

THE CHRISTIAN & THE CHURCH (09)

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Introduction.

The church is the bride of Christ. The church is the body of Christ. Last Lord's Day we began to look at this second Biblical imagery of the church – it is the body of Christ. In our study we looked at two passages : *Eph.1:18-23* & *Col.1:13-23*. These two passages deal with two facts side by side : (1) Christ is preeminent over the cosmos or the old creation, and, (2) Christ is preeminent over the new creation which is His church or His body. *Col.1:18* emphasizes the fact that Christ is the head of the body, the church. The goal of His headship is preeminence in position and preeminence in authority.

In our study we saw that Christ's headship over His body is His Lordship over His church. And we took note of the following : (1) Christ's Lordship means Christ regulates the issues concerning your salvation; (2) Lordship ties together belief in Christ and obedience to Christ; (3) Lordship means Christ makes the rules; (4) Lordship means we must obey Christ; (5) Lordship means Christ regulates your whole life. In closing we looked at the non-negotiables of Christ's Lordship. We saw : (1) Christ's Lordship itself is a non-negotiable; (2) Christ's word is a non-negotiable; (3) obeying Christ is a non-negotiable.

In *Gen.3:5* Satan offered Adam and Eve Godhood. The offer was empty because it was rooted in a lie. They reached for Godhood, for equality with God, but instead received the fall into sin. With sin came death. With sin came spiritual and moral deterioration and destruction. Today Satan is offering Christians a share in Christ's Lordship. Satan is offering Christians a share on Christ's throne. Beware, the offer is empty. Beware, the offer is rooted in a dreadful lie. Beware, the offer is idolatrous. Beware, to reach for a

share in Christ's Lordship or Christ's throne is to make yourself an idolater. Beware, Satan's offer will only bring you spiritual and moral deterioration. Beware, Satan's offer sets before you the frightening prospect of spiritual and moral apostasy.

Instead of reaching for a share in Christ's Lordship, you need to surrender your all to Christ. You need to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice to Him. This is acceptable or well-pleasing to God. In closing our study we noted that the battle for self-control that began in Eden must end at the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The grab for divinity that took place in Eden must be abandoned at the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The lust for equality with God that was born in Eden must be crucified at the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is Lord. This truth is non-negotiable. Christ is seated on the throne. This truth is non-negotiable. There is room at Christ's cross for you. But there is no room on Christ's throne for you. Christ is the only **despotes** and **kurios**, the only Sovereign Master and Lord. This truth is non-negotiable. There is no room for debate here.

You Are Christ's Body.

With this review, I want to turn your attention to ***1Cor.12:1-30***. (**read**). The context of this chapter is the Corinthian church and the many problems that existed in the Corinthian church. There were divisions in the Corinthian church. (***1Cor.1:13***). These divisions gave rise to arrogance and boasting. Members were boasting about the human leader they were following. (***1Cor.1:12***). Members were boasting about their wisdom. (***1Cor.3:18***). Members were boasting about their superiority. (***1Cor.4:7***). Members had become judgmental. (***1Cor.4:5***). Members were boasting about their spiritual gifts and making the claim that spiritual gifts separated the super-spiritual elite from the less spiritual. Paul's teachings concerning the body of Christ in ***1Cor.12*** are really a response to many

of these problems in the church. Let us consider Paul's teachings.

Firstly, there is one obvious fact in this chapter that stands out very clearly : *vs.27* declares, "you are Christ's body." The Corinthians are the body of Christ. You are Christ's body. The word "**you**" is plural and emphatic. You, collectively, in your common relationship to Christ, are Christ's body. The emphasis here is, firstly, on your relationship to Christ and, secondly, on your relationship to one another. Together, you are Christ's body. Together, you are a body. In other words, like it or not, we are in this together, inseparably together. If you are a Christian, get comfortable with this fact.

