

The Church

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In our discussion of the church, it is inevitable that we should repeat some of the material which appears earlier in this book. The subject of the church in the final analysis covers or touches every aspect of the Christian's relationship to God.

When the Bible uses the word *church*, it means something different from what is meant in everyday use of this word. In any ordinary conversation I might use the word *church* to mean a *building*, as when I would say, "There are three churches in our block." The Bible does not use the word *church* in that sense. I could also use the word *church* to refer to a *denomination*, as when I would say, "The Baptist Church has many congregations in this city." The Bible does not mention denominations at all. I could use the word *church* to refer to a *cultural factor* at work in the community. In this way I could say, "The church opposes vice and the sale of alcoholic beverages." But the Bible never uses the word *church* in that way. I could use the word *church* to refer to all public activities of Christians as a group in society. In this way I could say, "The church was certainly weak in the community where I grew up as a boy." The word *church* is never used that way in the Bible. Or I could use the word *church* to refer to a *cause*. And so I could say, "I am certainly in favor of promoting the church." By this you would understand that I am in favor of anything that produces the good and the moral. But again it is not used in that sense in the New Testament. I could also speak of the *church* as "the pillar of society." I could say, "Our American society rests upon the home, the church, and the school." And everyone would understand that I meant to say that the *church* is one of the factors which build up our civilization. This would be understood by my hearers, but the New Testament never uses the word *church* in that way.

Each of the uses which I have mentioned above is meaningful. Each means something in our modern language, and it is possible to see how each idea is related to the true *church* as set forth in the Scriptures. But not one of these ideas is what the Bible means when it uses the word *church*.

ECCLESIA

The word *church* was originally a Greek word, *Ecclesia*. It was used in the New Testament, and it gives the real meaning of the church because it means the "called-out ones." This really describes the believers in Christ. Believers in Christ are actually the "called-out ones" and so are called the *Ecclesia*, which is the Greek word we translate as *church*.

The question might well be asked, *called out* from what? The Bible would answer, "called out from the world." This does not refer to a change of location. The Scriptures say that believers are "in the world but not of the world." The church remains in the world, but actually is not part of the world. How can this be? The church may be likened to a boat in a lake. The boat is in the lake, but it is not of the lake. The only reason the boat is of use is because it is not part of the lake; for the minute the boat and the lake become the same thing, the boat loses its usefulness. It is only while the boat can ride on and over the lake that it can be useful.

So it is with the church. The church is in the world, but it is not of the world. The church is called out of the world so far as its nature and life are concerned. That does not mean that the church is a part of the world which has been made over - refined, moralized, spiritualized - so that it is the part of the world

which is moral and spiritual. It is something taken *out of* and *away from*. But now our thinking must be directed to Biblical expressions, because in trying to understand the church as the *called-out ones* the question could well be asked, "Can we be sure that this is the meaning of the word?"

The Bible is filled with illustrations of *called-out* people. Consider first, Noah. In Noah's time, the judgment of God had gone out; and the whole world was to be destroyed by water. But Noah was *called out* of that destruction. God told him what to do, and he carried out God's command in the building of the ark to the saving of his family. Although the flood came, it did not destroy Noah because he was *called out, singled out, separated* from the rest of the people by the fact that he did what God told him to do in the making of the ark.

Secondly, consider Abraham. Abraham is the classic example of faith. Christians are called children of Abraham and the whole of Scripture would point to Abraham and say, "There is a man who believed in God." But what did Abraham do when he believed God? When we read Genesis 12:1 and Hebrews 11:8, we find that Abraham left behind everything that was his own and came into a new country where he had never been. The word *Hebrew* in the Old Testament and the word *Ecclesia* in the New Testament are similar in their meaning. The word *Hebrew* means *over*. The *Hebrew* is a man from *over yonder*, an immigrant. A man may be spoken of as going "over the hill" in the sense that he is going away. In a rather peculiar yet significant way, Abraham was the world's first recognized immigrant. He left his own country and "came out" into a new country.

Both Noah and Abraham begin to point to what is meant by the church. In the New Testament, the church is not only spoken of as *called out* in the word *Ecclesia*, but Christians are called *strangers* and *pilgrims* (Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 2:11). The believer in Christ is distinctly told that he does not belong in this world but that his citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). The word *stranger* has a very broad meaning, and the word *pilgrim* is rarely used in present-day speech; so perhaps the word *tourist* will give a clearer idea of what we mean. A *tourist* is a visitor; he is passing through the community; he does not belong there. He obeys the laws of the community but he is not part of the community. Any member of the true *church* is a *tourist* in the world.

The Book of Exodus (Chapters 1-14) tells of Israel's bondage in Egypt. The time came, however, when those people were *called out* of Egypt. This whole story sets forth the very basic idea that I will have to "come out of" and "away from" the situation that I am in as a human being before I can "come into" the blessing of God.

If I become a member of the church through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, then I really belong to Him. I will experience being "called out of" myself to "come into" the things of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Himself said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). As a Christian I am distinctly told to reckon myself "indeed to be dead unto sin that we may be alive unto God."

