



Volume 1 Number 1

## Inside Issue 1 EDITED BY IAN REES

**Behaving ourselves  
in the house of God**

Page 1

**What does God look  
like?**

Page 4

**Ancient wisdom for  
a modern world**

Page 8

# Behaving ourselves in the house of God

*Timeless truths about the local assembly*

## The Church – its nature

Having heard the gospel and taken the first two steps of obedience in response to it, it is vital for each new believer to follow the example set by the first Christians. The first step of obedience to the gospel is to believe it and the second is to be baptized. Those who 'gladly received [Peter's] word were baptized' and were 'added to the church' by the Lord Himself, Acts 2.47.



What is the 'church?' In its everyday use, the word 'church' in English refers either to a building - 'Go down the hill and turn left at the church' - or to a denomination - the Anglican Church, for instance. But is that the right use of the word 'church'? Christians should be more interested in how God in the Bible sees and describes the 'church'.

## The Active Church

It is the Lord Jesus who first mentioned the word 'church' in the New Testament when He said, 'I will build my church', Matt. 16. 18. He is referring here to the universal church. Two chapters later He again refers to the church, this time local, when, speaking about Christians who have fallen out with one another, He says, 'If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be to thee as an heathen man', Matt. 18. 17. Here the Lord clearly implies that the 'church' can hear (He says, 'tell it to the church') and that it can speak ('if he neglect to hear the church'). The same thing is implied in Acts 11. 22 where we

... Continued on Page 2

# YPS

**(Young Precious Seed)** is a new supplement of *Precious Seed* designed for young believers. Its purpose is to restate timeless truths from the word of God for a new generation of Christians and to kindle a biblical approach to current issues in the world in which we live.



# Behaving ourselves in the house of God

read, 'Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem'. In Acts 12. 5 the church prayed, for 'Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him'. The church can be hospitable (in Acts 15. 4 Paul and his delegation 'were received of the church'), and it can be greeted (in Romans 16.5 Paul instructed his readers to 'salute (greet) the church in Rome', as he had greeted the church in Jerusalem in Acts 18.22). It can be persecuted (Acts 8. 1, Gal. 1. 13), it can be instructed or edified, (1 Cor. 14. 12) and it meets together (1 Cor. 14. 23). Now none of these things can be true of a building. No building can hear, pray, receive others, be greeted, edified, persecuted or meet together. Evidently, therefore, the 'church', as far as the Bible is concerned, is not a building but something else –

something alive, something capable of doing things. This conclusion is confirmed when we read of the church in Antioch that **they** (the church) sent forth Barnabas and Saul, Acts 13. 1-3.

We have arrived at this conclusion merely by looking at our English translation. Were we to look a little deeper into the original Greek in which the New Testament was first written, we would find the use of the Greek word for 'church' confirms this. Looking up each of the references we have used above in *Strong's Concordance*, following the numbers he gives, and using a Greek Lexicon/Dictionary coded to these numbers, we find that the word translated 'church' in English is the word *ekklesia* in Greek.

## The Assembled Church

There are many other places in the New Testament where the Greek word *ekklesia* is used. One that should draw our attention at this stage in our study is found in Acts chapter 19 and verses 29-41. A crowd of people in Ephesus were angry at something the apostle Paul was teaching. They arrested Paul and his companions and rushed to a public building, the theatre. This large group of hostile people here is called an *ekklesia* in Greek. The town-clerk eventually intervened, attempting to restore order and disperse the crowd. 'If ye inquire anything concerning other matters,' he said, 'it shall be determined in a lawful assembly (*ekklesia*). For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar ... and when he had thus spoken he dismissed the assembly (*ekklesia*)', Acts 19. 29-41.

