

1 Corinthians - Commentaries by John Brereton

Conference: 1977, Ye Are Sanctified (6:9)

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I would like to turn to Leviticus. Chapter 20. Leviticus, chapter 20. And verse 22. You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my judgments, and do them. Back the land, whether I bring you to dwell therein. Spew you not out. And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation which I cast out before you. For they committed all these things. And therefore I abhorred them. But I have said unto you, He shall inherit their land. And I will give it under you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey. I am the Lord your God, which have separated you from other people. Ye shall therefore put difference between clean beasts and unclean, and between unclean fowls and clean. And ye shall not make your souls abominable by beasts, or by fowl, or by any manner of living thing that creepeth on the ground. Which I have separated from you as unclean. And ye shall be holy unto me. For I, the Lord, I'm holy and have severed you from other people. That ye should be mine. Just a few comments, dear young people, in connection with this portion before we turn to that which is particularly upon my heart. Many of us who are older often heard in these very meetings the comment made. That the moral ways of God do not change with dispensations. And we find here in the book of Leviticus. After. Very detailed instruction concerning that which was evil. And the sight of the Lord. The children of Israel were reminded. That they had been separated. The nations around them. That even though they had been brought into the land. Where those nations had dwelt. The language of the scripture in the 23rd verse is Ye shall not walk in the manners. Of the nation. Which I cast out before you, for they committed all these things. Beloved young people. You and I that belong to Christ. We live in the midst of a people, of a nation, of a world. That indeed does practice. All the things. That God's word so specifically. That God's word, so definitely. Chose to be sin in the sight of God. Many of these things are spoken of openly. In our schools today. Many of them. Are discussed openly in classes. We find students in school today being given instruction. On how to avoid the consequences. Of sinful practices. But in every case. That I have heard of. The reference is always to escaping. The consequences? The diminishing degree of shame.

In the sight of men. Without any thought. As to the fact. That it is God with whom we have to do. Israel was reminded beloved young people that they were not to follow the manners of the nation. They were minded. In the 24th verse. I am the Lord your God, which has separated you. From other people. I'm speaking now, dear young people, to those who have belonged to Christ. And you have been separated. By God. From the rest of the world. You are. One of God's chosen children. And he? Gives us here very clearly to see that he is the one who has separated you. The end of the 26th verse. After telling them that they were to make a difference. As far as the unsaved man, the unconverted man is concerned. There is not much difference, and today there is a diminishing difference between the clean and the unclean. But God calls upon you and I to make a difference. Make a difference between the Queen and the unclean. And then he finally says, And ye shall be holy unto me. By the Lord am holy. And have severed you from other people. That ye should be mine. Now, beloved young people. I cannot, and I'm sure you cannot conceive of anything more sweet, more precious. Than to have the Lord of glory say to you and to me, you are mine. You online, I have severed you from the nation. From that land, the people in the land, several of you from those around you, are mine. Now I would like to turn to the New Testament First Corinthians chapter 6. And by God's grace, I would like us to see. That we are not only given to see, marvelous as it is, that we now belong to another. But there are seven reasons given. Why? Beloved young people, why? You. That belong to Christ are different. From those in the world. First Corinthians chapter 6, and we'll begin reading at the ninth verse. Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God? Be not deceived neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind. Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the Kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats. But God shall destroy or bring to nothing both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. Knowing not that your bodies are the members of Christ. Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? For two saith, he shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is 1 spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body, but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God. In your body. We find, as was mentioned in the meeting this morning. That there is a reminder. To our hearts, to each one of us. Such were some of you. And while we may read some of the descriptions that are given here and say, well, that particular word does not apply to me, yet there is a reminder to all our hearts, dear young people. That it cost God an infinite price in order that all that you and I were guilty of might be put away from before the sight of God. And we must ever, and I trust we do ever, have in our hearts the reminder. That there is not one of us that can point to anyone. Of these things mentioned here. Or any others that you might care to add to the list. And say that it is by my own strength, by my own power, by my own diligence. That I am not guilty today. There is not one sin listed here. Not one. That you and I could not be guilty of, but by the grace of God keeping us. But we do find that in this portion of First Corinthians chapter 6. God is leading by His Spirit up to a very simple statement. Glorify God in your body. The words here and in your spirit. Which are gods I understand are not in the original. The subject is the body. And beloved young people, God has given us seven reasons here that I would like to look at very briefly. Why your body? And my body is to be that which is so involved in the glory of God, in glorifying God. You notice it says. In the 11th verse such were some of you, but ye are washed. Now that is not true of anyone here. That is not the Lord. If you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, you are not washed. You need the precious blood of Christ, as we heard last night. But for those who belong to Christ, dear young people, you are washed. The precious blood of Christ has been applied to you, and all your guilt has been forever. Removed from before God. By the application of the precious blood of Christ. And so today, that body.

