

Lessons on the Church

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1 Corinthians 11:23-34

1. Look in. Let a man examine himself, judging himself.

A. We should examine our companions of the week. Have they been the companions that fear thee? Psalm 119:63. Come out from among them and be ye separate. 2 Corinthians 6:17.

B. Examine our habits: Are we loving the world more than Christ? 1 John 2:15. Love not the world, nor the things of the world.

C. Examine our thoughts. Proverbs 23:7—As a man thinketh so is he. Our hearts should be overflowing with a good matter—Psalm 45:1. Meditate upon Him day and night—Psalm 63:6. Our affections should be set on things above—Colossians 3:2.

D. We should examine our weaknesses. John 12:12-22.

2. Look up. Verse 23.

Paul was not indebted to any man for his instructions regarding the Lord's Supper. His information came directly from the risen Christ as a revelation. David received the pattern for the temple. Paul received the pattern for the Lord's Supper. Peter, James and John don't mention the Lord's Supper.

3. Look back. Verse 26.

Ye do shew forth the Lord's death. The supper should occupy our minds greatly, but not exclusively. We do not meet together just to remember His death; not just a memorial but a remembrance feast.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper

These are the two ordinances of the Christian Church.

They were instituted in the Gospels (Matt. 28:19; Luke 22:19-20).

They were practiced in the Acts 10:47, 48; 20:7.

They are expounded in the Epistles (Rom. 6:3-10; 1 Cor. 11:23-32).

There are three forms of baptism in the NT:

1. John's Baptism—Mark 1:4
2. Spirit Baptism—1 Cor. 12:13
3. Believer's Baptism—Rom. 6:3-10

These three forms of baptism should not be confused.

After the day of Pentecost there is no mention of any persons being baptized except those who were believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. "They that gladly received his word were baptized"—Acts 2:41.
2. "When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women"—Acts 8:12.
3. Acts 10:47-48—In the house of Cornelius. Households are mentioned as being baptized (Acts 16:15; 1 Cor. 1:16) but there is no evidence to suppose that these households included children who had never trusted the Lord Jesus.

Once the believer was dead “in” sin—now he is dead “to” sin.

Believers’ baptism is expounded in detail in Romans 6:1-10. The question of being saved and living in sin is unthinkable. See verses 1-2.

v. 3—When we as believers were baptized we were actually baptized into His death. The world never saw him again after His death.

We profess in our baptism to having died to the whole question of sin, world, flesh, devil. Sin, so to speak, has no claim and certainly should have no dominion over us. Verse 14.

God sees every believer as having been crucified with Christ. All that we were as sinners has been nailed to the cross. “God forbid that I should glory,” etc. Old man—Eph. 4:22. I am crucified with Christ—Galatians 2:20; Col. 3:5.

The old nature in Ephesians 4 is corrupt and comprises of deceitful lusts. Lying, anger, submitting to the devil, stealing, corrupt communication, bitterness, clamor, slander, malice. See Col. 3. Death to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness which is idolatry. Put away anger, wrath, malice, slander, foul talk, lying. Verse 8.

The new nature (later). Baptism is the outward expression of an inward condition. All this does not take place at baptism, but in baptism the believer publicly declares what has already taken place.

If baptism is understood correctly the individual concerned is literally saying:

1. When Christ was crucified, the flesh within me, the old nature, the old self was crucified, too.
2. When my Lord died to the world, I died also "to the world."
3. When Jesus was buried I also was buried. Everything fleshly, carnal, everything of self is dead and buried, put out of sight.

We have considered the teaching of baptism relative to Christ's death and burial. But there is the teaching related to His resurrection. The Lord Jesus was raised from the dead; correspondingly, believers are raised from the waters of baptism. In being raised from the waters he declares his determination to walk in newness of life, to walk in the Spirit, to produce the fruits of the Spirit. Galatians 5. See also 1 Cor. 3:12-17.

Deeds of the New Nature: compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, patience, forbearing with one another, forgiving one another, put on love, let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, let the word of Christ dwell in us richly, admonishing one another, teaching one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with all our hearts to the Lord, whatever we do in word or deed, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through Him.

The baptized believer also proclaims that his life will be selfless, that it will be for the use and the glory of God. That from henceforth Christ shall reign supreme and unchallenged in his heart. The Lordship of Christ. So then baptism is an act of obedience. Matthew 28:19-20. It is a public act of confession and identification.

Note the picture of baptism in type in the OT:

1. Israel crossing the Red Sea. (a) Severing their connections with Egypt (world); (b) The opening of a new life with/in Christ.

2. Peter says that the flood is a like figure to baptism. 1 Peter 3:21. Its meaning. (a) Noah by the flood was separated from the ungodly generation in which he lived; (b) from its associations; (c) from its evils; (d) and also its doom.