It is clear from this passage that an *ekklesia* is a group, a gathering, or an



assembly of people. It need not be a religious gathering, for this riot in Ephesus was anything but. It is disappointing that the translators of our English Bibles were inconsistent in their translation of this word, and instead of translating *ekklesia* with the word 'assembly' every time, as they did in Acts 19, the same word *ekklesia* is usually translated 'church'. Geoffrey Bromiley's abridgement of Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* tells us, 'General dictionaries define *ekklesia* as 1. 'assembly' and 2. 'church'. Since the [New Testament] uses a single term, translators should try to do so, but this raises the question whether 'church' or 'congregation' is always suitable . . . 'assembly' . . . is perhaps the best single term'. It is important to remember this – the 'church', the *ekklesia*, is the assembly or group of people who meet in God's name, not the building in which they meet. In New Testament times, of course, the 'church' did not have dedicated buildings in which to meet, as we do, but met in other peoples' houses, Rom. 16. 5.

## The Attracted Church

Looking up the word *ekklesia* in W. E. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* we discover it means 'a calling out of'. The *ekklesia* is an assembly of people 'called out of' somewhere for a particular purpose. When the word *ekklesia* is linked with God, we understand the church is an assembly of people called out by God. Because God calls out local assemblies of Christians, they are referred to as belonging to Him. In Acts 20. 28, the apostle Paul refers to 'the assembly (*ekklesia*/church) **of God** which he hath purchased with his own blood'; so also



we read of 'the *ekklesia*/assembly **of God** which is at Corinth', 1 Cor. 1. 2. The assembly is also referred to as Christ's assembly, for He said, 'I will build my church' (*ekklesia*) and in Romans 16. 16. 'the assemblies **of Christ** salute you'.

The local assembly of Christians to which you or I belong (some people use the phrase 'where we are in fellowship') is not our assembly. It is God's assembly. The people in that assembly have been called out, or gathered by God and by Christ to meet together in His name. Though it may be the one in which we are in fellowship, it does not belong to us; instead we belong to it. It is God's assembly to do with as He sees fit, not ours. God's principles must govern it, as must God's purposes. If you are saved and baptized, but not yet in 'membership/ fellowship' in a local assembly of Christians you should be! Search out your brothers and sisters in the Lord and meet with them, and God will bless you.

---

**IAN REES** saw an assembly planted in Francistown, Botswana, having served the Lord there for 13 years. Now based in the UK, he continues in fellowship in Manvers Hall, Bath, one of his commending assemblies. He is married and has seven children.

# Your God is too small! Essential truths

## What does God look like?

What a question! Why should the appearance of God be so important? Surely that is a most trivial thing to ask. Is it? When you pray, what do you see in your mind's eye? Is God, as Michaelangelo famously painted Him, a grand old man up in the sky with an amazingly wrinkled face, long white hair and a flowing white beard? It is true that old age implies dignity, authority and wisdom, but old age often brings weakness, infirmity and timidity and whatever God is, He is neither weak, infirm nor timid. So, whilst the picture of the grand old man might legitimately try to portray the idea of great age it is an incomplete and an unjust picture of God. That is why we are forbidden to make any image of Him because any shape, form or figure we give Him does not do Him justice.

## No man has ever seen God

So what does God look like? Our first problem is this – that no-one knows, for 'no man hath seen God at any time', John 1. 18. This claim is repeated in 1 John 4. 12. When something is affirmed in the Bible we need to consider and accept it, but when it is said twice, we should sit up and take notice. Paul, when writing about God in 1 Timothy 6. 16, says He is 'the only wise God . . . whom no man hath seen, nor can see'. The Spirit of God has therefore said at least three times that no man has ever seen God.

## Objection 1: Men walked and talked with God in Old Testament times

But surely there were instances in Old Testament times when people did see

God? Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden, Gen. 3. Abraham met God in the plain. He saw three men walking past and, hurrying to invite them into his home, prepared them a meal. The two who left to go to Sodom, were probably angels, but the one who stayed behind to talk with Abraham was God, Gen. 18. 33. Jacob wrestled all night with a man, but said 'I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved', Gen. 32. 30. Moses spoke with God face to face. Joshua and Gideon saw the Angel of the Lord, which was no ordinary angel because He accepted worship. Didn't Elijah, on Mount Horeb, see the back parts of God? God was seen by men, was He not?