That God claims for his glory. He lets us know that first of all. First of all. Before there can be any use of the body for the glory of God. It is necessary that you be washed. Do you belong to Christ? Do you do, young people? Is he your ward? Then you are what? And that first vital step. That first vital matter has been settled forever as a result of the work of Christ at Calvary. But then it says, But ye are sanctified. Sanctification in scripture is used. In different ways at times. But here we have that which is vital. Not only are you beloved young people washed, but you have been set apart. Set apart. You remember how? In Leviticus chapter 20. It said I have severed you. Here it says you are sanctified, set apart, put into a class. Of people by the Spirit of God. Who belong to God. All beloved young people, is it not a most wonderful thing to know that you're washed and when you go to school on Monday morning or Tuesday morning? When the world around you picks up its practices. When it looks and speaks and acts. I know that which was so evil in the sight of God was nothing at all. Where such things as moral evil. Fornication is looked upon as that. Which in the 1970s is now acceptable in the world. That you sit there in that plaster, young people, that you're in the office where you are or at home where you are, and you know. That you are different. You have been washed by the precious blood of Christ. You have been sanctified, set apart in that class of 30 students. If you're the only believer in that class, you are set apart. You are not one with the others. Separated, sanctified, set apart for God. And then it says thirdly. And justify. Justify, Beloved young people, do you and I rejoice today in the realization that God has given us in Christ a life to which no manner of sin has ever been attacked? That you and I now, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, are seen by God. Before his eye in Christ we are seen as those who have the life of Christ. We have a life given to us of God, not only that does not sin, but that cannot sin. A life, beloved young people, to which sin has never been attacked. The life of Christ. God looks at you and I. And in that Newman. In that new creation that we've been hearing about, that new creature that you are now in Christ Jesus, that new life, that new person, God says of him. God says of her, He not only does not sin, but he cannot sin. He is born of God here it says.

Washed, sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus. And by the Spirit of our God, all beloved young people, you and I now, as those who are washed, sanctified and justified, are identified with the name of the Lord Jesus, by the name of the Lord Jesus. We bear his name. We are identified with him. And as a result of the activity of the Spirit of God. All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any meats for the belly, and the belly for meats, but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by His own power. Now I'm sure that you and I realize that the Apostle Paul is not suggesting here that any manner of practice, sinful or not, is acceptable, is lawful. That is not the thought. The apostle here is Speaking of those things that. The word of God would not condemn. But that he would avoid at times because they were not profitable. They didn't produce profit. And then he goes on to show us beloved young people in the simplest of language. That we have not been left here to please ourselves. Makes for the belly and the belly for meats. It isn't just a question of saying, well, I like that, so I'm going to do it. It isn't simply a question of saying, well, that's what a piece appeals to me, so I'm going to practice it. He goes on to say the now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord. Oh beloved young people here, can I use the word number four? Reason #4 exhortation #4. That is addressed to us. First, you'll wash. Second, you're sanctified. 3rd you are justified. And now the reminder that you were given a body. And that body has appetites, it has desires that God recognizes. But you have not been given a body in order to simply please yourself. The body is for the Lord, The body is for the Lord. Beloved young people, that body that has been given to you is for the more. It was given to you in order. That it might be used. Glorify God not to satisfy your own desire or for me. And then it goes on to say, And to my own soul, it's most precious when it says. But for the Lord and the Lord for the body, the Lord for the body, we may feel sometimes beloved young people. That that which the flesh seeks after that which the body seeks for itself will satisfy. Will satisfy. We reach out for it just like Eve reached out for the fruit on the tree. Only to find out that not only is the body for the Lord. But only the Lord can truly satisfy the desires of your heart. Only the Lord can truly meet the longings of your heart and mind. And it goes on to say, and to my own soul, it's a most solemn reminder. It goes on to say, And God hath both raised up the Lord. And will also raise up us by his own power.

