

Captive's Corner



"Bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ"

2 Corinthians 10:5

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Great Truths Concerning the Church

The life of every believer in Christ and, thus, the church, is the place God has chosen to put His Name and display His glory. Compare Haggai 1:1–2:9 with 1 Cor 3:16 and Eph 2:19-22 "... *ye are the temple of God*" and "... *an holy temple of God.*" Christ has such loving affections for the church that He has purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28; Galatians 2:20; Eph 5:25). The church is the great object lesson of God to the invisible creation. So the church should reflect the great truths of God in its worship of Him *in* this world and in its proclaiming of Him *to* this world. As we do, He is glorified to the hosts of angels because they view His wisdom in ways never seen before until the church was purchased by His blood (Eph 3:6-10; 1 Pet 2:5, 9).

Sadly, the church too many times is a poor reflection of God's wisdom and glory. I was grieved (as I'm sure the angels were) by the battle for control of St. Stanislaus church in St. Louis Missouri. Two quotes from the front page article of the Post-Dispatch were so vivid. The reporter wrote, "The real question is, who is in control of St. Stanislaus church?" He also quoted the members of St. Stanislaus as saying, "We met with the Archbishop and the message was clear— 'turn over the deed to your church building and land to the Archdiocese or lose your priest.' " The member went on to say that if they lost their priest they could no longer worship or partake of the Lord's Supper. If I was brought to tears by this article, can you imagine how God feels since He laid down His life for the church.

The sadness was deepened because as the members of St. Stanislaus and the Archbishop wanted control of it, both were wrong. God has given our crucified, risen, and highly exalted Lord Jesus as Head over all things to the church. Rightfully so, after all, He purchased it with His blood (Ephesians 1:20-23). Secondly, all believers are priests to God, equipped and empowered by His Spirit to perform the worship and service due our great God and Savior (1 Peter 2:5, 9;

Rev 1:6; Romans 12:1-2; Titus 2:13). Grieving with the heart of God, I wrote them to explain these simple truths. If believed, these truths would deliver them, glorify God, and accurately reflect God's wisdom in His church to the angels.

I still pray for St. Stanislaus. However, in principle, the lesson for us is: There but by the grace of God go us. We can have compassion on them instead of a critical spirit because we too are beset with weakness in how our lives and, therefore, collectively how our assembly reflects the great biblical truths concerning His church (Heb 5:2). Therefore, it is impressed upon us to know the great truths of the church. If God had not spoken, we would not know. So it is to His Word we look for the great truths of His blood purchased church. His church includes all who have repented in God's presence only to be comforted by faith in the blood of His Son—Jesus, which has satisfied God's justice regarding our offense against His Holy nature (Is 6:3).

We get the word *church* from the Greek word *ekklesia* in Scripture. It is translated as *assembly* also. It literally means "a called-out company or gathering." It is used for various gatherings such as an angry mob in Acts 19:32, 39,

41. Typically when there is a gathering or assembly of people they gather with or to a common interest or object. For example, at a sporting event thousands of people gather with great commitment and zeal to root their team to victory. The church has

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the life of Christ in common. All members are joined in living union by the Spirit of Christ (the Holy Spirit), and the church gathers to Christ. Therefore, the church differs from all the other religious and non-religious gatherings in the world. These are all lifeless for the church alone has become partakers of life eternal and abundant in our Living Lord Jesus. The church is a living organism, not a lifeless institution. *Ekklesia* is most often used in the Bible to refer to this living organism, both universally through the whole world as well as its local expression in a

group of gathered believers in Christ. The local church is composed of believers in a given locality who gather in simplicity to our Lord Jesus Christ, faithful and subject to Him. These saints have a common fellowship with other groups of true believers in other localities. Yet, they have no organization on earth that must link them together because they are linked by the very life and Spirit of Christ. Separated from sin and sinful men, we gather to worship God and to equip one another for service to God (1 John 5:11-12; John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:1-6; Acts 20:28).

