

The Church the Body of Christ

by Elijah Goodwin

The church is the body of Christ, and Christ is the head of the church, guiding and directing its members through their shared faith and mutual dependence.

Scripture: Matthew 1:23, John 1:1, John 1:3, Romans 6:3, 1 Corinthians 11:3, 1 Corinthians 12:12, Galatians 3:27, Ephesians 1:22, Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18, Hebrews 1:10, 1 John 4:11

Topics: "Church Unity", "Christ Supremacy"

Description

Elijah Goodwin preaches about the significance of Christ as the head of the church, emphasizing His supremacy in various biblical figures and the pre-eminence He should have in all aspects. The sermon delves into the character of Christ, highlighting His divine nature as the creator and upholder of all things, and the unity that exists between Christ as the head and the church as His body. Practical reflections are drawn on the importance of loving one another, honoring Christ, cooperating for the church's welfare, maintaining purity, and the assurance of resurrection for the members of Christ's body.

Transcript

"And he is the head of the body, the church."--Col. 1:18.

ARIOUS are the figures employed by the inspired writers for the purpose of illustrating that religious organism which is called "the church of God, the ground and support of the truth"; and in every such figure Christ is spoken of as supreme. Are the members of the church represented as the branches of a living vine? Then, He is the vine. Is the church represented as a flock of sheep? Then, He is the good shepherd, who even gives His life for the sheep. Is the church spoken of as a kingdom? Then, He is the King who reigns over that kingdom. Is the church represented under the figure of a body, as in our text? Then, He is the head of that body. In all things, therefore, He should have the pre-eminence.

This is not the only Scripture in which Christ is represented as the head of the church. To the [170] Corinthians, Paul says: "I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ" (1 Cor. 11:3). To the church at Ephesus, he says: "The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, and he is the Saviour of the body" (Eph. 5:23). Again: God "hath given him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body" (Eph. 1:22).

My design in this discourse is to speak of the church as the body of Christ, and of Christ as the head of this body, in doing which I propose the following order:

I. Speak of the character of Christ, the head of the church.

II. Speak of the church under the figure of a body--our physical organization.

III. Notice the union that exists between the head and the body.

IV. Close with practical conclusions, drawn from the premises which will, by that time, be before our minds.

I. According to this order, we are first to notice the character of Him who is the head of the church.

1. The dignity of His divine character is clearly indicated by the works which are ascribed to Him. In the context it is said: "By him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; [171] all things were created by him and for him" (v. 16). Again: "All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3).

Surely, no power short of the power of God could perform such stupendous works. Indeed, finite minds can not comprehend this mighty creation; how, then, could a finite mind contrive it, or a finite mind execute it? Contemplate, gentle reader, the vastness of creation. What a world is this which we inhabit!--with all its mighty mountains; its roaring and muttering volcanoes, ever and anon belching forth rolling torrents of burning lava. Behold its widespread plains, its deep-rolling rivers, and its mighty oceans, whose mountain waves are ever lashing the shore at the feet of the awe-stricken beholder. Then contemplate the innumerable tribes of living beings, formed to inhabit every part of this mighty world of ours; the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea; but, above all, contemplate man, made in the image of God; and then remember that all, all, were created by Him who is the head of the church, and we may form some faint idea of His glorious character.

But our little world is but a speck in creation; as but a grain of sand on the seashore, compared with the immensity of the created universe. The sun, moon and stars are the works of His fingers; He "in the beginning laid the foundation of the [172] earth, and the heavens are the works of his hands" (Heb. 1:10). Imagine every fixed star--even those that can only be seen by the aid of our largest and most powerful telescopes--to be a sun, placed in the center of a system of worlds, all performing their annual revolutions around their respective suns; then imagine all these worlds, with their innumerable hosts of living inhabitants, to be a very small portion of the workmanship of His almighty power; and then think how glorious must He be who is the head of the church and the Saviour of the body.

2. But the Scriptures teach that He not only made all things, but that He upholds all things. In connection with our text, Paul says: "He is before all things, and by him all things consist" (v. 17). Again the same apostle says: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power," etc. (Heb. 1:1-3). The apostle here seems to represent the power of Christ as a mighty arch, reaching from eternity past to eternity to come, or spanning that broken-off fragment of eternity which we call time; upon which arch is suspended the universe, all borne up or upheld by [173] Him "whom God hath given to be head over all things to the church." He who created all things, and who upholds all things, must be divine.

