in spite of them, we note in the book of Acts as well as in the Epistles, a gradual breaking down of the "middle wall of partition" Jewish believers gradually leaving Judaism behind and coming more and more fully to enjoy their oneness with the Gentile believers in Christ.

This is why we reject the argument that the kingdom believers living after the raising up of Paul did not become members of the Body of Christ, but that it was God's will for them to continue in their kingdom calling indefinitely, while the members of the Body continued in theirs, the two economies running parallel, thus:

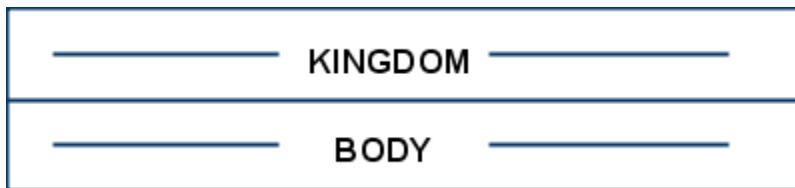


Figure 3

Our object in this article, then, will be to defend by Scripture the position represented by figure 2 against that represented by figure 3, and to show how these kingdom saints, having now become members of the one Body, were brought into an enlarged¹ position and hope.

¹ In years gone by the twelve were sometimes spoken of as having been "transferred" into the Body, but this, we believe, is an unfortunate choice of terminology. It gives the impression that they were taken permanently from one position and hope and placed into another. We all agree that this is not so; that the twelve, for example, will reign with Christ in His kingdom, as He promised they would.

AN OBJECTION ANSWERED

It is sometimes objected that if the twelve apostles are to occupy twelve thrones in the kingdom on earth, then how can they be members of the Body of Christ, with its position in heaven? This question seems to bear some weight. Many, indeed

accept this argument as conclusive, but the subject is not as simple as that.

Our Lord Himself will reign with the twelve on earth and He is the Head of the Body. We believe there are many more evidences too that the twelve and the kingdom believers living after the raising up of Paul did in fact become members of the Body of Christ.

TOO MANY EXCEPTIONS

It is certain that some of the kingdom saints became members of the Body of Christ. Among these were:

Barnabas, the Levite, who sold his land for the common good just after Pentecost (Acts 4:36,37) but later was called by God to become Paul's co-worker (Acts 13:2).

Silas, a leading member of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:22) who also later became Paul's co-worker (Acts 15:39,40).

John Mark, Barnabas' nephew, who became Paul's helper, and is referred to in Paul's latest epistles as a co-worker (Acts 12:25; 13:5; Col. 4:10; II Tim. 4:11).

Luke, the "beloved physician," who wrote one of the synoptic "gospels," but became Paul's constant companion, even after his imprisonment at Rome (See Acts and II Tim. 4:11).

Apollos, a Jew who knew only "the baptism of John," until shown "the way of God more perfectly" by Aquilla and Priscilla (Acts 18:24-26). Later we find him "watering" what Paul had "planted," as "one" with Paul (I Cor. 3:6-8).

Andronicus and Junia, who were "in Christ" before Paul, but later became his "fellow prisoners" (Rom. 16:7).

In addition to these there are many more who are not specifically named. These evidently became, and recognized themselves to be, members of the one Body, for they could hardly have been Paul's fellow workers and fellow prisoners had they continued preaching the kingdom message.

It is not enough to say that these mentioned were exceptions. Rather they are examples which prove at the very least that it is possible that kingdom saints could become members of the Body of Christ.

What about the Pentecostal believers who traveled, for example, to Rome, and to whom Paul writes, telling them that they are members of the one Body" (Rom. 12:5)? It is evident that these individuals did not become members of the Body of Christ by merely seeing and accepting the truths concerning the Body. Otherwise it would follow that millions of believers today are not members of the Body because they do not understand "Body truth." Evidently the dispensation of the mystery had united all believers into one Body - which truth some gradually came to understand and others never came to understand, even as many believers today do not understand it.

ALL MEN EVERYWHERE

There are other evidences that the kingdom saints of Paul's day became members of the Body of Christ.

