

The Church that Jesus is building



A series of Bible Studies on the Nature, Structure, and Functioning of the Church – the Body of Christ on earth.

By Brian Caughley

THE CHURCH THAT JESUS IS BUILDING

Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?"
Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Jesus replied "On this rock I will build My Church,
and the gates of Hades [death] will not prevail against it."

Matthew 16:15-18

CONTENTS

1. Introduction	3
2. "I will build My Church ..."	4
3. Illustrations of the Church	6
4. The Church: The Building of Christ	9
5. The Church: The Bride of Christ	11
6. The Church: The Body of Christ	13
7. Body ministry	16
8. Finding your ministry	19
9. The Church and the churches	21
10. Fellowship	24
11. Deacons and elders	26
12. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers	30
13. Unity in the Church	32
14. The Spirit-filled Church	34
15. Summary of main points	37
Other books by the same author	38
Footnote: The Kingdom of God	

1. INTRODUCTION

By the way, the Church is not a building – it is people who are Christians. And Christians are people who follow Jesus Christ – they are “Christ’s ones” – His followers or disciples.

As a teenage Christian I used to attend the weekly Christian meetings held in the college to which I went. There were about 700 students at this college but only about 20 or 30 attended these meetings. My concept of the Church was, as I later discovered, far from what it should have been. I had read Matthew 16:18 in which Jesus said, “I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”, but for some reason I always thought that He was saying that even though the devil would attack the Church, Christ would protect it, and it would not be destroyed.

I thought of the Church as a tiny minority who met together for mutual support and encouragement, to pat each other on the back and say, “Be of good cheer; though the enemy is attacking us and is so strong, all is not lost for we will eventually pull through with God’s help.” My thoughts were of strong attacks of the enemy, and Christians huddling together for fear that they would be destroyed, except for God’s help.

Then one day, I suddenly realized that the “gates” of hell are *not* the attacks of the enemy; gates are positions of *defence*, not attack. In a walled city, in which the walls are built of massive stone blocks, very high and very thick, the wooden gates were the weakest place in the wall, and Jesus said that the gates (*defences*) of *hell* would not prevail against the onslaughts of the Church!

This was a complete reversal of my previous way of thinking! Hell was not attacking the Church; the Church was to attack and destroy all the defences of hell! This revolutionized my idea of the Church: it was not a weak, feeble minority huddling together to fend off the attacks of the enemy – it was the power of God to destroy every evil work of Satan; not to defend but to attack; not conquered but conquering; not weak but powerful; not defeated but victorious – the Winner!

The word “hell” in Matthew 16:18 is actually the word *hades* in the Greek, and it means death. So death will not overcome the Church – the Church is triumphant over death because Jesus triumphed over death! The Church is eternal! Just as we Christians – believers in, and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ have eternal life, *hades* will never triumph over us, through physical death, or spiritually. We are Overcomers! Hallelujah!

Many years ago, I was studying the book of Acts. Each night I would read a chapter or so, meditate on what I had read, and then spend some time in prayer, talking to God. One of the things that really puzzled me was the tremendous difference between the Church as I knew it, and the Church I was reading about in the Bible. The differences seemed so great that I wondered if the Church today as I knew it (that was in December 1963) was really related to the early New Testament Church. The early Church had such power and authority, vitality and growth – it was exciting to be a Christian, not something of which to be nervously embarrassed or ashamed!

Since those days I have done much thinking, praying and searching the Scriptures concerning the Church. Over the past few years God has been saying much to Christians about the Church. After all, the Church is the visible expression of Christ (“Christ’s Body”) in the world today. What the unbeliever knows of Christ is what he sees in the lives of Christians – for better or for worse!

We need to pray for the Church – that it will truly reflect the glory, wisdom and power of God; that it will grow according to *God's* plan, not man's; that it will be the light of the world, showing forth our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Above all, we need to pray that we will have “ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches” in these days. We have become incredibly bound by traditions and by worldly ways of thinking. We need to see the Church as God desires it to be, in all its splendour.

We are living in a time when God is restoring truth to His people. This is not new truth (in the sense that it was not known before) but truth as old as the Scriptures themselves, and yet which has been lost over the centuries. Not the least of this truth, which God has been restoring, has to do with THE CHURCH – its nature, its structure, and the way it functions. So many of the problems facing the Church today have arisen because the Church has departed from the concepts and teachings given to the early disciples, as recorded in the New Testament.

In these last days God is restoring the Church, so that it might be conformed to *His pattern*; so that it will be a Bride without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, prepared for the coming Bridegroom. May God give us eyes to see, and ears to hear, what the Spirit is saying to the Church *today*, and make us willing to be obedient to this vision.

With these thoughts in mind, I have prepared these Bible studies on ***THE CHURCH THAT JESUS IS BUILDING***. May we catch a vision of what God wants to show us regarding the Body of Christ, and may we see it implemented in our land as we intercede for the Church!

“He who has ears to hear ... let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Mark 4:9; Revelation 2:11). “If the vision seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay” (Habakkuk 2:2-3)

Note: In these studies, a local church or churches is written with a small “c” to distinguish it from the whole Church of Jesus Christ which comprises all true believers/disciples of Jesus, throughout the world and throughout history.

QUESTIONS

1. Why are many Christians embarrassed about their Faith?
2. What do some Christians not like about the church as they experience it?
3. How similar to the New Testament Church is the church you go to?
4. Did the early Church prevail against the world, and the powers of darkness? Why or why not?
5. Is the Church today prevailing against the world, and the powers of darkness? Why or why not?
6. What are some ways we need to pray for the Church today?

2. “I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH ...”

Jesus said to His disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for

flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father Who is in Heaven. Also I say to you, you are Peter (*Petros*), and upon this rock (*petra*) I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:15-18)

UPON THIS ROCK — Jesus is about to reveal some very important truths concerning the Church. The above passage is the first mention of the Church in the Bible, and Jesus reveals that His Church is going to be founded upon Peter and his confession of Jesus as the Messiah (Christ), the Son of the living God.

In one sense, of course, Jesus Himself is the foundation of the Church, for without Him there would be no Church (1 Cor. 3:11). But in another, very practical, sense Peter and his confession and preaching were the foundation on which the Church was built on the day of Pentecost in 30 AD (Acts 2:14-42; see also Ephesians 2:19-22).

The Greek for Peter is *Petros*, which means a small stone or pebble. The Greek for rock is *petra*, which means a large rock or boulder – and upon this rock, Christ was to build His Church.

I — Christ is the Master-Builder, not us. While it is true that we are fellow-workmen (1 Cor. 3:9) we must beware of trying to build our own little kingdoms or our own little denominations, and beware of other “kingdom-builders”. It is *Christ’s* Church, and His alone; for *His* glory.

WILL — There is absolute certainty in Christ’s words. What He says He will do, He will do! We can be absolutely certain that what Christ has started to build, He will complete (even if it does take some time!)

BUILD — Building takes time; buildings are built up stone upon stone, and are not complete until the last stone is laid. One day that last stone will have been laid, and Christ will return to His Building, made without (human) hands, whose Builder and Maker is God (Mark 14:58; Heb. 11:10).

MY — It is His Church, not ours. The Church of Jesus Christ should have no denominational tags or names other than the Name of our Lord. E.g., It is not “the Presbyterian Church”, it is the Church of Jesus Christ. It is not “St Paul’s Church”, it is Christ’s and His alone.

CHURCH — Evangelism, revival, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, etc., are *all* for the purpose of building the Church. The word *ekklesia* (Church or churches) occurs **112 times** in the New Testament. The Church is the *ekklesia*, the “called out ones”, those saved, sanctified and washed by the Blood of the Lamb. In Moses’ time, the Israelites in Egypt sacrificed a lamb and placed its blood on the doorposts and lintels of their homes. Then God “called them out” of Egypt, saved them from slavery and death in Egypt, and sanctified them (set them apart from Egypt and the world, to become His people). In a very similar way, God has “called Christians out” of slavery and death, and separated us (sanctified us) from the world through the Blood Jesus shed on the cross. Christians should always hold the concept and truths of the Church in very high regard, in spite of all the attacks upon it today (sadly, sometimes by Christians).

AND — Although He is building, there will be opposition (cf. Nehemiah, chapters 1-6.)

THE GATES — Gates are positions of defence, not attack! The Church should be so aggressively militant (in the right sense), attacking all the defences of hell, that hell cannot withstand the Church; *not vice versa!* That is, the Church should attack and win; hell and its powers should be defeated.

OF HELL — Hell, here, means the grave or death (*hades*). Christ started building His Church about 30 AD. Scaffolding has cluttered a lot of it for many centuries, much of it has not been built according to His plan, and much has fallen into disrepair, but it will not die. Christ will not abandon His plan. One day it will be revealed as a glorious Church, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing

(Eph. 5:27).

SHALL NOT — Victory is certain! There may be things in the book of Revelation about which we are not certain, but one thing that *is* certain is victory for the Church and those who belong to Christ.

PREVAIL — The devil may oppose, and seem at times to be victorious, but the final victory is ours – it belongs to Christ and His Church. Christ – the Messiah – will return for His Church, His people for whom He died!

AGAINST IT — All opposition will be destroyed and Christ will be declared to be “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev. 19:16), and His glorious Church, the mystery of the ages, will be seen by all as a masterpiece of the wisdom and glory of God.

Does not this concept of the Church revolutionize what most people have thought of the Church – a weak, almost defenceless minority in the midst of a wicked world, meeting together for mutual encouragement and consolation as the attacks of the enemy rain all around and drive them into semi-isolation?

No! The Church is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Pray for the day when it will be restored to the place of awe, authority and power that it had nearly 2000 years ago: “And fear came upon every soul. ... Praising God and having favour with all the people ... None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high honour (Acts 2:43-47; 5:12-16). May it be so, again!

QUESTIONS

1. What is “The Rock” on which Christ is building His Church? (Matt. 16:13-19; 1 Cor. 3:10-11; Eph. 2:19-22).
2. *Which* Church is the Church that Christ is building?
3. In what ways is the Church attacking the gates of hell, and in what ways is hell attacking the Church?
4. How can we avoid “personal kingdom building” and denominationalism?
5. Why is it that Christ has been building His Church for nearly 2000 years and it still is not complete? Could it have been completed sooner?
6. Will the Church ever be perfect here on earth?
7. In what ways has the Church today departed from the pattern of the early New Testament Church?

3. ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE CHURCH

There are a number of different illustrations (metaphors, pictures or types) used in the Bible to describe what the Church is like – various aspects and characteristics of the Church. It should be noted that these metaphors are not always used in exactly the same way in different passages of Scripture. For example, in 1 Corinthians 3:11 Paul calls Christ the foundation of the Church, but in Ephesians 2:20 he calls Christ the chief cornerstone, and says that the Church is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” There is no real contradiction here, for these are just different aspects of the whole truth, and each illustration that is used has particular significance in its context.

The three major illustrations of the Church are that it is: the **Building**, the **Body**, and the **Bride of Christ**. Let us look at some of these examples and see what truths they illustrate.

The Building of Christ (Matthew 16:18)

Christ is described as the Builder (Matt. 16:18), the Foundation (1 Cor. 3:11), and the chief Cornerstone (1 Pet. 2:5-6). Christians are described as living stones (1 Pet. 2:5).

Some characteristics of a building that are also characteristics of the Church are:

- 1. Its solidarity** – its enduring nature. A building is built to withstand the elements for scores of years. The Church, whose foundation was laid nearly 2000 years ago, still stands, in spite of many onslaughts against it, both by man and by Satan.
- 2. Its magnificence.** A well-designed and well-built building is an object of beauty and magnificence. The Church, being built by the Master-Builder according to the divine plan, will be magnificent to behold.
- 3. Its completion** is not until the last stone is laid. Until the last saint is added to the Church in the last days, the Building will not be complete. Now is the day of salvation – now is the time to be built into the Church of Jesus Christ, before the Builder completes His masterpiece.
- 4. Its plan.** A building is not a haphazard arrangement of stones. It is built to a well-thought-out plan. In God's Word He has given us the blue-print or plan of the House which He is building for Himself. While parts of it at present may not be according to His plan, and may have to be altered, the final building will reflect the skill and wisdom of the Architect as its true design is revealed.
- 5. Its strength.** While a building is strong and solid, its strength only comes after much labour – it has to be worked at, requiring much effort, skill and determination on the part of the labourers.

The Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)

Christ is the Head of the Body (Col. 1:18) and Christians are the members of the Body (1 Cor. 12:27). The Church as a Body emphasizes:

- 1. Its activity.** The Body is not an inanimate object, but a living being; it is active, growing, doing. It has life.
- 2. Its need for growth.** A body is born complete and whole but it still needs to grow towards maturity.
- 3. Its members are all needed** if it is to function properly. If any part of the body is not functioning properly, then the body is sick and may even die. *All* parts are needed, and all must function.
- 4. Its unity.** A body could not move or function properly if its members were not united and coordinated. In particular, it must act upon orders from the Head, and be submitted to His Lordship, or else it will not function as it ought.

5. **Its multiplication.** A normal healthy body grows and multiplies – so should the Church!

The Bride of Christ (Revelation 19:7)

Christ is the Bridegroom (Matt. 25:1) and Christians are the Bride (Rev. 19:7) or virgins (Matt. 25:1)

1. **The Bride is pure** (Rev. 19:6-8). She is a virgin, faithful and true to her Husband; she does not love other gods but totally devotes herself to her Bridegroom. She does not leave Him, and He will never forsake her.
2. **The Bride is beautiful.** In the eyes of the Bridegroom there is no-one more beautiful; she is perfect in His eyes, without spot or wrinkle.
3. **The Bride is loving.** Her whole life is a love-relationship with her Husband. Everything she does is motivated by love, and the Bridegroom in turn lavishes His love upon her.
4. **The Bride is one with the Bridegroom.** There can be no true marriage until there is true unity and union between Bride and Bridegroom. They become one.
5. **The Bride is submissive to her husband.** The Bride of Christ will never be perfected until there is true submission, from the heart, to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Other illustrations of the Church

Wineskin (Matt. 9:17). The picture of the Church as a wineskin emphasizes the need for flexibility; to be sensitive to God and move with Him; also the need to be filled with the Spirit.

Sheepfold (John 10:1-16). The sheepfold is a place of security, under the care and protection of the Good Shepherd who feeds and provides for His sheep. There is one flock and one Shepherd, although there are many folds (John 10:16 RSV & NAS).

QUESTIONS

The book of Ephesians deals a lot with the Church. The Church is called the Body of Christ (1:22-23; 4:11-16), the Building of Christ (2:19-22), and the Bride of Christ (5:22-23). Listed below are some other titles for the Church, found in Ephesians.

What characteristics of the Church are seen in each of the following titles?

1. Sons of God (1:5)
2. The Household of God, or the Household of Faith (2:19) – the Family of God.
3. A Holy Temple (2:21)
4. The Wisdom of God (3:10)
5. The Kingdom of God (5:5)
6. The Army of God (6:10-20)
7. What other titles or illustrations are used in the Bible for the Church, and what similarities do they have with the Church?

4. THE CHURCH: THE BUILDING OF CHRIST

(Matthew 16:17-18; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:4-10)

Jesus said, “I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18).

Why is Christ building the Church? Because He wants to restore the fellowship with God which was destroyed by sin. When Adam and Eve sinned, their fellowship with God was broken (Gen. 3:22-24); this fellowship is being restored through the Church.

Why does Satan want to destroy the Church? Because he does not want us to have fellowship with God!

Aspects of the Building

In picturing the Church as a Building, the Bible uses a number of different metaphors, and in different passages of Scripture these are sometimes used in slightly different ways and to symbolize different things. However, each has truths to illustrate and we need to discern what are each of these truths.

1. The Builder: Christ (Matt. 16:18 “I will build My Church ...”). God (Heb. 11:10 “the city ... whose Builder and Maker is God”).

Notice that it is *Christ* who is building *His* Church. Let us always beware that *we* do not try to build *our* Church! And yet we are fellow-workers with Him in this building (1 Cor. 3:9-10).

The Master-Builder has a plan or blue-print for His Church: it is not a haphazard building. While God wants to work in our lives as individual Christians and make our lives Christlike, He also wants to build these lives together into a Building. There is a vast difference between a heap of beautiful stones and a building! Pastors are not called to be guardians of a heap of stones, but to build these stones into a Building (Eph. 4:11-16). A stone can easily be stolen or lost from a heap of stones, but not when it is built into a building!

2. The Foundation: Christ (1 Cor. 3:11). Apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20; compare with Matt. 16:17-18 and Acts 2:14-42). In the historic, physical sense the first apostles and prophets were the foundation of the Church. Through their labours and ministry the early New Testament Church was established and built up. Thus Revelation 21:14 says that the wall of the New Jerusalem had twelve foundations and on them were written the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. (This, of course, in no way denies the fact that *spiritually* Christ is the Founder and Foundation of the Church and no-one can lay, or build upon, any other foundation – 1 Corinthians 3: 10-11).

The solidarity of the Church is seen in its Foundation – it is built upon the Rock – the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence its permanence, its enduring nature, standing against the storms of time, and the attacks of both men and Satan. (cf. The foundations laid by the wise man and the foolish man in Matthew 7:24-27). Likewise, the solidarity of the Church provides protection for all within its walls. Like a sheepfold protecting its sheep from all harm outside, so the Christian in the Church has protection from the attacks of the enemy.

3. The Stones: Christians (“living stones”, 1 Pet. 2:5). The building is being built up stone upon stone. The growth may seem very slow (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9-10), having already taken nearly 2000 years, but it is steadily growing. The stones need to be shaped and fitted together. There is much chipping and polishing needed in order for them to fit together and to grow up together. The mortar of Christian fellowship must be present to bind the stones together into one unified Building. And this takes time!

One characteristic of limestone building blocks is that over a long period of time, the stones are weathered in such a way that they literally grow into one massive stone, rather than being smaller individual stones – they are “living” stones, slowly growing into one another, and becoming part of one another.

While the Church is likened to a building, the Church is not a physical building – it is *people*, in fellowship with one another and with God. It is a spiritual entity, made of “living stones”. God wants to fellowship with His people; He does not just want us to “conduct services”. He wants to dwell amongst His people: “What temple will you build for Me? says the Lord” (Acts 7:48-50). “I will build another (Temple) made without hands” said Jesus (Mark 14:58). “You are God’s temple” (1 Cor. 3:9-17; Heb. 3:1-6). “I will live in them and move amongst them” says God (2 Cor. 6:16-18).

4. The Chief Cornerstone: Christ (Matt. 21:42; Acts 4:10-12; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:4-8). The stone which was rejected has become the Chief Cornerstone in God’s Building.

5. The Walls and Gates: “You shall call your walls *Salvation*, and your gates *Praise*” (Is. 60:18; Ps. 100:4).

6. The Door: Jesus said, “I am the Door; if anyone enters by Me, he shall be saved” (John 10:9). There is no other way into God’s House except through the Door – the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12).

7. The Unveiling: When Christ has finished building His Church and the last stone (Christian) has been added, when the scaffolding has come down and the rubbish has been cleared away, the Building will be unveiled and will be seen in all its glory and magnificence to be the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10).

Through the centuries much of the Church has fallen into disrepair. Bondage to man-made traditions, denial or refusal to accept God’s Word and pattern for His Church, sin, carnal thinking and practices, etc., have cluttered and hidden the true nature of the Church. But these are days of restoration in which all the rubbish is being cleared away, all that is not in God’s plan will be pulled down, and the true Church will emerge as a Building which shows the wisdom and glory of God.

These are days of restoration. Soon the Lord will send the Christ appointed for us – “Jesus, Whom Heaven must receive until the time of restoration of all things that God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old” (Acts 3:19-21).

Where man has built according to *his* plans and not according to God’s, God will tear down these works of the flesh, and instead, God will restore His plan and His Church *will* be built according to the blue-print of the Master-Builder, to Whom will go all the glory.

QUESTIONS

1. What is God's Temple? (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19-20)
 2. In what ways has man been building contrary to the plan of God, as given in the New Testament, for His Church?
 3. A building is covered by a roof. What is the "covering" of the Church, and what is the Christian's covering?
 4. What does John 14:2-3 mean? What is the house? What are the rooms?
 5. To what extent is the New Testament Church the pattern for the Church today, and to what extent must the Church adapt to the culture and the times in which we live?
 6. Do we need apostles and prophets today to help build the Church?
-

5. THE CHURCH: THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

"Come, and I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:9).

Read Matthew 25:1-13; Ephesians 5:21-33; Revelation 19:6-9.

When the Church is called a Bride, the key similarities are love, unity, submission, faithfulness, purity and beauty. As the Bride loves, is united with, and submits to her husband, so the Church should be characterised by love, unity and submission – both to one another, and to the Lord, our Heavenly Bridegroom. The Church too, like a bride, should be faithful, pure and beautiful.