In these various scriptural uses it seems clear that the word *church* refers to people who have been "called out of" anything that is natural and ordinary with them, "into" something that God wants them to be. We can see that the primary meaning of the word *church* is the *called-out ones*. This is not something church members should seek to become. This does not mean that after being a member of the church for a certain period of time a person finally becomes separated to Christ. This is the way it all starts. I begin to be a Christian by being separated to Christ. But can I begin to be a Christian without any experience or preparation? It is very much like getting married. Folks can get married without any former experience. They can get married without knowing anything about it, and many do get married without even thinking much about it. When a couple gets married it simply means that out of all the group of girls

that used to live in that neighborhood, this one girl becomes the bride of this one boy. In that sense, she is "called out of" all the girls in that community to be the wife of this particular man. In the same sense, the church is "called out of" all the world to become the Bride of Christ. A young couple can be married without having had any previous experience, but everyone would agree that once they get married they have experience, and experiences follow. Marriage is real from the very outset. So it is in the matter of being in the church.

Since the word *Ecclesia* is being considered, it would be well to mention the adjective *ecclesiastical*. We use this word when we say about some man: "He is an ecclesiastical officer." Or we may say, "That is an ecclesiastical organization." The adjective *ecclesiastical* means far less than the word *church*. It is about twice removed from the original idea. It refers to the church organization and that is the church at its poorest. The church is at the best level in the heart condition of the people. We have the beginning of the church when the individual soul receives the Lord Jesus Christ. We see the church more really when the individual Christian worships the Lord Jesus Christ, and we see the church at its best when the individual Christian does the will of the Lord Jesus Christ and feels personally responsible to Him.

When the church is set up as an organization and becomes a public group, it always has people in it who do not really belong to it. There can be people voting on ecclesiastical problems who are not really Christians, people not really dedicated and yielded to the Lord. While the word *ecclesiastical* does belong to *Ecclesia* by way of its origin, it is only in this sense that it refers to the church organization. The scriptural meaning of the word *church* is far more fundamental and basic in Christian experience than the organization which, of course, comes later. The matter of being "called out to be with Him" points to the vital heart of the true church of God.

THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

The Bible sometimes speaks of the church as the *Bride of Christ*. This is one name for the church that the whole world would understand. The writers of the New Testament may well have had in mind that the word *bride* would be understood by people in any culture and in any society. A bride is one who belongs to her husband, and in that sense the church belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is meant to be very exclusive. The church belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ as she belongs to no one else. The church is a group of people who are "called out of" everything that is natural to live only in the Lord Jesus Christ. They belong to Him in a way in which they belong to nothing else. When I am a member of the Bride of Christ, there is no organization that I belong to, there is no society that I am a member of, there is no culture in which I am related, there is no family into which I was born, there is absolutely no other relationship that is now to be considered equal to my relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. I belong to Him more and differently than I belong to anything or to anybody.

When a woman marries a man she belongs to him, and when a man marries a woman he belongs to her and these "twain become one flesh"; they forsake all else that they should belong together. When the Bible speaks of the church as the Bride of Christ, it has in mind that these individual Christians belong to Him *first* before all others. When our Lord Jesus Christ was here upon earth, on one occasion certain people came to Him and said that His mother and brothers were outside and wanted to talk with Him. "But He answered and said unto him that told Him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? and he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matt. 12:50). In that way, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself showed how exclusive and

completely absorbing this relationship is in which the Bride of Christ belongs to her Lord.

When we think of a bride we have in mind immediately that she is loved by her husband. It may be that different husbands love to a different extent; but so far as any one husband is concerned, all the love in his heart goes out to his bride. Just as the bride is loved by her husband, so the church is loved by the Lord Jesus Christ. This places a significance upon the church and upon its members. If I am a member of the church, I am a person who is loved by the Lord Jesus Christ.

A bride begins a new life with her husband. Wife and husband will live together as neither one of them lived before. They are going to have fellowship in things that neither of them has experienced before. They are going to have experiences together that are part of a common life. The same is true with the church. To speak of the church as the Bride of Christ means that I as a Christian am going to enter into a fellowship and relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ that I have never had before and that will shut out all others and open up new experiences for me such as I never could have by myself.

When we say that a certain woman becomes the bride of a certain man, we mean that she becomes a part of him and the two of them become the beginning of a home and the be of a family. So, too, with the church. When the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ receives Him and enters into fellowship and relationship with Him, the Christian becomes part of something that never existed for him before. This is going to lead him into experiences that he never had before.

When the church is called the Bride of Christ, we emphasize the *personal* nature of the relationship. When a man gets married, no other man but *that* man gets married; and when a girl gets married, there is no other girl but *that* girl who gets married. It is very personal. In this sense, it is a personal matter when I receive the Lord Jesus Christ. Nobody else in the church, or in the community, or in that church service has the experience that I have. I have an experience that is altogether *personal* and altogether *singular*.

