

THE CHRISTIAN & THE CHURCH (11)

June 22, 2008.

Introduction.

I want to begin by reading to you *Eph. chap.2.* (read). You are the body of Christ. You became a member in the body of Christ through conversion to Christ and baptism in the Holy Spirit. In our last study we saw that Christ's body is one but it has many members. Christ's body is a plurality dominated by unity. In our study we examined *Eph.2* to see what God accomplished in us through Christ. We saw our condition before God before we were saved. But we also saw that God intervened with extraordinary generous grace and saved us.

We saw that under the terms of the new covenant established by our Lord Jesus Christ, God is doing something new in this world. God is saving Jews and Gentiles and making them into one new man, one body, fellow citizens with the saints, God's household, a holy temple to the Lord and a dwelling of God. In *1Pet.2:9* Peter described this new body of Jews and Gentiles as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession." Every one of these descriptions was used in the O.T. to peculiarly describe the Jews. Peter has taken them and applied them to the church which consists of Jews and Gentiles.

We saw that what God is doing, as described in *Eph.2* and other passages, goes far beyond when Gentiles became proselytes in Judaism. God is creating in Christ a new community, a new people, a new nation which transcends Israel and all the privileges that once peculiarly belonged to Israel. God is creating in Christ a new community in which Jews and Gentiles have equal status and are on equal footing with equal privileges.

The Lord Jesus accomplished this grand work by becoming our peace. He bridged the infinite divide of enmity and hostility between God and us and established peace between God and us. He bridged the divide of enmity and hostility between Jews and Gentiles and established peace between us. We saw that it is only Jesus who can take people from different races, cultures, social and economic backgrounds and make them into His one body.

In our study we saw that our unity in Christ is theological. This unity in Christ is an established indestructible fact. But our theological unity must also be a practical unity. We examined this unity in *Eph.4* and looked at Paul's command in *vs.3* to be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The verb "diligent" calls upon us to be actively, continually and passionately diligent. We saw from *vs.2* the moral qualities that must be present in us for preserving this unity we have in Christ. Well, Brethren, with this brief review we come now to today's study.

The Importance Of Unity.

Psa.133:1 says, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity." Unity in the church is not only good and pleasant, it is also vitally important. Let us briefly consider the vital importance of unity in the church.

In *Jn.17* the Lord Jesus prayed to His Father for His disciples and for those who will believe in Him. In *Jn.17:11* the Lord prayed, "that they (**the disciples**) may be one even as We are." In *vss.20-21* the Lord prayed, "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one." Then the Lord added in *vss.22-23*, "The glory which You have given Me I

have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.” What does Jesus’ prayer tell us? It tells us that unity in the church glorifies Him. It tells us that unity in the church brings glory to the church. And it tells us that the unity of the church has positive consequences for evangelism.

Secondly, in a world plagued by all kinds of divisions and the evil consequences of those divisions, the unity of the church is vitally important because it manifests among believers in Christ a moral quality of life that is worthy of our calling in Christ. This is one of the important points Paul made in *Eph.4:1-6* when he exhorted to conduct our lives worthy of the calling with which we have been called.

Thirdly, the unity of the church is vitally important because the steadfastness of the church against a hostile world is grounded in our unity. This is Paul’s point in *Phil.1:27*. (**read**). Paul wrote this verse to a church that had become greatly alarmed over the persecution it was facing and was ready to scatter. *Vs.27* shows us this unity has four elements to it. **Firstly**, “standing firm in one Spirit” points to unity of the Spirit. The word “**spirit**” should have a capital “**S**” because it is best taken as a reference to the Holy Spirit. “Standing firm” pictures a soldier digging in, holding ground and refusing to budge in the face of an oncoming enemy. **Secondly**, “with one mind” points to unity of mind. The Greek word translated “mind” refers to the sphere of the affections and moral energies. (**Motyer**).

Thirdly, “striving together” points to unity in action. The verb Paul used here pictures a line of soldiers marching forward with locked arms. A united church is a church without passengers. A united church is a church in which everyone member has locked arms with other members and actively “striving together for the faith of the gospel.” This brings us to the **fourth** element of our unity : “for the faith of the gospel”. This points to

unity in the faith. In this verse **“faith”** speaks of knowing the truth and believing the truth. **Motyer** noted, *“the unity of the church is a unity in the doctrine and the experience of salvation.”* If there is no steadfastness grounded in unity, the hostility and persecution of the world would quickly scatter the church.