1. Love: The only thing that will hold the Church together is God's love working through His people. In the natural, the Church will always be divided, full of schisms, differences of opinion, intolerance, etc., because we are all so different. But so are a husband and wife – yet their love for each other binds them together in spite of their differences.

We must love (in the sense of 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a) every one of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Everyone who loves our Lord and is washed in His Blood, is part of us, part of the Bride of Christ, and the Bride must be characterised by love.

The Bride must also love the Bridegroom. Our love for Him is shown in our obedience (John 14:15), our worship, our devotion, and our submission to Him.

2. Unity: No marriage is properly consummated until there is unity and union between bride and bridegroom. Unity can only come where there is true love. Christ's greatest desire is that we might be one, as He and the Father are one, and that we might also be one with Him (John 17:20-23). Denominationalism is one of the greatest dividing forces in the Church today – it is a mark of carnal Christians (1 Cor. 1:10-15; 3:1-9). The sooner we recognize our unity and practice it, the sooner will the Bride be ready to meet the Bridegroom.

3. Submission: We are to submit ourselves to one another in the fear of God (Eph. 5:21), and be clothed with humility towards one another (1 Pet. 5:5-6). As we humble ourselves and submit to each

other, unity will flow because one of the greatest hindrances to unity is pride and a domineering spirit (Rom. 12:3; Phil. 2:1-8).

Submission to one another, love and unity will only come as we are first truly submitted to God. When He is truly Lord, and we are totally obedient, then love, unity and submission will come, because this is what He desires in His Bride.

4. Faithfulness: Tragically, one of the things that destroy so many marriages today is unfaithfulness. This has also been true throughout the history of the Christian Church, as it was of Israel in Old Testament times. We have “lost our first love” (Rev. 2:4), we have followed after the doctrines and traditions of men, rather than being true to God and His Word. Some deny the deity of Christ; some liberalize and “re-interpret” the Bible, even to the extent of virtually denying the Blood that bought them. The Holy Spirit has been quenched and grieved. It is time for the Church to repent of her backslidings and return to *all* that God has for her. False shepherds need to be removed from their positions; the sheep need to be fed, the truth must be revealed, and we must start to *practice* what God has commanded us and revealed to us. The Bridegroom will not come for an unfaithful Bride. It is time to cleanse our hands and our hearts in the Blood of the Lamb, and be faithful to our Lord and Master (James 4:8). See also Ezekiel 34 and the book of Hosea.

5. Purity: “Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, that the Church might be presented before Him in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27).

Purity is a quality of the individual Christian. The Bride can only be as pure as her individual members are pure. We need to be cleansed in the Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to lead holy lives in preparation for the coming of the Bridegroom (2 Pet. 3:11-13).

Christians are to be virgins (Matt. 25:1-13; Rev. 14:4-5). Notice that in the parable of the ten virgins there is no mention of “a bride”, for the wise virgins *are* the Bride!

Revelation 19:6-9 describes the Bride as having made herself ready: “Clothed with fine linen, bright and pure – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.”

6. Beauty: What could be more wonderful than for a Bridegroom to find a Bride who is full of love, faithful, pure and beautiful? No wonder the Father is preparing such a tremendous marriage supper for His Son and His Bride! You and I can be invited if we are clothed in the robes of His righteousness (Matt. 22:1-14).

The Holy City

The holy city, the New Jerusalem, is described as coming down out of Heaven from God, as a Bride adorned for her Husband. Read Revelation 21:1 – 22:5. Apart from the beauty described in these verses, think over the meaning of the many symbols used in this passage and their relevance to the Church. This is the city whose Builder and Maker is God (Heb. 11:10); the city He has built, in which He will dwell with His people as a Bridegroom dwells with His Bride – in true love, unity and harmony, forever! Hallelujah!

“Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.” (Rev. 21:3-4).

QUESTIONS

1. Why is the holy city called the Bride? (Rev. 21:2, 9-10)
 2. Who brings people to Christ and into His Kingdom? (Rev. 21:17)
 3. What is the meaning of the parable in Matthew 22:1-14, and what is “the wedding garment” (v. 12)?
 4. Contrast the great harlot (the great city) of Revelation 17 with the pure Bride (the holy city) of Revelation 21.
 5. What is the meaning of the extra oil that the five wise virgins had that the others did not have?
 6. What do the following symbols in Revelation 21 stand for: great high wall (v.12), twelve gates (v.12), twelve foundations (v.14), gold (v.18), twelve pearls (v.21), river (22:1), tree of life (22:2), God’s Name on their foreheads (22:4)?
-

6. THE CHURCH: THE BODY OF CHRIST

1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 4: 11-16.

“Christ is the Head of the Body, the Church” (Col. 1:18). “For the body does not consist of one member, but many.” (1 Cor. 12:14).

The figure of the Church as a Body emphasises that it is made up of many different members, each with different functions, yet each one related to the Head and to one another.

All born-again Christians are members of this Body. In other passages of Scripture they are called “saints” (ones who are sanctified or set apart for God’s holy use), and “disciples” (followers of Christ), but the important thing to note is that every true believer is a part of the Body, and every member of the Body is both important and needed.

Unlike a building, a body has activity and life; it matures with time and experience; there are relationships within a body; it is subject to the leading and direction of the head. In fact, it is through the Body that the Head expresses Himself. The members of a body function together in unity, so that if one member suffers (or rejoices), all the members suffer (or rejoice) together (1 Cor. 12:26). These are all characteristics of the Church of Jesus Christ. The Church is not so much an organization as an organism.

Unity and diversity

There is *unity* within the Body; there is also *diversity*. Without unity, very little would be achieved, for it would be torn apart by schisms, brought into disrespect, and much of the work would be

dissipated. Without diversity, it will become narrow-minded, exclusive and achieve little of the total scope that God desires for His Church.

Ephesians 4:15-16

1. The Head is Christ (see also 1 Cor. 12:3).
2. The Body is the company of believers – the Church (see also 1 Cor. 12:12-31).
3. Love is the sphere in which the whole Church operates (see also 1 Cor. 13). Where there is true love there will be unity and a working together *in spite of differences*. See John 13:34-35; 17:21. Where Christ is truly Lord (Head), and we are truly submitted to that Lordship, there will be unity because Christ is working towards *one goal* – namely, that of building His Church and upbuilding the believers so that all may profit.

The New Testament pattern for the Church will *only* work if:

- (a) Christ is Lord and Head (He is the ultimate authority);
- (b) Believers are submitted to Him (they are obedient); and
- (c) Believers are submitted to one another in love.

Seven facts concerning the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12)

1. There is only one Body: verses 12-13.

There is only one Shepherd and one Flock, although there are many folds (John 10:16). We cannot belong to any other Body because there is only one! For this reason you cannot “sheep-steal” because there is only one flock and all the sheep belong to the same Shepherd! You cannot steal your own sheep!

Likewise, the terms “wandering sheep” and “spiritual gypsies” are misnomers, because although the sheep may wander around the folds, all the sheep belong to the same flock and to the same Shepherd.

A person cannot “start another Church” because there is only one Church; or, if this is meant in the local sense, is it right to have, say, 8 churches in one locality, but not right to have 9?

2. There is only one Head: verse 3.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the Body, and He is the *only* Head. If there was more than one Head we would have a grotesque monster, and unity would not be possible. God never created a Body with more than one head!

See Colossians 1:18. Do not try to build your own kingdom. Jesus said, “*I will build My Church ...*” Beware of people who try to build their own kingdom around themselves as head.

3. There are many members: verses 12, 14, 20.

There are many members in the Body of Christ, just as there are many members (parts) in our physical bodies. See Romans 12:4-5.

4. The members have different functions: verses 4-6, 11, 29-30.

See Romans 12:3-8. We all have different functions, gifts and ministries. Find out from God what yours are (no matter how great or small) and exercise them to the glory of God.

God chooses our gifts and ministries. While we are to “earnestly desire” and “seek after” and “ask” (Matt. 7:11), it is *God’s* prerogative to choose our gifts and ministries (1 Cor. 12:11, 18, 28; Heb. 2:4).

Some lists of ministries are given in Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28; Ephesians 4:11.

5. **All members are equal:** verses 13, 15-26.

All members of the Body are equal, not necessarily in authority (for some are placed in positions of leadership and authority by God), but they are equal in their position in Christ, in being members of the same Body, etc. There is no “select of the elect”!

See Matthew 20:26-27; Acts 10:34; Galatians 3:27-28; 1 Timothy 4:12.

6. **All members are united:** verses 12, 25-26.

See Ephesians 4:15-16. The Body is united by the one Spirit and is built up in love. If the members are *not* united, then the Body is dismembered and the members (“branches”) will die (John 15:1-8; esp. v. 4-6).

But how can *many members*, with *different functions all* be united? Because they are all part of the *one Body*, and all have the *one Spirit* (v.13).

The basis of unity is fellowship with one another, and with the Lord, in the Body of Christ.

The basis is *not* doctrine, leadership, tradition, or denomination, but fellowship in and with Christ. See 1 John 1:3 and Revelation 7:9-12.

“Be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace ... until we all attain to the unity of the Faith” (Eph. 4:3, 13). Notice that unity of the Spirit *precedes* unity of the Faith.

“Behold, how good and pleasant it is for the brethren to dwell together in unity ... for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for ever more.” (Ps. 133:1, 3).

We need to intercede for unity within the Church, between churches, between Christian organizations, and between Christians. First we need to *recognize* our unity, and then we need to *work it out in practice*.

7. **All are needed:** verses 7, 17, 19, 21.

There can be no pride or inferiority in the Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit puts us in the Body, and gives us our ministry (v. 11, 18, 28). Everyone, and every ministry, no matter how humble, is necessary in the Body of Christ.

In John 21:21-22 Jesus said, in effect, to Peter: “Mind your own business. Get on with the ministry

to which I have called *you*.”

The deacon is just as needed as the elder, for without deacons the elders would have to do the work, and therefore other parts of their ministries would have to be curtailed. In serving the church, the deacons release the elders for their spiritual ministry, and are therefore just as important. All of us only have 24 hours in a day; therefore we need each other and we need each other’s help.

There is no part of the Body which is useless – every part is needed and must function if the whole Body is to work properly. It is not just a matter of needing more people with five talents – we also need all the people with one talent to *use* their talents to the glory of God.

Christians and churches are not “independent” or “autonomous” – these terms are unscriptural. We are all to “submit to one another in the fear of the Lord”; we should be totally dependent on the Lord and on each other, and not try to do our own independent thing. Our fellowship is with the Lord and with one another (1 John 1:3) and so is our dependence.