Being a member of the Bride of Christ is also a *total* relationship. When a girl gets married, she gets married *in toto*. When a boy gets married, he gets married *altogether*. It is possibly true there are boys and girls in the world, who do not fully realize this. They seem to imagine they can get married and still be what they were. This is one thing, however, they will certainly find out. It is quite possible they will be better than they ever were, but they will surely be different. The same is true with reference to becoming a Christian. Something happens to me when I become a member of the church, the Bride of Christ: something that is complete, and total, and final. When I become a member of the Bride of Christ I enter into a relationship that is intended to be forever. In the Bible, marriage is considered to be permanent. In the world, marriage is often entered into as a temporary arrangement; but even so, when husband and wife come together and they "twain become one flesh" something happens to each of them that changes them forever.

When we speak of the church as the Bride of Christ, we mean that the church is loved by the Lord and that she loves the Lord, in an exclusive way. The Bible teaches again and again that it is the will of Almighty God that the church shall belong to Him only. In speaking about this, James uses very blunt language. He says, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that friendship of the world is enmity with God?" (James 4:4). That language is used to refer to this very relationship and means that when I come as a bride to the Lord Jesus Christ and then let my heart be diverted to anything else in the world, I am guilty of spiritual adultery. It is like the woman who marries a man and then lets her heart be turned aside to other men. That is not the way it should be either with human relationships or with the church. As the Bride of Christ, the church shares all Christ is. When a girl marries a man, she shares whatever he is and has. He gives her his name; she comes into his home, and from that time on he is Mr. So-and-so and she is Mrs. So-and-so. They work together. The bride may herself have nothing and the groom may

be a millionaire; but the moment she marries him she is a millionaire because she has and shares everything that he is and has.

The Bible speaks of Christians as being "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Heb. 8:17). All that Christ has the Christian shares in the sense that the Christian belongs to Him and His Bride and is involved in all that He does. When I live truly in this fashion, I will be interested in winning souls because the Lord Jesus is interested in winning souls. The Lord Jesus is interested in going to the ends of the earth to win the heathen people to God; therefore, the church is interested in going to the ends of the earth to win heathen people to God. I share all that He does. I do not just reap the benefits of belonging to Christ, but I actually participate in what is going on in the same way the bride participates with her husband in the life that he lives.

We could also say that the church gives her whole heart to her Lord. Her heart is what He wants. If I have money, or means, or prestige, I can give all that, but the main thing Christ wants is my heart, my mind, and my strength.

In all this discussion we can see that the expression the *Bride of Christ* gives an idea of the proper mind of a Christian. As a Christian, I should be thinking that I am married to the Lord Jesus Christ and have entered into total communion and companionship with Christ Jesus as my Beloved. This is final, so that I am not looking for anything else. It is personal, so that with the living Lord Jesus I seek to be in constant communion. It is a case of feeling together, of being together, of thinking together, and of walking together, with Christ Jesus. We should keep in mind that when we say the church is "thinking together with the Lord Jesus Christ," we do not mean that the church had any original contribution to make that would affect His mind. It is not exactly the same as when we think about a husband and a wife in this world. Man and wife, both being human, are obviously on an equal basis; but when we speak of the church as the Bride of Christ, we remember that the Lord Jesus Christ is in Himself God and the church is not. Actually, the church becomes His body and so enters into a real relationship with Him. In this way the church will think His thoughts after Him, and His thoughts will become her thoughts; His feelings will become her feelings. Something like this happens time and again when people get married. When husband and wife live together in a normal marriage relationship, the one begins to think and to feel like the other. That is the way it is with the church - the Bride of Christ.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

The church is often spoken of in the Bible as the *body of Christ*. When this term is used, the emphasis is upon the obedience which the church should exercise and the service which the church should render. The word *body* is intended to refer to just the same function that our bodies have. When we say the church is the body of Christ, we mean the church is in relationship to Christ as my body is in relationship to me.

What, after all, is my hand? It is a part of my physical body. My hand does things which cannot be done by my ear, my foot, my lungs, or any other part of my body. It is that part of the tissues, muscles, and bones of my body that is designed for use when I want to shove, carry, pick up, or write something. If my hand is going to be a real hand, it must obey me. If I want to pick up something, I have to grasp it and hold it. If I want to carry something, I have to hang on to it. If I want to lay it down, I must let go of it. If I desire to place an object that is lying on one table on another table, my hand must move where I want it to move. If my hand is going to be useful to me, it must be obedient to me. My hand, in itself, will not have any thoughts of its own. It must do what I want to do with it.

The church as the *body of Christ* is in just such a relationship to Christ. It does not figure things out for itself. The church does not decide what it is going to do. The church tries to do in obedience what the living Lord wants it to do at any time in any place. When I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and belong to the church, the body of Christ, I am to be an obedient member of His body. Then, as part of the body as a whole, I am to be obedient to the Head.

