

There Is Only One Body

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References: **1 Corinthians 1**, Ephesians 5:25; 1 Corinthians 1:10-17; Acts 5:14; Acts 11:26; James 2:1; 1 Corinthians 3:3-4; Ephesians 4:3

Introduction: The Universal and Local Church

Well, good morning, everyone. This is the third now in a series that I've been—that I started. We trust that it will be a help in understanding something of the Church.

[Ephesians 5:25 NKJV]

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

Now, if it was so important, if the Church was so important for Christ, should it not be very important for you and I, who are members of the Church? Not that we should feel important, but that we should serve in the Church. We should understand what the Church is, our responsibility to the Church of Christ, the Church which is His body that He gave.

Now—no. Last week we looked at the universal church and the local church. The universal church, again, is the invisible body of Christ. It's made up of all believers of all time and all places. So there's a body in the world today of believers of the Lord Jesus Christ, and each one is a member of the body of Christ.

Now, the New Testament also speaks of local churches, which are made up of believers in any given locality. So the local church—we're a local church here. We meet at 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel. That's the name of our physical location, but our local church is the members—has nothing to do with the physical building: the ceiling, the walls, the windows, the doors, and so on. That's just a convenient place for us to be able to gather together.

Now, we read in the local church—we read of churches that were at Jerusalem, Corinth, and Rome, and so on. Now, each of these local churches, they were independent of other churches, but there should have been a fellowship between them, but all subject to the Head, which is—which is Christ. In other words, the local church should be a replica of the

whole universal church. The universal church, made up of all believers, they are perfect in God's eyes. And we, as a local assembly, a local expression of the church, we should also be like a miniature of the total church in every way.

Now, Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian philosopher and statesman, he was once asked why he did not join the Christian church. And he replied, "Which one?" And that is a problem, because Christendom is now divided up into all kinds of sects and denominations and religions. Peace. That is very confusing.

Now, where do we find the local church, the ideal local church? Is it possible to find a local church? Well, the New Testament itself is sufficient, and it's the only true guide that can bring us to a knowledge of what the local church should be.

Seven Truths Concerning the Church

Now, what we'd like to do is we'd like to look at seven New Testament truths concerning the local church, so that we get an idea of what the local church should be and what it should testify to.

Now, interwoven throughout the book of Acts and the epistles of the New Testament, there are many great truths concerning the church of God. And today we're going to look at the first one: there is only one body. We'll go through these seven just as an introduction to the next series that we will look at, in the Lord's will.

Today we'll look at the first: there is only one body. How can we give expression to that?

Secondly, Christ is the head of the body. That will be a topic of another time.

Thirdly, all believers are members of the body.

Fourthly, the Holy Spirit, next, is Christ's representative on the earth.

And fifthly, the church of God is holy.

Sixth, gifts are given for the edification and the growth of the church—how the church grows.

And then lastly, all believers are priests of God; there's no division among the people of God.

So today we'd like to look at the church, which is: there is only one body.

In spite of all the circumstances that we see today, which seem to deny the fact that there's only one church, one body, the fact remains that as far as God is concerned, there is only **one** body of believers on the earth today. Now, although this church is not visible—we never

see this church in a visible sense—yet it is formed into a common body by the Holy Spirit. So the truth of the one body there, if that's true—and we believe it is from the Scriptures—how can believers testify to this fact today? How can we, as a gathering here in this location, as an assembly—we're gathered to the Lord—how can we testify to the oneness of the body in a practical sense?

Taking No Sectarian Names

Well, we have it up on the screen. The first thing is by taking no names that would separate us or separate other Christians from other Christians. In other words, there are little gatherings of Christians through our city, and they come in different names. Some of them have names of countries—the Church of England, for example. Some are named after men: Lutheran churches. Some are named after certain practices: Baptists or Pentecostals. They're all names that are given, but what they do is they tend to separate Christians.

Now, so that to testify today, we should take no name that would separate us from any other Christian. That's one way we can give testimony to the one body—not that we're better than anybody else, not that we're trying to separate ourselves from other Christians. The idea is that we take no name that would separate us from other Christians.

Now, look at what's happening in the city of Corinth, 1 Corinthians chapter 1. We read there in verse 10. "Now I plead with you, brethren," he says—Paul writing to them:

[1 Corinthians 1:10-13 NKJV]

¹⁰ Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. ¹¹ For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. ¹² Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." ¹³ Is Christ divided?

There's the question: Is Christ divided? No, there's only **one** body!

[1 Corinthians 1:13-17 NKJV]

Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ lest anyone should say

that I had baptized in my own name. ¹⁶ Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

They were divided. There were little groups within the church at Corinth. Some were saying, "I'm a Paulite." Another was saying, "I am of Apollos." And others were saying, "We are of Christ," meaning that the others were not. And so there were these divisions there.

So we shouldn't take any name. What name should we take then? Well, we take the names that only are given in the Scriptures, such as—and for the sake of time, we won't look at those. I just want to get this screen. There we go.

By taking names: believers—Acts chapter 5, verse 14, you can look up these scriptures yourself, they were called believers. They were called, in Acts chapter 9, disciples. They're called Christians, Acts 11:26. And saints, often called saints, or simply brethren, James 2:1.

Now, notice that's a small "b" brethren, not a big "B" Brethren. I don't like that when people say, "Well, who do you fellowship with?"

"Oh, I'm with the Brethren."