Summary

Each of the above seven points can be summed up in one word:

- Uniqueness:** There is only one Body, the Church of Jesus Christ.
- Headship:** There is only one Head, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Multiplicity:** There are many members in the Body.
- Diversity:** There are many functions in the Body.
- Equality:** All members are equal.
- Unity:** All members are united.
- Dependence:** All members are needed, and depend on each other.

Finally, the Body has been *sanctified* (set apart for God): it is being *edified* (built up); and it will be *glorified* so that it can glorify its Head, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

QUESTIONS

1. Read Ephesians 5:21-33 and compare the Church with a husband and wife: one body; one head; two members; different; equal; united; both needed; build each other up in love.
2. What does it mean to “discern the Body”? (1 Cor. 11:27-32)
3. Why are both unity and diversity essential in the Church?
4. In what sense are all members of the Body equal, and in what sense are they not?
5. What problems are caused when doctrine, leadership, tradition, or denomination become the basis of our meeting together, rather than fellowship with Christians who love the Lord?
6. Can there be unity of the Faith if there is no unity in the Spirit?

7. BODY MINISTRY

Ephesians 4:1-16

What is Body Ministry?

Body ministry is every member of the Body of Christ (every Christian) exercising their God-given ministries in the Church for the glory of God and the edification (upbuilding) of the Body.

Body ministry involves both giving and receiving ministry – ministering and being ministered to.

Speaking on the parable of the talents, Watchman Nee made three interesting observations:

- (a) What we need is not more 5-talent people, but for all the 1-talent people to use their talents.
- (b) The napkin is not to wrap the talent in, but to wipe the sweat off our brows.
- (c) Everyone has at least one talent – no-one was given none.

One of the truths God is restoring to us at this time is the need for every single Christian to function in the Church according to the gifts, abilities and calling God has given him. (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11, 27-31). All our gifts are *gifts from God*, so no-one can boast; and God has given gifts to everyone, so everyone is needed in the Body, no matter how lowly his gifts may seem to be (1 Cor. 12:22-25).

Every part of the Body is needed for full health and strength, and for proper functioning. If one part does not function, “muscular atrophy” sets in and that member wastes away and the Body is less effective as a result.

The Priesthood of All Believers

1 Peter 2:5, 9 tells us that Christians are “a holy priesthood ... a royal priesthood.” (Compare with Ex. 19:5-6; Rev. 1:6; 5:10). Unlike the Israelites of old, we need no priest (other than Jesus, our great High Priest) in order to come to God – all believers are priests, with direct access to God at all times, and with both the privilege and the responsibility of reconciling unbelievers to Him.

Most Christians need to learn how to come to God themselves rather than be constantly dependent upon other Christians for help, nurture, guidance, teaching, prayer, etc. The *whole Body* (every member) should be maturing together. Leaders need to beware of making others dependent upon themselves and not God; conversely, members need to beware of being dependent on the leaders rather than getting to know God themselves.

The term “priesthood of every believer” simply means that all Christians have direct access to God through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (Heb. 4:14-16); we can *all* offer spiritual sacrifices, receive atonement for our sins, and minister to the Lord and to one another. The ministries once reserved solely for the Levitical priesthood are now available to *all* Christians: the veil has been torn! (Matt. 27:51).

The Church and the Churches

The New Testament speaks of the Church in three ways:

- (a) **The Universal Church** (Matt. 16:18) – all believers, throughout the world and throughout

history. This Church will not meet until we are all with the Lord in glory (Rev. 7:9-12).

- (b) **The Local Church** (Matt. 18:17) – all believers in a locality or area who meet together for teaching and worship.
- (c) **The Church in the House** (Rom. 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Philemon 2) – a small group of believers who meet in a Christian’s home for fellowship, mutual edification, ministry to one another, counsel, prayer, etc. (cf. Matt. 18:19-20).

One opportunity for Body ministry (that is, various members taking part and exercising their gifts and ministries) is during times of corporate fellowship and worship (1 Cor. 14:26-33; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). In very large meetings this may not be very practical, but in smaller meetings (e.g., home meetings) all can participate as the Lord leads them.

In the past, emphasis has been placed on the larger church meetings (say, over 30 people). In large meetings there is a place for singing, worship, testimony, Bible reading, teaching and exhortation; but true personal fellowship, sharing, Body ministry in which all can participate, is really only possible in small home meetings (with, say, less than 20-30 people). It is in these meetings that love, friendship, counsel, personal prayer, and so on, can most effectively be given and received.

It is not an either/or situation – either attend a large Church meeting, or attend a home meeting; it is both – they are supplementary to one another. Both have their place and both are essential in the life of a growing Christian. In many churches, the larger meeting(s) are held on Sundays and the smaller, home meetings are held during the week.

The early disciples attended the temple together (that is, larger meetings) and *also* fellowshiped in their homes (Acts 2:46; 5:42).

Ministries in the Body

See Acts 2:38-47; Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 27-31; 14:1-6, 26-33; Ephesians 4:11-16; 5:18-20; Colossians 3:16-17.

1. Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors (Shepherds, Elders, Bishops), Teachers.
2. Gifts of: Wisdom, Knowledge, Faith, Healing, Miracles, Prophecy, Discernment, Tongues, Interpretation, and Revelation.
3. Exhortation, Encouragement, Edification, Consolation, Admonition.
4. Prayer, Worship, Thanksgiving.
5. Sharing, Serving (Deacons), Giving, Helping, Showing kindness and mercy, Administrating.
6. Singing and music: Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, melodies.
7. Included in the above, but not specifically named: Intercessors, Counsellors, Personal evangelists/witnesses, other Leaders, Deliverance.

Does it work?

Yes, if people are prepared to work at it. People need to come *prepared* to minister – to give and not just to receive.

Some people fear that it will become disorganized – that confusion and chaos will result – but God is

not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33) and if people minister as they are led by God, confusion will *not* result. God is better at organizing, flowing, moving, and bringing about unity and harmony, than we are!

Leadership need to take a firm control where necessary and, in particular, *teach* people how to exercise in Body ministry. Leadership must be united, sensitive, and spiritual.

Above all, seek to be sensitive to what the Spirit is doing and saying through people; do not cut across the flow of the meeting, and make sure that what you say is edifying and will glorify *God* and not you!

An Exhortation: “*Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given to you ... I remind you to stir up (rekindle) the gift of God that is within you*” (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).

QUESTIONS

1. How can I know what are my gifts, ministries or talents?
2. How can I know if it is right for me to exercise a gift in a public meeting?
3. What sort of leadership is necessary in smaller home meetings?
4. What can you do if most members don't (or won't) function?
5. What functions of the church are best met in:
 - (a) the larger meeting (local church)?
 - (b) the smaller meeting (church in the house)?
6. How should the following problems be dealt with:
 - (a) One person dominates the meeting or talks or prays too long?
 - (b) A person is insensitive to what is happening?
 - (c) A person ministers in the flesh, not in the Spirit?
 - (d) A wrong spirit is manifested?

8. FINDING YOUR MINISTRY

If every Christian has a ministry or function to fulfill in the Body of Christ, how can we know what is our ministry or calling?

The following guides may help you to know what part God has for you in His Body.

1. A desire in your heart for a particular ministry.

“Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart” (Ps. 37:4). “If anyone aspires to the office of a bishop, he desires a noble task” (1 Tim. 3:1). If our desire is to please God and to serve Him in whatever way He pleases, then He will place the right desires in our hearts and we will have what seems to be an intuitive attraction for the work to which He is calling us. Some people have a false idea that God wants us to do the very thing we *least* want to do! God is *not* a hard task-master; He gives us a joy in serving Him. This is why the Psalmist could say “I *delight* to do Your will, O my God” (Ps. 40:8). God's calling for us is *not* the opposite of what we want, but the very thing that gives us a real joy and peace in doing.

2. Ministry or ministries.

Sometimes people get the impression that there is one and only one thing that God wants us to do. Usually this is not correct. While we may have one main ministry, this almost always incorporates other ministries. For example, Paul, as an apostle, was also an evangelist, a pastor (shepherd), a prophet, and a teacher. He exhorted, he counselled, he interceded, he exercised various gifts of the Spirit, and so on. Likewise our calling will usually involve a number of related ministries – do not limit God just to one!

3. Major and minor ministries.

“Are all apostles?” (1 Cor. 12:29). No! Some ministries are more prominent than others, but the Body of Christ needs the “minor” as well as the “major” members in order to operate effectively. Just as in the human body there are parts which we seldom think about and which may seem unimportant or even unnecessary, yet all are needed for the healthy functioning and growth of the body. So it is with the Church (see 1 Cor. 12:14-26). Do not despise any ministry, nor feel proud that God has called you to a “higher” calling. E.g., Without the ministry of helps, the more prominent ministries would be so tied up with other work that they would not be so free to carry out their callings (cf. Acts 6:1-6). Besides, a “lesser” calling, faithfully carried out, may later lead to a “higher” calling. Cf., Philip, the deacon, who ministered to the financial and material needs of the widows, later became Philip the evangelist who started a revival in Samaria, with signs, deliverances and healings, and then was used by God in getting the Gospel into Ethiopia! (Acts 6:5; 8:5-40). Do not despise small beginnings! God knows when we are ready for greater responsibility in the Church.

4. The variety of ministries.

Not all ministries are vocal; not all involve speaking publicly or praying for people. Nevertheless God has given us all tongues to use, and many callings of God involve speaking, praying, counselling, teaching, etc. But let us not limit God’s gifts to those which are seen and heard in public, and which are prominent. Much of God’s work is seen by very few people; but God sees it all!

5. What are some ministries?

In seeking God for our ministries, we do well to see some of the ministries listed in Scripture. A list of these was given in the previous study. Read the passages mentioned and note the ministries that are described in them.

6. “Study to show yourself approved” (2 Timothy 2:15)

When you believe God has shown you your ministry, seek to excel in that calling. Pray over it, meditate upon it, study the Scriptures concerning it; let it become part of you – devote yourself to it in God’s service – become “a workman who has no need to be ashamed”. Learn all you can about the ministry; talk to others that have the same ministry and learn from them. Become an “expert” on it; “fulfill your ministry” (2 Tim. 4:5).

7. Natural talents and abilities.

All our gifts and talents come from God, and frequently God will use our “natural” talents in our ministry. Present all your abilities to God; let Him develop, expand, and enhance them. Let Him renew them, add a spiritual dimension to them and anoint them with supernatural power by His Spirit (Rom. 12:1-2). Give God all the glory, for without Him you would be nothing and could do nothing!