When trying to understand obedience, we may remember that there are times when hands do not do as they should. There are unfortunate people whose hands have become paralyzed. Very often a paralyzed hand stays small; in time it withers, and loses all its strength. The same is true with the church if it will not do as the Lord wants it to do. When we use the word *church* we must keep in mind that the church is the individual Christian belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever happens to the church starts in the individual believer. If I as a Christian do not respond to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ and do not do what He wants me to do, then that relationship will shrivel like a withered hand. In the story of the miracle of the healing of the man with the withered hand (Mark 3:1-5), a picture is given of any Christian who does not obey the Lord. The church must respond to her Lord's will in the same way the hand must respond to the person's will.

There may be aspects of the spiritual experience that are involuntary and over which a person has no control. There are organs in the body whose actions are involuntary and over which a person has no conscious control. The heart beats without the will's being involved. The blood circulates in the body unconsciously. The liver, the lungs, and other inner organs go about their work without the person's deciding about their function. In spiritual experience, the Lord Jesus Christ may accomplish some things in men even when they are asleep. As the body lives while the person sleeps, so the spiritual experience would go on even when the person sleeps. God will do even more than men can ask or think and He will work out His will in our lives, even though part of what He does never comes to our conscious attention. But the body is to be the means by which the person operates. With the body the person performs the daily tasks, whatever they may be. So, too, the Lord operates with the use of His body.

The believer in Christ may ask, "What would the Lord Jesus Christ want me to do?" He is not left entirely to his own imagination. He can turn to the Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - and there find out what the Lord Jesus wants His followers to do. The Lord Jesus said, "as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." It is not to be thought that the Father stayed in heaven and sent the Lord Jesus down into this world on an errand by Himself. While there is a sense in which it may be said that God sent forth the Son, it must be remembered that there was never a time when the Father was not with the Son. The Son went out in obedience to the Father, but He could at any time lift His eyes up to heaven and speak to His Father: "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me" (John 11:41). As Christ stood before the world, He could say, "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). He further said that He did nothing of Himself, but "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5: 17). The Lord Jesus Christ testified to the whole world that at all times there was the very closest communion between Himself and His Father. Although to the human mind it might at first appear that God sent His Son away from Himself, God went with Him. It is in this fashion that the Lord Jesus said, "even so send I you." He sends the church out into the world but never to go alone. The great commission of the Lord Jesus Christ was, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations . . . and, *lo, I am with you always*, even to the end of the world" (Matt. 28:19-20).

At one time it was my expectation to go to the mission field. My father-in-law questioned me as to why I was going. The best reason I finally discovered for my going to the mission field was to have fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. If I did not go, I would not be with Him. Later, the best reason I

could give for going into the pastorate was that if I did not take this work I would not be with Him. The best reason I had for talking to a soul to see if he could be won to Christ was that if I did not go and talk to that soul I would not be in fellowship with the Lord. My father-in-law tried to bring to me the idea that when the Lord Jesus said, "Lo, I am with you alway," He did not necessarily mean "Lo, I am following after you." It could very well mean "Lo, I am going before you." The verse says, "I am with you *always*, even unto the end of the world." Going before would be the normal way in which Christ would do it. When He was with the disciples, He always led them; and when He is with present-day Christians, He will also lead them.

The church, then, is going to be led by the Lord Jesus Christ. Believers are not left entirely in the dark as to what that leading will be. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John tell what Christ did. It is astonishing that there is no record of the Lord Jesus Christ's doing anything that ordinary human beings do. The Bible does not say that He built any fortune; it does not say that He built any buildings. It does not say that He painted a picture, or that He wrote a poem, or carved a statue. He never led an army. He wrote no music. What did He do? *He came to seek and to save the lost.* He came to win men to God, and He did that as no one else ever did. That shows exactly what the church should be doing. It is the only thing, really and truly, that the church should actually be doing in the world. Christ has not changed His mind. During the time that He was here on earth, He did His work; and now that He is gone, He is not going to do something else. No, He did what He had to do, and now He will send us to do the same. "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."

Christians, being members of His body, will not be led through the same physical experience that He was led through; but the spiritual experiences will be the same. This could be pointed out in many different ways. If the Lord Jesus Christ wants to do anything in our community today, He will do it through His believing people. If He wants to talk to somebody who is not in communion with His Father in heaven, the only way that He can talk to that person is through a believer who will go and speak to that person.

When Paul had seen the Lord on the road to Damascus and was left blind in the house of Simon on the street called Straight, Ananias was sent to him and was told to speak to him and baptize him and give him his sight. Ananias needed to go in order for Paul to have the benefits intended for him. That is a way of saying that there will be no one invited to church unless the members of the church *go* and invite them. No one will be taught the Gospel unless believers teach them. That is how the Lord Jesus Christ wants to do it. Believing people - the church - are members of the body of Christ, and as such they are His means of working in this world.