In I Corinthians 1:2, Paul addresses his letter to the Corinthian church, "with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs [those in every place] and ours [those with Paul]." And he says to "all" these believers "in every place": "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one Body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles" (I Cor. 12:13). How can this be made to exclude the Judean believers?

Further; in II Corinthians 5:16, the apostle says: "Wherefore henceforth know we NO MAN after the flesh." Can this sweeping declaration be made to exclude the Judean believers? And does Paul not emphasize the fact that he is including kingdom saints when he goes on to say: "Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, [as had the kingdom believers] yet now, henceforth know we Him [so] no more."?

But our apostle has still more to say about this matter; for continuing in Verse 17 he says: "Therefore if ANY MAN be in Christ, he is a new creation...." Does not this phrase "any man" include the Judean saints? Were they not men? Were they not "in Christ"? Like Paul's kinsmen of Romans 16:7, they were in Christ before him, and Paul now declares that all in Christ are "henceforth" members of the "new creation" (Cf. Eph. 2:14-16; 3:1-6).

Again, in Galatians 3:27,28, the apostle declares that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek.. for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Some people make this passage to read that there is neither Jew nor Greek in the Body of Christ. This, of course, we all know, but it is not what Paul says in Galatians 3:28. In this passage he says that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, and as we have shown from Scripture, these believers were in Christ even before Paul, therefore they were "henceforth" one with the Gentile believers in the joint Body.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

Did not Paul, or certainly some Pauline person, write to the Hebrews (not just the Jews of the dispersion) to leave Judaism and take their stand with the rejected Christ (Heb. 13:13)? Did he not bid them to go "without the camp" and "within the veil," to take their places with Christ at God's right hand (Heb. 6:19,20; 10:19,20)? Did he not bid them enter into God's rest and to sit down with Christ in the heavenlies (Heb. 4:9,10)? Did he not call them "partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1) and bring them into a "better hope" (Heb. 7:19)?

Is it objected that the terminology of Hebrews is different from that of Paul's epistles to the Gentiles? Of course! He is writing to Hebrews!

In light of these facts it is difficult to understand how some can say that there is not any scriptural support for the argument that the twelve apostles became members of the Body of Christ.

THE TRANSITION

Some brethren do not even deal with the transition so evident in the Acts and the Epistles of both Paul and Peter. Some do not even believe there was a transition, contending that even Peter's epistles are no advance upon his message

at Pentecost. They hold the view illustrated in figure 3, while we believe that there was such a transition (see figure 2) and that the gradual breaking down of "the middle wall of partition" affected those on both sides. Let us see what the Scriptures say about this.

Paul, himself having been baptized under the kingdom program, had the truths of the mystery revealed to him gradually (Acts 26:16; II Cor. 12:1). In his early epistles he still recognizes water baptism and the Pentecostal signs, but these are "done away" by the time we reach his prison epistles. Similarly, we come more and more fully into the glorious truths of the mystery as we proceed from his earlier to his later epistles. Thus there is a fading out of the old program and gradual unfolding of the new.

Peter; too, began dealing with Israel only (Acts 2), then later was shown by God that he could and should eat with uncircumcised Gentiles (Acts 10).² Still later at the Jerusalem Council his testimony induced the Judean saints to recognize the Gentile believers as one with them in Christ, Peter declaring that God had made "no difference between us and them" (Acts 15:9) and that "through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" the Jewish believers would be saved "even as they" (the Gentile believers). In this connection we should also compare Acts 2:38, where, in obedience to the "Great Commission," Peter demands repentance and baptism "for the remission of sins," with his epistles where, later; he proclaims the finished work

² Later he enjoyed more of this fellowship with the Gentiles at Antioch and was rebuked when he let some from James' party frighten him out of it (Gal. 2:11-14).

of Christ for salvation (I Pet. 1:18,19; 2:24; 3:18). Also Acts 3:19-21, where he offers the return of Christ to reign, with II Peter 3:3,4,8,9,15,16,18, where he explains the delay in Christ's return and refers his readers to "our beloved brother Paul," whose epistles speak of "these things."
We must confine this section to these examples for there are so many evidences of transition from the old program to the new, that one finds it difficult to understand how anyone could question that it exists.

ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS

We now proceed from our own arguments for the affirmative, to deal with those arguments of some for the negative.

1. If the twelve are to reign on earth with Christ, how can they belong to the Body of Christ, with its position in the heavenlies?

The answer to this, the over-all argument, is simply that like Christ they will have a dual position during the kingdom reign. Their reign on twelve thrones with Christ surely does not imply that each one will sit on one seat in Jerusalem for a thousand years! The twelve and those associated with them will have a position in the kingdom, but will not be confined to earth as will those who survive the "great tribulation" to enter the kingdom.

This writer believes that we ourselves will reign with Christ, not on, but over the earth, much as the "principalities and powers in the heavenlies" reign over it now,

behind the scenes. Why, then, cannot the twelve reign with Christ, both over and on the earth?

Surely the members of the Body will not be separated from their Head for 1,000 years but will reign with Him (Col. 1:13 cf. I Thes. 2:12; II Tim. 2:12; 4:18). Indeed I Thessalonians 4:17 states that after our Rapture to heaven we will be with Christ forever. Thus our Lord will occupy a dual position, with us in the heavenlies and with Israel on earth.

2. Some say that to believe that the twelve apostles have a dual calling destroys the foundation of our distinctive message.

The promise to the twelve to reign on earth was not made to them as members of the Body, but as heirs of the kingdom; however; it does not follow from this that they could not have later also been baptized into one Body with the Gentile believers. If it did, this would necessarily also be true with regard to Barnabas and the others we have listed above; it would mean that the Holy Spirit "called" at least one person to help gather members into the Body who was not himself a member of the Body! (Acts 13:2).

Let us not forget that Christ, the Head of that Body to which no earthly promises are made, will nevertheless sit on David's throne in fulfillment of Old Testament promises.

3. Others say that we are confused as to the basic salvation message—all one in Christ as the Head of the new race, as compared with our dispensational position. They say that this basic salvation, through Christ's work is a matter of one's faith and is true of all believers regardless of calling.

We should like to ask who, before Paul, proclaimed the finished work of Christ for salvation. Did Peter preach this at Pentecost? (See Acts 2:38 and cf. Rom. 3:21; Gal. 3:23; I Tim. 2:5-7). And who before Paul presented Christ as the Head of a new race? Did Peter at Pentecost? Did he not rather present Him as the King of Israel? (See Acts 2 and 3) Christ as Head of a new race was revealed through Paul with the ushering in of the dispensation of grace and the mystery (Rom. 5:12-19; cf. Eph. 2:15; 3:1-3). Does this sound as if "basic salvation" was presented for the faith of "all believers, regardless of calling"?

4. Some brethren read more into Galatians 2:7-9, than the passage states. Galatians 2:7 does not say that "the gospel of the circumcision" was committed to Peter at that time, nor does Verse 9 indicate that he was then sent to the circumcision to proclaim this gospel to them. Rather Verse 7 states that the Jerusalem believers "saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was [i.e., had been] committed unto [Paul] as the gospel of the circumcision was [had been] committed unto Peter." Verse 9 then adds that Peter agreed to confine his ministry to "the circumcision," but it does not say what he should preach.

Thus Galatians 2:2-9 does not indicate that the two groups were henceforth to continue with their present programs, but rather indicates a recognition by the Judean believers of the further revelation given to Paul. Certainly, if Peter agreed to continue preaching "the gospel of the circumcision," he broke his word, for he does not proclaim this gospel in his Epistles.

We should compare Galatians 2 with Acts 15, where the great Jerusalem

Council agreed only that the Gentiles should not be subject to circumcision or the law but made no decision as to the Jews, nor did they even discuss how the new turn of events might affect the Jews.

Then note Acts 15:9 where Peter declares that God had shown him that He had henceforth put "no difference" between Jew and Gentile and goes so far as to acknowledge:

"But we believe that THROUGH THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, WE [JEWS] SHALL BE SAVED EVEN AS THEY" (Ver. 11).