3. But the very term which expresses divine nature is applied to Jesus, the Christ.

John says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1, 14). Now, it can not be that this title "God" is applied to our Lord Jesus merely on account of any delegated power or authority which He may have received from the Father, nor on account of any office that may have been conferred upon Him. In such cases it might be said that He was as God; but it is here declared that He was God, and that He was God in the beginning. This title, then, must be applied to Him in reference to His divine nature. Just say that Jesus Christ is God in nature, and all is plain. It does seem to me that much of the controversy concerning the Godhead of our blessed Redeemer might have been saved by this common-sense, and I will say Scriptural, view of the subject. Instead of contending that the Father and Son are one individual being, or personage, as some have been understood to do, let it be maintained that the unity is in nature; and I think but few who receive, as divinely inspired, [174] the teachings of the apostles of Christ, will object. But let him object that will, such is the truth in the case. Theos may be regarded as the name of a nature--divine nature--and anthropos as the name of human nature. Now, these two natures were undoubtedly united in that wonderfully glorious being whose character we are now considering. Therefore, it was said of Him before He was born: "They shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matt. 1:23).

II. But I now pass to my second head of discourse, which is indeed the main subject on which I design speaking; namely, "The body of Christ, the church."

1. One object I have before me, in taking the very brief view of the exalted position and divine character of the Lord Jesus that I have done under the first head of this discourse, is to exalt the church in our esteem. As intimated in the foregoing discourse, I fear that we do not esteem the church as highly as we should; hence, the unceremoniousness with which persons frequently leave the church, and the little interest that many seem to take in the prosperity and welfare of the church.

Now, we generally estimate the worth and efficiency of a body by its head. A human body may be strong, well organized and healthy, but, if its head be idiotic, we attach but little importance to the body. So of organized societies; we [175] look to the head for the honor and efficiency of the body. What estimate, then, should we place upon the church, when it is declared to be the body of Christ? If that glorious personage who is "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person"--by whom all things were created, and who upholds all things by the word of His power--I say, if this transcendently glorious and divine being condescends to preside over the church, as its head--and permits Himself to be regarded, by all the shining hosts of heaven, as the head of the church, and the church to be considered His body--surely the church of God is no mean affair; and to be a constitutional member thereof is no small matter. Oh that I could make this thought sink deep into the heart of every one who may read this discourse! Are you, dear reader, a member of the church of Jesus Christ? How exalted, then, is your position! How highly should you prize your relationship in, that body, of which Christ is the head; and how should you strive for the health and well-being of that body! But more of this in its proper place.

2. The second thought that I wish to suggest, in reference to the church, is, that it is a unit "the church is one."

This word "church" is translated from the Greek word ecclesia, which literally means "assembly" or "congregation." Ecclesia is derived from [176] ekkaleo--I call out, the called out. So the term "church"

means a congregation called out from the world. This term, I admit, is applied, in the New Testament, to individual congregations, such as the church at Corinth, the church at Ephesus, the church at Philippi; and it is applied in the plural form to the churches in Galatia, Judea and Asia. (See Gal. 1:2, 22; 2 Cor. 8:1, 18, 23; 11:28; Rev. 1:11, 20.) In all these places these individual congregations are considered in their individual capacity, as embracing all these congregations in one general body.

When Peter made the good confession, Christ said to him: "Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my church," etc. He did not say churches, but church--in the singular. Now, no one will say that He meant the congregation at Jerusalem, to the exclusion of all other Christian congregations. Paul, reflecting on his former life, said: "I am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (1 Cor. 15:9). He did not mean that he only persecuted one congregation, he persecuted the saints even unto strange cities; hence, he embraces the whole body of believers, wherever found, in the term "church." Again: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word [or, as Dr. McKnight renders it, with a bath of water, [177] and with the Word], that he might present it to himself a glorious church" (Eph. 5:25, 26).

Now, in this whole connection, the apostle surely uses the term "church" in a general sense. And it is used in the same sense in our text: "He is the head of the body, the church." Thus are all the Christian congregations contemplated, in the light of apostolic teaching, as one church--one body.