One important principle of biblical interpretation is that no verse should ever be interpreted in a way that contradicts another verse. If, therefore, the Bible says that no man has seen God at any time that must be so. What is the explanation, then, behind these appearances of God? They are 'theophanies'. A theophany is an appearance of God in visible form, yet it is an appearance of God in a form other than His own, a form He takes temporarily and for the purpose of His visit. Both Abraham and Jacob wrestled with God, who appeared to be a man. Yet Joshua and Gideon saw an angel, the Angel of the Lord. But God is neither a man nor an angel. A theophany is not God in His real form. The second explanation is that every appearance of God in Old Testament times was actually an appearance of the Son of God. The Son is always the one who comes out from the Father to reveal the Father. Every theophany is actually a 'Christophany'. Thus it was the Son of God who sat in Abraham's tent, who wrestled with Jacob and who accepted



# about the attributes of God *Ian Rees*

the worship of Joshua and Gideon. Even in New Testament times it was the Son of God who came out from God, becoming man to be seen by men and to be one of them. John 1. 18 says, 'the only-begotten of the Father, he hath declared him'.

## God is incorporeal

If, then, Jesus is the only man ever to have seen and known the Father, what does He say He looks like? In John 4. 4 our Lord said, 'God is spirit'. Now a spirit does not have a body. This is further emphasized when our Lord said to His disciples after His resurrection, 'Handle me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as ye see me have', Luke 24. 39. That being the case, God, who is spirit, does not have flesh and bones. He is a body-less spirit, He is incorporeal.

## God is invisible

If this is true then we would imagine God to be invisible. This is precisely what scripture says of him. We read that Christ is 'the image of *the invisible God*', Col. 1. 15. Moses, 'endured as seeing Him who is *invisible*', Heb. 11. 27. We read of God in 1 Timothy 1. 17 that He is 'the King eternal, immortal, *invisible*'. 1 Timothy 6. 16 adds, 'whom no man hath seen, nor can see'.

## Objection 2: But God has body parts

Ah! But if God does not have a body, why does Isaiah 59. 1 say, 'The Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither is his ear heavy that it cannot hear'? Does not this imply that God does have hands and ears? Don't we read in Psalm 11. 4 'His eyes behold, his eyelids try the children of men'? Doesn't the High Priest, in that magnificent blessing invoked upon the people of God, say, 'The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and

give you peace'? And doesn't the New Testament teaching in 1 Peter 3. 12 imply God has a face, when we read 'the face of the Lord is against them that do evil'? These verses, surely, indicate to us that God does have a body.

No, they don't. What God is teaching us in these verses is that, though He is spirit, He is a living spirit, a spirit who sees, hears, knows and understands, a spirit that can be grieved or pleased, a spirit that can do things for us. He is not an inanimate force whose effect can be seen, like the wind rustling in the trees. He is a living being, a person. In order to convey to us the fact that He can see He uses language that we can understand. We need an eye to see, so He talks of His eyes. We need ears to hear, so He says His ear is open to us. We need hands to do things, so He says His hand is not unable to help us. We turn our faces away from people who have disappointed us, so He tells us He does the same. But none of this is intended to imply He has ears, eyes, hands, and a face. These verses tell us what God can do; they do not describe what He is like. They describe His *abilities*, not His appearance.

Take another set of images that, on first reading, could be thought to describe God's appearance. 'He is the rock, his work is perfect', Deut. 32. 4. 'Our God is a consuming fire', Heb. 12. 29. 'The Lord is a strong tower', Ps. 144. 2. What do these verses imply? Do they mean that on the throne of heaven there is a burning fire? or a rock? or a shield or tower? No. God is described as a rock because He is dependable, trustworthy. He is called a



# Your God is too small! Essential truth



fire because He is holy and will burn away sin. He is a shield because He will protect His people. These images describe God's character, His *attributes*, not His appearance.