8. Opportunities will open up.

If your calling is of God, then He will give you opportunities to start ministering. He will open doors (and close them if necessary – Rev. 3:7). Start exercising your ministry and let God confirm your calling by the fruit it produces.

9. Submit your ministry to the Body of Christ and its leadership.

Let it be examined by the elders of the Church, so that they may both correct, if necessary, and also encourage you in your ministry.

10. Specific calling.

In some cases God may give a very definite and specific calling to a person. E.g., “Paul, called to be an apostle ...” (Rom. 1: 1). Jesus calls and leads His sheep in many ways (John 10:3-4), but whatever your ministry, “I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called ...” (Eph. 4:1).

QUESTIONS

1. Briefly define each of the following ministries: apostles, prophets, exhorters, helpers, deacons, elders (shepherds).
2. Which ministries do you think are most lacking in the Church today?
3. What gifts and/or ministries has God given you?
4. Do you have a desire towards some particular ministry in which you are not yet involved? If so, which one; and why would you like to be involved in it?
5. Apart from the ministries listed in the previous study, what other ministries are there?
6. What can be done if some ministry or ministries are lacking in a local church?
7. Where are there apostolic and prophetic ministries in the Church today?

9. THE CHURCH AND THE CHURCHES

Frequently, the building in which Christians meet to worship, is referred to as “the church”. Of course the Church is not a literal, physical building – the Church is *people* – people who love the Lord Jesus Christ and who have been called together to love, worship and serve Him.

The New Testament speaks of the Church in three ways:

1. The Universal Church (e.g., Matthew 16:18)

This comprises all believers, throughout the world, and throughout history. The universal Church has never met together as one Body, but it will when we are all together with the Lord in glory (Rev. 7:9-12). The universal Church is the complete Body of Christ – spanning time and space, race and age, social and material status (Gal. 3:26-28). There is only one universal Church; there can never be more than one; it is also known as the Body of Christ.

2. The Local Church (e.g., Matthew 18:17)

This comprises all believers who live in the same locality or area, and who meet together for teaching and worship. It is obviously impossible for the whole of the Body of Christ to meet together at one time, so, in New Testament times, the believers in each locality met together. In the New Testament,

the local church was always called by the name of the city in which it was located (e.g., the Church at Antioch, Acts 13:1; the Church in Philadelphia, Rev. 3:7, etc.) The plural word “churches” is only used when referring to an area comprising more than one city (e.g., the churches of Asia, 1 Cor. 16:19; the churches throughout Syria, Acts 15:41, etc.) So, in one city there was one church, named after that city. Thus the only basis for division between churches was the geographical regions in which they occurred. Denominations are totally un-Scriptural (see 1 Cor. 1:10-13; 3:1-9). To be divided from other believers because of denominations, traditions, leadership, or doctrinal differences is to be *carnally minded* – it is the “party spirit” listed as one of the lusts of the flesh in Galatians 5:20 (“I belong to this party or denomination; you belong to that one”). Note: Doctrine, tradition and leadership are not necessarily wrong, but to be *divided* from other brothers and sisters in Christ over these issues *is* wrong. There are many local churches, but there should be unity between believers in each locality.

3. The Household Church (e.g., Romans 16:3-5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Philemon 2)

This comprises a small group of believers who meet in a Christian’s home for fellowship, mutual edification, ministry to one another, counsel, prayer, etc. (cf. Matt. 18:19-20)

In the next study we will look at the meaning of Christian Fellowship. It should be obvious that true *fellowship* is not really possible in a very large local church. In a group of, say, 100 or more people, we can worship together, sing, be led in prayer, listen to teaching, etc., but personal needs, discussion, individual prayer or ministry, are best done in a small group. Likewise, many aspects of Body ministry can only really be achieved in a small home meeting. The church in the house is thus the place where most Christians will exercise their gifts and ministries, be free to speak, open up their hearts for ministry, prayer and counsel, take part in discussions, etc., and where fellowship on a person-to-person basis is possible.

But the smaller home church is not really an alternative to the local church. *Both* are needed. It is not an either/or situation – either go to the larger local church or go to a home group. We need the larger group to enlarge our vision, to receive greater depth of ministry, teaching, inspiration and worship, etc., that is not possible in the smaller home group. But the church in the home is also needed so that individual Christians can express themselves, both giving and receiving personal ministry. The two (local church and home church) are thus complementary.

Why home meetings?

1. Because they are small enough for everyone to participate, and ask questions, or make comments, if they want to (cf. 1 Cor. 14:26-33)
2. Because they are small enough to *encourage* everyone to participate; no-one needs to feel shy when they are with a few close friends.
3. Personal and intimate needs can be prayed for, and people can be given counsel and help.
4. They are friendly, informal, relaxed, and *true* fellowship is possible, in the deepest sense of the word.
5. Non-Christians and nominal Christians who rarely, if ever, go to an established church may come to a home.
6. They allow leadership to develop and grow under the personal guidance and counsel of established elders.

Names of the Church

1. **The Universal Church** is referred to as the Church of Christ, or the Body of Christ (as Jesus Christ Himself is its Head), or the Church of God (e.g., Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 5:23).
2. **The Local Church** is called by the name of the city or area in which it is located.
3. **The Household Church** is named after the owner or head of the house (e.g., “Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house ...” 1 Cor. 16:19).

The Churches today

The situation in the churches today is very confused. Often, Christians are divided from other Christians because of:

- (a) denominational differences
- (b) doctrinal differences
- (c) differences in tradition and ways of worship
- (d) division over leadership – preferring one pastor or leader to another.

None of these is a Biblical basis for division; in fact they are *all* contrary to Scripture. Today we have the tragic situation of churches of different denominations being built almost next door to each other, and competing with each other, rather than a single united Church in each locality which powerfully proclaims and demonstrates the Gospel.

This present-day division provides non-Christians with an excuse for not becoming a Christian and for not going to a church. While this excuse is not justified, it is nevertheless used, and unbelievers do *not* see the love and unity they should see (John 13:35).

Five Functions of a Local Church

1. **Evangelism** (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20). We must evangelize, or perish! And this means going out, not just expecting people to come in! (See Acts 2:41-47; 5:11-16)
2. **Fellowship and worship** (Heb. 10:23-25). Our fellowship should be both within our local church and between local churches (e.g., citywide), thus bringing about true unity – true “church union”. (See Acts 2:42 – teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayer)
3. **Teaching and discipleship** (2 Tim. 2:2). New Christians need to be brought into Christian maturity and leadership.
4. **Missions** (Matt. 9:35-38). A worldwide missionary vision, not just to the free world but to the *whole* world – Moslem, Hindu, Buddhist, atheistic and communist countries too!
5. **Social concern** (James 2:14-17; Acts 4:32-35). We should not become so concerned about “souls” that we forget that souls have needy bodies!

QUESTIONS

1. Compare and contrast the Universal, Local and Household Church.
2. What should be the “locality” or geographical boundary of a Local Church?
3. What is wrong with denominationalism?
4. What can be achieved in (a) a large local church, and (b) a small home fellowship, that cannot be achieved in the other?

5. How can Christians maintain a large and open vision of the Body of Christ, rather than becoming introverted and narrow-minded (only concerned with their own particular local church)?
 6. In what ways can all the local churches in a city (the whole church) come together?
 7. If denominationalism is wrong, what can we do about it?
-

10. FELLOWSHIP

About the year 1700 BC Jacob prophesied over his son Judah (an ancestor of Jesus Christ) saying: "... unto Him shall the gathering of the people be." (Gen. 49:10 AV). In this phrase lies the essence of true Christian fellowship: a gathering together of the Lord's people unto Him. John says: "that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). Fellowship is thus both between us and God, and between one another – both vertical and horizontal.

The problem is that while we may have fellowship with God, we do not truly have fellowship with one another by sitting in parallel rows in a church building every Sunday, looking at the back of the person in front of us! For fellowship to be really personal, meaningful and helpful, it must be intimate and within a relatively small group of people (say, less than 30). This is why the Church in the Home (mentioned in the previous study) is just as important as the larger meeting of the local church.

In Hebrews 10:24-25 we are exhorted to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, but encouraging one another, and all the more so as the day of Christ's return draws near.

The meaning of fellowship

The meaning of the Greek word *koinonia* is essentially fellowship, communion, a sharing of something in common. The following five passages use this word in slightly different ways, bringing out various aspects of its meaning:

1. 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

The word is here translated "communion" and refers to the act of sharing something in common.

Communion = common union = something in common + union

If we are to have fellowship, we must have something in common, and it must be shared in true unity between us. As Christians, the centre of all our lives is the Lord Himself, and our unity and union is in Him, as we share His Spirit with one another. In the communion service we share together the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ – we have something and Someone in common, and it is this which brings about our union.

2. Luke 5:8-10

The word is here translated "partners" (v. 10). To have fellowship thus means that we are partners

together in the *same* business (not in opposition!) So often the Church seems to be divided and we act as though different churches were in competition with each other. *This should not be so*; all Christians should be in partnership, all working together for the same God. We are fellow-workers, all pulling together rather than pulling against each other. We have enough of a battle against the powers of darkness, without Christians fighting against each other! Indeed, “a kingdom divided against itself will fall”, so let us act as partners, and fellowship and work together for God.

3. Romans 15:26-27

The word is here translated “contribution”. Did you realize that part of our fellowship with one another is our *giving* to each other? (Giving spiritually, materially and financially). The early church shared everything in common – they gave liberally to one another, as anyone had need (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37; 2 Cor. 8:13-15). See also 2 Corinthians 8:4.

4. 2 Peter 1:4 (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:20)

The word is here translated “partaker” and “sharer” (NAS). To have fellowship is to share with one another – to share in one another’s lives – to rejoice with them, pray with them, counsel them, weep with them – to be involved in their lives. Fellowship cannot be remote – it must be personal, caring and loving. We partake with one another, we share with one another; we love one another in the deepest sense of the word (1 Cor. 13:4-8a). We need to get to know one another – to experience real companionship.

5. Revelation 18:4 (NASB)

The word used here means “to participate in and with” (in this passage it is used in the negative). To fellowship with another person is to participate in and with them, to be part of them, to be one, even as the Father and the Son are one (John 17:20-23).

True Christian fellowship, as outlined above, is a rare but beautiful thing. No wonder Paul counselled us to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

Some aspects of fellowship

1. Fellowship was one of the four major activities in the early church (Acts 2:42, “apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayers”). It is of fundamental importance to the spiritual growth of all Christians and of the Church as a whole. No Church can be strong if it lacks true Biblical fellowship – preaching at people is not enough!