Beloved young people, do you realize that that body that has been given to you, that that body is going to be taken into heaven? Now it's going to be changed. It's going to be changed. He's going to change these bodies of humiliation and fashion them like unto his body of glory. But remember the language here. God has raised up the Lord Jesus and He's going to raise up us. Raise up us by His own power, and I'm going to enter into glory with a changed body. But it will still be a body. A body, dear, beloved young people, a body that had been changed, but a body that was designed and fashioned for the Lord. And whose true desires only the Lord can satisfy. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? How precious it is for us to know. That we are so closely identified with the Christ of God. That we are reminded here that our bodies are members of Christ. Our beloved young people, this hand. Is a member of my body, it's a member of Maine. It is part of me. And we are reminded here. In this 5th exhortation. That our bodies are members of Christ. That that body that you have is identified with Christ in the nearness relationship, possible a member of Christ. And then the beloved apostle. Has to say, shall I then take the members of Christ and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. Oh, beloved brethren, some may feel this is very plain language being spoken today. Our young people face terrible temptations in school and at work. They face situations today that I knew nothing about and I haven't been out of school that long. I hear today of things that are as I mentioned earlier. That are treated so casually. Discussed so openly. Fools make mark of sin and beloved young people. You are a member of Christ. Can that which is a member of Christ? They joined with that which is a harm. This is the language that you use here. Know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? For two said He shall be one flesh, but he that is joined unto the Lord. Is 1 spirit. Now I should mention that Spirit in this verse should be kiss felt with a capital S. It is the Holy Spirit that is in view. Join to the Lord is 1 spirit. We are beloved brethren, dear, beloved young people. We are joined to the Lord by the Spirit of God as you sit in that classroom on Monday or Tuesday morning. As you hear the discussions, as you hear the stories. As you hear the fools making mock of sin. May the Lord give us beloved young people to recognize. That we are washed. Sanctified and justified. May the Lord give us to see. That these bodies that have been given to us are not to please ourselves, but are for the Lord. And that only the Lord can truly satisfy the heart. May we be conscious, beloved young people, that we are members of Christ, members of Christ. Oh, beloved young people, does it not seem? Appalling. Does it not seem almost impossible? To think of that which is fornication.

And those who are members of Christ. Being involved with it. I trust we will always keep that horror. And yet, beloved young people, bear with it, and I trust and I pray that my brethren will pray for me. That we will always have the conscious sense in our souls. That there is nothing that I am incapable of doing. Apart from denying the Lord Jesus from my heart. Apart from the keeping grace of God. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body, but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What know ye not that your body? Is the Temple of the Holy Ghost. Which is in you. Which ye have of God. Number six in the exhortation. Number six. In this reminder, beloved young people. Your body individually because you belong to Christ. Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost of the Holy Spirit. God dwells in you by His Spirit in your body. In your body. Can anything be more? Solemn. Than to think of that which is the temple. Of the Holy

Spirit. Being used. Being used in that. Relationship. And is so sinful in the sight of God. Your body is the Temple of the Holy Ghost, beloved young people. God has in his wondrous grace. Not only redeemed you, but taken up His dwelling in you. By His Spirit. You have not only been redeemed, but you have been made a member of Christ. And lastly. Ye are not your own. For ye have been locked with a price. All beloved young Saints of God. To think that you have been purchased. Set a Calvary Cross. A price was paid. A price that we cannot measure, but nevertheless a price that was measured out. To God's beloved Son of hell. And at the cost of his life, at the cost of all the Calvary meant to his holy soul, the Lord Jesus paid the price. That you and I might belong to him. May God keep us, dear young people. It is a corrupt world in which we live. It is a world in which not only is corruption seeing, but it's accepted. Not only is immorality practice, but it is preached. Not only. Is that? Wickedness. Of fornication scene in our school. But it is made the subject of foolish talk and jesting. And here, in the most solemn of language, we are shown how entirely foreign it is to one. Who is Wash sanctified? Justify. Given a body that is for the Lord, made a member of Christ, give it a body that is the temple of the Holy Ghost.