MEMBERS ONE OF ANOTHER

The Bible speaks of the church as being *members one of another*. Notice, however, that this expression follows the phrase *one body in Christ* - the *body of Christ*. The attention is now focused upon the *relationship between Christians*. We have seen that the term *body of Christ* means the relationship of the individual church member to the Lord as being similar to the relationship of a member of the human body to the head of the body. Christians are primarily members of His body. In the second sense, and involved in that idea, they are members of each other; but we should remember that they become members of each other as they become members of Christ. Christians are members of the *body of Christ* in what they do and in how they obey. As members of Christ's body, Christians are guided through communion with Him that they should follow as He leads, and do what He wants them to do.

Now we shall see that individual believers, Christians, as members of Christ's body are also *members one of another*. They are *members one of another* mostly in experience; however, they do not learn from one another what they ought to do, for that is learned from the Lord. But while they are doing what the Lord wants them to do and while they are doing these things together, they have the experience of being *fellow members of His body - members one of another*.

With reference to his inner feeling, the believer is first of all conscious of the Lord, but if any one member is disobedient to the Lord there is set up in the heart of fellow believers sadness, distress, strain, and uneasiness because this fellow Christian has not obeyed the Lord. All will feel his guilt and his responsibility. They sympathize and share in his feeling. Paul makes this clear when he states, "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12:26).

It is very important that members of the church, Christian people, should be aware of this fact that they have such a real relationship with each other. They belong to each other not because they are led by each other as to what to do, for each believer is led by the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. But whatever results from the service of anyone, the consequences of obedience or disobedience, these are shared with each other. If some one member of the church has been led of the Lord to serve Him in a marked way or if one member of the church gives liberally to missions, the whole church is lifted by such service. If one member of the church is moved to engage in evangelistic activity, seeking to win souls, the whole church is conscious of it. Every member of the church may not approve it, but all members will be aware of it and the entire tone of the church will be affected by the fact that one member is doing something.

In the same way, if there are members of the church who do nothing, taking no part in evangelistic activities at all, the tendency will be for the whole church to do nothing. Even those who would be minded to do something will feel it hard to do anything because there does not seem to be any support. There will be individuals who will carry on visitation in spite of disinterested members, but such will feel the drag of those who will not visit. It is a bit like being in a company of people where everybody is tired; you, too, will soon feel sleepy. However, if you were in the company of people who were alert and bright and interested, you too would become more wide-awake. This does not work actually 100 per cent, but it is a tendency. If one member suffers, all other members suffer with him. If one member is hurt, all the members are hurt; and if one member is blessed, they are all blessed. They share; they are *members one of another*.

Because Christians share this mutual relationship with each other, the individual should keep in mind that if he wants his own spiritual life to grow, he needs to be interested in other Christian people. Any one Christian person will find that his own relationship with the Lord will not prosper unless he gives actual and intelligent attention to other Christians with whom he is associated. Sometimes he will see in them things that should be prayed for; he may see deficiency; he may see faults. The Scriptures tell him to do this. Members *need to do* this or else their own spiritual life will falter.

Being *members one of another* carries in it the meaning that Christians are all related to each other. Therefore, a genuinely sincere Christian should have in mind that any other genuinely sincere believer in any church or denomination is his personal brother. This will mean that if a Christian in a community is a member of the Presbyterian Church because he wants to be a member of the Presbyterian Church and if there is a Methodist Church in the community, he should pray for that Methodist Church. There may be an Episcopal Church, a Pentecostal Church, a Salvation Army Church, or a Roman Catholic Church in the community, and the Christian should keep in mind that among all these congregations there could be someone who is actually his brother because that person names the name of Christ. When a Christian

approaches the Lord, maintaining communion with Him, he could have in mind that if for any reason he feels sluggish in his relationship with the Lord, it might well be that the body of Christians in that whole community is just slow; they are cool and he needs to pray for all of them. They may not all warm up at the same time, and it may be that revival will start in his own heart. When a revival starts in my heart I should be very careful that I do not let myself be moved into isolation and away from other people. I should remain concerned about them, for if they belong to the Lord Jesus Christ it should be my desire that what is happening to me would happen to them. This is the attitude that is grounded in the truth that Christians are *members one of another*.

Because Christians are *members one of another*, they will do certain things with each other. In the Book of James, the Christian is told: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). Many Christian people will have in mind that other members will not always confess their faults to them, so they will have to pray for them even though they have not confessed their faults. The matter of being conscious of the faults of other Christians can be very normal; but I should take care that such knowledge does not degenerate into criticism. It should move me to prayer. As the Christian becomes aware of the needs of others, he should pray about them. Christians are *members one of another*.

When the Christian learns something about the Lord Jesus Christ, he will want to share it with others. If one Christian has some understanding about Scripture, he will try to impart it to other people, bringing out of his treasury things new and old. Christians will also give to each other of their material things. When the Christian becomes conscious that some other member of the church is in need, he will feel inclined to share with him. Christian people will visit the sick and help those who are in trouble and those in need in the congregation, because they are members one of another.

