

The Assemblies 1 cor.3;17

by J.M. Davies

J.M. Davies' sermon highlights the critical characteristics and responsibilities of the assembly as the temple of God, body of Christ, and chaste virgin, urging unity and purity among believers.

Duration: 36:39

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, 1 Corinthians 3:17, Ephesians 5:27, 1 Timothy 3:15, Hebrews 10:25, James 3:16, 1 Peter 2:9

Topics: "Assembly"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on his experiences of being part of the people of God for 50 years in various countries. He emphasizes the importance of simplicity and purity in devotion to God. The sermon focuses on three well-known scriptures: 1 Corinthians 3:17, which warns against defiling the temple of God; James, which highlights the destructive nature of envy and strife; and 1 Corinthians 12:21, which speaks about the interdependence of different members in the body of Christ. The speaker urges believers to guard against division and strive for unity in the assembly.

Transcript

I almost hesitate to read the three scriptures, but I want to read with you. For they have been read and they have been spoken on until possibly many of us think they're threadbare and war. Some things with regard to what the Apostle brought before the saints of Corinth in order to set right things that were wrong in their midst, bringing before us things relative to the assembly.

Someone, a brother in the Lord, was going to minister in a certain assembly, and he said to them, What would you like? Well, he says, Give us some church truth, brother. He says, Church truth? You've had enough to sink a ship. And that is one reason why I hesitate to speak on these scriptures this afternoon, and yet I feel constrained to turn your attention to them.

I certainly do not wish to say anything that will beget any spirit of pride in our own hearts with regard to any position we may consider we occupy and any witness we hold. The history of the church has been too sad for too long for any companies to have anything but a bowed head and a bowed heart. Failure has dogged the footsteps of the people of God for so long.

I'm speaking now of the church and its general witness since apostolic days. The Lord said, Repent, or else I will remove thy lampstand. It was either remember and repent, or removal.

And that was in apostolic days. And the history from then on has been a history of continued failure, as Revelation 2 and 3 makes clear. And things are not improving.

I'm forgetting the history of the church in general, of all believers in all associations. The history of assembly in the last hundred and twenty-five years is not something that we can glory. Oh, there's much to thank God for, much to give God thanks for.

There's a great deal to cause us to bow our heads in shame. The envy, the strife, and the division of the past hundred and twenty-five years or so, I hope, is too well known by all of us for us to have any pride of place and position or any glory in the fact that by grace today we meet in the way we do. Limit your circle, if you like, and come to your own highly privileged north of Ireland.

What has been the history of assembly? Much, of course, as I said before, to thank God for. For a stranger coming into the country is not here very long before he knows that there are currents and cross-currents and undercurrents. Much of what I've rather attended with has been characteristic of the testimony of assembly in beloved Ulster.

And so, with these introductory remarks, shall we turn to the three scriptures that I want to read. And I'll just read three, and dwell upon them. You may already have anticipated what I'm going to speak about.

Three well-known scriptures. 1 Corinthians chapter three, and we'll read from verse... just read verse seventeen. If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy.

The word for defile and the word destroy is a translation of the same word. As is used again in 2 Corinthians 11, their translate is corrupt. For the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

How about sixteen? Knowing not that ye are temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. The twelfth chapter, verse twenty-seven. Now, ye are, leaving out the definite article, ye are body of Christ, and members in particular.

Now, 2 Corinthians chapter eleven, and verse two. For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy. For I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you with chaste virgins to Christ.

But I fear that by any means does the serpent beguile thieves through its subtlety. So your mind should be corrupted from the simplicity, following the revised here, please, and purity that is towards Christ. It has nothing to do with simplicity of gathering.

It has to do with simplicity and purity towards Christ, heart's devotion to Christ. Now, here are the three very well-worn, very well-known, very often quoted portions of the word of God. Very often spoken on, I'm sure, in believers' meetings in various assemblies in Northern Ireland.

This will not be the first time for all of us here to have had these scriptures read in our hearing. And I quite readily confess it's not the first time for me to draw attention to them either. Unlikely it will not be the last.