Certainly Peter returned to his people with a greater knowledge of what God was doing. Surely he could hardly have kept still, in his ministry at Jerusalem, about the all-sufficiency of Christ's finished work, or about the grace that had made Jewish and Gentile believers one in Christ.

5. Some also read far more into Acts 21:20 than it says. This passage simply records the statement of James and the Judean elders that many thousands of Jews which believed were "all zealous of the law." This does not at all prove that they ought to have been zealous of the law (See Heb. 5:11). Many of the Galatians also were zealous of the law. Does this mean they were not members of the Body of Christ?

Here we must remember what the Scriptures say about James, the legalist, and his influence over the Judean Church. James, "the Lord's brother," was not even one of the twelve and certainly not Christ's appointed head over the twelve. Our Lord had clearly appointed Peter to this position (Matt. 16:19) but somehow James had gained the leadership, probably because of his physical relationship to the Lord. In Acts 15 we even find him presiding over the Jerusalem council and closing it with the words: "Wherefore, my sentence is... (Lit., "Wherefore I decide.") Providentially the Holy Spirit had used the testimonies of Paul, Barnabas, and Peter to persuade the council to recognize officially the liberty of the believing Gentiles, but this was clearly not due to James' influence.³

Peter, not James, should have presided over the council and the church at Jerusalem. This is doubtless why, in Galatians 2, Paul so strongly emphasizes Peter's call to the apostleship of the circumcision (Vers. 7,8) and refers to the present leadership as "those who seemed to be somewhat," adding: "Whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me" (Ver. 6).

Three times in this passage Paul, by the Spirit, refers to these leaders as those who seemed to be somewhat, and this shows how remarkably God overruled in this troubled convention so that even James, the legalist, joined with Cephas and John in giving to Paul and Barnabas "the right hands of fellowship," officially recognizing Paul's message and his ministry among the Gentiles (Ver. 9).

6. It is said that Peter wrote to the circumcision believers, not in order to lead them on into further and new truth, but to stir up their memories in the things they had already received by the Old Testament prophets and our Lord after the flesh and their apostles. They say that the message Peter proclaimed at Pentecost was the present truth in which they were established by his epistles. (See II Pet. 1:10-12).

Just think: In I Peter 1:18,19; 2:24; 3:18, Peter tells his readers how they were redeemed by "the precious blood of Christ," how Christ Himself "bore our sins in

His own body on the tree" and how He "suffered, the Just for the unjust, to bring us

3 The Editor's Acts, Dispensationally Considered, Vol. IV contains a whole chapter on the role James played at the Jerusalem church.

to God." Does this sound like his Pentecostal message, where he referred to the cross only to blame his hearers for it and then, in response to their "What shall we do?" demanded that they "repent and be baptized.. .for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:37,38)? Surely Peter did not preach the finished work of Christ at Pentecost. As to II Peter, it is true that here the apostle reminds his readers of their stake in the kingdom and declares that he had not been telling them fables when he made known to them the power and coming of Christ, but he does this to prepare them for his further declaration that God, in longsuffering, is now to delay Christ's return to judge and reign (II Pet. 3:3,4, 8,9) and then he commends them to "our beloved brother Paul," who "in all his epistles," writes of "these things" (II Pet. 3:15,16). It should be noted here too that Peter states that Paul had already written to them about these things (Ver. 15). If these Jews were to "retain their fleshly standing" and were not to be members of the one Body, what business did Paul have writing them?

In the light of the above it is significant that Peter opens his second epistle with the words: "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of our Lord Jesus Christ."

It is true that Peter does not deal with "Body truth," as such, in his epistles. Here the selective principle in divine inspiration is in operation because God would keep Paul as the distinctive apostle of this great truth. But who can deny that Peter, in his epistles, taught his readers more-and wished that they might know still more, about our glorified Lord than they had known in the Pentecostal era? How, then, can we agree that Peter's epistles contain no new or further truth from that which he had proclaimed at Pentecost?

7. It is objected that although Peter heard something of the heavenly calling of the one Body from Paul, he was not called to it, but he retained his fleshly standing (Gal. 2:9-11).