By working for each other, Christians are helped to respect one another. Being members of the body of Christ and members one of another means that when I become a Christian I belong to fellow Christians and I belong to the Lord. Upon observing members in the early church, the pagan people said of them, "Behold, how they love one another." That comment has been used as sarcasm in our present day, but it is true that Christians do care for each other. Christians should strive to "love one another" so that the statement may be no less true now than when it was made concerning the first-century church.

THE HABITATION OF GOD

The Bible teaches that Christians should not "forsake the assembling of themselves together." In this way, the writer of the Book of Hebrews puts it upon my heart and mind that I should meet in fellowship with other Christians. The reason I should do this is simply that we are all members of the church.

In what we have said before, we have pointed out that as a Christian I am a member of the "body of the Lord Jesus Christ" and belong to Him; and, also, with reference to other Christians we are "members one of another" and belong to each other. Now we shall see that as Christians we not only are to *belong to* each other but also we are to have *fellowship with* each other. We are to have *communion* with each other, and this is what happens when we come together in church meetings.

In the New Testament, we can see this idea plainly because many of the epistles were written to churches rather than to single individuals. Much of the explanation of the Gospel was given to Christians as a group. The Book of Romans was written to the Christians who were in Rome; the Books of 1 and 2 Corinthians were written to the church of God in Corinth; the Book of Ephesians was written to the

believers at Ephesus. Each of the church epistles of Paul was written to some congregation, yet it is known that the truth comes to the believer *individually*. I must as an individual receive the Lord Jesus Christ and must myself belong to Him; however, I am to have this individual experience in fellowship with other Christians. While the Lord does deal with me in my own heart and I have a person-to-person relationship with the Lord so that I become a member of the body of Christ before I am in the church as members one of another; yet when the Lord would teach and bring ideas to me, He speaks to me when I am in the church. So we can see why the messages in the epistles are directed to what is called the *church*.

The *church* in itself is never anything but the company, the fellowship, of believing people. In fact, I receive an understanding of the Gospel when I am in company and in communion with other people. This is actually helpful for the soundness of my spiritual experience, because the very nature of man is such that "it is not good that man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18). This is not only true for me *personally* and *socially*, but it is true for me *spiritually*. When I am together with other Christians, I am stronger; and I am also kept from personal peculiarities.

We notice as we look around at people we know that when people live with other people they are likely to be normal. But if anybody lives by himself and is alone a lot, there is a tendency for that person to become queer. Such a person can actually become unbalanced. Certain things in which he has a personal interest get bigger and certain things in which he is not personally interested get smaller, until his judgment and his conduct are simply not sound. Living together with other Christians in the Lord is important because in being together with others we keep a better balance. One person may be more interested in one aspect of the truth; another person may have greater interest in another aspect so that together they balance each other. Suppose there is a congregation with three members named Tom, Dick, and Harry. When they all meet together, Tom emphasizes what he is interested in, Dick emphasizes what he is interested in, and Harry emphasizes what he is interested in. The result is that Tom, Dick, and Harry have more together than if Tom were alone, or Dick alone, or Harry alone. God has arranged it this way so that no one should have the total responsibility for all that he has. Some of what I have as a Christian comes to me from other Christians.

When a group of people are going to live together, they must have some kind of order. If not, they will become a mob, and that is not far away from a riot. Whenever people gather as a group, some form of leadership is needed. This is what the Bible teaches about the church. When Christians come together, *gifts* are given to them wherein God helps them along with their living together. The *gifts* are "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers" (Eph. 4: 11). An *apostle* is a man who serves other people; a *prophet* is a man who teaches other people; a *pastor* is a man who watches over other people; a *teacher* is a man who gives ideas to other people. Every one of these *gifts* is exercised with other people, and this shows that God has in mind that some individuals should serve others by helping them in their faith and life. Such servants are given special abilities "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in unity of the faith . . . unto a perfect man." The Bible says that Christians coming together "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:20-22). The expression "fitly framed together" brings out that one person will be given one kind of ability, while another will have a different ability. So there will be some who can interpret well, some who can perform and carry out practical activities, some who pray well, and so on. But working together they all help the church to grow.

When I think about anything being "fitly framed together," I think of a house. In order for a house to be "fitly framed together" it must have walls, a roof, and a floor properly arranged. The whole house cannot be walls nor can it be all roof. If it were all floor, it would be a patio and not a house. To be a house it must have doors, windows, and some wall space. It could not be all doors. Between doors and windows there must be wall space. The general idea is plain enough that it takes all these different parts to make a house. So it is with the church, the fellowship of Christians. All members must function with each other and "those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary" (I Cor. 12:22). This is what Paul meant when he wrote, "All the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord."

Peter says the same thing. In speaking of Christians, he says, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house . . ." (I Pet. 2:5). The word *lively* means *living*. Here Peter is bringing in the idea that Christians are more than individuals, more than just single persons. They are persons in action. In their action they should be together as Christians. What does the word *stones* mean? Stones are the material from which the temple is built. When Peter says "a spiritual house," he means what Paul means when he says "an habitation of God." They both are referring to the church. Apparently they want us to get the idea that it is God's plan that the church as a group of people should be *gathered together*, and also they should be *structured together* in the sense that each will have his own function to perform. As an individual I will have some part to play, some function to perform; and the strength of the church will be determined by the manner in which I and others like me perform our particular functions.