And beloved young people that has been purchased, who has been purchased by such a cost, We are not our own. We've been bought with a price then it says glorify God. In your body, beloved young people, may the Lord keep us each one. That only that which is for the glory of God. Will be practiced by these bodies of ours.

The Divine Ground of Gathering, Part 3 (10:15-21)

I would like to turn to John 4. We have followed over a period of approximately one thousand years through the Old Testament that testimony which God established at Jerusalem, which was characterized by the Lord's name being there. It was a place for worship, a place where binding decisions could be rendered for God's people, and where prayer could be made collectively in connection with what God had raised up at Jerusalem.

We found that this testimony was maintained in spite of weakness and failure, and how those who were there at Jerusalem in Ezra's time offered a sacrifice on behalf of all Israel, showing before God that they still recognized that they were one nation, made up of twelve tribes. Then we found that some five hundred years later, at Jerusalem, there was still a feeble company who recognized that God's center was there. We see Mary and Joseph going up to Jerusalem to present Jesus before the Lord. We find Simeon, Anna, Zacharias and Elizabeth, and we find, lastly, in that little picture that is given to us in connection with the Lord Jesus at twelve years of age, that in departing from Jerusalem, God's center, they left the Lord behind. Only by returning to Jerusalem could they once again be found where the Lord was in the midst.

But that Old Testament history, given to us of God for our learning, finds a conclusion in one sense here in John 4:20-23:

"Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him."

We find here that God has not given up His desire for worshippers. It specifically tells us, "For the Father seeketh such to worship Him," but it was no longer to be at Jerusalem. The Lord Jesus says, "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth," and, "The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." So we find that having gone through the many passages referred to in the Old Testament and in having gathered many principles that will be of vital importance in instructing us — in directing our search in the New Testament, the fact remains that Jerusalem as the center, where the Lord's name was placed, is set aside. The place where the people were to go as worshippers, where prayer was to be directed to and where binding decisions were to be sought was no longer to be at Jerusalem. Jerusalem was to be set aside. "But the hour cometh, and now is" when it was not to be at Jerusalem. God was going to introduce that which would supersede Jerusalem, where many of the very same principles that we have already noticed would apply, where God would still have a people that He would gather around Himself in the Person of the Son, and where the Lord Jesus would have those who would be the joy of His heart gathered around Himself, but not at a geographical place like Jerusalem.

Please turn now to Matthew 16:13-18:

"When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? And they said, Some say that Thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto Him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Before we consider this passage, I would like to comment on the expression "the church." The word "church" simply means "assembly." It never refers to a building. It never refers to some peculiar denomination of professing believers. It is the assembly. In some instances in the Word of God it is the assembly made up of every believer on the face of the earth — the body of Christ — the assembly. In other instances it refers to the local expression of that company, that is, the local assembly. We read about the churches or assemblies in Galatia, for instance. This refers to those local gatherings of the children of God, gathered scripturally according to the mind of God, who act in their local gatherings on behalf of the one body of Christ.

Not so very long ago a servant of Christ met an ordained minister whom he knew was a child of God, and this man asked our brother, "What church do you belong to?" The answer he gave, I thought, was an exceedingly wise one. He said, "Brother, I belong to the same church that you do." After the man got over his initial surprise, he suddenly said, "Oh, I see what you mean. You're talking about the church in the broad sense." Our brother's answer to that was, "No, I'm talking about the church in the only sense in which the Word of God talks of the church."