I do not understand from this that the apostle intended to teach that all these congregations should be united by any general council, or by conventional rules; or that they should be united in one visible head, whether called bishop or pope; but that all who believed in Jesus Christ, and submitted to His authority, and stood upon the apostolic platform--namely, the one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all--were, by these holy principles, united in the unity of the Spirit and in the bond of peace, and were, therefore, to be regarded as one body.

3. My third remark, in reference to the mystical body of Christ, is that in the days of the apostles, when persons were prepared by faith and true repentance for a place in the church, they became members by baptism.

A reconciliation to God in all the feelings of the heart, and an entire reformation of life, are necessary to membership in that church. This [178] change, or purification of heart, is effected by faith in the truth of God concerning the Christ, the Son of the living God; and this change of heart produces the change of life which is implied in evangelical repentance. Now, when a person is thus prepared for this society, he becomes a member by being baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Paul said: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" (Rom. 6:3). Again: "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). No one is, or can be, baptized into Christ literally, and yet, in the Scriptures just quoted, the apostle teaches most clearly that they were baptized into Christ. It follows, then, that they were baptized into the body of Christ, the church. Hence, all the members of this body were baptized, nor can it be shown that any person was ever regarded as a member of Christ's church without baptism.

4. The next item that I will notice, in relation to the church under the figure of a body, is the union that should exist among the members.

This subject is often spoken of in the Scriptures. The union of God's people was one of the great objects for which the Saviour taught and labored and died. It was the theme of His instruction, and the subject of His prayers. In one of His most solemn petitions to His heavenly Father, He [179] said: "Neither pray I for these alone [the apostles], but for them also who shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:20, 21). How near and how dear must that union be, if it resembles the union between God, our heavenly Father, and Jesus Christ, the blessed Redeemer! We have seen in this discourse that they are one in nature; so should Christians be--all being partakers of the divine nature, through the exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel. And is not this as it should be? Should not all the members of a body have the same nature? and should not that be the nature of the head?

This union is often illustrated, in the apostolic teaching, by the union that exists between the members of a natural body. To the Ephesians, Paul wrote thus: "Wherefore, putting away all lying, speak every man the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another" (Eph. 4:25). To the church at Rome he said: "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. 12:4, 5). Now, who can conceive the nearness of the relation that exists between the members of my physical body? This, Christian reader, is but a figure of the holy union [180] that should exist among all the members of Christ's mystical body, the church. The apostle teaches that it is the will of Christ that all the members, "speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. 4:15, 16).

What a beautiful description this is of the human body, and how forcibly does it illustrate the union that should obtain among the members of the church of Christ, which is His body. In the natural body, every joint supplies its place; the members are fitly (not unfitly) joined together, the parts composing the joint all adapted to each other; and then these parts are joined together by ligaments that hold the members in a very near relation to each other. Then they are compacted together by the outside membranes; and then, by the effectual working of every part, the body increases. So should the members of the body of Christ be united. Each should supply his place in the body, and all "be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10), and then, by the effectual working of every part, of every member, whether preacher, pastor, elder, deacon, or private [181] member, each working in his respective sphere for the general good, the body, or church, will grow, and increase in moral power as it grows.

The apostle Paul speaks at still greater length on the same subject in his first letter to the Corinthians. He says: "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 all been made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. . . . If they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye can not say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you" (1 Cor. 12:12-21). So should all the members of the church of Christ regard themselves--all united in the bond of peace, and all mutually dependent upon each other.

But the apostle labors this subject still further. He says: "There should be no schism in the body; but the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it." Thus are the members of my natural body united. If the lady's little finger is honored by wearing a gold ring, her head is honored; all the members [182] partake of that honor. And if the most remote member of the natural body is pained, all the members sympathize with it. Thus it is that when one member of the body is diseased, the whole body becomes enfeebled. Why should a sound member be enervated by a disease in another member? It is because "all the members have the same care one for another." The forces and power of all the members are concentrated at the diseased part of the body, for the purpose of overcoming the disease and saving the member. So should it be with the members of Christ's mystical body. If one member is honored on account of devotion to, and usefulness in, the church, the whole body is honored by having such a worthy member in it; and hence, no one should be jealous of the influence of another, nor envious at his success in doing good.