Finally Peter says it is the answer of a good conscience before God.

Christ Loved the Church

Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it:
Ephesians 5:25.

This truth is further exemplified in parabolic language in
Matthew 13:45-46.

v. 44—Describes the treasure hid in a field. Individual
aspect of the Church.

v. 45-46—It is the pearl of great price. Collective aspect
of the Church.

The merchant man (who is typical of Christ) sold all that
He had, and bought this pearl and the treasure.

The Lord Christ in the fullest sense gave all that he had
—He gave Himself. See v. 25.

That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing
of water by the word. That he might present it to himself
a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any
such thing; but that it should be holy and without
blemish.

We too should love the church and should be prepared
to give ourselves for it. We should give ourselves in
loving, glad service, devoted and sacrificial service, in
order that that church, which is so dear to the heart of
our Lord might prosper, progress and triumph over all
its foes.

What do we mean by the Church? The word “Church” is
a translation of the Greek work “ekklesia” which means
a gathering or an assembly.

The most common use of this particular word is to describe a group of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. A “called out company.” Paul speaks “of the church of God which He has purchased with His own blood.”—Acts 20:28. In writing to the Corinthians he divides the world into Jews, Gentiles, and the “Church of God.” 1 Corinthians 10:32.

In writing to the Philippian Church he divided it into three classes:

1. “Saints” or “Believers”
2. Bishops or elders
3. Deacons or servants

The church is presented to us in two aspects:

1. The Church “Universal”
2. The Church “local”

The “Universal Church” is composed of every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ irrespective of where he meets or with whom he meets to serve and worship God.

It has often been said that the church is not an organization, but an organism. This means that it is not a lifeless institution but a living unit. (Let all things be done decently and in order.)

The Church is a vital, virile, warm fellowship of all those who share the life of Christ and who are linked together inseparably in living union with the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:13.

The Church is described in the NT by many descriptive titles:

1. A flock (John 10:16)

Jewish nation is a fold, the Church is a flock.

This simile of the flock brings the thought of a group of Christians living together under the loving care of the Good Shepherd, hearing His voice and following Him.

2. God's husbandry (1 Corinthians 3:9)

The church is God's garden. It is His purpose to raise fruit for His glory. Fruit-bearing, John 15.

3. God's building (1 Corinthians 3:9)

God adds such as are being saved, He is adding living stones. Our lives should be vitally devoted to the project in which He is so interested. See 1 Peter 2:5.

4. The temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19)

Temple brings the thought of worship...the only worship God gets today is from His Church.

5. The body of Christ (Ephesians 22:23)

The body is the vehicle through which a person expresses himself. The church which is His body is the vehicle through which God chooses to express Himself to the world today. Once we grasp this truth we will never again think of the Church as of minor importance.

6. A new man (Ephesians 2:15)

Here the idea of a new creature is prominent Paul says that the greatest of all differences among men—Jew and Gentile—has been abolished in the church and God has made these two peoples one new man.

7. A habitation of God (Ephesians 2:22)

This expression conveys the truth that God now dwells in the Church rather than in the material tabernacle or temple as in the Old Testament.

8. The bride of Christ (Ephesians 25:27; 1 Corinthians 11:2)

He bought her. He is sanctifying her. He will present her. This view brings into prominence the idea of affection and love. Christ loved the church, the church should be full of bridal love for Him.

Discipline in the Church

There are certain perils which threaten the doctrine and purity of the Church. The pastoral epistles in particular are full of warnings against false teachers. Paul warned the elders at Ephesus that after his departure grievous wolves would come in, not sparing the flock, and that from within, men would arise teaching perverse things to draw away the disciples after them. Acts 20:29-30.

The attack would be twofold—from without and within. In the pastoral epistles Paul describes various forms of departure from God.

1 Timothy 1:19—Shipwreck. This was the result of being unstable and badly taught. The context shows that this was erroneous teaching regarding the resurrection which led to blasphemy.

1 Timothy 4:12—The cauterized conscience. This was the result of apostasy from the faith, the work of seducing spirits and doctrine of demons.

1 Timothy 5:8—Denial of the faith. The believer who neglects to provide for his own house is worse than an unbeliever.

1 Timothy 5:12—Cast away their first faith. These are people who have lost their first love, consequently their joy in the Lord. They fill the vacuum by being idle in God's work, this leads to excessive visitation with friends ending in the disreputable condition of being busybodies, tattlers, gossips, and talebearers.

1 Timothy 6:10—These have erred or wandered from the faith. This error would be found in the business world.

This is one of the tools of the devil today. Many a bright and promising young Christian has wandered from the faith in their realm.

1 Timothy 6:21—Erred concerning the faith. Missed the mark. Intellectualism is a cancer which is eating at the vitals of the Christian faith.

Notice the spheres that these errors operate in: domestic, social, business, intellectual.