If this is true, why does Galatians 2 go on to tell how Paul rebuked Peter when he stopped eating with the Gentiles at Antioch (Gal. 2:11-14)? If Peter "retained his fleshly standing," he should have been rebuked for eating with Gentiles. Had not Peter himself indicated that his fleshly standing no longer counted when he said that God had put "no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:9)? And is it not true that those who had come "from James" had intimidated Peter, so that in withdrawing from the Gentiles he went back on light which all of them had received (Acts 15:9; Gal. 2:2,9-16)? Had he not previously relinquished his fleshly standing to rejoice in his oneness with Gentile believers in Christ?

Again, if Peter only "heard something of the heavenly calling," but himself retained his fleshly standing, as it is contended, why was he called, in Hebrews 3:1, a "partaker of the heavenly calling," along with the other Hebrew believers of

his time? Surely this argument breaks down completely here.

8. Some say that to believe that the twelve apostles have a dual calling renders Paul's statement in Ephesians 4:4 ["one hope of your calling"] false.

We have never subscribed to the idea that the "hope" here refers only to the Rapture of the Church, as compared with our Lord's return to earth. We rather connect this passage with Ephesians 1:18, where Paul expresses his desire that believers may know, or understand, "what is the hope of His calling [of us]" i.e., "the hope which His call to you inspires" (Weymouth Translation). This "calling" is, of course, the "holy calling" referred to in II Timothy 1:9, with its "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places." It is a present matter rather than merely a future one. And this was the "heavenly calling" into which these Jewish believers now came and which, as they came to understand it more fully, would inspire them with "hope" despite the postponement of the kingdom. As to the future aspect of this hope and calling, we must not forget that even today the instructed and spiritual believer longs not only to go and be with Christ at the Rapture, he also longs to reign with Christ.

9. Based on Ephesians 4:4-6, some say that there is only one hope and calling for members of Christ's Body and that to say that the twelve came into a heavenly calling renders Paul's statement in Ephesians 4:4 false.

We agree that "there is only one hope and calling for members of Christ's Body," but this is not what Ephesians 4:4 teaches. Read Ephesians 4:4-6 carefully. It does not say that in the Body there is one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father (though this would be true). It rather lists the one Body along with all the other unities, indicating that God recognized but one Body, one hope, one baptism, etc. This means that the Jewish believers then living were recognized as one Body with the Gentile believers, that they should now be enjoying the present "holy calling" which inspired the Gentile believers with hope. It also means that water baptism was now a thing of the past and that both should rejoice together in the one baptism by which they had been united. Thus it is they, not we, who violate Ephesians 4:4-6, for by leaving the Judean believers of Paul's day out of the one Body, to continue with their Pentecostal program, they must also recognize two separate hopes, two callings and two baptisms.

10. Some say that because there is neither Jew nor Gentile, circumcision nor uncircumcision before God in Christ's Body, the twelve circumcision apostles could not be members of the Body of Christ with its ONE spiritual heavenly calling. If this is so, what about all the Jews among the Gentiles saved under Paul's ministry? Were these not members of "the circumcision"? Yet our objectors agree that they became members of the one Body This is the whole tenor of I Corinthians 12:13.

Further; they have overlooked the fact that according to Paul's own statement, in Christ's Body there is "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision." Therefore if the circumcision of the twelve would keep them out of the Body, our uncircumcision would keep us out! The fact is that believers from both the circumcision and the uncircumcision have been made one in Christ, where these distinctions disappear.

CONCLUSION

With this we must close, though there is much more to say. We rejoice that in the "Grace Movement" we may freely discuss these matters, and we ask only that

the above arguments be considered prayerfully in the light of the Word, for any one truth misunderstood can affect our understanding of other truths and bring us into confusion in our study and proclamation of the Word.

Together; thank God, we stand for the distinctive character of the revelation committed to Paul. The question is simply whether or not the Judean "kingdom" believers living after the raising up of Paul became members of the one Body with which his message was concerned. Therefore let us not make this issue a larger one than it is, lest we cause division among those who, above all people, should be united in making known the riches of God's grace.