The first great truth that the local church is to witness to the world and to the angels is that **there is only one body of Christ** (Ephesians 4:4). All believers in Christ, in union with one another by God's Spirit, are also in living union with the glorified Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Head and we are His body. Of course, a head only has one body, but there are many members of it. It is such a living and vital union that to ridicule and persecute a believer in Christ is to persecute Christ Himself—WOW!—See how unique and intimate we are to Him and in Him (Romans 6:3-4; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Acts 9:4-5; Luke 6:22-23, 27; John 16:33).

In many ways we can express the great truth that there is only one body of Christ in order to present an accurate witness of Christ instead of a "divided Christ." One obvious expression is to use names which are common to all believers in Christ, avoiding a sectarian (denominational) spirit (1 Cor 1:10-12; 3:1-4), e.g. *believers* (Acts 5:14), *saints* (1 Corinthians 1:2), *followers of the Lord* (1 Thessalonians 1:6). A second way we can practically express this truth is to not have an attitude of pride in association with a particular assembly of believers over another. Restricting ourselves to a particular group of believers is a barrier to the one body's fellowship. It also hinders the building up (equipping) of the body by limiting the movement and, therefore, the use of gifted men to a very limited number of believers. Pride in association with one group of believers over another confuses the world as to what the

church really is and "which church is right." This hinders their reception of the gospel. In Acts 2-4 we see the truth of the one body expressed very well. The early church was "of one accord," "all with one mind," caring for one another. And we see believers being added to the church daily as the world witnessed this great truth. Devotion to Christ and His word (1 Cor 11:2; 2 Tim 2:15), receiving and fellowshiping with all true believers [(common life in Christ) Rom 15:7], and accepting diversity within the body as a good and necessary thing (Rom 12:4-5) will aid our unity and true expression of the one body of Christ. It is by the very virtue of our differences that each is built up by the other to maturity. This is God's design. When His glory is the great desire of our heart, then we will be drawn together and love one another. Then His prayer will be answered: "That they may by one, even as We are one" (John 17:22).

A second truth about the church is that **Christ alone is head of His body**, the church (Eph 5:23). The Head in heaven controls His body on earth. The head speaks of authority, leadership, and the origin of the thinking, resulting in direction given to the body. The head and body share the same life, interests, and goals. As the head is not complete without the body, so in a very real sense, Christ is not complete without His church. Therefore, Ephesians 1:23 says that the church, as His body, "is the fullness of Him that filleth all in all." This is cause for deepest awe and worship.

The practical expression of this truth is that no human leader is head of the church (Ephesians 1:22). Also, no human organization is to control a local church (Acts 20:32). Further, no human leader is meant to rule over the church (3 John 1:9-10). The headquarters of the church are where the Head is, that is, in heaven. "Headquarters" speaks of the center of operations and of authority. Jesus Christ is the One Who is to guide the local church by His Spirit, directing its activities, and making its decisions. This requires the saints to walk a path of dependence,

prayer, and patient waiting on the Lord to make His will known. Thus, with Jesus Christ as Head of the church, each local gathering is responsible to Him. Regardless of each member's gift and, thus, his function in the body, his role is one of sacrifice and service to the benefit of the body so that all may grow up into the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, into a fuller experiencing of Him (2 Peter 3:18; Eph 1:16,17; Colossians 1:10).

Another great truth is that **all believers in Christ are members of the one body**. The moment a person repents and believes on Christ (His death for his sins, His burial and resurrection—1 Cor 15:1-5) he is saved and added to the church as a member of the body (Acts 2:47). The body has many members. Every member has a function to perform, but not all have the same function. This membership has no barriers or boundaries, not race, color, culture, nationality, or denomination. Since Jesus has abolished the wall of separation (the Law) between Jew and Gentile through the cross, the two can be reconciled into one body. God currently views man not as Jew or Gentile, but as either in His Son and, therefore, accepted and blessed by God, or outside and rejecting His Son and, therefore, at enmity (mutual hostility) with God and objects of His wrath (Jn 3:36; Eph 2). Christ is the first Man of and Head of a new race. In Christ, all believers (the church) are a new creation, a chosen race, a holy nation, a royal priesthood (1 Cor 15:45; 2 Cor 5:17; 1 Peter 2:9). The welfare and growth of the body depends on all members working together in humble, loving service. Each member is dependent on every member to be built up because no one has completely arrived; no one has all the spiritual gifts, knowledge, or maturity. Because all members of the body need each other, there is no true reason for envy or grumbling, pride or independence. Instead, dependence on one another should lead to mutual care, humility, and joy (1 Cor 12:12-31; 13:12; Phil 3:12-16; 2:1-8).