Lastly, the unity of the church is vitally important because it is the hallmark of the life worthy of the gospel and it brings joy to those whom Christ has called to lead and shepherd His church. This is seen in ***Phil.2:1-2.*** (**read**). The word “if” does not imply uncertainty. The idea in this word is, “if, as is certainly the case....” **Alec Motyer** made the following comments in his exposition of these two verses. He wrote, *“Paul’s repetition of the subject [of unity] not only underlines its importance but lifts it to a higher level : unity is not just a useful weapon against the world, but rather it belongs to the very essence of Christian life, for it is the way in which Christians display outwardly what the gospel means to them. Unity is the gospel’s hallmark; it says to all who examine it, ‘This life is worthy of the gospel.’”*

Motyer added, *“Paul saw unity as a by-product of the great truths on which the gospel rests, but he did not see it as coming about automatically or effortlessly. It is ‘natural’ in relation to the gospel, but it will not ‘come naturally’ – only by effort, obedience and deliberate cultivation.”* The responsibility of the life worthy of the gospel, that is, the life of gospel unity rooted in Christ, is individual and personal. It is the responsibility of every Christian in this church. With humility of mind you must continually, actively and passionately pursue it.

The Dangers Of Disunity.

We come now to consider the dangers of disunity. The problem that existed in the

Corinthian church was not with the theological basis of their unity. As we saw already our theological unity in Christ is an indestructible fact. 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. Divisions of all kinds were pervasively present in the church and they gave rise to all kinds of ungodly behavior.

In *1Cor.1:13* Paul asked the question : “Has Christ been divided?” The name “**Christ**” is used here as a figure of speech for Christ as a whole, that is, Christ and His body. To use Paul’s imagery, the Corinthians sliced up Christ and divided Him among human leaders. They sliced up Christ along spiritual, social and economic lines. In the church there were the following classifications : the wise and the foolish; the noble and the ignoble; the strong and the weak; the exalted and the abased or despised; the rich and the poor; the Jews and the Greeks; the slaves and the free; the spiritually superior and the spiritually inferior. (*1Cor.1:26-28; 4:6ff; 11:18-22; 12:13.*)

Divisions in the church are completely wrong. Paul stood firmly against divisions and so must we. 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 the devil and his hosts of demons have worked overtime to ensure that local churches are plagued by doctrinal, 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. These points are not set out in any order of priority.

Firstly, division in the church is a practical rejection of the theological unity that exists in the Christian faith. In *Eph.4:1-6* Paul grounded his exhortation to pursue unity in the truth that “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.”

Secondly, division in the church is a practical rejection of the Lord’s repeated request in His prayer in **Jn.17**. In His prayer our Lord emphasized the oneness that exists between Him and His Father.

Thirdly, 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 there is not one sinner on the face of this earth who became a Christian apart from Christ. There is not one sinner on the face of this earth who became a member in the body of Christ apart from being baptized in the Spirit. Christ came and preached peace to those who were far away. But He did not preach a different message to those who were near. He preached the same message of peace to those who were near. (**Eph.2:17**).

Fourthly, division in the church is a practical rejection of what we are in Christ. We are one body in Christ. We all stand on equal footing before Christ with the same spiritual privileges. As Paul says in **Gal.3:28**, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Fifthly, division in the church is a practical 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 were clearly marked divisions, contempt, hostilities and hatred. Our Lord, by His death on the cross broke down the barriers and the dividing wall of contempt, hostilities and hatred. If we are in Christ, if we say that we are Christians, how can we work against our Lord and seek to rebuild the very things He destroyed by His death on the cross?

Sixthly, division in the church is a practical rejection of our declared oneness in the body of Christ and a working against our oneness in the body of Christ. If you use your hands to punch your face, what will happen? If you use your teeth to bite various parts of your body, what will happen? If your white corpuscles decide to work against your body, what will happen? If organs in your body decide to become non-functional, what will happen? Your body will be hurt. Your body will begin to suffer pain. Your body will grow sick. Your body will begin to die.

You are a member of Christ's body, this local expression of Christ's body. Now apply the points I just made concerning your physical body to the body of Christ and see what will happen. Paul wrote in *Gal.5:15*, "if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another." If you begin to bite and devour one another, Christ's body of which you are a member will be hurt, will begin to suffer pain, will begin to grow sick and will begin to die. Paul said in *1Cor.12:26*, "if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it."

