

7 Principles of n.t.church - Part 1

by William MacDonald

The New Testament church is built on seven divine principles: the truth of the one body, the plurality of elders, Christ as the gathering center, the gifts given to the church, autonomy of local churches, the priesthood of all believers, and the importance of divine principles.

Duration: 42:50

Scripture: Ephesians 4:4, Revelation 1:12

Topics: "Church Practice"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses several principles related to the gathering of believers and the purpose of spiritual gifts. The first principle is that Christ is the center of His people, and believers should have a personal relationship with Him. The second principle is that spiritual gifts were given to perfect the saints and equip them for ministry. The third principle emphasizes the autonomy of each local church, with direct responsibility to the Lord. The fourth principle highlights the priesthood of all believers, emphasizing the importance of personal conviction and practice of the truth. The speaker also emphasizes the unity of believers as members of the body of Christ and the purpose of spiritual gifts in edifying the body. The sermon references Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12 to support these principles.

Transcript

These men very highly in love for their work states. Incidentally, what was the first hymn that we sang today? How many remember? This afternoon I would like to speak to you about seven principles of the New Testament church. For many of you this will be nothing new at all.

Perhaps for some of the younger people it might be helpful. Seven principles of the New Testament church, and these certainly don't exhaust the principles either. I'll go over them first of all, and then we'll just, I'll list them first of all, and then we'll go over them step by step.

Principle number one, the truth of the one body, has been already alluded to in the ministry. There is one body. Principle number two, all believers are members of that one body.

That also has been alluded to. Principle number three, the plurality of elders in the local assembly. The plurality of elders in the local assembly.

Number four, Christ, the gathering center of his people. Am I going too fast for you? Use your best shorthand. Christ, the gathering center of his people.

Principle number five, the gifts were given for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry. A truly revolutionary insight. The gifts were given, as we'll see in Ephesians 4, for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry.

Principle number six, every local church autonomous. Responsible directly to the Lord alone. Every local church autonomous.

And principle number seven, the priesthood of all believers. The priesthood of all believers. It's good to have convictions about the truth of the word of God.

A lot of us drift through life hanging on to our parents' convictions. We've never really made them our own. We've never hammered them out on our own anvil.

I'd like to challenge you today. If you don't have convictions about the New Testament assembly, go to the word of God. Ask God to show you personally what the truth is.

I'll never forget years ago, dear brother Nate took me aside and he said, Bill, when you get divine principles, stick to them. And you know that's a needed word for the day in which we live. When you get divine principles, stick to them.

Well, here are some principles that I believe to be divine. First of all, the truth of the one body. There is one body.

Ephesians chapter four and verse four. And this is really a marvelous truth. And it's a precious truth.

Although everything in the religious world seems to deny it today. As you look about you in the world today, it seems that the body is decimated. But the truth is there just the same.

The truth of God, there is one body and only one body. Lord, keep me from sectarianism. Keep me from a sectarian heart.

You know, I believe sectarianism is native in the fallen human heart. I really do. And you and I have to battle it all the time.

And we have to stand for this truth in our actions as well as in our hearts. The truth of the one body. What are you? People come to me all the time, what are you? And I say, I'm a Christian.

They say, of course you're a Christian, you're saved. Everyone who's saved is a Christian. You've got to be something else.

Well, I say, I'm a saint. Well, they say all true believers are saints. But what else are you? Well, I'm a disciple of the Lord.

Well, they say, now quit emphasizing the obvious. You see, they're trying to get me in a pigeonhole. And when I refuse to be pigeonholed, they say to me, I know you're a brethren.

And there's a look of triumph in their eyes. And I say, I'm a brethren in the same way you're a brethren if you're a born-again believer. I utterly and absolutely refuse such a name as Plymouth Brethren.

In fact, I chuckle every time I hear it. Plymouth Brethren. It's a self-contradictory expression.

It's like Roman Catholic. Catholic means universal and Roman means not universal. Roman means Italian.

You can be anything but a member of Christ today. It's thrilling. Now, having said that, let me say something.

You look around in the evangelical world, and really there's an awful lot that makes my heart heavy. I've met some of the promoters. I've met the gadgeteers.