As well as describing the errors to expect, Paul also instructs Timothy and Titus as to the methods of dealing with the false teachers and their doctrines. There are at least four instances of discipline in these epistles.

1. Excommunication—1 Timothy 1:19-20. Paul singles out two men whom he had to put away from assembly fellowship. Their sin was that of blasphemy. If the Hymenaeus of 2 Tim. 2:17 is the same person mentioned in 1 Tim. 1:2, then the sin that they were guilty of was teaching that the resurrection was past. They were guilty not only of a grievous doctrinal error but guilty of leading others astray. The way to deal with this was excommunication from assembly fellowship.

Another sin is fornication—1 Corinthians 5. Paul says to the Corinthian church, you have miserably failed in your responsibility, by allowing these persons who practice this sin to remain in fellowship. “Deliver them to Satan for the destruction of the flesh.” That is, “put them away from fellowship.”

When known sin is allowed to remain unjudged in an assembly it has a corrupting affect on the whole. V. 7 —“Purge out the old leaven.”

Now look at verse 11. While I believe that this verse primarily governs our social life, I also believe that it has an indirect bearing on assembly fellowship. We are instructed not to eat/socialize with people who practice:

1. Fornication—illicit sex relations
2. Covetous persons—a person guilty of excessive greed
3. Idolater—one who is devoted to any object that usurps the place of God
4. A railer—a person with a foul tongue, a slanderer, abusive.
5. A drunkard
6. An extortioner—swindler, one who robs people

These sins are some of the reasons why Paul says, “Let a man examine himself.” These sins then would debar the people who practice them from fellowship. Now here is a timely warning. If any time anyone brings an accusation against a brother or a sister in fellowship, he had better be sure that his facts are right, because if they are not they could be guilty of the sin of “railing” which in turn would require the elders to act.

2. Open Rebuke—1 Timothy 5:20. “Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.” This also is a serious step. Discipline of this nature should never be carried out in a hurry, and only carried out after much exercise and prayer. The word “rebuke” means to convict, and to put to shame. The sin has to be such as would affect the public testimony. I take it also that responsible brethren have attempted in a private way to instruct this sinning believer, but their admonitions have gone unheeded hence the public rebuke.

3. Silencing the unruly and vain talker—Titus 1:10-11. Unruly means that this person will not submit to any authority. Vain talkers are those who talk but do not accomplish anything, their testimony or preaching is useless and afflicts God's people. Paul says, "Their mouths must be stopped." That is, something must be put in their mouths, a gag or muzzle. The man, then, who afflicts an assembly with unprofitable ministry who is on his feet at every opportunity, who by his actions stifles the true ministry of the Holy Spirit, and drives people away, has to be muzzled or gagged.

4. The faction maker—Titus 3:10-11. The heretic here is not so much the dispenser of erroneous doctrine as the man who divides the assembly because of his one-sided interpretation of scripture, and his presence of superior faithfulness to the Word. Paul warns the Roman church "to mark them who cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which you have learned; and avoid them, for they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own flesh; and by goad words and fair speeches, deceive the hearts of the simple. Romans 16:17-18.

The divider of the Saints has to be warned twice. If these admonitions fail, then he is to be rejected. The nature of the teaching and the seriousness of the circumstances would determine the action to be taken.

Disciplinary measures is the work of the whole assembly rather than the elders alone.

The reception policy.

The headship of Christ.

Gen. 24—Rebecca "covered herself."

Isa. 6—Seraphim, each of them had 6 wings, with two they flew and with the remaining four they covered themselves.

The point in view is “subjection.”

v. 7—the man does not wear a covering because he is the “glory of God.” The woman who is the “glory of man” is exhorted to be covered. In obeying God’s command she not only covers “man’s glory” but also covers her “personal glory.”

Set Apart Christ as Lord

Introduction.

“But in your heart set apart Christ as Lord.”

This is an exhortation to make an inner commitment to Christ. Set apart—conscious, deliberate, calculated, choice.

From this initial surrender all I do and say will be in His will, for His pleasure, honor and glory.

As my Lord, He will dominate every area of my life.

As my Master, He will control and govern my possessions, my occupation (secular or spiritual), my library, my marriage, my spare time...nothing will be excluded from His control.

As my Sovereign Lord he will have absolute ownership and uncontrolled power over my life.

He actually wanted Jacob for Himself—body, soul and spirit. Jacob had lived his own life. He was his own man. He had lived for his family. He had ridden over all opposition rough-shod. He had lied, cheated and connived all his life. He deceived his father, stolen from his brother, and almost ruined his uncle Laban. He was a very rich man. The Lord wanted to change all this. Jacob resisted every effort to change Him. Finally, the Lord touched his hip joint, putting it out of place. In a moment Jacob's strength was gone. He laid down the arms of rebellion, he surrendered totally to the Lord. His nature was changed, his name was changed. He became the father of Israel.