Brethren, when you hurt any member of this church in any form or fashion you are hurting the body of Christ and bringing pain to the body of Christ. But since you are a part of this body, you are also hurting yourself. And in keeping with *Acts 9:5*, you are hurting Christ Himself. Brethren, is it not enough that the world hates us, despises us, treats us as scum and the dregs of society? (*Jn.15:18; 1Cor.4:13*). If it is enough, then we should be loving one another, protecting one another, encouraging one another and building up one another. (*Jn.13:34-35; 1Thess.5:11*).

Seventhly, those who create division in the church are not only working against the Lord Jesus Christ whom they profess to believe in and serve, they are also working hand in hand with the devil. They are willing one will with the devil. (cf. *2Tim.2:26*). The devil's

goal is to wreak havoc in the church by creating divisions in the church.

Lastly, a divisive person must be put out from the church, even excommunicated, after the second warning. Please turn to *Tit.3:9-11*. (**read**). The factious person is a divisive person. The idea of him being a heretic is a meaning that came subsequent to the apostle's primary understanding. It would seem from the context in *vs.9* that the problem focuses on this person's behavior. He is argumentative and creating controversies, strife and disputes in the church over things that are unprofitable and worthless.

Now let us note the spiritual description of this man as given in *vs.11*. Firstly, he is described as spiritually "perverted". The verb used is perfect tense which indicates that this is his settled condition. Secondly, he is described as "**sinning**". This verb is present tense and indicates to us this person's persistence in sinning and creating divisions despite being warned. Lastly, he is described as "being self-condemned", that is, by his divisive behavior and his persistence in sinning he has condemned himself and brought upon himself the judgment of being put out of the church.

In closing this point I want to say that those who become divisive in the church are spiritually insane people. We have seen that divisive people work against what the Triune God is doing in the church. Divisive people are seeking to break down what God is doing. Divisive people have no idea of the utterly grave danger they 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. Paul wrote, "if any man the temple of God destroys, will destroy this man God." Note carefully the warning : "Let no man deceive himself." Do not fool yourself regarding the nature and seriousness of this warning. You bring harm to or destroy God's church and God will do the same to you.

Unity in the Body and Certain Sins.

This brings us to the third major point I want to deal with : **Unity in the body and certain sins.** Under this point I want to turn your attention to three passages. They deal with sins that have a direct impact on the body of Christ. These sins are idolatry, sexual immorality and the formation of unequal yokes. Today I want to deal with idolatry. And Lord willing, next week I will deal with sexual immorality and the unequal yoke. Now, as we approach this study you need to be reminded of some of Paul's foundational teaching concerning the body of Christ. So please turn to *1Cor.12:14-21, 26.* (**read**). What Paul has said here has already been explained to you and very clear. So we will proceed without further comment.

Please turn now to *1Cor.10:14-22.* (**read**). The Roman world in Paul's day was a great religious melting pot. The religious culture in Paul's day would have much in common with the religious culture we have in this country today. The Greeks and Romans were accustomed to joining in the sacrificial meals of the various gods and goddesses, none of which required an exclusive relationship. Gods were worshipped for utilitarian reasons. Many believed there was safety in numbers and so the more gods they worshipped the greater would be their chances of success in life. Doctrinal issues regarding the gods and goddesses were of no interest among the people.

When Paul came preaching the gospel he radically rejected all religious syncretism. There was only one body of revealed religious truth. And there was only one God who revealed Himself to mankind in this one body of revealed religious truth. This God doctrinally defined and described Himself very clearly. And this God demanded exclusive loyalty. It is with this immediate background in mind and the history of Israel's idolatrous failures and God's judgments upon them that Paul wrote *1Cor.10:14-22.*

By way of introduction to this passage, **Alan Johnson** wrote, *“Paul will argue directly against participation under any circumstances in the eating of **known** sacrificial idol food. Eating it is tantamount to violating the new covenant with Christ and the unity of the people of God, the reality behind believing communities’ participation in the [Lord’s Table]. To do so is to become idolaters and incur God’s judgment....”*

There are three important points you must keep in mind as we proceed. **Firstly**, the Greek word **koinonia**. This word is used primarily to describe the communion, the intimate fellowship, the common bond we share in Christ and with each other. This word made its first appearance in *Acts 2:42*. On that day 3000 people were baptized and added to the church. And then we are told, “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship (**koinonia**), to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.” In the passage before us this word is translated “sharing & sharers”.