When the Lord Jesus speaks here and says, “Upon this rock I will build My church,” that refers to the assembly, made up of every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ on the face of this earth. He was about to build something new that had never existed in the world before — the assembly. Now we find here in Matthew 16 that which corresponds in the New Testament to what we found in Genesis 22 in the Old Testament. We find brought before us here, in the most lovely way, the Father and the Son. We find Peter confessing Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. We find the Lord Jesus confessing the Father. He says, “Flesh and blood have not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven.” As in Genesis 22, we had the Father and the Son, so here we have the Father and the Son. In Genesis 22 we had the man of faith, in the person of Abraham, who acted on that which had been revealed to him. He acted on the revelation, “In Isaac shall thy seed be called.” Here we have the man of faith in Peter, who acts upon the revelation that was made to him, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Lastly, in Genesis 22 we found that God had a place. God was about to establish upon that Mount Moriah that which would bear His name and where He would have His people to go. Here we find that the Lord Jesus speaks of that which He is soon to establish — “I will build My church.”

When we go back into the principles of the Old Testament, we find that God has written for our learning that which we see confirmed in the New Testament, that God still presents to us the Father and the Son and the wondrous relationship between them as they both went to Calvary for the Son to be offered up in sacrifice. We see in the New Testament it is still a matter of faith, acting on the revelation that God has given, but that there is to be, raised up of God, built by the Lord Jesus Christ, His church here in this world, which would replace Judaism and Jerusalem.

Now He tells us in Matthew 18 something further concerning this church or assembly. Matthew 18:15-20:

“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.”

You will recall that in Deuteronomy 16 we were told that in the event of sin being introduced among God’s people, at the mouth of two or three witnesses it was to be dealt with, and the one who was guilty was to be expelled. He was, in the case of Israel, to be stoned. We find here in Matthew 18 that again the principle applies: “In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.”

We found back in Deuteronomy 17 that in the event of difficulties that they could not answer, they were to go to the place where the Lord had set His name, and there they would be given that decision which was to be binding upon them and they were to act accordingly.

Here we find that the Word of God says, “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” The same principle, the same direction, the same order, but now it was to be the assembly that was to render that government which was then to be binding because it was ratified in heaven.

Also, we noticed in 1 Kings 8 how that prayer was connected with the temple which was built at Jerusalem. When prayer was directed towards God’s center at Jerusalem, they were to recognize collectively, even in prayer, that God’s center was there. Now we find, again, prayer connected with the assembly, for it says, “That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven.”

Lastly, we noticed that in connection with the place, established of God, the name of the Lord was there. He chose to place His name there. Now we find the Word of God again picks up this account in the New Testament and it says, “Where two or three are gathered together in [or a better rendering is ‘unto’] My name.” Nothing has changed — “unto My name.” Prayer is still connected, binding decisions are still connected, and, above all, worship, where His own are brought together, but no temple. There is nothing that the eye can see physically, but a promise given by the Lord Jesus Himself that “where two or three are gathered together [unto] My name, there am I in the midst of them.” No temple, no choir, no ordained priesthood, no fancy services, but the promised presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst!

Now let’s go back for a moment in our thoughts to what we had in the Old Testament. We found there that God had chosen the place, and Israel was expressly forbidden to do that which was right in their own eyes. Instead, they were given specific instructions that they were to recognize where He chose to put His name. Now He tells us that His name is again to be identified with that place where two or three are to be gathered together. We notice, too, that it doesn’t make any reference here simply to gathering themselves together. Abraham, in Genesis 22, was given specific direction, and he was led as God directed him to that place of God’s choice. Here we are told, “Are gathered together [unto] My name.”

Now, let us go back again to Israel’s history for a moment. Jeroboam didn’t like the idea of the one center at Jerusalem, so he established his own, and he invited the children of Israel to go to the centers that he had established. God gives us to see over and over again that those centers Jeroboam established not only did not have His approval when they were established, but one hundred years later they still didn’t have His approval. The passage of time has changed nothing. God’s center was at Jerusalem, and now we are told that God again has a center. It is not a geographical place, but, nevertheless, a center where “two or three are gathered together [unto] My name, there am I in the midst of them.”

What does it mean to be gathered to His name? Well, obviously, the first thing is that it sets aside every other name so that we are to refuse to come together in any other name or to be identified by any other name but the precious name of Jesus. We are to come together, gathered by the Spirit of God, to the name of the Lord Jesus, laying hold of His promise by faith, “There am I in the midst of them.” When Abraham followed the directions, led along step by step by the leading of God in Genesis 22, he was led to the place where he found the “ram caught in a thicket by his horns.” Here we are told that we, too, led by the Spirit of God, gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, will find that He is there in the midst of the two or three thus gathered.