And if one member suffer, all the members should sympathize with him; for, says the apostle, in making his application, "you are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (v. 27). If one member is morally diseased, all should feel for him. Suppose a member of the church has been overtaken in a fault, and has stepped out of the way: the members should not turn off from that member with cold indifference; they should not speak lightly of him, and express their fears of his steadfastness, and their want of confidence in the purity of his motives. This is not the way [183] we treat the members of the natural body. The influence of the whole body is exercised in behalf of the diseased member, to save it, if possible. So, the care and influence and counsel and prayers of the whole church should be thrown around the erring member; yes, surround him with loving kindness, and make him feel that all are interested in his well-being. Amputation is never resorted to in the natural body until all hope is lost--until the very life of the body is jeopardized by its connection with a diseased, decaying member; and even then it is a painful operation. So should it be in the church of Christ. Exclusion should be the very last resort, and never should take place until all hope of saving the member is lost, and until the very life (spiritual life) of the body is endangered by the connection of the offending member with it.

Such is the union which should ever be maintained among the members of Christ's mystical body. Christian reader, what think you of it? Are you endeavoring to keep the union in the bond of peace? I fear that many who have talked and sung and preached and prayed much on this subject, the subject of Bible union on Bible principles, do not realize a moiety of the holy spiritual union that the gospel requires. We have said more on this subject than any other people during the last quarter of a century, and yet we do not exhibit to the world any more of that union than [184] we ought. I speak to those who have taken the Bible as their only rule for religious faith and religious manners. Do we realize all that nearness of feeling, that identity of interest, that warmth of soul, that oneness of mind and purpose that we have professed that the Saviour prayed for? that the foregoing Scripture quotations indicate? and that should always exist among the members of the same body? Ponder well these questions, Christian reader, and may the good Lord enable us to love one another, with pure hearts, fervently.

III. But let us now consider the relation and union that exist between the head and the body.

1. In all physical bodies which have animation, the head governs the body. This is emphatically true in reference to the human body, which seems to be the kind of body to which the apostle has more particular reference in this figure. The head is the seat of the judgment and will, by which all the members are controlled. One body, one head, one will, is Heaven's order. One body with two heads would be a

monster, and such would be one head with many bodies.

No body could act efficiently if the members thereof were governed by different and conflicting wills. This is the secret cause of all the divisions among the professed followers of Christ. There are too many wills to be consulted, too many heads, too many lawmakers. Now, if we [185] acknowledge Christ as the head of the body, the church, our wills should all be lost in His; self should be crucified with Him by the cross, and we should be buried with Him in baptism; then we should rise to walk in newness of life, and in all our future actions we should be governed by His righteous will. Paul says we have the mind, or will, of Christ. This we have in the Holy Scriptures. To this blessed Book, then, we should always come, in order to learn the will of Christ; and having learned His will, we should not stop to confer with flesh and blood; we should not consult our own views of propriety, or the views of our neighbor; but we should do the will of the great head of the church, and leave the results in His almighty hands.

2. I notice, in the second place, under this division of the subject, that the head is the seat of sensation--of sympathy. What is done to the members is felt in the head. The great sympathetic nerve, which connects with the head, divides itself into a thousand fibers, and runs through every ramification of the body, carrying the sensation of the smallest touch upon the most remote member, to the head, in the twinkling of an eye; and by this means all the members sympathize with each other, and all the members sympathize with the head, and the head sympathizes with all the members.

Now, let that nerve represent the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given [186] unto all the true members of the body of Christ, the church, and you have a very faint representation of the relation and sympathy that exist between Christ and His church.

I will only introduce two examples to show this relation--one of maltreatment, and one of benevolent treatment.

After Christ was crowned Lord of all, and His body, the church, was fully organized, there was a man of much influence and of great firmness and perseverance who set his face against this infant body, and determined on its destruction. In order to accomplish his designs, he persecuted the saints, even unto strange cities. On one occasion, he himself says: "I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring them that were there, bound unto Jerusalem to be punished. And it came to pass, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus, about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest" (Acts 22:5-8).

Now, what was this man doing? He had no idea that he was persecuting Jesus. If he had ever heard His name, he believed that he had been justly crucified, and was then in the cold arms of mother earth. But he was persecuting [187] those who believed in Jesus, and who had become the members of His body; and Jesus says, "You are persecuting me." As if He had said, "I am in heaven, seated on the throne of the universe, and the members of my mystical body are down here upon earth, yet I know them: I feel every pain that they endure for my sake; they are as dear to me as the apple of my eye; you can't touch them but I feel it; when you persecute them, you persecute me, and I hold you accountable for it, as if you had persecuted me face to face." How near, then, must be the union between Christ and His people! Oh, how careful we should be as to how we treat the members of the Lord's body!