Secondly, we find in *vs.17* this important statement, “we who are many are one body.” As we already know, this truth will be repeatedly emphasized in *1Cor.12*.

Thirdly, what is an idol? An idol is something a person worships in the place of the true and living God. When we think of idols we think of something made from clay, wood, stone or metals. But as we know and the Bible makes clear, idolatry could be far more extensive than that. However, in this context Paul is dealing with those idols that men have made for themselves, idols which they use in their religious worship and feasts, idols which they bow down to and worship as a god. Now Paul made it clear that in and of itself an idol is nothing. It is a lifeless object. But Paul also made it clear that behind every idol is a demon. When a man bows and worships an idol, he is bowing to and worshipping a demon. When a man sacrifices to an idol, he is sacrificing to a demon.

Leon Morris noted that Paul *“will not agree that ... idols can safely be treated as nothing more than ... blocks of wood and stone. The demons use people’s readiness to worship idols. Thus, when people sacrifice to idols, it cannot be said that they are engaging in some meaningless or neutral activity. They are sacrificing to evil spirits.... Idol worshippers are entering into fellowship with demons.”*

Now Paul began this section of his letter with the command, “Flee from idolatry.” (*vs.14*). A similar command is found in *1Cor.6:18* where Paul wrote, “Flee immorality.” The command **“flee”** is direct, strong and urgent. This must be an unremitting battle. **Garland** wrote, *“Idolatry is like radioactive waste : it requires them to bolt from this area immediately to avoid contamination and certain death.”* The point in the repeated command is not how near you can go to idolatry or sexual immorality but how far you can fly away from them. In this passage Paul rejected all Corinthian rationalizations and justifications and declared that attendance to idol feasts and eating idol food is idolatry.

Paul’s **second** point in *vss.16-17* focused upon the unique ***koinonia*** that is established with Christ and with one another as we partake of the cup of blessing and the bread. **Garland** noted, *“The Spirit, ... creates the unity among believers ... but the meal affirms and reinforces this unity in bringing them together.”* When you take that bread and that cup you are not only saying, *“I am one with Christ”*. You are also saying, *“I am one with every Christian in the church.”* Each time you partake you are affirming and reinforcing this unity.

Let it grip you at this point why actively or passively creating disunity in the church is so serious. There are many Christians today who are passively creating disunity in the church by being a passenger in the church, by being a spectator in the church, and by other passive means. The meaning of partaking of the bread and the cup says that those who are actively or passively creating disunity in the church are telling lies. What a frightening thing to be lying in one of the most sacred aspects of Christian worship on the Lord’s

Day!!

Paul's **third** point is that this **koinonia** with Christ and the body of Christ that he has just described excludes all other **koinonia**, particularly those associated with idolatry. **Vs.20** makes it clear that when the Gentiles are sacrificing to idols they are actually sacrificing to demons. Paul is repeating here what was stated in **Deut.32:17**. Moses said concerning the Israelites' behavior in the wilderness, "They sacrificed to demons who were not God." In other words, Brethren, there is no such thing as a casual sacrifice, and Christians cannot casually join in feasts honoring idols that epitomize demonic hostility to God. (**Garland**). Paul's position is very clear : "I do not want you to become sharers (**koinonia**) with demons."

Garland wrote, *"The unity with Christ and with one another in the meal has consequences for participation in any other meals that also create bonds and signal alliances. If meals embody the community, then one cannot embody community with Christ and with demons. One cannot be aligned with Christ and aligned with demons."* **Gordon Fee** wrote, *[The Corinthians] singular existence as the people of God, bound together to their Lord through the benefits of the cross and experienced regularly at His Table, makes all other such meals idolatry."*

The world says to you : How can you say you are my brothers, my sister, my son, my daughter, my relative, my husband, my wife, my friend, my neighbor, if you refuse to share with me, even in the smallest way, in this feast that is so important to me? How can we maintain our connecting bonds if you refuse to share with me? My dear Brethren, loving Christ and obeying Christ may cost you these relationships. But the consequences for this kind of breaching covenant fellowship with Christ and His body can only be calamitous for you as it was for the nation of Israel.