Studies in Romans 8

In Romans 8:33-39, Paul asks three different questions. Who shall accuse us? Who shall condemn us? And who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Let us examine this last question. Paul affirms that nothing, not even trouble, difficulties, tribulations, anguish, calamity, misfortune, nor distress can separate us or part us from Christ. We can be assured in this truth that persecution, famine, nakedness, peril of our lives, nor the sword of our enemies can separate us from Christ. Paul continues by reassuring us: "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39) This means that neither a power from on high, nor a power from below, nor anything else in God's whole world, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which comes to us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

John's gospel speaks of this truth as well when he speaks of believers' eternal existence. In John 11:25-26, Jesus teaches, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die." In John 10:28-29, Jesus speaks more in detail about this "eternal life," saying, "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand." This means that we can

be assured our eternal lives will be forever. It is given to us and promised by Christ to be timeless, perpetual, imperishable, indestructible, and immutable. When Jesus says we will “never perish,” this phrase is one of the strongest forms of speech in the original language, meaning that we are eternally safe and protected. Christ Himself gave this gift of eternal life to His sheep, so no power is stronger than that of Christ to keep His sheep under His eternal care. Then the Lord says, “no one is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand” and “my Father is greater than all.” (John 10:29) This means that God the Father is unrivalled in majesty and unlimited in power. This same mighty God is our God, who cares so much for us and loves each one of us deeply. It is almost unthinkable, then, that any created being could snatch one sheep away from God’s protective custody. The conclusion of the matter is that no separation can be made between the Triune God and His sheep. Let us give praise and glory to God our Almighty Father!

The Holy Spirit in the Church

John 14:16, 26.

The Holy Spirit is Christ's representative in the church. After the Lord ascended back into heaven He sent the Holy Spirit to be His representative on the earth and in the Church. His activities in the church may be seen in part from the following:

1. He leads Christians in their worship—Eph. 2:18; Phil. 3:3.
2. He inspires their prayers—Rom. 8:26-27.
3. He empowers their preaching—1 Thess. 1:5.
4. He guides them in their activities—Acts 13:2.
5. He raises up overseers for the church—Acts 20:28.
6. He bestows gifts for its growth and effectiveness—1 Cor. 12.
7. He guides believers into all truth—John 16:13.

Expressing this truth, especially in view of the doctrine of the Headship of Christ, may to some seem an overlap or conflict. Both statements are true. Christ is the head of the Church, but has delegated the Holy Spirit to be His agent or representative on earth. Therefore it behooves every local church to give the Holy Spirit His rightful place.

Some may ask: How can we give the Holy Spirit His rightful place?

1. The assembly should seek His guidance in all its affairs.

- a. Arranging the type of meetings to be held.
- b. Discerning the human instruments to be used in ministering the Word.
- c. Disbursement of funds.
- d. Exercising of godly discipline.

Assembly is the dwelling place of the Spirit—1 Cor. 3. The believer is also the dwelling place of the Spirit—1 Cor. 6.

2. We should recognize the sovereignty of the Spirit. Romans 12:1-2. Each believer and local church must be completely surrendered so that the Holy Spirit will be able to do as He pleases for us, through us, and in us. The working of the Spirit is like the wind. “We know not whither it cometh or wither it goeth”—John 3:8. His movements are unpredictable. He has no prescribed pattern. The symbols used in the Scriptures to describe Him are fire, water, oil and wind. These illustrate the fluidity and mobility with which He works. Every local church and every individual believer would do well to allow Him this Divine prerogative. Quench not...Grieve not the Holy Spirit.

What would an assembly be like if it were controlled by the Holy Spirit?

- 1. There would be no dull, unprofitable meetings.
- 2. There would not be the unhallowed intrusion of the human nature or spirit—the flesh.
- 3. There would be no saving/making of prayers.
- 4. No talking for taking’s sake. No display of the flesh whatsoever.

5. Each gifted vessel would be filled, fitted and used as the Master planned.

6. Each eye would be directed to the Lord. “Every eye was fastened on Him.”

7. Each heart would be occupied with Christ.

8. When a hymn is sung, our spirits would be lifted up to God in praise, just like sweeping the strings of the heavenly harp, a real “Hallelujah Chorus.”

9. We would feel ourselves in the very presence of God, and enjoy a foretaste of the time when we shall worship in the heavenly courts above.

While we are considering the Presidency of the Holy Spirit it might be profitable to introduce the Scriptural truth of the “Priesthood of Believers.”

All believers are priests of God—1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:5-6.

It is the responsibility of each believer to exercise the privileges of this sacred office in private and in public.

1. Peter writing to the “strangers scattered abroad” informs them in chapters 2-5 that they are “living stones built into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” Col. 1; 1 Tim. 1 and 6.