The next case to which we refer is found in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew. In this chapter we have a very graphic description of the great and notable day of the Lord--that dreadful day when the destinies of men will be settled for eternity. In describing the scenes of that final day, Jesus says: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them, one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit [188] the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Now, mark well what follows: "For I was hungry, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me" (Matt. 25:31-36).

Oh, what a lesson this is for all who love the Lord; yes, and for those who love Him not, but treat His cause and His people with contempt.

It seems that these righteous persons do not fully understand the meaning of the Judge; and hence they shall say: "Lord, when did we see you hungry, and fed you? When did we see you thirsty, and gave you drink? When did we visit you in sickness, or in prison? We spent our days on earth, among the sons of men, while you were seated upon the throne, high up in heaven, surrounded by all the angelic hosts, who always delight to do thy will. How is it, then, we have performed these acts of kindness and mercy unto you?" Reader, hear the answer, and let it sink deep into your heart: "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (v. 40). Lord, help us to feel the force of that declaration.

When the Philippians sent once and again unto the necessities of the apostle Paul, they may not have thought that they were administering to the wants of the blessed Lord. (See [189] Phil. 1:7; 4:14, 15.) Onesiphorus, also, may not have considered that he was bestowing favors on the Lord Jesus, when he so diligently sought Paul, the prisoner of the Lord, in the great city of Rome, and refreshed him with some of the good things of this life. (See 2 Tim. 1:16, 17.) But Jesus saw him, and regarded it as done to Himself, and will reward him accordingly. Reader, do you always reflect, when you speak of Christians, that Christ notes every word, as having reference to Himself? The Lord sees our hearts, He knows our motives, and He will remember how we treat the members of His body--the church.

You can not treat with contempt a member of a natural body without insulting the head. If you spit upon my little finger through contempt, my head is insulted; it would be regarded as offering an indignity to my head. So Jesus regards all the constitutional members of His church. Hence the apostle says: "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30). Such is the body of Christ. You can not offer an indignity to a member of the church without insulting Jesus, its head. Hence, He says that it were better that a millstone were hanged about a person's neck, and he be cast into the sea, than for him to offend one who believes in Christ.

IV. According to my fourth proposition, I am now to close this discourse with a few practical Reflections [190]

1. If we are members of the Lord's body, we ought to love Him most devoutly. We have seen the attachment that He has for the members of His mystical body; and should not this attachment be mutual? We should give Him the warmest seat in our hearts' affections, and we should always show our respect for

Him and His holy cause, in all we do and in all we say.

2. We should honor Him. The members of any body, whether physical, political or ecclesiastical, should always honor their head, especially if the head be worthy. And I ask, What organism on earth has so worthy a head as the church? What head has ever shown such interest in the well-being of His body as the great head of the church has shown toward the body over which He presides? One witness hath testified that "he gave himself for the church, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Eph. 5:25, 26). That is, He died for this body, that He might sanctify and save it; or, as Dr. McKnight renders it, "that he might sanctify her [the church], having cleansed her with a bath of water, and with the word." Now, if Christ has thus loved the church, should not the members honor Him? They should not speak a word, nor perform an act, that would be a reproach to the great head of the church; but all they do and say should reflect honor on the name and cause of Christ. [191]

3. Christians should love one another. If all true Christians are members of the same body, surely they should love each other sincerely, and always strive to promote the peace and happiness of one another. Read the following Scriptures on this subject: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (1 John 4:11). "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. . . . Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:14-18). "Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that you love one another with a pure heart fervently" (1 Pet. 1:22). "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion owe of another; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous" (1 Pet. 3:8).

Surely, the love here recommended is more than mere natural affection, growing out of worldly considerations. This love is to proceed from pure hearts, and is to be fervent; which means "earnestly, eagerly, vehemently, with great warmth, [192] with pious ardor, with earnest zeal, ardently."--Webster. This love to the brotherhood should be like the fire upon the golden altar in God's ancient temple. It should be holy, and be ever burning; it should never be permitted to go out. This will require much watching and prayer.