I did hardly draw your attention, of course, to the fact that these are only three of many other similes and metaphors that are used in the New Testament. And I did hardly mention possibly that these three are found for us in the epistle to the Ephesians, where we have the exposition of the truth relative to the church given to us by the apostle. And every occasion, every one of the nine references where the word church is used in that epistle, it refers to the church in its entirety.

I prefer that word to the words of the church in its universal character. The church in its all-inclusiveness and exclusiveness. And in that epistle we have these three metaphors used.

So whatever is true of the church in its entirety should characterize any company of believers. And that's what I want to emphasize this afternoon. What are these characteristics? And when we measure ourselves alongside of these characteristics, where do we find ourselves? How do we measure up to these New Testament standards? For they are New Testament standards.

When you think of the assembly of a company of Christians and Corinth, spoken of as Enoch's temple of God, they were not THE temple. They were characteristically temple of God. They were characteristically body of Christ.

And they were spoken of as the chaste virgin. Now when you think of these three together, there are certain things that clearly come before our minds. The word temple refers not to the temple in its... the outer court and the holy place and the holiest of all.

It refers just to the holiest of all. To the inner sanctuary. Now the first thing in connection with that sanctuary in the old economy, whether it be the tabernacle or the temple, was this.

That here was a place that was illuminated by light. Not the light of nature, not the light of the lampstand, but the light of the Shekinah glory. Here was a small, confined place.

There was all aglow with the glory of God. The brightness of God's glory was there. The light of God illuminated.

The company of Christians then, according to what we have got in this epistle, should be a company, a company that is illuminated by divine light. That the light and the holiness of God should have its home in that place. In Him there is no darkness at all.

When you think of the term body, you don't think of light. You think of life. There is an organism that's animated by life.

And a company of Christians, such as we read of in the New Testament, is a company that's animated by divine light. Life shared in common with the head. And life shared in common with every believer in the law of Jesus.

Life that links the individual believer to Christ the head. And life that links him equally with every believer in our Lord Jesus Christ. Life.

Now, when you think of the bride, the chaste virgin, you don't think of light. Nor do you think of life. You think of love.

There is an individual whose heart has been won. Whose hearts have been wooed and won by another. And she's waiting for the day of her espousal.

It's love that's there. Love for the one to whom she's going to be united. And that's the secret of everything as far as her life is concerned.

She's motivated by love. Now, let me ask, as we hurriedly pass along, to what extent is the assembly with which you are associated illuminated by the light of God's Word and the light of God's Holy Spirit? To what

extent is it animated by divine light? To what extent is it motivated by divine love? You see, these are the three of the attributes of deity. God is light.

God is love. And of the Lord Jesus, we read in him, was light. In other words, that's why the church is the church of God, because there are characteristics in that company that belong to heaven, not to earth.

There's something of God about that company. The light of God is there, and the life of God is there, and the love of God is there. Go back again with me.

When you think of the temple, you think of where the priests worshipped. There were priests that were treading the courts of the sanctuary. There was a place for priestly communion with God, a place for priestly worship.

The holiest of all, I know, was the place where only the high priests went. Here is God's Word, I think. Here is the assembly in its responsibility of God's Word.

To what extent is it? To what extent do we, as companies of believers, exercise our priestly ministry? To what extent do we enter in into what our attention has been drawn to? True worship. True worship. Occupation of heart with the glory of Christ.

Occupation of heart with the person of Christ. Delighting before God in all that Christ is to the heart of God. How high do we land in the matter of worship? Is there any truth in the charge at times that the art of worship is becoming lost? And brethren who can really lead the saints of God in worship are few and far between.

Well, the apostles say, you give it, thou give it, thanks well. What a joy it is when you listen to somebody who leads the saints of God in true spiritual worship. O brethren, those of you who seek to lead in the saints in worship, let us not think that we can do so by suddenly arising to it on a Lord's Day morning.

If there is not a life lived in the attitude of soul worship before God, our worship on a Lord's Day morning will be a very empty one. Temple, then, is a place for worship. The body of worship.

It's not one word now, it's edification. It's edification, it's building up. It's not worship, it's work.

