

Discerning the Body

by Richard E. Bieber

The sermon emphasizes the importance of discerning the body of Christ in the bread and wine, and in the assembly, in order to experience true unity and become the body of Christ on earth.

Topics: "Church Unity", "Lord's Supper"

Description

Richard E. Bieber emphasizes the importance of true unity among believers, highlighting that our differences are good and should not lead to dead uniformity but rather manifest the unity of heaven. He warns against substituting tangible things or doctrines as rallying points instead of Jesus, the Living Bread. Bieber stresses the significance of discerning the body of the Lord in the bread and wine, as well as in the assembly, by offering ourselves up as living sacrifices and laying down our lives for one another.

Transcript

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. I Corinthians 10:16 Many of us are beginning to see that if the ministry we've been given to perform is to get done, if the healing presence of the Lord is to be found in what we do, there's going to have to be an actual practiced unity among us the likes of which we have so far not known.

And while we move toward unity, we need to be careful that we don't start taking short cuts. There is the danger that we push ahead to something which is not the unity of the Spirit at all - but dead uniformity. God has brought us from many places. We are very different from each other. And these differences are good - they are the mark of heaven upon us, if we manifest the unity of heaven. After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb!" Revelations 7:9-10 These people didn't look like they'd all come out of the same machine.

It was still obvious that although they were all wearing white robes and all praising God they were different. They came from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues. - The one thing they had in common was that they had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. - That was their unity! Praise God we're different. Praise God that our backgrounds, our ages, our races, and even our languages are different, and that we've been drawn together by one thing only: - Our need for

Jesus. - Our love for him. - Our commitment to him. - Jesus is our rallying point.

So often believers recognize the need to draw closer to each other. And to speed things up, they substitute something that seems more tangible than Jesus as the rallying point. - A certain doctrine becomes the rallying point. - Eternal security. - Justification by faith. - Predestination. - Or tongues. - Or a life style. - Or a view of the church. Or, they make their assembly itself the rallying point. "Do you belong to Messiah Church? Praise God, you're my brother." "What? you belong to the House of Prayer?

I'll pray for you." So we end up being a cult. We may call it "unity", but it's not unity in Jesus and it won't survive. It doesn't edify the Body, it stifles, kills, destroys, blinds. In the past month-and-a-half, without any master planners sitting down in a closed meeting working it out, two things have been laid upon us. Both, I am satisfied, have come to us from the Holy Spirit himself. 1. That there should be breaking of bread every time we gather here on Sunday - as they did in apostolic days and as many gatherings of believers do now. 2.

That our dinner tables in our homes and apartments might become places of informal fellowship as we break bread together. Of course, the idea of eating together is nothing new. Believers have done this since the earliest days. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Acts 2:46-47 But - God help us to see this clearly - eating meals together is not our rallying point, it's not the source of our unity. And if we make a "thing" out of eating together in our homes, if we try to make this in itself a short-cut to unity, we're no different than those who make a thing out of "tongues", or "eternal security", or "the 144,000". We remember the time after the resurrection when Jesus told Peter the kind of death Peter was going to, die. Right away Peter wanted to know "what's going to become of John?"

"I'm going to be crucified. What about John? What's going to happen to him?" And Jesus answers, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what's that to you? Follow me." In other words, "John doesn't conform to the road I call you to take. He walks the road I tell him to take. The road isn't the rallying point, I am the rallying point." So with us, our rallying point is not our dinner table, or our coffee pot. Our rallying point is the Living Bread, that one bread, that one cup, who is Jesus himself.

Even if I never eat at your house or you never eat at my house, today we eat at Jesus' table from one loaf. And if we truly discern the body of the Lord as we do this, then we are drawn by the power of the Holy Spirit into the unity of God, which we seek. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. I Corinthians 11:28-29 We will find unity not by eating, but by discerning the body of the Lord as we eat.

First, we need to discern the body of the Lord in the bread itself. Take eat, this is my body given for you. Take drink, this is the blood of the new covenant, shed for your sins. We discern the body of Jesus in this bread and wine when we see this meal for what it is. - Jesus is offering himself up, laying down his life, sacrificing himself as the atonement for our sins. How can we ever take this meal lightly - even if we were to eat it every day - when we see it as the sacrifice for our sins which has now become our sustenance, our food.

His death is what keeps us alive in God. Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed. (Food and drink because they give life.) John 6:53-55 It's our responsibility, by faith, to discern the body and the blood every time we take this bread and wine. Second, we're to discern the body of the Lord in the assembly.

We hear a lot of talk these days about "body ministry" - about manifested gifts of the Spirit coming through the body. And again there are short cuts people are trying to take. Sometimes we think if we gather a few believers in our living room and we start prophesying, speaking in tongues, and laying hands on each other we have a "body ministry." That's much too cheap. The body of Christ on earth is made up of members who, in the name and Spirit of Jesus, have presented their bodies to God as a corporate living sacrifice - have offered themselves up. - This bread is the body of Christ because he offered himself up as our atonement and as our food. - This assembly is the body of Christ to the extent that its members have joined themselves to Jesus in offering themselves up to the Father as a living sacrifice.

It's so easy to say, "I am crucified with Christ." But are we? To discern the body; - means that I offer myself up to the Father in Jesus and become one with those who are doing the same, - it means laying down our lives for each other in simple daily acts of self-giving, inconvenience, the joyful, patient enduring of hurts, - it means going out of our way, not just for my Christian buddy, but for that brother or sister with whom I have nothing in common but Jesus himself. The body of Christ on earth is this corporate living sacrifice of those who have truly presented their bodies to God.

And we can only discern the body as we become part of the sacrifice. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. I John 3:16 - And when we eat this food we're agreeing to do just that. As a flock we've come to the place of that man who went to his friend at midnight and said, "Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey and I have nothing to set before him." "People are coming to us with their wrecked lives and stained souls and we don't have the bread, Lord." So after pounding on heaven's door, after making it clear to him that we're serious, we are finally told by the Lord, "Here is the bread - as much as you need: my Body.

In it you will also find my Spirit." We need to learn that the body of Christ is not only food that we eat, it's a loaf we become part of. That in union with our Lord we are to be broken and given as food for those who are still starving for the reality of God. And we will learn this lesson of what it means to be the bread of God in union with the Lord by; - serving each other, - forgiving each other, - breaking bread with each other, - denying ourselves, - going out of our way, - inconveniencing ourselves, until we come to the supreme inconvenience of laying down our lives completely.

If we are willing to pay the price of learning this lesson we will soon experience, as never before, what it means to be the Body of Christ - healing the sick, seeking the lost. We will soon have the necessary power - the power we have lacked so many times - to bring men and women from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. We will have found our place and our function in the Body of Christ on earth as the Body, guided by his Spirit, prepares this world for its final hour.

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