2. Fellowship is firstly with God (1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 John 1:3-7). We fellowship with God the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit. Note that in order to really know Christ and the power of His resurrection, it is first necessary to share in the fellowship of His sufferings and become like Him in His death (Phil. 3:10).

3. Light cannot fellowship with darkness (2 Cor. 6:14-18). We cannot fellowship with God if there is sin, rebellion, disobedience, etc., in our lives. The Spirit of Holiness can only dwell in, and fill, lives that are cleansed from all sin. If we want to receive the light, then darkness must be dispelled. Likewise we can only really fellowship with others who also walk in the light (1 John 1:5-

7).

Some important attitudes for true fellowship

Read Philippians 2:1-10. If we are to have fellowship with one another then we must:

1. Be of the same mind (v. 2)
2. Have the same love (v. 2)
3. Be united in spirit (be of one accord, v. 2)
4. Be of one mind (v. 2)
5. Not be selfish (v. 3)
6. Not be conceited (v. 3)
7. Have true humility (v. 3, 5-8)
8. Have a genuine interest in others (v. 4)

Lack of any of these attributes will hinder true fellowship.

Some results of true fellowship

1. Much joy, comfort, and love; and the saints will be refreshed (Philemon 6-7).
2. Great power, great grace (Acts 4:33); and great joy (Acts 15:3).
3. Read Acts 2:42-47.

QUESTIONS

1. Explain in one sentence the Christian meaning of the word “fellowship”.
2. What are some hindrances to fellowship?
3. To what extent should we participate in the lives of other Christians?
4. What are some practical ways of encouraging fellowship?
5. How can we help Christians who seem to be lonely, introverted, unloved or not cared for?
6. What is “the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings” (Philippians 3:10)?

11. DEACONS AND ELDERS

“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus: To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Phil. 1:1).

This verse uses three different terms for Christians in the Church at Philippi:

- “saints” – that is, Christians who have been set apart (sanctified) for God’s service.
- “bishops – also called elders or overseers, in other parts of the New Testament.
- “deacons” – also called ministers or helpers, in other parts of the New Testament.

All Christians are *saints*, servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those to whom spiritual oversight or authority is given (usually older, more mature, experienced and wise Christians) were called *elders*;

and those to whom oversight of material matters was given were called *deacons* or ministers.

Thus, in the New Testament Church we find two types of leadership:

Elders, who were the spiritual leaders in the Church, and

Deacons, who were responsible for the material side of Church affairs.

The elders were people of maturity and experience, in the natural or physical sense, as well as spiritually. Five of the ministries which these elders had were: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Eph. 4:11). We will deal with these five ministries in the next study; at present we will look at elders and deacons, and the qualifications Paul describes for a person who is an elder or deacon.

It should be noted that leadership is a calling, a gift, a ministry. It is not for everyone; it is not *necessarily* for those who desire it, or for those who are pushed into it! Paul says that he was “called [by God] to be an apostle, set apart [by the Church] for the Gospel” (Rom. 1:1). James 3:1 warns us: “Let not many of you become teachers, for we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness”, and Jesus Himself said “Whoever would be first among you must be your servant” (Matt. 20:25-28). In 1 Timothy 3:1 Paul says “If anyone aspires to the office of bishop (elder), he desires a noble task”; he then lists the qualifications necessary!

All Christian leadership today should be patterned on the leadership principles of the New Testament, even though these may be very different from natural, worldly, seemingly obvious, or even preconceived ideas of leadership!

Deacons

Deacons were originally chosen in the Church because material matters were occupying the apostles' time to such an extent that they were not able to devote enough time to the ministry of God's Word and to prayer. Hence they asked the Church to choose men of good repute, full of the Holy Spirit, wisdom and faith, to look after the material affairs of the Church and to its daily functioning. When the Church had chosen seven such men, the apostles commissioned them for the task, with the laying on of hands in prayer. See Acts 6:1-6.

The Greek word *diakonos* means a deacon or minister; a servant (one who serves other people); one who looks after church administration and the material needs of the church.

Although the word “deacon” does not occur in Acts 6:1-6, the word “*diakonos*” does – it is translated “ministration” or “service” in v. 1; to “serve” in v. 2; and to “minister” the Word of God in v. 4. In other parts of the New Testament it is translated “minister” (e.g., Acts 19:22; Heb. 6:10; 1 Pet. 4:10-11); a servant (e.g., Rom. 16:1); deacon (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:8). In 1 Corinthians 12:5 the word translated “administration” is the word *diakonia*, and in Romans 12:7 and Colossians 4:17 the word *diakonia* is translated “ministry”.

These verses, especially Acts 6:1-6, give us a clear picture of the deacon as one who serves or ministers to the material needs of the Church. Ministries of deacons thus include service, giving, helping, compassion (Rom. 12:3-8), and administration (1 Cor. 12:28).

Today, in many churches, the title “The Minister” is frequently used for the person who is really the

pastor or teacher, and not a minister (or deacon, or servant) in the Biblical sense at all – although many pastors do end up doing a lot of deacons’ work, in administration, etc!

Qualifications of a deacon

The qualifications for a deacon are listed in Acts 6:1-6 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13. They are: good repute (trustworthy, reliable, honest, faithful), full of the Spirit, full of wisdom and faith, serious (sensible), not double-tongued (hypocritical, liar or deceiver), not addicted to much wine (temperate), not greedy for gain, sound in faith and with a clear conscience, tested first and found blameless, husband of one wife, able to manage his children and household well.

Elders

The word “elder” is frequently found in the New Testament, especially in the book of Acts. There are two Greek words used when referring to an elder:

1. *Presbuteros* (translated “elder”), meaning an older or aged person, a senior or spiritually mature person. The emphasis of this word is on seniority, maturity, experience and hence wisdom.
2. *Episkopos* (translated “bishop”, “overseer”, or “superintendent”). The emphasis of this word is on his function or ministry, rather than his (spiritual) age.

Acts 20:17, 28 show that these two words are used of the same people: “Paul sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders (*presbuteros*) of the Church ... ‘Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (*episkopos*), to feed (or shepherd, or pastor) the Church of God’.”

In Titus 1:5-9 Paul says, “Ordain elders (*presbuteros*) in every city ... men who are blameless ... for a bishop (*episkopos*) must be blameless”.

The function of the elders was thus to oversee, feed, shepherd (pastor), and care for the spiritual needs of the flock. Jesus Himself is our supreme Shepherd and Bishop (1 Pet. 2:25).

The five terms – elder, bishop, overseer, shepherd, pastor – more or less apply to the same people; the different terms emphasizing different aspects of their ministry.

Because the elders’ ministry is so important, the requirements for eldership are even stricter than those for a deacon, but also elders are not to be rebuked (1 Tim. 5:1); they are worthy of double honour, especially if they preach and teach (1 Tim. 5:17); and because their lives have been tested prior to ordination, no accusation against them is to be accepted unless there are at least two or three witnesses (1 Tim. 5:19). Moreover, we are to be subject to the elders (1 Pet. 5:5).

Qualifications of an elder

Normally, a person may be a deacon before becoming an elder, so the previously-listed qualifications of a deacon would also apply. The following is an additional list of qualities for an elder, as listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 2:2 and 1 Peter 5:1-3.

Above reproach	Manages his own household well
Husband of one wife	Has submissive and respectful children
Temperate	Not a new convert, but mature
Sensible, wise	Not conceited or proud
Dignified	Well thought of by outsiders
Hospitable	Disciplined, self-controlled
Good teacher	Holy
Not a drunkard	Sound in faith
Gentle, not violent	Stable, steadfast
Not quarrelsome	A good example
Not a lover of money	

Acts 14:21-23 describes the appointment of elders in a local church, by the apostles. Acts 15:1-35 and 21:18-25 show the functioning of an eldership in their spiritual capacity, to decide on questions and problems affecting the church.

It is important to notice that the word “elder” is *never* used in the singular with regard to a local church. In other words, there was *always* a plurality of spiritual oversight (eldership) in any local church, and never a “one-man-band”. The only times where the word “elder” occurs in the singular is when Peter (1 Pet. 5:1) and John (2 John 1; 3 John 1) use the term to distinguish themselves from other Peters and Johns in the church. In New Testament times people did not have surnames as we do today, and it was necessary to identify themselves in this way to avoid confusion.

There are two references to “older women”: 1 Timothy 5:1-2 (*presbuteras*) where we are told to treat older women in the church as we would our mothers; and Titus 2:3-5 (*presbutidas* – aged women) are told to teach the younger women how they should live and run their homes, bring up their children and care for their husbands, etc.

QUESTIONS

1. How can a person know if God wants them to be a leader?
2. What can you do if you find that you are the leader of a “one-man-band”, or a member of a group controlled by one person?
3. If a group is led by a number of people and they do not all agree on some issue, what should they do?
4. Is there a place for “full time” leadership in the church? What possible problems might it have?
5. What is the significance of the words “deacons” and “elders” occurring in the plural, in the Bible?
6. Is it practical, or possible, to have all the leaders (elders) submitted to each other (Eph. 5:21; 1 Pet. 5:5)?
7. Should a person be a deacon before becoming an elder? Why or why not?
8. What should we do if our leadership is obviously lacking in important qualities? What other qualities should a good leader have?
9. If a person considering eldership does not fulfill all the Biblical qualifications, can he still be an elder?
10. How would you handle the problems of: a very popular “leader” who is not spiritually qualified; and murmuring, complaining and criticism of leaders?

12. APOSTLES, PROPHETS, EVANGELISTS, PASTORS, TEACHERS

Read Ephesians 4:1-16.

When Jesus ascended on High, He gave gifts to men (v. 8). These gifts, as distinct from those of 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, were gifted people who were given to the Church in order to perfect and equip the saints for the work of the ministry, and to edify (build up) the Body of Christ (v. 11-12). These ministry gifts which Christ gave to the Church are: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (v. 11).

APOSTLES

The word “apostle” (Gk. *apostolos*) means “one who is sent forth”. The word is sometimes translated “messenger”; and the word “missionary” comes from the Latin equivalent of this word.

Acts 13:1-4 gives an example of this word in use: although the word “apostle” does not occur in the English translation, the church in Antioch literally “apostlized” Barnabas and Saul – they sent them forth (v. 3-4), to evangelise and establish churches. An apostle is thus a church-planter; one who establishes local churches. This involves evangelizing, teaching, training, discipling, raising up leaders and ordaining elders (cf. Acts 14:21-23). The ministry of an apostle thus often includes the ministries of prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher as well. In Acts we see apostolic *teams* moving round and ministering. The people in these teams had complementary ministries and they functioned together in the ministry. It is not a one-man-band that we read about in the New Testament, but a *Body*, with many members, many functions, many gifts, all working together to establish and build up the Church.