You remember, on one occasion the priests permitted the fire on the golden altar to go out. This happened on account of inattention on the part of these priests. So will it be without Christian love, which should ever be burning upon the altar of our hearts. If we neglect this altar, and give our attention too much to the cares of this world, the fire of sacred love will expire.

You also remember, reader, what those priests did. They put unsanctified fire upon that altar; that is, fire that had not been consecrated and set apart to a holy or religious use.

May we not virtually do the same thing? That is, may we not kindle the fire of Christian affection out of mere worldly considerations? How often do we see this thing, called Christian love, confined in its manifestations to certain grades and castes of society. Is it sometimes the case that our love to Christians is regulated by the fashions and etiquette of society? And how easily is such love cooled! A little inattention--even failing to return a fashionable call--cools all the affection that once existed between church-members. My brother, this is placing unholy fire upon God's altar. [193]

And do you not remember the fate of those ancient priests who thus defiled the temple of God? (Read in Lev. 10:1, 2.) God destroyed them for their neglect of duty and presumptuous wickedness. And should not all Christians examine themselves carefully, lest they be condemned at last Remember that, if our Christian love is accepted of God, it must be kindled with alive coal from His altar; or, to speak without a figure, it must be inspired by the Spirit of the living God; but this they can only obtain and maintain by a union with Christ, the head of this body.

4. We should co-operate in all the interests of the church. That the body of Christ, the church, may be a healthy, growing body, it must be a working body. The strongest and most robust physical body would soon become feeble without exercise. And an individual member may be kept in a state of rest until its power to act is lost. Hence, you always see active, stirring persons most healthy, and the members that are most used become the strongest.

So is it spiritually speaking. The members of the church that never do much for the Lord's cause never feel like doing much, while those who work for Christ become stronger and stronger, and are thus able to do still more and more for the prosperity of the Lord's cause. If this should meet the eye of a moral dyspeptic, I exhort him to go to work in the cause of Christ, and it will do him good. [194]

But the thought that I wished to impress upon the reader's mind is the necessity of co-operation among the members of this body, for the welfare of the body. I speak now particularly to those who have taken their stand on the Bible alone; who have united on the foundation of apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone; who have become members of the body of Christ on Bible principles.

My brethren, should not the members of this body co-operate in all their general efforts for the enlargement of the borders of Zion--for the growth of the body--until it shall fill the whole earth? The brethren living in counties should form county co-operations for the purpose of sustaining the proclamation of the gospel in destitute portions of the counties. And districts and States should do the same. Why may they not? Are they not all members of the same body? And do not all of the members of my body co-operate for the general good of the body? So may the members of the body of Christ. Nay, they not only may, but they are in duty bound to do so.

5. The members of this body should keep them selves pure. Speaking of the Christian's hope, the apostle John says: "Every one that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3). If the head is pure, the members should be. Hear the great apostle of the Gentiles on this subject: "Know ye not that your bodies [195] 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 one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:15-17). Thus reasons one who had the mind of Christ. Contemplating the purity of the great head of the church, he concludes that all the members should be pure; that it would be unjust, unnatural and unrighteous to form such an unholy alliance between the members of Christ's body and the base character just named.

But, if such an alliance with one species of crime is wrong, the same I s true in reference to all sin. How appropriate Paul's command to Timothy: "Keep thyself pure." Shall I take the members of Christ's body, and introduce them into the ballroom? Shall I cause the Lord's feet to move in the giddy dance? If I do, do I not dishonor the head? Let every member of the mystical body of Christ endeavor, by divine grace, to "keep himself unspotted from the world," for this is one of the constituents of pure and undefiled religion.

6. The head was raised from the dead and glorified in heaven; so shall the members be. "Because I live, ye shall live also," said the blessed Lord. "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your [196] mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:11). "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" (1 Thess. 4:14). Then the desire of the Lord will be realized. "Father," said he, "I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me" (John 17:24). "Then shall be brought to pass that saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor. 15:54, 55).

Reader, are you a member of this body--the church of Christ? Then, be faithful unto death, and the Lord hath said you shall have a crown of life. But if you are not a member of this body, oh, be exhorted to come to the Saviour; believe on Him with all your heart, confess His worthy name, reform your life, and be baptized into the body of Christ. [197]

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