The important thing for a brick in a wall is that it should remain a brick and stay in its place. The brick must not melt away or fall out of place. If the brick does not stay in its place, the wall will collapse at that point. Staying in place is just what many Christians need to do as church members. They need to be simply what they are and be faithful to that.

Being "fitly framed together" can be illustrated by a person's hand. The hand is composed of five fingers, and yet the hand is more than just the five fingers. The hand can do some things which no one finger could do. But for it to be a hand, the five fingers must each one do its part. The thumb must act like a thumb and the little finger must act like a little finger. If for any reason all the fingers should do the same thing in exactly the same way, it would not be a hand; it would be a flipper. A hand must be flexible, and the only way it can be flexible is for each of the fingers to do its part. So it is in the church; all the members "fitly framed together" can do much when each one does his part and lets the others do their parts.

THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Bible speaks of the church as being the *temple of the Holy Spirit*. We have been thinking of how the church, builded together, is "an habitation of God." This can be called the temple of God. And that means there will be a time when the Lord Himself will come to dwell in it.

The tabernacle in the days of the Exodus of Israel was the first dwelling place of God among His people. When it was finally completed and every part of it had been put together according to the specifications which God Himself had ordered, there came a time when it was filled with the glory of God (Exod. 40:34). This is called the "Shekinah Glory of God." The same thing happened when the temple of Solomon was built. When every part of the temple had been completed, and all the furnishings had been put in place, when the priests had been sanctified, the sacrifices offered, and the people waited before the Lord, suddenly the glory of God burst forth and for seven days no one could go in or come

out of the temple (1 Ki. 8:11).

In the early church the Christians were to learn that in their communion and fellowship together, they were the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches that the Christian's body is the, temple of the Holy Spirit, but there is also a strong emphasis that the Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of His people when they are in fellowship with each other in a way that He cannot dwell in their hearts when they are not in fellowship with one another.

When the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, He came to the group. The church was together "with one accord (of one heart and of one mind) in one place" (Acts 2: 1). The expression "one heart and one mind" means exactly what "fitly framed together" means. All Christians had the same ideas. This does not mean that they were all alike. Peter was still Peter; James was still James; John was still John. Each one of the apostles retained his own nature and remained his own size, so to speak; but there was a union and a communion among them. There was a unity into which the Holy Spirit was given.

When the Lord Jesus was here on earth, He said, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). The Lord Jesus Christ comes to dwell in the hearts of believers. But is there ever such a fullness of the presence of the Lord in the heart of the believer when he is alone as there is when he is in company with other believers? I think not. This is a way of saying that when the Christian joins in the fellowship in a Christian church and shares in the communion, the worship, and the service, there will be a certain richness, a certain fullness, a certain enlargement of his experience he could never have when he is alone. We should notice that in every instance where the coming of the Holy Spirit is recorded in the Book of Acts it happened at a time when a group was together. Each time it is stated that "they were *all* filled with the Holy Ghost."

Individuals *can* be filled with the Holy Spirit, for the Bible says that Peter was full of the Holy Spirit when he stood before the council (Acts 4:8). Paul was also filled with the Holy Ghost when Ananias was talking with him (Acts 9:17). But just now we are noticing that at Pentecost, *all* the disciples were gathered together when the Holy Spirit came. The "habitation of God" had been built and the Holy Spirit came to dwell in the building that had been prepared. Any time Christians come together and have communion and fellowship with each other as believers, they can be sure the Holy Spirit of God is with them.

This truth means something for the church. When thinking of Christians as being members of the body of Christ, each one a stone in the wall of the temple, all builded together, and "an habitation of God," it should be remembered that because God is holy and will now dwell amongst them, Christians are to be holy. Paul has this in mind when he says, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord God Almighty. Having therefore these promises . . . cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 6:17-7: 1). This idea of the believer's being the temple of the Holy Spirit will move all Christians to have a feeling that their daily life should be affected. There will be things that will be unfit for them, unclean, unsound, and improper simply because God is in their hearts.

The Holy Spirit comes to be in the heart of the Christian primarily to witness. Whenever the Holy Spirit was given in the New Testament, there was always some form of action. He was never given merely for the individual to enjoy so that the Christian could be happy in himself over what God had done. The Holy Spirit was given for service. There was always something for the Christians to do that would help other people.

Christians are to serve both God and man. Christians are to serve the Lord. They are also to serve each

other. And there is a responsibility of the Christian to render service to the people on the outside. The Holy Spirit given to the Christian moves him to act in all these directions.

