

Great Truths About the Church

by William MacDonald

The Church is one body, formed into a common body by the Holy Spirit, with Christ as its Head, and all believers are members of the body, priests of God, and part of God's holy people.

Scripture: John 14:16, Acts 2:47, Romans 8:26-27, 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, Ephesians 4:4-5, Colossians 1:18, 1 Thessalonians 4:17, 1 Peter 2:5

Topics: "Unity of the Church", "Spiritual Gifts"

Description

William MacDonald emphasizes the unity and significance of the Church as the one body of believers, highlighting that Christ is the head of this body, guiding and empowering it through the Holy Spirit. He explains that all believers, regardless of background, are integral members of this body, each with unique functions that contribute to the Church's growth and holiness. The sermon also underscores the priesthood of all believers and the importance of spiritual gifts for the edification of the Church. Ultimately, MacDonald assures that the Church is destined for eternal glory with Christ, serving as a testament to God's grace and wisdom.

Transcript

THERE IS ONE BODY

According to Ephesians 4:4 there is only one Church. In spite of all the circumstances that seem to deny it, the fact remains that as far as God is concerned, there is only one body of believers on the earth today. Although this Church is never visible to man in its entirety, yet it is formed into a common body by the Holy Spirit.

CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE BODY

By using the analogy of the human body (Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18), Paul teaches us that Christ as Head in heaven controls His body on earth. The head speaks of authority, leadership, and the seat of the intellect. The head and the body share the same life, interests and prospects. As the head is not complete without the body, so, in a sense, Christ is not "complete" without His Church. Thus we read in Ephesians 1:23 that the Church, as His body, "is the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." This is cause for deepest awe and worship in the believer.

ALL BELIEVERS ARE MEMBERS OF THE BODY

The moment a person is saved, he is added to the Church as a member of the body (Acts 2:47). This membership transcends the bounds of race, color, nationality, temperament, culture, social caste, language and denomination.

In his classic passage on the members of Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12:12-26), Paul reminds us that there are many members in the body (vv. 12-14). Every member has a function to perform (vv 15-17). However, not all members have the same function (v. 19). The welfare of the body depends on all the members working together (vv. 21-23). Because all the members of the body need each other, there is no cause for envy or discontent, on the one hand (vv. 15-17); or for pride and independence on the other (v. 21). Because all are members of the one body, there should be mutual care, sympathy, and joy (vv. 23-26).

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE REPRESENTATIVE OF CHRIST IN THE CHURCH

After He ascended into heaven, the Lord Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to be His Representative on the earth (John 14:16,26). The Spirit's activities in the Church may be seen in part from the fact that He leads Christians in their worship (Ephesians 2:18); He inspires their prayers (Romans 8:26, 27); He empowers their preaching (1 Thessalonians 1:5); He guides them in their activities, both positively (Acts 13:2), and negatively (Acts 16:6, 7); He raises up overseers for the church (Acts 20:28); He bestows gifts for its growth and effectiveness (Ephesians 4:11) and He guides believers into all truth (John 16:13).

THE CHURCH OF GOD IS HOLY

God is calling out of the nations a people for His name. He sets them apart to Himself from the sinful world and calls upon them to respond with lives of practical holiness (1 Corinthians 3:17). Only in this way can the Church faithfully represent a holy God in this corrupt scene.

GIFTS ARE GIVEN FOR THE EDIFICATION OF THE CHURCH

It is the Lord's will that the Church should grow both spiritually and numerically. To that end the risen Christ gives gifts to the Church (Ephesians 4:11). These gifts are men who are given special ability to build up the Church. As listed in Ephesians 4:11, the gifts are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. (see note 1).

We believe that the apostles and prophets were concerned primarily with the foundation of the Church (Ephesians 2:20). The need for these apostles and New Testament prophets passed when the foundation was laid, and we no longer have them, in the primary sense of the terms.(see note 2)

However, we still do have evangelists, pastors, and teachers. The evangelists go out to the world with the Gospel, bring sinners to Christ, and then lead them into the fellowship of the local church. Pastors take a shepherd-care of the flock, nourishing the sheep, encouraging them, and guarding them from evil. The teachers unfold the Word of God in an understandable way, and present the doctrines of the Scriptures in a well-balanced manner. However, the probability is that the "pastor-teacher" gift is one gift as the care of the flock would include teaching the Word of God.

As these gifts minister, the Church grows and the saints are built up in their most holy faith. Gifts are God's provision for the expansion of the Church.

ALL BELIEVERS ARE PRIESTS OF GOD

A final truth which we will mention in connection with the Church is the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5, 9). In the old Testament, only a certain group of men were eligible for the priesthood-the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron (Exodus 28:1). Today there is no special caste of priests, separate from their fellows, with distinctive garb and peculiar privileges. All children of God are priests of God with all the privileges and responsibilities that go with such a name.

THE COMPLETION AND DESTINY OF THE CHURCH

As has already been noted, the Church is now in the process of construction. Every time a soul is saved, a living stone is added to the building. The edifice is rising silently without sound of hammer. The Holy Spirit adds daily to the Church such as should be saved (Acts 2: 47).

One day soon, the work will be finished. The last stone will be added, and the Lord Jesus will descend into the air. As if drawn by a divine magnet, the Church will rise to meet the Savior, and together they both will return to the many mansions of the Father's house. And so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

It will be the Church's blessed portion not only to be with Christ forever, but also to share the glories which He won during His earthly career (John 17:22).

Throughout eternity the Church is destined to be an eternal witness to the glory of God. "That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7).

In the meantime, the Church is God's masterpiece on the earth-an object lesson to principalities and powers in heavenly places of the manifold wisdom of God. Every believer should therefore be vitally interested in the Church, and his Christian service should have the expansion and edification of the Church as one of its primary aims.

NOTES (1)

In 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, another list of spiritual gifts is given: the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, the gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, divers kinds of tongues, and interpretation of tongues. There is no necessary contradiction between the two lists. In Ephesians 4, the gifts are persons whose whole career, apparently, is given over to evangelism, teaching, or pastoral work. In 1 Corinthians 12, the gifts are endowments or abilities which are not necessarily limited to certain individuals but which the Holy Spirit may give to any member of the Body of Christ at any time He chooses. For instance, any Christian man may be Spirit-led to give a "word of wisdom" or a "word of knowledge" and yet not be exactly a teacher. Another may be able to point a soul to Christ and yet not be an evangelist.

Again in 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul speaks of apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, gifts of healing, helps, governments, and diversities of tongues. The question inevitably arises here as to whether we still have gifts of a miraculous nature today. In Hebrews 2:4, it is stated that God used signs and wonders to authenticate the early preaching of the Gospel. This was in days before the complete Word of God was available in written form. Many believe that with the coming of the complete Bible, the need for these miracles ceased. The Bible does not settle the matter decisively. While we believe that these miracle gifts are not with us today, generally speaking, yet we cannot say that the sovereign Spirit is not at liberty to

use them still, especially on those mission fields where the Scriptures are not extensively available. In any event, those who do profess to have these miraculous gifts must be careful to use them in accordance with the instructions of the Word (for example, the use of tongues is regulated in 1 Corinthians 14).

NOTES (2)

In a secondary sense, we doubtless still have apostles, if we simply mean men sent forth by the Lord, In this lesser sense, we still have prophets also, that is, men who cry out for God against sin and abuse But we utterly reject the idea that there are men today who have the same authority as was committed to the original apostles or who can speak by the same direct and inspired revelation as the New Testament prophets.

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