If you are not comfortable with this fact the options you have are not Biblical and they are dangerous to the spiritual and eternal welfare of your soul. You have to understand that there is no salvation outside of the church, that is, outside of being committed to and joined to the membership of a local Biblical church. As we shall see when we study *John 15*, you cannot exist as a Christian outside of the church or disconnected to the church. Being a church tramp is not a Biblical option. This is why we make it clear to our visitors that if they are not active members in a Biblical church, they must not partake from the Lord's Table. If you are a Christian you are a member of Christ's body. Christ's Lordship requires that you commit to and live out all that it means to be a member of His body. This is a non-negotiable.

The other point to be noted in *vs.27* is found in the possessive expression "Christ's body". The body belongs to Christ and no one else but Christ. He owns it and He holds the preeminence over it. *Col.1:18* says "first place" or preeminence belongs to Christ. John tells us about a man called Diotrephes who wanted to have preeminence over the local church in which he (Diotrephes) was a leader. In *3Jn.1:9* John described Diotrephes as one "who loves to be first" in the church. "**Loves to be first**" is the translation of a Greek verb that speaks of the love for preeminence. Beware of those who try to give the impression that they have some kind of ownership stake in the church and

seek to have preeminence in Christ's church. The leaders in Christ's church are servant leaders. They are there to serve, not to lord it over the church. (*1Pet.5:3*).

There is one other point to note here : Christ's possession and ownership of the body also means that I belong to Christ just as equally as you belong to Christ. Christ loves me just as much as He loves you. Christ cares for me just as much as He cares for you. Paul said "the Son of God ... loved me and gave Himself up for me." (*Gal.2:20*). You can say the same.

This brings us to our **second** point : how did the Corinthians and you become a member in Christ's body? The answer is in *vs.13*. (**read**). The better translation is "for in one Spirit". The Spirit is not the agent in this baptism. The Spirit is not the One doing the baptizing. The Spirit is the element into which "we ... all" are baptized. There are those who wrongly hold the view that the Spirit is the agent in this baptism. As a result they teach that this baptism is a special post-conversion experience in the Spirit and those who experience it enter into some kind of super-spiritual realm in the Christian life.

Note the words "we" and "all" in *vs.13*. Paul's point is that whatever he is describing is the common experience of **all** Christians. The word "**all**" must be emphasized. Not even one Christian is excluded here. With the use of the word "**we**" Paul included himself. In this verse Paul is describing what every Christian experiences at conversion and he used parallel statements to describe the same experience. The parallel statements are : "for in one Spirit we were all baptized", and "we were all made to drink of one Spirit."

The purpose for which we all are baptized or immersed in the Spirit is not to make us into super-spiritual Christians. The purpose is expressed in the three words, "into the body". Baptism in the Spirit places us into the body of Christ. This is the common purpose or goal of "we ... all" being baptized in the Spirit. In order to emphasize what he meant by

“we ... all” Paul added, “whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free.” In other words, whether you were a Jew or Gentile, a slave or a free person, a male or a female, a rich person or a poor person, an upper class person or a lower class person, you entered into and became a member in the body of Christ by the one and only means : baptism in the Spirit.

For Paul, the reception of the Spirit is the indispensable ingredient of the Christian life. The Spirit is what essentially distinguishes the believer from the non-believer. (*1Cor.2:14-15*). The Spirit is what especially marks the beginning of the Christian life. (*Gal.3:2-3*). The Spirit is what makes a person a child of God. (*Rom.8:14-17*). It is through baptism in the Spirit that we are placed in the body of Christ. And Paul made it absolutely clear in *Rom.8:9* that if you do not have the Spirit you are not a Christian. If you have not received the Spirit, you are not a Christian. If you are not indwelt by the Spirit, you are not a Christian.

Baptism in the Spirit takes place at conversion and puts you into the body of Christ. The agent of this baptism is the Lord Jesus Christ. (*Matt.3:11*). You do not seek this baptism. You do not pray and / or fast for this baptism. This is what Jesus does for you when He saves you. He baptizes you in the Spirit. When this happens your first desire is water baptism, the rite that publicly testifies to your salvation in Christ and your identification with the body of Christ. Are you saved? If your answer is “yes”, then you have been baptized in the Spirit. Is it your desire to be publicly identified with the body of Christ? If your answer is “yes”, then you have been baptized in the Spirit.