It's not priestly ministry, it's relict ministry. Have you noticed those ten deacons mentioned by Paul in chapter 12? He's a master of illustration, he's the apostle. The foot and the hand, the ear, the eye, and the nose.

Two feet, two hands, two ears, two eyes, two nostrils. Five pairs of deacons, and all of them working for the upbuilding of the body. You see, it's fellowship by virtue of being possessed of a common life and by virtue of submission to a common authority.

These two hands have never agreed to do anything. They've never been in any disagreement. For the simple reason that both are subject to the one head.

Fellowship in service is the result of submission to a common authority. It's work. Years ago I saw an ad in a Toronto paper of an argument between the ears and the nose, and the eyes as to who are the most important individuals.

And the ears, they said, of course, of course it is. Everything hangs on us, they said. Everything hangs on us.

And then the nose laughs. Ha, you two fellows, there's not a bit of backbone in you. You're nothing but a bit of crystal.

Could you help me if I wasn't there? I'm the only one with a backbone among you. Of course, that's not in Ireland. That's far away from here.

And yet somehow or other, Paul's illustrations are very up to date, aren't they? They're very modern, very modern. And the eyes listened, and they laughed. And they said, you fellows, you're only help for us to look through those glasses.

And visit one of the poets in England. He's speaking of this. He wrote a piece of poetry on it.

The thing went to court, he says, according to that piece of poetry. And at last, the judge ordered that the eyes be closed, because these two and the nose, they quarreled so much as to their responsibility. And so the eyes were closed, and he was ordered closed.

So the man fell and broke his nose. Now, when you think of the church as the chief virgin, you don't think of worship. You don't think of work.

You think of one whose heart has been won, and whose life is a witness to everybody. Her affections are not something to be played around with with everybody else. But her heart has been captivated.

And she's separated. Nobody can come to her anymore and offer her his hand, or seek her hand. She walks in separation from all of that, in the power of a new affection.

In the power of devotion to the ones to whom she's engaged. Then you go back over these three again. The devil has a great interest in the assembly.

The Lord Jesus said that the gates of hell would not prevail against him. And that clearly indicates that he had a great interest in it. He'd like to prevail if he could.

That's why we read so much about the devil in these first and second epistles to the Corinthians. That's why we read seven times about Satan in Revelation 2 and 3. Out of the eight times that Satan is mentioned in the book of Revelation, five of them are in Revelation 2 and 3. And the word devil appears once. That's the sphere where he's active today.

What was he after in Corinth? You see, the assembly, the temple is a clean place, a holy place. Unfortunately, in Old Testament days, when a revival came, they had to clear out a lot of rubbish that had come in into the sanctuary. And in Corinth, what the devil wanted to do was to rob the assembly of its sanctity.

Whereas there is among you envying and strife and division. Are you not carnal? Do you not walk as men? Paul says, James, where envying and strife is, there is every evil work. That's why in chapter five you've got fornication.

The envying and the strife of chapter three paves the way for the fornication of chapter five. Where there's envying and where there's strife, there's every evil work. I well remember out in India, going along, the late

Missandei Byrd and I had been together in Calicut.

We went on to another place, and there was a bit of trouble there, and I went along first. When I got there, began to listen, that scripture in James came before me. Where envy and strife is, there's every evil work.

And I said, Oh Lord, what is there to be brought out of this? What is it that needs to be unearthed? What is there that needs to be brought to daylight? To be brought out? What is there that's hidden here? Is the envy and the strife that which is the cause of this, or is it something that hides it up? The devil wants to rob the assembly of its sanctity, same as he did rob the temple of its sanctity in John chapter two, by introducing commercialism, as we have heard about. When you think of the church as the body, and the assembly is to give expression to that truth. Every assembly is to give expression to the truth of the church as a temple.

Every assembly is to give expression to the truth of the church as a body, and every assembly is to give expression to the truth of the church as the Chase Virgin. These things are to be characteristics of any assembly. When you think of the unity around a church as a body, the devil says, I'll rob it of its unity.