I've met the men. And the more you know about it, the more disappointed. The sins of the nation, and he made them his own.

It is the body of Christ. Gadgeteering. People say, we had a lovely time on our vacation.

There were some Baptist Christians there, but it's so nice to be back. We're all a part of that same bundle. To stand here in my everyday life.

I have to give witness to it by all means that I belong to that body. I take my place for that. The second truth is that all true believers are members of the body of Christ.

We had that this morning, didn't we, in 1 Corinthians 12, verses 12 and 13. Four by one spirit into one body. You know, it's a beautiful thing.

I think we gloss over these truths sometimes, and we say, I think I can see in some people, and a Mary Magdalene, and a Charles Coulson, and an Eldridge Cleaver, and I believe a Jimmy Carter, and a Bill McDonald, and make them all members of the body. Pretty poor raw material. I have never.

I mean, I agree when they teach me something. Fervency in prayer. And in many of their fellowships, they reach.

And I think sometimes that we can react. But all true believers are members of the body of Christ. And how wonderful.

We're going to spend eternity with them. I guess the Lord really first brought this home to me in a very real and practical way during the war years. I tell you, you get out to some of those places, and you meet somebody about him, and my, the warm fellowship you can have just around the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What a precious. Well, I see another great principle in the word of God, and to me a very important. In the word of God, that God has ordained that in the local fellowship, there should be a group of elders.

Now, there are many verses we could turn to in this regard. It's interesting how the Lord used this. He used this one in my life.

Philippians chapter 1, verse 1. It says, Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi with the bishops and the deacons. Now, here's Paul, a Christian gentleman, and he's writing a letter to the fellowship, to the assembly there in Philippi, and he addresses it to the saints with the bishops, the elders, and the deacons. Now, that's very significant to me.

I see three, I don't want to use the word classes, three groups there. The saints, the bishops or elders, and the deacons. Now, if there had been a one-man minister in that church in Philippi, wouldn't you think that Paul, a Christian gentleman, would have acknowledged him? Why didn't he mention him in this first part of his epistle? The reason he mentioned him is because such a man didn't exist.

But I don't have to labor the point because if you go to the Christian libraries and say, we don't have to fight that, I could turn to common sense and say, look, this one-man ministry doesn't exist in the primitive church. They agree with that. It is an important point that all over the world, in every land, be there really in the ship, the elders, and they were carried today, and they didn't have a lot, and then you go, really work.

And it's beautiful when you see them working. And this is a very important principle. When you think of the count, they share with you today that the early morning, in their difficulties, elders who, but that isn't all.

There are other principles that we want to think of today, and I think one of the important ones that I'd like to mention is that the gifts are given of his people. Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. Christ, the gathering center of his people.

This means a lot to me, and I'll tell you how it comes to me. We don't gather to a man. We gather to the Lord Jesus.

Unto him shall the gathering of the people be. We see so much, especially out where I live, where you get a gifted man of God, a good preacher, and he stands there. Sometimes he is, I don't think it's exaggerated.

We come to the meetings of the local assembly. I'm just a, but I believe when we come to the meetings of the Lord, and we wouldn't have missed it. We meet in the presence in Illinois.

And nobody who's ever at that meeting will ever forget it. If you were to go to Chicago, in your mind, when the Lord, special moving of the Holy Spirit. A few months later, I got a letter from a dear young brother whom I had known very well.

And he said to me, my life has never been the same. All the bitter, bitter regrets. But maybe the Lord can still salvage something from my life.

He and his family packed. I say there are times worship meetings, and once again, the hearts of God, and I really believe where you get a group, and who act upon it, you'll have people who know why they're there. Chapter four, the fourth chapter of Ephesians, chapter four.

And I'll begin reading in verse seven. Ephesians four and seven. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high, he let captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth. He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.

And he gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the faith unto the work of the ministry. Unto the edifying of the body of Christ till we all come in the unity of the faith of the perfect man unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. That we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro, carried about with every wind of doctrine by the

slight of men and cunning.