Well, that's a denomination! We've made ourselves separate from others. I don't like that personally. Maybe some are okay with that, but personally, I feel rather offensive to be called a Big B Brother. It separates us from others. We might as well call ourselves a very formal name of that. And so the scriptural approach is to take no name that excludes others, but that includes every believer in the church at whole. Those are names that are given that are universal.

Now, this may be difficult to consistently practice because the world loves labels. People will ask me, "Well, what are you as a Christian?"

And I say, "Well, I am a Christian. I believe in the Lord Jesus as my Head."

And they will say, "What denomination?"

I say, "Well, it's not a denomination. It's part of the body of Christ."

That's how we can give expression to the truth of the one body. And it often leads into interesting conversations where people will say, "Well, what do you mean by that?" We'll say there's only one body, and there's Christians. I accept all Christians from any group, whatever their names are. If they're true Christians, they are members of the body of Christ

and they are my brothers and sisters. They are saints. They are Christians. They are believers.

So sometimes, though, we may suffer reproach even from other Christians. They don't like the fact that you do not have any labels. But what it does, it separates. It's an evil.

Avoiding Spiritual Pride

Now, a word of caution here. We can be scripturally correct, but spiritually proud. Remember those believers in Corinth? They said, "Oh, you're of Paul? You're of Apollos. But we—we are of Christ." And that is spiritual pride, thinking somehow that they are the only ones that are following the correct path. And so that's the sectarian spirit that we're trying to avoid altogether. And we find ourselves falling into it: "Because we're better than them."

But we're not, brothers and sisters. In great humility, we need to hold this truth of the unity of the body. It's very difficult to continue in practice.

God's Blessing and God's Attitude Toward Division

But some say, "Well, but hasn't God blessed some of the great divisions of the church? We see the movement of the Spirit of God sometimes moving in some of these churches with sectarian names to a wonderful degree. We see people saved and baptized and brought into the kingdom of God and added to the body. Isn't that showing that God is blessing those denominations?"

Now, first of all, in answer to that, the blessing of the Lord does not mean He approves in every detail what goes on in these local churches. He honors His Word in spite of imperfection. Otherwise, we'd have no blessing at all! If we had to be the perfect church, there would be no blessing anywhere. So God is gracious, and He blesses in spite of our imperfections.

Now, let's look for a moment at God's attitude toward divisions, though. Yes, He may bless in times when sometimes churches will get together, and they kind of forget about their sectarianism. So when they cry out to the Lord, and they cry for blessing, God answers that prayer. But so often, this idea of divisions comes in, of sectarianism, or separation to denominations. They become proud.

Well, first of all, the Lord's attitude toward division is that, number one, it's unspiritual. In 1 Corinthians 3 and verse 4, we read this:

[1 Corinthians 3:3 NKJV]

³ for you are still carnal.

He says to the Corinthians, you're still unspiritual; you are immature:

[1 Corinthians 3:3-4 NKJV]

For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? ⁴ For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?

Are you not immature?

So the very fact of these denomination names means the churches, whatever they may profess to be, it's a spiritual immaturity, not recognizing this great truth of the unity of the body of Christ. It's a doctrine that we give expression to, but we hold it in deep humility. Can I say that again? We hold this truth in deep humility, not merely as a doctrine, but as a practice from the heart. We have a narrow idea of God's purposes; we have a broad heart to encompass all of God's people. That's hard to maintain.

Maintaining the Unity of the Spirit

Now, the unity of the body cannot be made by man's efforts. Some have tried through what we call the ecumenical councils, seeking to draw together different denominations. But in those denominations, many of them, there is bad spiritual doctrine. They deny the virgin birth, some of them. Some of them deny that the death of Christ is sufficient. We can't join together. Men's efforts have failed miserably—unions of some kind. The United Church is called United Church because it tried to join two denominations together. And what happened? They're empty today. They're empty. They just sold the big United Church up on the hill there to a congregation of believers. Praise the Lord for that!

There is only one body formed by God, and we are told to keep that unity. We don't try to make a unity; it's already been made by the Spirit of God. Ephesians chapter 4, verse 3, we read here:

[Ephesians 4:3 NKJV]

endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

We don't need to argue and fight. We just keep that unity. We don't make the unity; we keep that unity in the bond of peace.

Now, in conclusion, it's not easy to separate ourselves from the divisions of the church and at the same time maintain a loving spirit to all the people of God. And I emphasized it before and again I do: to do so, we need courage. We need Christ's courage to do so, to stand up and not try to backpedal and try to pretend that we fit into ordinary Christianity. No. We want to be a testimony to the oneness of the body of Christ. To do so, we need courage. But to hold that truth and make it real to others as a testimony, it has to be done in **deep humility**.

Closing Prayer

Well, that concludes it. Let's just look to the Lord with a word of prayer.

Our Father and our God, we thank You for this great truth of the unity of the body of Christ. That, Lord, we can look to Your blessing among Your people wherever You may meet them. We can have fellowship with them, Lord, if they're walking according to Your holy Word. And, Lord, as we can open our arms to them, we can embrace them. But, Lord, we need to be narrow as Your Scriptures to walk in the truth, but be gracious as well.

And so, Father, help us to keep this balance in humility, we pray. We give You thanks now for the time that we've had of worship. We ask Your blessing upon the refreshments that are provided for us by the dear sisters down in the basement. And we ask Your blessing again upon the Family Bible Hour. And we thank You in the worthy name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.