Now here is the next question that is very important : Is this desire to be identified with the body of Christ a passing fancy or is it an ongoing and continually strengthened desire? The desire of those who are baptized in the Spirit to be identified with the body of Christ is no passing fancy. Their desire is an ongoing desire. Their desire is daily strengthened. Such people love the church. Such people highly esteem the church. Such people delight in the members of the church. Such people love to join with the other members of

Christ's body to worship Christ. Such people are always burdened for the welfare of the church and have a strong desire to see the church grow in all aspects of its life and ministries. Baptism in the Spirit is not self-orientated. Baptism in the Spirit is not for the spiritual exaltation or spiritual elitism. Baptism in the Spirit is church orientated. If you are baptized in the Spirit you become a church orientated person.

The **third** point we must note in *1Cor.12* is that the body of Christ is one, but it has many members. Let us take note of the following verses :

Vs.12, "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ." (This verse can be properly completed with the words, "**so also is Christ's body**".)

Vs.14, "For the body is not one member, but many."

Vs.20, "But now there are many members, but one body."

Vs.27, "Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it."

The word "many" points, firstly, to plurality. There is plurality in Christ's body. The body is made up of many members. But it is this plurality that is knitted together to make up the one body. The word "many" points, secondly, to diversity. There is diversity in the body of Christ. As we shall see, this diversity is God's will. But this diversity is dominated by its unity. And it is this unity that makes the diversity meaningful and constructive. At the same time it must be emphasized that unity is not uniformity.

I have touched time and again on the unity that exists in the body of Christ. This unity is theological and it must be practical. Christians are one. We are one in Christ. We are one in the church universal. We are one in the church local. We are one in Christ by virtue of our salvation in Christ. We are all saved by Christ. We are all saved through repentance of our sins and faith in Christ after hearing and coming to understand the

gospel. If you became a Christian by some other means, then you are not a Christian.

The apostle Paul emphasized in *Eph.2* this oneness that exists in Christ's body. In *vs.15* he said we are "one new man". In *vs.16* he said we are "one body". In *vs.18* he said we have "our access in one Spirit to the Father." In *vs.19* he said we are "fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household." In *vs.21* he said we are "a holy temple in the Lord."

In *Eph.4:3* the apostle called upon us to be "diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." How does Paul describe this unity? He wrote from *vss.4-6*, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all." The word "one" is repeated seven times. The theological basis of our unity in Christ is an established indestructible fact. If your claim to be a Christian is not rooted in this theological basis, which can be summed up as our salvation in Christ, then you are not saved and you are not one of the many that make up Christ's body.

The problem that existed in the Corinthian church was not with the theological basis of their unity. The problem that existed in the Corinthian church was with the practical application and outworking of that unity. They did extremely poorly with the practical application and outworking of their unity in Christ.

Paul opened his letter to the Corinthians by focusing on the problem of divisions in the church. (*1Cor.1:10*). Paul's first exhortation was, "that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you." In *1Cor.1:13* Paul asked the question : "Has Christ been divided?" Here "Christ" is used as a figure of speech for Christ as a whole, that is, Christ and His body. To use Paul's imagery, the Corinthians had sliced up Christ and divided Him among human leaders. They had also sliced up Christ along social and

economic lines. There were the wise and the foolish; the noble and the ignoble; the strong and the weak; the exalted and the based and despised; the rich and the poor; the Jews and the Greeks; the slaves and the free (*1Cor.1:26-28; 11:18-22; 12:13*). There were also the spiritually superior and the spiritually inferior. (*1Cor.4:6ff*).

This division in the church was completely wrong and Paul stood firmly against it. This division gave rise to quarrels (*1Cor.1:11*), jealousy and strife (*1Cor.3:3*). Paul described this division and its fruits as childish and fleshly. (*1Cor.3:1-4*). The word “**fleshly**” tells us that Paul was charging the Corinthians with behaving as the unsaved, or to use the expression in vs.3, “like mere men”. This division gave rise to arrogance and pretensions of superiority. (*1Cor.4:6-7*). This division caused the well-to-do members to behave disgracefully towards the members who were poor. (*1Cor.11:20-22*). Paul charged them with shaming and humiliating the poor members of the church.