May grow up into him in all things which is the head, even Christ. How many years ago the Lord had dealings in my heart and I had to come to the place where I had evangelists, pastors, and it says and our bill says to me that the apostles, they are not but it is built on what they built upon the ministry. Once the foundation is laid you go and build upon it and Paul said that in 1 Corinthians 3. So the foundation has been laid by the apostles and prophets.

I don't believe the apostles and prophets are with us any longer although their ministry is with us in the pages of the New Testament. So we're not the poorer without the apostles and prophets because we have their ministry preserved for us in the sacred scriptures. But that leaves us with three.

Evangelists, pastors, and teachers. My own personal view is that these men are itinerant men. Evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

I don't equate the pastors here with the elders in an assembly. I equate them with men like Paul Timothy and Titus who were sent by Paul to do temporary work in various assemblies. Timothy to Ephesus, Titus to Crete, etc.

You have the evangelists first of all. These men, their sphere, their parish is the world. And they go out into the world and they preach the gospel of redeeming grace and a crucial key it says.

Translation is which means that these gifts are extendable. These gifts which means that success in this Christian work is working yourself out of a job in the quickest possible time and moving on to new worlds to come. Now, this isn't working today very well with the clerical system.

As long as we have a clerical system in the world, the body of Christ will never be developed the way God intended it to be and the world will never be evangelized the way God intended it to be. As long as we have that system. God's way is best.

God's way is for these gifts to seek to build up the strength for the work of the ministry and to pass on. The longest the Apostle Paul ever stayed in one place was two years in Ephesus. During his lifetime he spent a total of three years in Ephesus.

But at any one time the longest he ever stayed was two years. Mind you, he did better than that in Thessalonica, didn't he? He went in there and he preached to the Jews for three Sabbath days and left behind a functioning New Testament church. I'm amazed every time I read it.

I think that probably was exceptional, don't you? Probably wasn't the norm, but it worked anyway. That was success. That was really success in Christian work.

Paul didn't think that the saints should be perpetually dependent upon him. He was just thrilled to see them stand in their own seats and moving out for the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of you here today know T.B. Gilbert.

Knew him before the Lord took him on. Really a valuable trooper for the Lord Jesus. And use of God to see where it's planted in different parts of the United States.

Some years ago he went to Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and he got on the radio and he started blasting a word that saved him a little. And he let them know that the saints were there. One of these days they were

going to be on their own.

Well, do you know the day came when those dear brethren in Murfreesboro said, we certainly appreciate the work you've done here. We appreciate what you've meant to us. Now you've been willing to come down.

And they said, now, they said, you know, there's a little group of exorcised believers in Huntsville, Alabama. And we wonder if you'd be interested to go over there and see if you could help. You know, a lot of people would be crestfallen.

They'd really be hurt and go in the corner and sulk. He didn't sulk. He said, praise the Lord.

And he moved down to Huntsville and there's a little group of believers there. And the Lord took him home from Huntsville. This is beautiful.

And this is the way that God intends that the work should be spread. The gifts were given for the perfecting of the faith unto the work of the ministry, unto the edifying of the body of Christ. And this is to go on, this process is to go on, to spread by multiplication.

You have, of course, the same principle in another way. In Paul writing to Timothy, he said, The things thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also. Well, the Lord showed me this from the word of God and it really had a tremendous influence in my life.

And I said, Yes, this is ideal. And I look around and I see brethren who many churches, evangelical churches, would be thrilled to have them, thrilled to have them come. And they could go there and build a work around themselves.

God forbid. God forbid. Far better to the use of God to build up saints that the saints can move out with the gospel of grace and with the teaching of the word of God.

Now, we believe in addition to that, that every church should be autonomous. And I must go on so fast. Now, I believe every church, every local fellowship should be an autonomous fellowship.

Just one verse to suggest it. And once again, it's interesting how we're repeating passages, but in Revelation chapter 1 and verses 12 and 13, Revelation 1 verses 12 and 13, John says, And I turned to see the voice that spake with me, and being turned, I saw seven golden lampstands. And in the midst of the seven lampstands, one light came forth unto the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girded about the paps with a golden girdle.

Now, we don't have to guess at the golden lampstands. The golden lampstands represent the seven churches of Asia. The Lord Jesus is standing in the midst of the seven churches.