About 25 apostles are mentioned by name in the New Testament – this includes the 12 Jesus first chose and sent forth in Matthew 10:2 (Note the words “sent out” in v. 5, 16), and 13 others mentioned in other parts of the New Testament. As well as these, 70 are mentioned in Luke 10:1. (Note the word “send” in v. 1, 3).

The ministry of apostles is essential for the planting and growth of the Church in areas where it is not yet established.

PROPHETS

A prophet (Gk. *prophetes*) is a person who speaks forth on behalf of God. They are people who bring a message which is inspired by God. In this sense they are God’s “mouthpiece”. This *may* involve foretelling the future (e.g., Acts 21:10-14) but always involves a forth-telling of a message from God. The message may be to Christians or to the unconverted (e.g., John the Baptist, and many Old Testament prophets such as Elijah and Elisha). Prophets spoke to nations, to kings, to church leaders, and to the people. Their message was often a stern one, a message of warning (e.g., Jonah). The ministry of a prophet in this sense is very different from a person who prophesies in a meeting (1 Cor. 12:10; 14:1, 3). Many people prophesy, but the ministry of a prophet is somewhat rare today. A

prophet was the voice of God to the nation, which affected national, civic and religious leaders.

Thus a prophet has the gift of prophecy, but not everyone with the gift of prophecy is called to the ministry of a prophet.

EVANGELISTS

An evangelist (Gk. *evangelistes*) is a person who proclaims the Good News (the evangel) of salvation and wholeness through the death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. They are called to carry out the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20 and Mark 16:15-18, going into all the world and preaching the Gospel to the whole of creation. The Church must evangelise or perish. Unless each generation of Christians continues to preach the Gospel, the Church will die out in the next generation. Thus the ministry of evangelists is of vital importance to the future of the Church. Philip (Acts 8:5-8; 21:8) and Timothy (2 Tim. 4:5) were evangelists.

PASTORS

A pastor (Gk. *poimen*) is a shepherd of the sheep. Ephesians 4:11 is the only place in the New Testament where this word is translated “pastors” – elsewhere it is translated “shepherds”. The function of the shepherds is to care for, encourage, counsel (tend), protect and feed the sheep (Acts 20:28).

Notice that the word “pastors” is in the plural – in every church there should be a plurality of pastors (shepherds, elders) who tend the flock of God. The true shepherd cares for his sheep – if necessary being willing to lay down his life for them. The hireling, on the other hand, does not really care for the sheep, but may have wrong motives (e.g., monetary gain, prestige, etc.) and will protect himself rather than his sheep, when the wolf attacks (John 10:10-13).

TEACHERS

A teacher (Gk. *didaskolos*) is a person with the ability to instruct and teach the Word of God and the ways of God. Ezra 7:10 shows what a good teacher is like: one who sets their heart to study the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach it. Note the order: they study God’s Word first, then practise it, then teach it.

A teacher both teaches and disciples. To disciple a person, we have to get alongside them, to instruct, encourage, correct, etc. Jesus told His disciples not only to “preach the Gospel” but also to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). It is easy to preach at people, but it may have little effect. It is a lot harder to make disciples, but this is what God has commanded us to do.

Note that not every pastor is necessarily gifted as a teacher, and not every teacher may be an effective pastor. Too often one person tries to do both jobs but may not really be gifted at one or other. We need both pastors *and* teachers. God has given to the Church a plurality of ministries to be exercised through a group of gifted people, and the growth of the Church will be seriously stunted if these gifts are not fully used.

It will be apparent from the above that these five ministries are ministries of mature Christians –

elders. While it is right that younger people aspire to, and train towards, these ministries, they require maturity and experience, plus the gift and calling of God, if they are to be really effective.

How we need to pray that Jesus will increasingly give these gifts to the church today, that they will be free to exercise their gifts and ministries, and that the Body of Christ will be built up and edified to His glory.

QUESTIONS

1. Is the New Testament concept of an apostle the same as the present-day concept of a missionary?
 2. What is the difference between a prophet and a person who prophesies in a meeting?
 3. Is the present-day concept of a local church having only one pastor (minister), Biblical?
 4. It is common for one person in a church (the “minister” or “pastor”) to both pastor and teach. Is this Scriptural, and what are the disadvantages of it?
 5. Why does James say, “Let not many of you become teachers ...” (James 3:1)?
 6. What is the difference in emphasis between the terms: elder, bishop, overseer, pastor, shepherd?
-

13. UNITY IN THE CHURCH

In John 13:34-35 Jesus gave His disciples a new commandment: “that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Jesus was so concerned that this commandment be fulfilled that on the eve of His crucifixion He prayed “for those who are to believe in Me ... that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me, and I am in You, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.” (John 17:20-23).

Do Christians love one another in the same way as Jesus loves them? Does everyone know that we are Christians by the way we love each other? Are we *really* one — not just in theory, but in practice — in our day-by-day living? Does the world believe that the Father sent Jesus because this is the only explanation for our perfect unity and oneness? Tragically, and to our shame, we must answer “No”. We can spiritualize this and answer “Yes”, but if what we do in practice means anything at all, then we cannot help but admit that we fall far short of God’s desire for His people.

Hindrances to unity

The four greatest hindrances to unity are:

1. **Denominationalism:** We have allowed our denominations to separate us from other brothers and sisters in Christ. We build churches almost alongside each other, or just across the road from one another, and say to the world, in effect, “Come to us, not to them.”
2. **Traditions:** While some traditions may be all right in themselves, we have allowed them to divide us and hinder our fellowship with other Christians who differ in their traditions and backgrounds.
3. **Leadership:** We have preferred one leader to another; we follow one pastor but cannot stand another. Strong leadership, itself divided, has separated the flock into opposing folds. It is always

easier to join someone we get on well with, rather than, by God's grace, learning to love and work alongside someone with whom we find it difficult to work.

4. **Doctrine:** Doctrine, probably above all else, has split Christians and caused more division, bitterness, hatred, misunderstanding, broken fellowship and brought more disgrace to the Church than anything else. *We have exalted doctrine above love.* "The truth" (as we understand it!) has become more important than loving another brother or sister in Christ. Of course, we are not here referring to the division between Christians and non-Christians. The believer cannot, by virtue of his new nature, fellowship with the world, but one day in glory all Christians will worship together around the throne of God, so it is time we started getting together down here!

As we have seen in chapter 9, the only Biblical basis for division is that of geographical locality — the simple fact that we cannot normally fellowship with Christians who live a long way away from us.

Structure versus relationships

These studies have, on the whole, emphasized Church structure rather than relationships within the Church. Is Church structure important? The perfect structure will not work if people are not rightly related; *but* right relationships need God's structure in order to achieve the maximum for God's glory. So structure *and* relationships are both important. (cf. The parable of the wineskins in Matthew 9:17; old wineskins — and wrong structures — are no good, even though the new wine is all right.)

1 Corinthians 12:12-27 and Ephesians 4:11-16 emphasize the need for right relationships between members of the Body of Christ.

People matter most

In all our relationships within the Church, it is very important that we realize that *people matter most*. We can be so concerned with "our ministry", "our church", "our calling" that we have no time for people! We can use people in order to achieve things, instead of using things in order to help people. Jesus had compassion on *people*; He gave his life for *people* — not for things, not for doctrines, not for traditions, but for people.

Thus, somehow, we must love people and seek unity in the Spirit with all true believers, and yet at the same time seek to uphold the truths of God's Word and proclaim God's message to people who may not agree with us. We must "protect" the Church and stand firm on God's Word, while at the same time loving, helping and giving our lives for God's people. After all, *the Church is people – God's people!*

We must remember, too, that our relationships within the Church will only be a reflection of our relationships in other situations: husband/wife, parent/child, master/servant (Eph. 5:21-6:9).

The problem

How can we love and be united with people who differ from us in doctrine, etc?

We are called to love, and be one with, those who sincerely love the Lord and seek to be obedient to His Word. The Word of God is the inspired, authoritative basis on which we *must* base all our

discussions on doctrine, tradition, etc. We must not compromise truth — we must preach the truth as we see it in God’s Word and as He has revealed it to us — *but* we must not be divided from other believers who do not see it as we do. We can still break bread together, still pray together, worship together, love one another, and search the Scriptures together “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood. (Eph. 4:13). If we allow doctrines, traditions or anything else to divide us, then sectarianism (“party spirit”, Gal. 5:20), suspicion, rumour, gossip, and all sorts of other devilish things will arise and drive us further and further apart, and we will *divide* the Body of Christ, rather than *discern* the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 11:27-34). United we stand, divided we fall. No wonder Satan wants to divide the Kingdom of God! (Matt. 12:25)

Thus God’s Word gives the only basis for division in the Church as one of geographical or physical necessity. The local church (singular) exists and meets in order to meet the needs of all believers in that locality.

However, we not only need active local churches meeting in each locality, but from time to time we also need a coming together of God’s people on a greater scale in order to inspire, unite, teach, witness, worship, and stand together as a testimony to the whole community that we are one, and that we love one another because He first loved us!

QUESTIONS

1. Meditate on Psalm 133. What does this Psalm have to say about unity?
2. Is it significant that Ephesians 4 speaks of “the unity of the Spirit” (v. 3) *before* “the unity of the faith” (v. 13)? Is it possible to agree on doctrine before we are united in Spirit?
3. Why is love the greatest of the three abiding qualities (1 Cor. 13:13)?
4. In the first Century, non-Christians said, “Behold how these Christians love one another.” Have you ever heard anyone say it these days? Would it be true if they did say it?
5. True Biblical love and unity are fundamentally *practical* — they are not just theological concepts. Discuss how love and unity can be practised in the church.
6. What is the difference between unity and union? Is “church union” the same as God’s desire for unity between believers? Does unity mean uniformity, or does unity allow for diversity?
7. “The basis of unity is *fellowship* with one another, and with the Lord, in the Body of Christ.” Discuss this statement.

14. THE SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH

One has only to read the book of Acts to see that the early New Testament Church was a Spirit-filled Church.

The Church was started by a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon 120 believers on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). This life-transforming experience thrust the disciples out into the streets of Jerusalem with a dynamic, bold, powerful witness as to the reality of the living, resurrected, glorified Lord Jesus Christ. So powerful was their witness, and so convicting was the power of the Holy Spirit,

that 3000 people were converted that day, baptized in water, and received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:37-42). So the Church was established. The enthusiasm, joy, liberty and reality of the life of Christ in the believers had a powerful effect on those about them. As a result of signs and wonders, a demonstration of divine love, and the evidence of Spirit-filled lives, “the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). Later, 5000 people were converted (Acts 4:4). Still later, “more than ever, believers were added to the Lord – multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:14). Their secret? The early Church was a Spirit-filled, united Church that demonstrated the love and power of God to save, heal, deliver, baptize in the Holy Spirit, and meet every other need a person may have (Acts 4:29-35).