Now I would like you to turn to Acts 2:14,41-42:

“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

We find now that that which the Lord Jesus had spoken of in Matthew 16 is now an accomplished fact. Again, the parallel in the Old Testament to my own soul is marvelous. That which the Lord had presented in principle in Genesis 22 found its fulfillment when Solomon had built his temple and there was a place where the Lord had set His name. Matthew 16 told us that He was going to build His church. Matthew 18 told us those things which would characterize it, and now Acts 2 reveals to us that it has now taken place. The Spirit of God has come. That rushing, mighty wind was the symbol of the Spirit of God, which had come into the world to live as a divine Person upon the earth. The result was that on that day something was created that had never existed on the earth before — the body of Christ, made up of all of the believers indwelt by the Spirit of God. These believers went out and preached the gospel that day and three thousand souls were saved.

It is remarkable how God again brings before us this number “three.” Three thousand souls were saved. It says, “The same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”

What were these three thousand souls going to do? The Word of God brings before us the three things in which they continued: (1) the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, that is, the truth they had received from the apostles, (2) the breaking of bread, that precious remembrance supper that the Lord had instituted while He was here on earth, and (3) prayer. “They continued steadfastly”!

Brethren, what did they join? What organization did they join? If you look at verses 46-47 for a moment, it says, “And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

Who added them to the church or the assembly? The Lord did. That day there were three thousand added. They had nothing to join; they had already been joined by the Lord. They didn’t have to inscribe their names on some register. They had already been added to that which God had raised up.

We see the most simple, precious outline of the truth here at the very beginning. Those who were saved, who were added to the church (the assembly), simply went on together in those three things that were to be the characteristics of where the Lord had placed His name — godly order, worship and prayer.

Turn now to 1 Corinthians 12:12-13:

“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”

We have the explanation here of what took place on the day of Pentecost. I have no doubt that if you had asked Peter that day the significance of what had happened, all he would have been able to say was, “It was the promise of the Father — the Holy Spirit is come that He might be with us and in us.” The Lord had told him that.

But now the Apostle Paul is used to reveal the significance of what happened on that day of Pentecost. “By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.” It was not that they were not believers before. It is not that they were not saved, but they had not been put together into one body. For that to happen, the Spirit of God had to come, and that had to wait for the day of Pentecost. But now we are told that on that day, one body was formed, and by God’s wondrous grace, the Spirit of God not only joined all believers together into one body, but He also joined us to the Head, which is in heaven — the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why it says here in 1 Corinthians 12, “As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.” This means that the body has a name and that name is Christ. Isn’t that a marvelous thing?

You remember how it says of Adam and Eve that God looked upon them and “called their name Adam.” Eve was so closely identified with Adam that she took his name. Here we find the body is identified with the Head. The Head is in heaven and the body here on earth. So closely are you and I identified with our Head in heaven, so much is the body one with the Head, that the Word of God gives the Head and the body one name. That name is Christ. “So also is Christ.” “By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.”

Do you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you believed the gospel of your salvation? If you have, then the Word of God says you are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. That moment that you accepted Christ as your Saviour and believed the gospel of your salvation, the Spirit of God came to dwell in you. You were sealed by the indwelling of the Spirit of God, and at the same moment you were made part of the body of Christ. By the indwelling of the Spirit of God, you were brought into that which was formed on the day of Pentecost, and if you belong to Christ, the Spirit dwells in you and forms a divine link, which links you, not only with every other believer on the face of the earth, but with your Head who is in heaven.

Let us go on to 1 Corinthians 12:25-27:

“That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.”

Do you recall that we read back in Deuteronomy 16 how Israel was instructed that they were to have a care one for another? God's eye was upon them, and they were to see to it that they provided for one another, and this care was to characterize them as one nation. Here we find that the Lord speaks of the same thing. It is not one nation now but one body, and as members one of another we are called upon to have that care one for another.

Ephesians 4:14:

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling."