What's between him and the churches? Absolutely nothing. There's nothing in the way of a denominational headquarters there. Those churches stand directly responsible to the Lord Jesus himself.

Admire the wisdom of God. What a wonderful thing. Think of countries today where the Christian church is being oppressed and persecuted.

If the government can seize a denominational headquarters, why, it's very easy to control them. It's not so easy. It's very easy for those assemblies to go underground, as they have had to do in many nations of the world today.

And then also, as we've already heard in the conference, the autonomy of the local fellowship hinders the spread of liberalism and modernism in the church. If the liberals and the modernists can seize the headquarters and seize the seminary, from then on it's just a timeless struggle. They can eventually control the whole system.

And frankly, they don't care whether there are a few good gospel preaching evangelical disciples in some of the works in the meantime. It's like communism. It is a timeless struggle.

And they figure, well, in time we'll have the whole thing as a pathetic denomination. You've probably never heard of them out here in enlightened Colorado. But they're back there anyway, in the New England area.

And their strategy has been to infiltrate, for instance, the divinity school at Harvard and the seminaries back there. To infiltrate them and to show their insidious doctrines in those seminaries. And so they have men today who are preaching in many different denominational purposes and the people don't know the difference.

Don't know the difference. No, no. God's will is that the local fellowship be autonomous and be responsible to him alone.

And then just finally, before I close, the last principle that I see in the word of God is the priesthood of all believers. And this, too, is very, very precious to me. 1 Peter 2, familiar verses to us, 1 Peter 2 verse 4, first of all, 1 Peter 2, verse 4, To whom coming is unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious.

Ye also, as living stones are built up a spiritual house and holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Verse 9, But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. We are holy priests.

We are royal priests. All believers are. The Old Testament, in order to be a priest under the Mosaic system, you had to be of the tribe of Levi and of the family of Aaron.

That was the way of approach to God. Praise God, God has changed it all in our dispensation, and we are all holy priests. What is our function as holy priests? Well, it says right here in this verse, verse 5, to offer up spiritual sacrifice, not dead animals, spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

What are our spiritual sacrifices? Well, there are quite a few of them. We offer up the sacrifice of our praise, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name. Our highest privilege here on earth.

Our highest privilege. I like that statement that somebody shared with me from a little book on prayer. It says, God is more interested in our worship than in our service.

The heavenly bridegroom is wooing a bride, not hiring a servant. Isn't that nice? God is more interested in our worship, in our love, than in our service. The heavenly bridegroom is wooing a bride, not hiring a servant.

And so we offer up the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name, the sacrifice of our praise. We offer the sacrifice of our persons to him. Once again, not dead bodies, living bodies, wholly acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

We thank your bodies, a living sacrifice. And then we offer up the sacrifice of our pocketbooks too, don't we? To do good and communicate, forget not. With such sacrifices God is well praised.

And we offer up the sacrifice of our service to the Lord as well. Paul spoke of his ministry among the Gentiles as being a sacrifice. And so as holy priests we offer up these spiritual sacrifices to God as it says, as a royal priest we go forth to the world to show forth the excellency of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

We believe that. We believe in the priesthood of all believers, a truth that's precious to us. And so there we have it.

You have the truth of the one body. Let's stick to it. Let's be delivered from sectarianism of any kind and realize the preciousness of the body of Christ.

All believers are members of that body. Let's be careful to love all the people of God because they belong to Christ. It doesn't mean you can cooperate with them in everything.

It doesn't mean you can do what they do. It doesn't mean you believe all that they believe. But you're united with them in Christ, an indiscriminable link.

The plurality of elders in the assembly, through the faith, with the bishops and the deacons. Pray for your elders more perhaps than we have been doing. Christ, the gathering center, we go there because he's there.

He is the attraction, the object of our affection. The gifts given for the person who is a saint under the work of the ministry under the edifying of the body of Christ. The gifts are expendable.

The saints are not to become perpetually dependent upon them. Every local church, autonomous, standing there, Christ in the midst, nothing between to control those local churches. And finally, the priesthood of all believers, holy priests, royal priests, offering up spiritual sacrifices, going forth to speak of his excellency to all the world.

May the Lord bless these principles to our hearts today.

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