The division problems that existed in the Corinthian church did not cease after Paul wrote his letter rebuking church and correcting church. Down through the centuries local churches have been plagued by similar social and economic divisions and the fruits of such divisions. These kinds of divisions, both at the individual level and the clique level, have brought great harm and great pain to the church. There are a few points I want you to note now.

Firstly, this division in the church is a practical rejection of the theological unity of our salvation in Christ. Sinners can be classified by race, gender, education, social status, economic status, and by the sin or sins that dominate their lives, to name a few factors. But here are the questions now : Is there a sinner on the face of this earth who became a Christian apart from Christ? Is there a sinner on the face of this earth who became a member in the body of Christ apart from being baptized in the Spirit?

As someone noted, at the foot of the cross we all stand on equal ground. We are all sinful

beggars reaching out with open hand for the same **free** gift of salvation in Christ. And I emphasize the word “**free**”. *Psa.49:8* says, “The redemption of [a] soul is costly.” Only the Lord Jesus could pay the cost. The cost was His precious blood. (*1Pet.1:18-19*). Like Saul, the Pharisee, whatever righteousness we may claim to have before we were saved is utterly useless. Such righteousness is filthy rags (*Isa.64:6*) and rubbish (*Phil.3:8*) in the eyes of God. The Greek word Paul used, **skubala**, may refer to rubbish, to half-eaten dead animals or to feces.

Standing at the cross we have nothing to boast about. We are all spiritually naked and empty-handed. We all came to be dressed in the righteousness of Christ. And it is the righteousness of Christ alone that makes us acceptable to God. And so Paul asked the Corinthians : Who makes you to differ? What is it that is making you believe that you are somehow special and superior? “What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (*1Cor.4:7*). God’s grace in your life must lead to gratitude and humility, not arrogance and self-exaltation.

Secondly, this division in the church is a rejection of our declared oneness in Christ and the attempt to rebuild what Christ has broken down. There was no more clearly defined division that existed in the ancient world than that which existed between Jews and Gentiles. There was clearly marked division, contempt, hostility and hatred. What did our Lord Jesus do? Please turn to *Eph.2:11-16*. (**read**).

What are the things that marked the division between the Jews and the Gentiles. The Gentiles were uncircumcised. The Gentiles had no relationship with Christ, neither historically nor spiritually. The Gentiles were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel. The Gentiles were strangers to the covenant of promise. The Gentiles were a people without spiritual hope. The Gentiles were without God; they had no knowledge of the true and living God.

By contrast, Paul stated concerning the Jews in **Rom.9:4-5**, “to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple services and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.” Jesus told the Samaritan woman, “You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.” (**Jn.4:22**).

What did Jesus do by His death on the cross? He broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, He abolished the enmity, and He put to death the enmity. The theological barriers that existed between Jews and Gentiles literally became a physical barrier. **The Epistle of Aristeas**, written in the second century B.C., stated, “*Our lawgiver ... fenced us about with impenetrable palisades and with walls of iron to the end that we should mingle in no way with any of the other nations...*” The Jewish temple had an outer court for Gentiles. This outer court was surrounded by a wall. On this wall the clear warning was displayed at regular intervals : “*No foreigner may enter within the barrier and enclosure round the temple. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.*” In other words, the warning to Gentiles was, “*Trespassers will be executed.*”

What else did Jesus do? **Vs.14** says, “For He Himself is our peace.” As sinners we were hostile enemies of God. (**Rom.5:10; 8:7**). Jesus established peace between God and man. (**Rom.5:1**). And Jesus established peace between man and man, between Jew and Jew, between Jew and Gentile and between Gentile and Gentile. It is only Jesus who could take Simon the Zealot and Matthew the tax collector and establish peace between them and make them His disciples. (**Lk.6:15**). The Zealots were the Jewish guerrilla fighters who waged war against the Romans. Matthew was a Jewish tax collector who worked for the Romans. The Zealots hated the Jewish tax collectors and their greatest desire was to murder the tax collectors.