In view of what we have just seen, Paul, using the starkest kind of language, emphatically declared in *vs.21*, “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.” This verse functions as a warning and a prohibition that must be treated with the utmost seriousness.

Note the repetition of the verb “cannot”. The word “cannot” which appears over **60** times in the N.T. is actually the translation of two Greek words which point to that which is impossible. The double use of “cannot” point to the absolute incompatibility between the table of the Lord and the table of demons. **Fee** noted that you are not eating at the table of friends. You are eating at the table of the enemies of your soul, at the table of demons. You who have *koinonia* with Christ and with the members of His body cannot and must not partake of the idolatrous table of demons.

One writer noted that what we have in this verse are parallel statements that set before us three points. (**Thiselton**). *Firstly*, there is a logical “cannot”, that is, the two possibilities logically exclude each other. *Secondly*, there is an empirical “cannot”, that is, something will be destroyed if you try to do both. *Thirdly*, there is an institutional “cannot”, that is, Christians cannot partake of the meals sacrificed to demons and still be counted as Christian. This third point is most serious. Acting in ignorance of the truth is one thing. But acting with the full knowledge of the truth is to act culpably and that is quite another issue. I want to add that ignorance of the truth may relieve you of the guilt of acting culpably but it does not remove your sin.

Paul concluded his warnings against idolatry with two questions in *vs.22*, “do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?” We can paraphrase the first question as follows : “What! Do we really want to arouse the Lord’s jealousy?” The questions take us back to *Deut.32:16* where Moses said concerning the Israelites, “They made Him jealous with strange gods; with abominations they provoked Him to anger.” God’s jealousy is connected to His

holiness and power and it is aroused by any form of idolatry committed by His covenant people. In this verse Paul is not warning Christians against the power of demons. Paul is warning Christians about the holiness and power of the Lord's jealousy and the grave danger they face when that jealousy is aroused.

Paul's point is that God's jealousy cannot be challenged with impunity. Those who would put God to the test by insisting on their right to participate in what Paul insists is idolatry are in effect taking God on, challenging Him by their actions, daring Him to act. Secure in their own foolhardiness, they think of themselves as so strong that they can challenge Christ Himself. (**Fee**). This kind of attitude and conduct are both foolish and dangerous. Those who walk in this path would find out sooner than later that no one mocks God and gets away. (cf. *Gal.6:7*).

Many of you in this church come from religious backgrounds that are deeply idolatrous and demonic. You will find yourselves time & again pressed to compromise. Be warned. You cannot compromise. To compromise is to join Christ to your sin. To compromise is to join the entire church to your sin. On the other hand you may not come from a religious background that is idolatrous and demonic. But beware of thinking that your idolatrous neighbor, friend or co-worker has an interesting religious background you need to become familiar with. Beware of accepting invitations to share meals during religious festivals and during family religious feasts. Beware of accepting invitations to share in activities that are passed off as innocent memorials for the dead.

These things are not innocent. These are serious matters with serious consequences. Do not open the door of your life to fellowship with demons. You will also be opening yourself to God's judgment.

In closing, if you are not a Christian, you are not standing on neutral ground. The Bible makes it clear that Satan is "the ruler of this world" (*Jn.12:31; 14:30*) and "the god

of this world” (*2Cor.4:4*). But he is a ruler with limited powers and a god without divine powers. Satan is behind every false religion and all empty deceptive philosophies in our world. (cf. *Col.2:8*). You may be an active worshipper of demons and not know it. You may be a passive worshipper of demons and not know it. Either way, whether active or passive, you are still a worshipper of demons. If you die in this condition, you will open your eyes in the place the Lord has prepared for the devil and his demons.

Most people will protest vehemently if you tell them that they are worshippers of demons. They will also declare that they are worshippers of God. Jesus made it clear that God can only be worshipped in Spirit and in truth. (*Jn.4:24*). **“Truth”** here refers to what God has revealed about Himself and how He must be worshipped. If you are not worshipping the true and living God in Spirit and in truth, then your worship is idolatrous.

I want you to clearly understand that your only hope of escaping demonic activities and influences in this world is the Lord Jesus Christ. Your only hope of escaping the eternal wrath of God in hell is the Lord Jesus Christ. Your only hope of salvation is the Lord Jesus Christ.