What took place on the day of Pentecost was the formation of the body of Christ. Now we are told that it isn't simply that there was one body, but there is one body. Today, it is just as true as it was on the day of Pentecost: "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling."

On the day of Pentecost, the believers were all together, with one accord, in one place, but their all being together did not make them into one body. The three thousand were not made members of the one body of Christ because they went on with the others. They were made part of the body of Christ by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and on the day of Pentecost when a soul was saved, he was indwelt with the Spirit of God, and when a soul is saved today, he is indwelt by the same Spirit of God. On the day of Pentecost the saved soul was added to the assembly and the soul that is saved today is immediately added to God's assembly by the Spirit of God. Nothing has changed. As far as God is concerned and as far as that which is vital is concerned, there is still one body and one Spirit.

When you and I look around today, we see very little outward evidence that there is one body, but there is one body. The Spirit of God has maintained that which He formed on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit of God has not been fragmented. The Spirit of God has not had His work demolished by man's frailty and man's failure. What He formed still exists, but the Word of God says, "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Endeavoring to keep it. God has formed by His Spirit the unity of the body and it is unbreakable. But the unity of the Spirit —that which is to represent before this world that the one body of Christ is a reality — is sadly fragmented today.

The fact that the testimony to the truth of the one body of Christ that God intended to be seen in this world is so broken up does not in any way set aside your responsibility and mine to endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Please turn to 1 Corinthians 10:15-21:

"I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What say I then? that the idol is anything, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is anything? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils [or demons]."

God has formed this body by His Spirit. We are instructed to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit, that is, to act in such a way in our relationships one with another as to conform scripturally to the truth of that which God has formed by His Spirit. God has formed one body, and in endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit, we want to act in such a way as to show out that there is one body formed by the Spirit of God.

One of the ways, indeed the principal way, that God has given to His people to manifest that there is one body is in believers' all partaking of the one loaf. We find in 1 Corinthians 10 that "the cup of blessing which we bless . . . the communion of the blood of Christ" is mentioned first because, before we can take the step that would bring us to the Lord's table, we need to know the ground for our acceptance there, and that is the precious blood of Christ. By being saved through the precious blood of Christ, we are indwelt with the Holy Spirit. By being indwelt with the Holy Spirit, we are made members of the body of Christ, and by being members of the body of Christ, our place is at the Lord's table.

We next read of the body: "The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread." There in that loaf every member of the body of Christ is represented — one loaf, one body! We look at that loaf on Lord's Day morning, and what we see there is the symbol that God has given to us to represent what God has formed by His Spirit: the one body of Christ.

We read further in verse 17, "We being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread" — one bread, one loaf! At Corinth they partook of one loaf! But what about today? How many places will there be next Lord's Day in this city where there will be a loaf and a glass of wine on the table? And in many of these companies the claim will be made "that we are gathered unto the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." They will claim that it is the Lord's table and that they are showing forth that there is one body. The Word of God, however, states in the strongest possible language that only by partaking of one loaf — not a dozen loaves or twenty or fifty, but one loaf — can we express that we are all members of one body.

Now, very obviously, it isn't a question of everyone trying to get into one building. Someone might say, "How could you get every believer in the city together into one building?" Brethren, that's not the difficulty. The difficulty is that so many partake of different loaves. It cannot be that two companies can partake of two loaves, independent one of the other, and both express the truth that there is one body.

One body, one loaf.

We being many are one bread

In 1 Corinthians 10, we read of the Lord's table — not tables — and at the Lord's table, gathered scripturally, we partake there in fellowship with the Lord at His table. There we have fellowship with Him. Now we also read about the tables of demons. The reference here is to Deuteronomy 32. The suggestion that the tables men have established, where many dear children of God come together, are "tables of demons" is not only unscriptural — it is appalling. It is a terrible thing even to suggest such a thing. God never intended us even to think of the truth of God that way.

When He speaks of the table of demons, He was talking here specifically in Corinth of those who were partaking of that which was offered to idols, and He speaks of that which was offered to idols as coming from the table of demons. There may be, and undoubtedly is, many a table that is man's table, but let us never even think in our hearts that where the Lord's people meet, even in division, could be called tables of demons.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 11:23-32:

"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread: and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat; this is My body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."