2. v. 9—“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people: that ye should show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” Acts 22:23.

3. John writes in Revelation 1:5-6, “Unto Him that loved us, and has washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests (a kingdom of

priests) unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

Explain the difference between the “Holy priesthood” and the “Royal Priesthood.”

Some other important duties of a priest are:

1. The offering of sacrifice.

In the OT the priest offered sacrifices which were usually slain animals. But today the offerings of a believer-priest are:

a. The sacrifice of his body. Romans 12:1—“A living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.”

b. The sacrifice of his material resources. Hebrews 13:16—“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”

c. The sacrifice of his praise. Hebrews 13:15—“Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name.”

d. Other duties of the believer-priest include prayer, testimony and a care for God’s people. He is an intercessor.

It is scriptural that all believers are priests. It is also scriptural that every Christian needs a Priest. This need is fully met in our Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrews sets Him forth as the Great High Priest, One who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, because He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Hebrews 4:15.

Every local church should recognize the Lord as the Great High Priest, and should also recognize every

believer as a holy and royal priest. Also he should recognize the Presidency of the Holy Spirit at all gatherings of the Church.

The Holy Spirit

The body prepared for the Eternal Son was born of a virgin. The body prepared for the Indwelling Spirit is begotten of faith in the Lord Jesus, the Son of the Living God.

If the Holy Spirit was given His rightful place in any assembly, it would throb with Pentecostal power.

This will never take place corporately, until each individual believer's life is lived on a Scriptural, spiritual, prayerful, Holy Spirit level, in walk and in service.

The Holy Spirit is the Administrator of the assembly. He is the One who bestows the gifts necessary for its effective functioning. 1 Cor. 12.

When those gifts are used under His direction there is power and blessing.

Our individual and collective witness must be in and through the Spirit. To be effective it must be in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Paul says, "Our Gospel came not into you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit"—1 Thess. 1:5.

We need the Spirit in our witness and also in our worship.

The Holy Spirit indwells every believer. You may be immature, weak and imperfect—despite this, if you have been truly "born again" of the Spirit, He dwells within you.

It is one thing for you to have the Holy Spirit but does the Holy Spirit have you? Does He fill you with abundant life?

“Be ye filled with the Holy Spirit”—Ephesians 5:8. This is a command.

You are baptized by the Spirit once into the body of Christ. You must be filled over and over again. The apostles that were filled in Acts 2 were filled again in Acts 4.

To be filled with the Spirit one must be Spirit-possessed, Spirit-empowered, Spirit-led, and Spirit-controlled. Acts 8:26-40.

You are filled with the Spirit that you might have joy—Eph. 5:19-20.

You are filled with the Spirit for service—Acts 6:3.

You are filled with the Spirit for power to be a witness—Acts 1:8.

You are filled with the Spirit that you may walk in the Spirit—Gal. 5:16-26.

You are filled with the Spirit that you may be led by the Spirit—Rom. 8:14.

We are commanded by Paul to “be filled with the Spirit”—Eph. 5:18.

The Local Church

Definition of the local church.

The Church Universal—The Church Invisible—The Mystical Body of Christ But the NT also speaks of local churches composed of believers in any given locality. To name a few: Jerusalem, Corinth, Rome, Ephesus. These in reality were local expressions of the universal church of God. The observant reader will find that:

1. Each one was a sovereign unit.
2. Each was independent of other churches.
3. Each one was subject to Christ.
4. Each one was in fellowship with the other.

What would the be true features of a local church? In 1593 Henry Burrow wrote, “A true New Testament church is a company of believers separated from unbelievers, gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus, whom they worship and obey. They are a brotherhood, a communion of saints, each one of them standing in and for their Christian liberty, to practice whatsoever God has commanded and revealed in His Holy Word.”

See also Acts 2:42—“They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers.” In conclusion, a local assembly or church is a group of believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, who assemble themselves regularly in His name for the purpose of fellowship, breaking of bread, worship, praise, prayer, testimony, ministry of the word, preaching of the Gospel, and discipline.

Every such church:

1. Has Christ in its midst.
2. Is a temple of God.
3. Is controlled by the Spirit.

When mature in Christ it consists of saints, bishops, and deacons. Philippians 1:1.

The local church should be miniature of the universal church. If then the local is to be a replica of the complete church, what are the great truths of the body of Christ to which it must give living testimony? There are at least seven:

1. There is one body.
2. Christ is Head of the body.
3. All believers are members of the body.
4. The Holy Spirit is the President in the Church.
5. The church of God is holy.
6. Gifts are given for the edification of the Church.
7. All believers are priests of God.

For our present study we will take those seven truths and seek to determine how the local assembly can really be a living testimony of them to the world.

The Truth of the One Body Ephesians 4:4

The origin of the brethren movement was to preserve this great truth. The local church is responsible to witness to this great church.