### Objection 3: Man was made in the image of God

Someone will say, Well surely man is made in the image of God. Therefore, because man is body, soul and spirit God must have a body too. The phrase 'made in the image of God', however does not describe

God's appearance. Animals have bodies, but they are not made in the image of God. The phrase 'made in the image of God' means, first of all, that mankind as a race is able to have a spiritual relationship with God that animals are unable to have. Human beings have a moral and spiritual capacity that animals simply do not have. The word 'image' also has the force of 'representative'. Note what God said in Genesis 1, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea . . . and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the face of the earth. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. And God blessed them and God said . . . replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion'. Being made in the image of God does not mean that God has a body because we have.

### Will we ever see God?

Will we ever see God? The phrase 'whom no man hath seen *nor can see*' immediately implies that we will never

see God. This may be because our mortal bodies cannot bear to see the essence and glory of God. 'There can no man see me and live' said God to Moses. Even the limited amount of glory the three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration saw shining in the face of our Lord caused them to fall to the ground. On the other hand, it may be that our sinful natures have prevented us from seeing God. If this is so, perhaps when we are in heaven and both our mortality and our sinfulness have gone, we shall at last be able to see Him. Yet this does not account for the fact that the angels themselves hide their faces from God's glory, and they have never sinned, Isaiah 6.

There are a few verses that seem to imply that we shall see God. The first, in 1 John 3.2 reads, 'when we see him, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is'. This passage, however, refers to the Son of God, not the Father. It is true that one day we shall see the Lord Jesus, because He has a body, and that body of His will be visible in heaven. Revelation chapter 22, verses 3 and 4, however, speak of a day when, in God's new heaven and earth, 'his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads'. The question is, to whom does this refer? Many would take it to refer to the Lord Jesus, the Lamb. We shall indeed see His face, but not necessarily the Father's. But even if it does refer to the Father does it literally mean we are all going to be in heaven with God, or Christ's names, engraved on our faces? Or is the explanation figurative, so that the phrase they shall see His face means there shall no longer be anything coming between us and the Lord. We shall have total unbroken, direct access and communion with Him, and we shall be totally identified with Him.

# s about the attributes of God

One passage, however, that clearly describes the Father in heaven is Revelation 4. John, in the Spirit, is shown 'a throne set in heaven, and one sat on the throne'. We know this is the Father, because in the same throne-room scene described in the next chapter we see Christ standing in the midst of the throne and taking the book from the One sitting upon it. Now, what does the One upon the throne look like? The answer is confusing. John describes it like this, 'He that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald'. What John appears to describe is the glory surrounding the Father and the throne, but he does not describe the One sitting upon the throne. When he describes the Lord Jesus in Revelation 1 he speaks of someone 'clothed with a garment down to the foot'. He describes His head, His hair, His feet, His voice, His right hand, His mouth and His face, cf. Rev. 19. But there is nothing of this when he describes the Father, for what John saw of the Father in heaven was the glory that surrounded Him. 'He only dwelleth in light inaccessible, whom no man hath seen nor can see', says the Scripture.

Will we be disappointed if we don't see the Father? I don't think so. To be in the glory ourselves will be thrill enough. But more than that, surely, to see our Lord face to face, to hear His voice, to touch and be touched by Him, will be enough for us all. We shall, at last, see Him as He is.

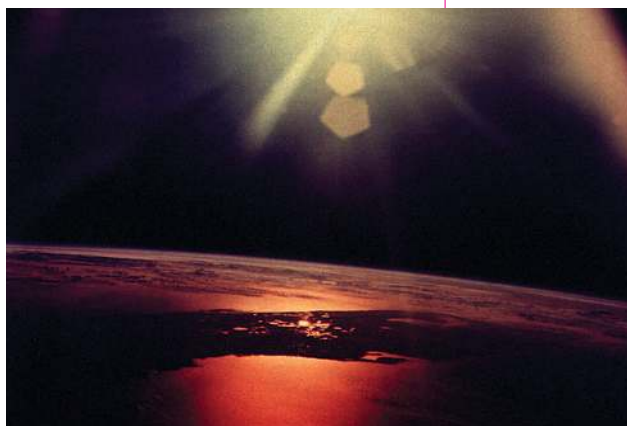
## Conclusion

We have no problem with the idea the Holy Spirit is 'spirit', yet we imagine the Father and the Son to be different and to have bodies. In the beginning, the one true God existed as Father, Son and