You will recall how previously we have spoken of the very foundation of the truth we have been considering as being the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. What we saw as the first type in Genesis 22 was the father and the son going together to the place of sacrifice. We have found over and over again how God brings the number "three" before us. This is a most striking reminder that to enter into the truth or to walk in any measure in it without the heart's affection being engaged and without faith being involved can only lead to tragedy.

We find, when we come to the New Testament, that God has by His Spirit extended the wonderful privilege, available to every child of God that will walk in separation from evil, of partaking of the Lord's supper at the Lord's table. The One who has invited us there is the Lord Himself. It is His table. Paul was not present on the night when this was instituted and so the Lord gives him a special revelation. He received it from the Lord, not from Peter. There was to be a memorial of the Lord Jesus made up of a loaf and a cup. These are the simplest of things and yet how precious to see that loaf and to recognize that God is saying to us in that loaf that our place is there because we are members of the one body of Christ. We see in the bread broken (given) the body of the Lord Jesus in His death at Calvary, that body that was prepared for Him — the wood that was laid upon Isaac. In partaking of that one loaf I remember the Lord Jesus in His death, and I express the truth that I am part of that one body portrayed in that one loaf.

We find at Corinth that there was much that grieved the heart of the Apostle. The Apostle Paul writes to them concerning this remembrance of the Lord and gives them to see that in acting in the scriptural order and partaking of the one loaf and of the cup, they showed the Lord's death till He returned. They showed out in those emblems that which presented the picture of death: the blood separate from the body. The Spirit of God then brings before them the solemnity of their partaking of that which symbolized the death to put sin away and yet still going on in sin. So we read in verse 27, "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily" — that is, in a manner that was not worthy of the Lord — "shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." Such an one fails to act upon the fact that it took the body and blood of the Lord (His death) to put away those very sins in which they are still going on.

When we talk about the Lord's table and the Lord's supper, we are talking about that which is infinitely precious, and yet we must ever be conscious of the truth that "holiness becometh Thine house, O Lord, forever." They are told in verse 28, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." They were to examine themselves and to put away that which was contrary to the Word of God, and then they were to partake of that bread and drink of that cup.

But, brethren, what has happened in Christendom today? Man examines himself or others and he says, "I don't like it. I think those people are too strict. I'm going to start my own table and I'll claim the Lord's presence too. I'll claim I'm meeting in the name of the Lord too." Or perhaps discipline comes in and the result is that the man who is set aside forms his own table, as Jeroboam did. So we look around today and we see the saints of God divided into so many companies. The Word of God, in language that cannot be clearer, shows us that there can be only one testimony, owned of God, to the truth that there is one body. There can only be one loaf partaken of that expresses that there is one body. The Corinthians were to examine themselves and partake of that bread, not one of their own choosing.

There are problems and difficulties that beset the Lord's people in acting on this principle, but the fact remains that God by His Spirit is still gathering to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. That which is to characterize those who are thus gathered remains the same: an endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, a separation from evil, and a conscious sense of the name to which we are gathered and of His presence there. Such will be a house of prayer, a place where discipline is exercised to maintain holiness, and a place, above all else, where the Lord is worshipped.

If you and I knew beyond a shadow of doubt that the Lord Jesus Christ was to be in a certain place in the city, where would we be today? I believe I can safely say that each and every one of us would be where He is, and we would be there because He is there. But let's suppose for one moment the Lord Jesus were to say that today He was going to be in twenty places in the city. I believe we would be scattered in twenty different places — some in one, some in another; some closer to their homes, others where they like the people better. For a variety of reasons we would choose one or the other. Why would we be apart? Whose fault would it be that we are not together, if such were true? Is not the honest answer that the fault would be the Lord's? He put Himself in twenty different places, and therefore He must expect His people to meet in twenty different places. But the Lord has already shown us that His desire is that they should be together. In John 17, the Lord

Jesus prayed “that they all may be one . . . that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me.” That was His desire — that they all might be one.

We must never expect the Lord Jesus to do that which would frustrate His own purpose and His own prayer. He will, and still does, make Himself the center to which He would gather all His people around Himself, where they can partake of one loaf and express that they are one body.

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