How can we witness to this fact today?

By taking no name that would separate us from other Christians. In God's sight the Church is not divided.

Compare 1 Corinthians 1:10 with 1:11-13. In Corinth there was in the making: “The Church of Saint Apollos”; “The Church of Saint Paul”; “The First Church of Christ”; “The Church of Saint Peter.” Is Christ divided? NO!

What sort of names should we take (Acts 11:26). The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch (Acts 5:14). And believers were the more added to the Lord (Acts 9:1). And Saul breathing out threats and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord (Ephesians 1:1). To the saints which are at Ephesus (James 2:1).

It is difficult to maintain this position in these days. And I may say that we will remain a conundrum and to the community, most people like a handle to hang on.

The Lord has never looked kindly on divisions in the Church. See 1 Corinthians 3:4—“For while one saith I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal?”

Divisions in the Church bring great evils:

1. They create artificial barriers to fellowship.
2. They limit the movement of gifted men of God whose ministry should be available to all the church.
3. They confuse the world causing them to ask “Which church is right?”

Marcus Rainsford wrote, “For my own part I believe that sects and denominations to be the result of the devils attempt to mar and hinder as far as possible the visible union of the Church of God. They all have their root in our spiritual pride, selfishness, self-sufficiency, sin.”

Believers who are determined to witness to this unity of the body will find it difficult to keep themselves separated from all these divisions and at the same time maintain a loving spirit to all the people of God. Separation with a spirit of grace and gentleness.

We cannot have fellowship with systems which deny Christ, but we should show love to all born again believers who are endeavoring to live and labor for Christ.

Churchmen today realize that there is something wrong with the system of Christendom. This realization has brought about great ecumenical movements. Men know that the Church of God should be one, but their methods to accomplish this are unscriptural. Ecumenicalism is only possible by compromising the great fundamentals of Scripture. Christian congregations deny their Lord when they join with those who repudiate His virgin birth, sinless life, substitutionary death, bodily resurrection, ascension and exaltation, and coming again.

The only true basis for Christian unity is a common devotion to Christ and His Word. When His honor and glory is the great desire of our hearts, then all His people will be drawn together as one, then the Lord's prayer will be answered. "That they may be one, even as we are one." John 17:22.

So, in this the day of our pilgrimage, it is our responsibility as local churches to maintain a testimony to the unity of the body, in a day when Christendom denies this fact.

May we do this by acknowledging in spirit, in principle and in practice, all other fellow-believers.

The Origin of the Church

In Ephesians 3-5 Paul speaks of the church as a “mystery which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.”

In verse 9 he states that the church is a mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God.

The church was a secret kept by God throughout the Old Testament times, and was never revealed until the NT apostles and prophets appeared. Paul was the one God used to reveal this.

Matthew 16:18—“The Lord said, ‘Upon this rock I will build my church.’” It was still future. The church was brought into being at Pentecost. Proof: The body of Christ or the Church was formed by the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:13—“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have all been made to drink of one Spirit.”

Can we determine when the baptism of the Spirit took place?

Acts 1:5—Before our Lord ascended He promised His disciples, “Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence.”

Acts 2:4—On the day of Pentecost “they were filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 2:47—“The Lord added to the Church,” etc.

By the time we come to 5:11 we read “that great fear came upon all the church.”

These scriptures pinpoint the birthday of the church as occurring at Pentecost.

Let us now consider briefly “Ten Great Truths Concerning the Church”:

1. There is one body; Ephesians 4:4.

The scriptures teach that there is only one church. There is only one body of believers on the earth today. The church in its entirety is never visible to man, it is formed into a common body by the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:13.

2. All believers are members of the Body; Acts 2:47.

The moment a person is saved, God adds him or her to the church as a member of the body. We become a living stone. Consider 1 Corinthians 12:12-26:

- a. There are many members in the body, v. 12-14.
- b. Every member has a function to perform, v. 15-17.
- c. All members do not have the same function, v. 18-19.
- d. The welfare of the body depends on all members working together, v. 21-26.

3. Christ is the Head of the body; Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18.

Christ as Head in Heaven controls the body on earth. The Head speaks of authority, leadership and the seat of intellect. Christ is not complete without His body, i.e. the church. That is why we read in Ephesians 1:23 that the church, as His body, “is the fullness of Him that filleth all

in all.” This fact should draw from our hearts worship and praise.

4. The Holy Spirit is the Representative of Christ in the church; John 14:16, 26.

Some of the Spirit’s activities in the church may be seen in the following observations:

- a. He leads Christians in their worship; Ephesians 2:18.
- b. He inspires their prayers; Romans 8:26-27.
- c. He empowers their preaching; 1 Thessalonians 1:5.
- d. He guides them in their activities; Acts 13:2.
- e. He raises up overseers in the church; Acts 20:28.
- f. He bestows gifts for its growth and effectiveness; 1 Corinthians 12.
- g. He guides believers into all truth; John 16:13.