Not only will he try to rob it of its sanctity, but rob it of its unity. He did it in Corinth. Some said, I am of Pauls, I am of Apollos, I of Cephas, and the worst party of all said that they were of Christ.

The worst of the four were those that made the highest claims of the four. Sectarianism is something like a virus that's crept into the very bloodstream of the Church. They have to get rid of it.

Medical science doesn't know how to get rid of the little virus that gives the shingles, as I know too well, from last nine months. It's a little thing. You can't do anything with it.

And somehow or other, this thing that came in in the early days of Ephesus, it persisted all down the centuries. The devil's interested in propagating it and in keeping it up. Keeping Christians divided.

That's what chapter 12, that's the very aim of the chapter that he teaches. That there be no schism. That there be no schism.

Now he says, the foot can't say to the hand, because I'm not the hand, well then I'm not coming to the meeting. And the ear can't say to the eye. Well, if I can't get doing the eye's job, well then goodbye.

I'm going to the next meeting. Over yonder. That's the illustration of Paul.

I'm introducing things that are not exactly there, because Paul didn't say that the eye or the foot will leave and go somewhere else. But you don't need to have a very vivid imagination to see what's happening. Maybe I'm blessed with too vivid an imagination sometimes.

But after 50 years of moving amongst the people of God in various countries, somehow or other these things come to life. And they live. You see them carried out.

You see them translated into life everywhere. The eye can't say to the hand, I don't need you. The more valuable can't say to the less valuable, I can go on without you.

The man with the money says, all right, you carry on. I'll go on. I'll build a place of my own.

The man who is a preacher. Just fancy, just fancy Samson, for instance. What a mighty man Samson was.

My, what a brawny arm he had. What strength there was in those muscles of his. He'd get a hold of those gates of Satan and carry them away.

Tremendous power. Just a fancy, supposing Mephibosheth was alive in his day, and Mephibosheth lived so long after all, Samson said, sir, can I be your batman, sir? Can I come along and carry a bank, sir? What do you think Samson would have said to him? Get home, look after the chicks, would he? He said, a brother in India, the very fact that he was able to do so much on his own, that's the very thing that's led to his ruin and to his death. My brethren, we need one another.

We need one another. This is not a day to pull apart. This is a day, in the language of Philippians chapter one, not to strive with each other, but to strive together for the faith of the gospel.

That's the call for today. The head cannot say to the foot, I don't need thee. Oh, the grace that's given to us.

It is that member that hasn't got any gift. It may be adorned with grace. It's not a hand, it's not a feet.

Not the ears or the eyes that are always, always there to the eye, to the gaze of the public, a hidden member. Remember, gift is only for time. There'll come a time when there will be no need to preach the gospel.

There'll come a time when there will be no need to advance one another as we do today. There'll come a time when the teaching gift will be passed. But there never will be a time when grace will cease to be to the glory of God.

A carnal man can appreciate gift. An unconverted man can do that. But it's a spirituality to appreciate grace, to appreciate grace.

Oh, that God may give us grace to go on seeking His ways. And if the devil wants to rob the temple of its sanctity, and if he wants to rob the body of its unity, and thereby rob it of its ministry. Assemblies, assemblies robbed of ministry because of division.

Servants of God having their hands tied because of this. The devil says, if I can rob this, if I can rob the body of its ministry, of that poop which will build up the saints, I'll do it. I'll do it.

If he does that with the other two, what does he do with the chaste virgin? He'll rob her of her chastity. He'll rob her of her purity. He'll rob her of her devotion to the Lord.

He'll rob her of that. He'll rob the assembly of their warm heart and love to Christ, and love for the Lord, and love for the people of God. He'll rob the people of God of their chastity.

It's a sad thing when a young woman loses her chastity. Young sister, God, your chastity. We're living in days when we hear many things, morals of degrade, of degenerating.

Fathers and mothers, God, help me to be only a God, and give wisdom to guys in these matters, that the assembly and the homes of God's people may be preserved for His glory. Oh, how the devil would rob the assembly of its chastity. And if she is robbed of her chastity, she has been robbed of her testimony.

Testimony will have gone. Shall we pray together?

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