A further great truth about **the church of God is** that it is **holy**. God is calling a people out of this sinful world and setting them apart from it (1 Peter 2:5-9). His will and call for every believer then is a life of practical holiness (1 Peter 1:15-16; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 1 Cor 3:17; Titus 2:11-14). Without this practical and vigilant pursuit of holiness the church cannot truly represent our holy God in and to this corrupt world (1 Pet 2:11-12; 2 Cor 6:11-7:1). The world can read about the gospel of Christ or hear about it by word of mouth. Yet, they need to and must *see it* by seeing in the lives of believers that the gospel of Christ delivers from sin versus other

"gospels" which do not. The world (our neighbor, our co-worker, etc.) cannot see our inheritance of eternal life in Christ or see that our sins are removed, but they can see the delivering power of the gospel in a changed life. If we lived a radically changed life, instead of knocking on doors to share the gospel, a sin-burdened world would be knocking on ours to ask, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:25-34).

Yet another great truth about the church is that our crucified, risen, and ascended Lord has provided for His body in **the Holy Spirit Who is His representative in the church**. Jesus Christ, victorious over sin, Satan, and the world ascended to the right hand of God and is now before the Father as our great High Priest. He forever guarantees salvation for every believer (Hebrews 7:23-25).

Therefore, Jesus keeps His promise in sending a Helper and Comforter like Himself (John 14:16, 26). The Spirit leads us in our meetings, e.g., prayer and worship (Eph 2:18); He inspires our prayers (Romans 8:16, 26-27); He empowers our teaching, preaching and exhorting (1 Thessalonians 1:5); He raises up under-shepherds to care for the flock (church) through service and sacrifice (Acts 20:28); He gives gifts to the church to enable or equip it to grow both spiritually and numerically (Eph 4:11-16); He guides the church in all aspects (Acts 13:2; 16:6, 7), and He guides believers into all truth (John 16:13).

Also in connection with the church is the great truth of the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:5, 9). Unlike in the Old Testament with Israel, in the church, **all believers are priests to God**, to offer up spiritual sacrifices to Him. This priesthood has no special class of men apart from the congregation, for the entire congregation are priests (Ex 28:1; Rev 1:6). The sacrifices of the New Testament priest are spiritual, e.g., the praise of our lips (Heb 13:15). This relates to every believer (priest) having the liberty to take part in public praise, prayer, and testimony for God when believers assemble. This truth applies to the believer's whole life. He is a priest to God at work, where he lives, in his leisure time, etc. For a more in-depth description of the New Testament priesthood and all its sacrifices, read the Captive's Corner *Today's Priesthood and Its Sacrifices*. Every believer has priestly privileges and responsibilities which relate to service toward God (1 Peter 2:5) and toward man (1 Peter 2:9).

A final great truth about the body of Christ is that **God gives spiritual gifts to His church** to bring about its maturity and growth. God desires many sons in glory who are transformed into the likeness of His Son (Eph 4:11-16; Heb 2:10; Rom 8:29; 1 John 3:2). He gives differing gifts which are an expression of His sovereign will and His desire to bless His people (Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:7-11, 28-30). Finally, He gives gifts to enable us to serve and, thereby, build up one another through speaking/ministering (1 Pet 4:10-11).

In conclusion, although the body labors, it is the Lord that provides the increase to His body each day by saving souls (Acts 2:47). He promises to come for His people so we can be with Him forever. This is the Church's great, sure, and constant hope (1 Thess 4:17; John 14:1-3). The church is an object lesson now to the angelic realm (Ephesians 3:10) and will be an eternal expression of His grace in the ages to come (Ephesians 2:7). In light of this, may we exhibit a faithful and living testimony of the great truths regarding the church which is His body, **purchased with His blood**. May we have confidence, not shame, when He suddenly appears (1 John 2:28).

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