5. The church of God is holy; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17.

God is calling out of the nations a people for His name. He sets them apart from all that is sinful to live lives of purity and holiness. “Be ye holy, for I am holy”—1 Peter 1:15-16. A holy God must be represented by a holy people.

6. Gifts are given for the edification of the church; Ephesians 4:11-12.

It is the Lord’s will that the church should grow spiritually and numerically. To this end the risen Lord gave gifts to the church. These gifts are obviously men: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. The first two mentioned have passed away in the primary sense. The latter three remain with us today. The evangelist brings lost sinners to Christ. The pastors

take care of the flock. The teacher unfolds the Word of God.

7. All believers are priests of God; 1 Peter 2:5-9; Revelation 1:6.

May we ever cherish the truth of the priesthood of all believers. In the OT only a certain group of men were eligible for the priesthood—the tribe of Levi, the family of Aaron. Exodus 28:1. Today, there is no special caste of men to approach God on behalf of others. All children of God are priests of God with all the privileges and responsibilities that go with such a name.

8. The completion and destiny of the church.

Every time a soul is saved, a living stone is added to the building, and it rises slowly to completion. One day soon the work will be completed, the last stone will be added, then the Lord Jesus will return to the air. As if drawn by a divine magnet, the church will rise to meet Him and dwell forever with Him in the mansions of glory. We will share his glory throughout eternity. In the meantime we are His workmanship, his masterpiece on earth, showing the principalities and powers the manifold wisdom of God.

9. The house of God; 1 Timothy 3:15.

A house or household speaks of order or discipline. “That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God.” Dress; head covering; no personal prayers at prayer meetings; we represent the company when we pray; personal experiences at worship service; children partaking of emblems; noise at morning meeting.

10. The pillar and ground of truth; 1 Timothy 3:15.

In addition to being a support for a building a pillar was often used for posting public notices. It was a means of publication. The word “ground” means a bulwark or support. This being so we conclude that the church of God is the unit or means which He has ordained for proclaiming, supporting and defending His truth.

Believers engaged in this expansion and in the spiritual welfare of the church can safely say that they are in the current line of God’s will and purposes.

The Prayer Meeting

We are not given much information in the NT concerning the meetings of the local church. Acts 2:42 tells us that believers met for “fellowship, prayer, ministry of the Word, and breaking of bread.”

Beyond this very little information is given. As far as Gospel witness is concerned, this seems to have been carried on largely by the individual in a personal way. Those who were reached and saved no doubt were brought into the fellowship or a local church. It would appear from the Acts and Epistles that the prayer meeting is a very important factor in the life of an assembly. Note that the church was born in the wake of a prayer meeting. Acts 1:14. after the birth of the church the believers “continued steadfastly in prayer”—Acts 2:42. the glorious history of the church is a tribute to the faithfulness of God who answers prayer.

Collective prayer carries with it divine sanction, also a special promise of the presence of the Lord Himself.

Matthew 18:19-20—“Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them.” These verses reveal to us a twofold promise and pledge which cannot be broken.

1. When two or more believers are united in presenting a petition to God that request is answered.
2. When Christians are gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus, He is in their midst. The tragedy in

Christendom as a whole is that we do not believe this. If we did, our prayer meetings would be filled and our churches would be on fire for God. If we were motivated thus, it would not be who was speaking that would induce our presence, but the glorious fact that the Lord is there.

Let us consider a few basics relative to prayer:

1. Only one person leads at a time. He is actually praying for the assembled company. All others should be following him and as occasion demands giving assent audibly by saying "Amen".

2. We must avoid the grievous error of saying prayers. Prayer should be an expression of the burdened heart. Prayer should be a deep spiritual exercise. Our prayer should be fresh, not repetitious, and there should be a spontaneity of utterance. These elements are usually found in the prayers of young believers. Older Christians frequently fall into a pattern of prayer that is useless for God and man. In this connection long prayers should be avoided, it is not good for one or two men to monopolize the meeting. Conversely the lack of exercise among the brethren could induce a situation like this. The more who are spiritually exercised and take part the greater the interest will be.

3. We should avoid generalization. "Bless all thy servants everywhere." It would be better to pray bless brother Jones in so and so. Remember brother Smith in his work among the children.

4. There should be no lack of subjects for prayer. The departmental work of the assembly, the elders and leaders of the various departments, the sick (mention by name), the unsaved relatives or friends, the backsliding

(those whose spiritual progress has stopped), those whom God is raising up. Pray for evangelists, teachers, pastors, missionaries, and all in authority over us. Never let us pray without offering our thanks for answered prayer and for our many blessings. Phil. 4:6—“Be over anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.