It is only Jesus who could take a Pharisee like Saul of Tarsus and make him the apostle to the Gentiles. It is only Jesus who could take the wealthy Lydia, the middle class jailer and the slave girl from whom Paul cast out a demon and start a church in Philippi. (*Acts 16*). It is only Jesus who could take fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and swindlers, save them and start a church. This is what He did in Corinth. (*1Cor.6:9-11*). It is only Jesus who would take a black man and use him to win a Brahmin Hindu priest to Christ. That priest was my father. I am sure most of you would have no idea of the nature of the miracle Jesus worked here.

What else did Jesus do? He took enemies, men and women divided along insurmountable religious, social, and economic lines and made them into one new man, into one body. He made them into His body, the church. And He is still doing the same today.

Look around you today. What do you see? You see in this church a mixture of the two primary races in this country and some in-between. There is also great diversity among us with regards to our history and backgrounds and with regards to our present condition. But at the same time we are one in Christ. And I have to thank God for the spirit of unity He has given to us. It is not perfect but I do know also that the Lord is building this unity, strengthening this unity and sanctifying this unity. And I am most grateful to the Lord for that.

But let me add that I am not satisfied and I will not be satisfied until I see every race present in this country present in our church. I will not be satisfied until I see people from every cultural and religious background saved and added to this church. This is my ongoing prayer. And you ought not to be satisfied and you ought to be praying. The church must be a godly united microcosm of our society, one that society must stop and take notice of.

Those who create division in the church have rejected our declared oneness in Christ and they are attempting to rebuild what Christ has broken down and they are seeking to break down what Christ is building. If you are one of these, you are a spiritually insane person. You have no idea of the utterly grave danger you are in. The Lord has emphatically promised to do to you the very thing you are seeking to do to His church. Turn to *1Cor.3:16-18a*. (read). In the Greek text the verbs “**destroys**” and “**destroy**” are placed side by side to emphasize God’s in-kind response. Note carefully the warning : “Let no man deceive himself.” Do not fool yourself regarding the nature and seriousness of this warning.

In closing, I want to say to you : if you are not a Christian you are living outside of one of the most amazing miracles taking place in the world. The most amazing miracle that is taking place in this world is God saving sinners and making them a new creation in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And a close second to this primary amazing miracle is the miracle of the church. I am most grateful to God, unworthy as I am, that He has allowed me the privilege to have an active part in both miracles around this world. You have no idea how often I sit and marvel at my life and what God has done for me.

What is it that makes Christians embrace all kinds of horrible persecutions and even death for the privilege to gather together with the church on the Lord’s Day to worship the Lord? You think, why not save your life and worship in the privacy of your home with your family or alone in your bedroom? Why risk your life to gather with the church for an hour or two? Such people have an understanding of the awesome miracle of the church in Christ that we are yet to attain to. This is why they would never obey laws that forbid them to gather together with the church in order to worship their Lord. We stay at home when rain fall. We stay at home if we do not have the full convenience of transport. We stay at home if we have a sniffle. We stay at home because we are tired. We stay at home because Tanti and granny have come to visit. We stay at home because of family social gatherings. The reasons for staying at home are far more than there are Sundays in the

year.

On the other hand they know death is waiting but they refuse to stay at home. They know spies will be in the service but they refuse to stay at home. They see police cars parked nearby and they know that they will be beaten and/or arrested, but they do not turn back nor stay at home. They see their building being bulldozed or set on fire and they immediately make plans to meet at another address. They love the church. They delight in the church. Why? Because they love the Head of the church. Because they delight in the Lord Jesus Christ.

What is it they know, they understand and has gripped them about the church that we do not understand, we do not know and has not gripped us about the church? We need to search our hearts and answer. We need to get on our knees and pray until the Lord shows us the answer. May the Lord grant us this answer, this understanding, this love for Christ and His church to the glory of His holy Name.