Holy Spirit, each one a spirit being, without body parts. When the world was made, the Son would come down into His creation temporarily, taking upon Himself whatever form He chose for the purpose. But Bethlehem changed all that. At Bethlehem, for the first time the Son of God became flesh. He did not merely take the appearance of flesh as He had done before; He became it. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory', writes John. God (the Father) sent his own Son 'in the likeness of sinful flesh', Rom. 8. 3. 'He was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself', Phil. 2. 7-8. Bethlehem was no theophany; Bethlehem was incarnation, God manifest in the flesh.

And that is why the only member of the Godhead you and I will ever see is the Son of God, for He alone has a body. And there is a man in the glory; a man whose resurrected body still bears the marks of the nails in His hands, and the wound of the spear in His side, John 20. 27. And though He may be the only visible member of the Trinity, we will surely not be disappointed to see Him, at last.

GOD IS SPIRIT



... a place for you  
... where I am

*Though you are homeless,  
Though you're alone,  
I will be your home.  
Whatever's the matter,  
Whatever's been done,  
I will be your home.*

*I will be your home,  
I will be your home,  
In this fearful, fallen place,  
I will be your home.*

*When time reaches fullness,  
When I move my hand,  
I will bring you home;  
Home to your own place,  
In a beautiful land,  
I will bring you home.*

*I will bring you home,  
I will bring you home,  
From this fearful, fallen place,  
I will bring you home,*

*I will bring you . . .*

*. . . home!*

*'... a place for you  
... where I am.'*

**MICHAEL CARD**

# Ancient Wisdom for a Modern World

Wise words from the book of Proverbs



## Can a man take fire unto his bosom and not be burned? Proverbs 6. 27

Surely no one would be so daft as to pick up a handful of burning coals from the embers of a fire and place them on one's chest. To do such a thing would be to invite severe burns and possible death. The average sensible person would see the likely consequences of such an action and not do it. Yet when it comes to sexual immorality, which is the theme of this proverb, many fail to be as sensible. They see an opportunity, take it, and wonder what went wrong when everything around them begins to disintegrate.

Adultery is both a cheap and an expensive act. It is cheap in so far as it is an unworthy act for all involved and it cheapens those who engage in it; yet at the same time it is expensive, for the consequences are enormous. God specifically condemns promiscuous living, too, though many today think nothing of having several 'partners' over a period of time.

'Having an affair', as adultery is euphemistically described because it sounds less harsh, is not simply a physical act. Sexual union with someone other than one's marriage partner carries with it tremendous moral and spiritual consequences, as well as social and personal ones. Part of the whole scenario of adultery is the deceit and betrayal that are inevitable; the secret meetings, the illicit contact, the web of lies and intrigues necessary to keep others from discovering the relationship. No matter how irreligious a person may be, few relationships survive adultery. To be betrayed in this way is intensely personal and, when the adultery is discovered, the results are invariably devastating: recrimination, guilt, the break-up of the marriage, divorce and distress to any children, opprobrium from others, loss of trust of colleagues and friends, loss of face and loss of self-respect. The poet, in cynical voice, wrote 'Do not adultery commit; advantage rarely comes of it.' The Bible, quite simply, tells us it is disastrous.

No true believer should ever set out deliberately to commit adultery or to be promiscuous. That is why this proverb is so pertinent. It tells us not to toy with temptation, because of what it may lead to. Do you lust after another man's wife? Are you spending too much time with someone else's husband? Avoid that person – don't get drawn like a moth into the flame. Don't read books or magazines, or watch television programmes or films that glorify such sins. These things compromise our spiritual immune systems and lower our standards. Don't take fire into your bosom: if you do, you will be burned. Fill your mind with the word of God; plead with God for His strength to overcome sin; and don't give place to the devil.

*Ian Rees*