Certain conditions must be met if our prayers are going to be effective:

1. We must abide in Christ. If ye abide in me and words in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. John 15:17. Abiding in Christ is keeping His commandments, doing His will, obeying His Word.

2. Our prayers should be according to His will. 1 John 5:14—“And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, he heareth us.” This is the key to successful praying “according to His will.” Find out what God’s will is from the Scriptures. If our prayers do not conflict with the will of God our prayers will definitely be answered.

3. We should always pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. “And whatsoever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son”—John 14:13. “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it to you”—John 16:13.

4. Our motives must be pure. Unpure, selfish motives are the cause of unanswered prayers. See James 4:3. We ask and receive not because we ask amiss, that we may consume it upon our lusts.

Some of the do's and don'ts to be observed if we want the "prayer meeting" to be the "power-house of the church":

1. Do not pray simply to be seen. See Matt. 6:5, hypocrites.
2. Do not ask God to do something that you can do yourself.
3. Do not ask for something that you know you should not have. God sometimes grants these requests but sends leanness to the soul. Psalm 106:15.
4. Do not be discouraged if the answer does not come when you expect it. God's timing is perfect.
5. If God's answer is not just exactly what you asked for, remember this: the Lord reserves the right to answer as He pleases. He knows what is best for us and is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.

Some Thoughts on Prayer

What does the Bible teach about prayer?

It is important for every believer to know what the Bible teaches about prayer. There can be no real progress in any part of the believer's life without prayer.

1. Why pray? Because the Bible commands us to do so. 1 Timothy 2:8.
2. How often should we pray? Daniel and the Psalmist prayed three times a day. Daniel 6:10. Paul urges us to pray without ceasing. 1 Thess. 5. The believer should give thanks for his food when he is alone and when he is with other people.

3. In what position should we pray? Daniel kneeled (6:10). The Lord Jesus kneeled (Luke 22:41). Nehemiah prayed as he stood before the king (Nehemiah 2:4). We may pray kneeling, standing, sitting, walking, at home, in the chapel, at work, etc.

4. What hour should we pray in order to have our prayer answered?

a. Our prayers will be answered if we abide in Christ. John 15:7. What does it mean to abide in Christ? If we enjoy Him day by day, if we have communion and fellowship with Him, if we obey the Scriptures, then we are abiding in Him.

b. If the above is true we will know God's will and our prayers will agree with it.

c. Our prayers should be in the name of the Lord Jesus. John 14:13. His thoughts become our thoughts. So that when we pray it is the same as if the Lord Jesus was speaking to God.

d. Our motive or the reason for our prayer must be right. Jams 4:3. We cannot expect an answer if our nature is selfish.

5. Some warnings about prayer.

a. Don't pray in order to be seen and praised. Matthew 6:5.

b. Don't ask God to do something you can do yourself.

c. Don't ask for something you know you shouldn't have.

d. Don't say words without thinking what they mean. Don't say the same things over and over again. Matt. 6:7.

6. If you have problems with mind wandering, try praying out loud. This will help you to think about the things for which you are praying.

Don't be discouraged if your answer does not come immediately. God knows best and answers in His time. He is never too early, and never too late.

The True Nature of a Local Church

According to Philippians 1:1 it is composed of believers, elders, and deacons. There is no Scriptural authority for unbelievers being in fellowship.

In the churches out of which the early brethren came, the wheat and the tares were growing together.

The activities of the local church are described in Acts 2:42. They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer. "They continually devoted themselves", etc.

They met together in the Lord's name for the Lord's Supper, worship, praise, prayer, fellowship, testimony, ministry, discipline, baptism, and the preaching of the Gospel.

When they discovered that the local church should be governed by a plurality of elders and deacons they implemented this immediately. They also found out that the Church should evangelize the world.

From these discoveries developed what we now know as Scriptural Principles of Gathering. Principles like these, coupled with the leading of the Holy Spirit, led these early brethren into a deep relationship with Christ and with one another.

These same principles also caused them to separate themselves from ungodly systems—2 Timothy 2:19, 21.

1. From the beginning these early brethren met together as called out companies, in the name of Jesus Christ alone.

2. Because they met in the Lord's name they confidently claimed His presence—Matthew 18:20.

3. They were subject to the headship of Christ and leadership of the Holy Spirit. Sovereignty of God, lordship of Christ, authority of the Word.

4. They were guided by elders. There is no higher authority in the assembly.

5. Instructed and taught by gifted brethren.

6. The unrestricted exercise of the priesthood of believers was practiced.

These conclusions were not arrived at quickly or easily.

There was great exercise of heart, and there were long seasons of prayer and travail in the presence of God.

From this sacred atmosphere the pattern for a NT assembly evolved and these godly men grasped firmly, by faith, the principles of gathering as the Spirit revealed them.

Describe the kind of men who were at the beginning.