The New Testament Church was a charismatic Church in the fullest sense of the word – it *demonstrated* all the gifts (charisma) of the ascended Christ and His Holy Spirit. It *practised* unity, and as a result God blessed it as He had promised (Ps. 133:1-3). Of course, not everything that was done was perfect – the early Church had its problems. The Church will never be any more perfect than the people of which it is made up, *but* their hearts were right, they desired to do God’s will, to worship Him, to love Him, to serve Him, to witness for Him, and so God moved in great power and with great blessing.

Marks of the Early Church

The New Testament Church was marked by a number of characteristics which are sadly lacking in many churches today.

- 1. Authority and power:** The New Testament Church exercised the authority given to them by Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Their ministry of deliverance to those who were demon-possessed, or bound in other ways, was one practical demonstration of this power. They had an *anointed ministry*.
- 2. Gifts of the Holy Spirit:** The New Testament Church was a charismatic (gifted) Church. Examples of all nine gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, and all five ministries in Ephesians 4:11 can be found in the New Testament. They exercised these gifts of the Spirit as an integral part of their overall witness and ministry.
- 3. Dynamic evangelism:** Evangelism was the spontaneous overflow of Spirit-filled lives – and it had amazing results! Evangelism was *primary* and *central* to the functioning of the early Church – without it the Church would have died – but worse, without it multitudes would have died in their sins. If the Church ever neglects outreach and evangelism it will become introverted and will destroy itself by internal strife and schisms. Only constant outreach will bring constant life, vitality and freshness of the Church.
- 4. Ministry in Spirit and Truth, bringing Life and Liberty:** The early Church ministered the Truth in the Spirit – the letter kills, but the Spirit brings life and liberty (Luke 4:18-19; John 4:23-24; 2 Cor. 3:6, 17). The early Church was filled with joy, liberty and love – filled with the Holy Spirit.

Keys to the Spirit-filled Church

- 1. Prayer:** “All these, with one accord, devoted themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14). We need to intercede for Spirit-filled churches in our land.
- 2. The fulness of the Holy Spirit:** “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4). We need to pray and earnestly desire that every Christian will be filled with the Holy Spirit. With this

baptism comes the power to be an effective, fruitful witness to Jesus Christ (Acts 1:5, 8).

3. **Repentance:** “Repent, therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, and times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). Christians and churches need to repent of their sins, their backsliding, apathy, loss of their first love, etc., and get right with God. *We are not what we should be!* Therefore we need to repent and turn back again to what God desires His Church to be.
4. **Unity:** “The company of those who believed were of one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32), and as a result they witnessed with great power; great grace was upon them all, and there was not a needy person among them (Acts 4:33-35). “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! ... For there the Lord has commanded the blessing – LIFE for evermore” (Ps. 133:1, 3).
5. **Witness:** “Every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42). A bold witness led to rapid growth of the new Church until they were accused, by unbelievers, of “turning the world upside down” (Acts 17:6).

Life in the Spirit

In the New Testament we are encouraged or commanded to:

1. Witness in the Spirit (Acts 6:10)
2. Be led by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14)
3. Be aglow with the Spirit (Rom. 12:11)
4. Be sanctified by the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:11)
5. Minister in the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4-7)
6. Exercise the gifts of the Spirits (1 Cor. 14:1)
7. Sing with the Spirit (1 Cor. 14:15)
8. Walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16)
9. Bring forth the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)
10. Live by the Spirit (Gal. 5:25)
11. Maintain the unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3)
12. Pray in the Spirit (Jude 20)

Ephesians 5:18 sums this all up in one command: “Be continually filled with the Holy Spirit.” This is expected of *every* Christian. Not only are deacons and elders to be Spirit-filled (Acts 6:3, 5) but *all* Christians are to be Spirit-filled: “In the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out My Spirit upon *all flesh* ... The promise is to you and to your children and to all that are afar off, *everyone* whom the Lord our God calls to Him” (Acts 2:17, 38-39).

Conclusion

If the problems and needs of today’s world are to be met and overcome, then it can only come about as a result of evangelism and revival in and through Spirit-filled churches. Spirit-filled churches, filled with the love of God, free in God and not bound by traditions, will bring about the revival for which we all long. We have seen thousands of individuals filled with the Spirit, but God desires *more* – a corporate, Spirit-filled Church – a Bride prepared for the coming Bridegroom.

“Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation ... These signs will accompany those who believe: in My Name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the

sick and they will recover. ... And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it. Amen.” (Mark 16:15, 17, 18, 20). *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”* (Rev. 2:11).

QUESTIONS

1. What is a Spirit-filled church? Do such churches exist?
 2. All ministry should be in SPIRIT and in TRUTH, bringing LIFE and LIBERTY. Discuss the importance of these four aspects of all Christian ministry.
 3. To what extent can, or should, the Church today be patterned on the early Church as described in the New Testament?
 4. Will the latter rain exceed the former rain? (James 5:7; cf. Joel 2:23-32)
 5. Recognising the lacks there are in the church today, what can we do about it?
 6. Can new wine be put into old wineskins (Matt. 9:17)?
-

15. SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Church should be demonstrating the power of God on earth, destroying all the powers of darkness, and being a light in a dark and dying world.

Chapter 2: “I will build My Church ...”

The Church is the Church of Jesus Christ and should be built according to His directions and plans, not according to our ideas, traditions, etc. There is no place for denominationalism in His Church.

Chapter 3: Types of the Church

A number of different types or illustrations of what the Church is like, occur in the Bible; the principal three are a Building, a Bride, and a Body.

Chapter 4: The Church: The Building of Christ

The Church is like a Building which Jesus, the Master-Builder, is building according to His plan. We must ensure that we follow and fit into His plan, rather than our own ideas or traditions.

Chapter 5: The Church: The Bride of Christ

The Church is to be like a Bride – pure, true, and faithful to her Bridegroom. She must repent of all unfaithfulness and backslidings.

Chapter 6: The Church: The Body of Christ

The Church as a Body emphasizes its unity and inter-dependence of all members of the Body. We are all needed and should all be exercising our God-given ministries in order to build up the Body.

Chapter 7: Body ministry

Rather than being a one-man-band, led and dictated to by one man, the Church should function as a many-membered Body, each member pulling his weight and fulfilling his ministry. We are all “priests” to our God.

Chapter 8: Finding your ministry

Each Christian should seek to find out in what capacity they should serve and minister in the Church.

Chapter 9: The Church and the churches

The Church is spoken of in the Bible in three ways – the universal church, local churches (one church in each geographical locality), and the church in a believer’s house. Denominations, traditions, doctrines and leadership are *not* Biblical reasons for dividing the churches from each other.

Chapter 10: Fellowship

Christians are to have fellowship both with God and with one another. True fellowship involves the sharing of our lives with one another in every sense of the word – spiritual, social, material, financial, etc.

Chapter 11: Deacons and elders

In a local church there are the saints (church members), deacons and elders. Deacons manage or administer material affairs in the church; elders are the spiritual leaders. A “clergy/laity” hierarchy is completely un-Scriptural. In every local church the authority resides in a corporate plural eldership, the elders being co-equal in authority, rather than a one-man leadership.

Chapter 12: Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers

These are gifted people, given to the church to perfect and equip the saints, and to build up the Body of Christ.

Chapter 13: Unity in the Church

All born-again Christians should be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and demonstrate to the world that they are Christians by their divine love for one another.

Chapter 14: The Spirit-filled Church

God’s desire is not only for individual Spirit-filled Christians, but for churches which are filled with His Spirit and which demonstrate the power and authority of God to a lost and needy world.

FOOTNOTE:

The Bible speaks a lot about the *Kingdom of God*, and the *Kingdom of Heaven*. The Church, worldwide, both now and in the past, is all part of God’s Kingdom. But the Kingdom of God is wider than just the Church. It includes the angelic realm, and what God is doing in the world at large. It also includes the age to come, when God creates the new Earth and all true believers dwell with the Lord forever.

Much, much more could be said about the Kingdom of God, but that is a whole new subject in itself!

OTHER BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

“WHAT NEXT? & EVER BEEN CHEATED?” What is a Christian? Are we being cheated out of salvation?

- “NOW I’M A CHRISTIAN — WHAT NEXT?”** A follow-up manual for new Christians on the basics of the Christian life.
- “DISCIPLESHIP”** What it means to be a disciple (follower) of Jesus Christ.
- “JESUS’ SERMON ON THE MOUNT”** Studies on Jesus’ teaching in Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7,
- “THE BRIDEGROOM AND HIS BRIDE”** Studies on Jesus Christ and His Bride, the Church.
- “JESUS CHRIST – SON OF GOD, SON OF MAN”** The deity and humanity of Jesus Christ (the Messiah)
- “ACTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT THROUGH THE APOSTLES”** Studies on the book of Acts, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and its relevance today.
- “ARE YOU ENJOYING THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE?”** Studies on how to be filled with the Holy Spirit and receive the gifts of the Spirit.
- “LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY” (Parts 1 and 2)** Studies on prayer and intercession.
- “PRAY FOR THE NATION!”** Praying for cities and nations.
- “SPEAK, LORD”** How God speaks to us and guides us.
- “THE CHURCH”** Studies on the nature, structure and functioning of the Church.
- “PRINCIPLES OF REVIVAL”** Studies on the Biblical principles of revival.
- “PRINCIPLES OF EVANGELISM”** Studies on ways of sharing the Gospel with others.
- “SPIRITUAL WARFARE THROUGH INTERCESSION”** Intercession and intercessory prayer groups as part of the spiritual warfare in which Christians are called to engage.
- “SOLDIERS OF CHRIST – ARISE!”** Studies which encourage Christians to live victorious, triumphant lives.
- “HOLINESS”** Studies on the meaning and practice of holiness in the Christian life.
- “LET THE PROPHETS SPEAK”** Studies from the books of Joel, Haggai and Revelation (chapters 1-5)
- “18 PILLARS OF PRAYER”** 18 key things we should pray about.
- “HIS NAME IS JESUS”** Who Jesus is, and why He came to earth.

The above books are available from:

PRAY FOR THE NATION, 105 Woodman Drive, Tawa, Wellington 5028, NEW ZEALAND