Toward God, the Christian is moved to worship. When the Holy Spirit is in the heart, the Christian is moved to prayer. The Lord Jesus taught His disciples to pray "Our Father." The word *our* is social; it implies a group. One cannot say, "Our Father," unless he has some other people in mind; otherwise, he would say, "My Father." It is recognized that for the individual Christian there is a sense in which he can pray to God as "My Father." That is private, personal, very important, and very real; but when the Lord Jesus Christ taught this prayer, he was teaching a group. He uses the words, "Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." And, "give *us* this day *our* daily bread and forgive *us our* trespasses." Always there is the plural, which means not so much being in the physical presence of others as conscious of the fellowship of others. The Christian is aware of others when he worships, because the Holy Spirit is given for function and performance in the group.

The Scriptures do not encourage believers to think that the individual is called out to serve alone. It is group performance, even though I may have my own responsibility in that performance. I may have to stand out on my own, but I am bringing all others with me when I come into the presence of God. In serving God I am led to prayer and in serving other people I am led to communion and service.

In this fellowship with other Christians in the Holy Spirit, there is comfort for the soul. Every Christian will know in his own spiritual experience that there is great strength in having fellowship with even one other Christian person, for "where two or three are gathered together" the Lord is present. It is when I share with others that I get more comfort from the promises of God. In sharing with other people I am built up in the edification of the Spirit and with reference to service. God has arranged to come and dwell in the hearts of His people when they are in fellowship with each other.

AGAPE

The Bible speaks of the church as the gathering of believing people which should be a *community of love*. In the Greek, the word *agapé* is used. It is difficult to translate into English because when translated it becomes a word that can be used for so many different things. The Greek word *agapé* gives the idea of the church's being "gathered together in fellowship" when the Christians will have a "love feast" or a "love communion." It is a time when they all become aware that they belong to each other.

When the word *love* is used in the Bible, it does not mean the inward feelings which we call emotions. There are words in the Bible which mean that: such as *compassion*, *pity*, *honor*, and *respect*. But this is not really what is meant by the word *love*. There is scarcely any action one can put his finger on and say, "This is the act of love." Love in itself is not special conduct. Love is a quality that can be seen in any conduct. One man will support his family, and do so in love. That will mean that he supports his family because he seeks to help them and he wants to do for them. Another man may support his family because he wants other people to think well of him. When people work at their daily labor by which they earn their living, whether it be in the office, in the factory, or on the farm, one could ask, "Why are they doing this? What is their objective?" If they are working because they either want to please God or they want to help their fellow man in some way, they are doing their work in love. But if they work for their own advantage, this is not done in love. The word *love* refers to the intent of one's action.

What we are thinking about can be seen in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). No doubt the Samaritan was moved to compassion, but this is not why the Lord Jesus told this parable. The story did not end when he looked on the man who was left wounded by the roadside and felt compassion. It

goes on to tell that he took of his own things and gave to this other man to help him. Love is to be seen in this: that he took of his own and gave to the other man because he needed help. The Samaritan was motivated, aroused, stirred by compassion, to be sure, but the *actual performance* when he took of his own and gave to the wounded man was *love*. The Bible states: "For God *so* loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." This passage does not draw any attention to God's feeling. It simply tells us what He did. Love is action.

Living in this *community of love* is not a matter of Christian people's getting together, looking into each other's faces, and being so pleased with each other that they think that they are the sweetest, nicest people in the world. Doing something for such people would be no great virtue because one would be doing something for people whom he likes. But when the church has this *agapé* (sharing with each other) it means that the strong, the weak, the rich, the poor, the big, and the little care for each other and do things to help each other.

The *communion of love* may be compared with what happens when one brings in his poor relations and includes them in the family situation. In the *communion of love* I am willing to include in my group those who are disobedient and cantankerous, even though some might have to be disciplined. They will be cared for; they will not be shut out. All will be brought into the group. The word *agapé* brings in the idea that *all* Christians belong together to this one group. When we say each one is interested in the other we do not mean that each one approves the other, agrees with the other, or thinks that the other is perfect. We mean that each one admits that he belongs to each other Christian who is present and the other believer belongs to him. This will mean that when the church gathers together in this *agapé* feast (love feast) it is going to take note of the weak members. It is going to take note of the slow ones, because the church is not going to be able to move any faster than its slowest member. It is not going to do any more than the weakest person can share. The very essence of this *communion of love* is going to be that the strong must bear the infirmities of the weak and not act to please themselves.

The important thing about the group of believers is that they are linked together. This may be pictured in an outward way by mountain climbers in the Swiss Alps. We understand such climbers have the custom of tying a rope from one to the other, so that if any one person falls other people on the rope will be able to hold him and keep him from destruction. This is an almost perfect illustration of what is involved when the church is considered as a *community of love*. It is not a community of mutual approval. When Christians gather together, this is not a time to flatter each other. It is the time when they realize that Christians belong to each other and each one is interested in one another. It will cause one person to inquire about another person. That is part of the *agapé*. If one member has been talking too much, other Christians will find it out, and they will do something about it.

It is very important for the new Christian and the young Christian to join an established fellowship of Christian people. Normally speaking, if the congregational life of the church is what it should be, the congregation as a whole will be interested in each individual member. That means that if there is a member of the church who is sick, the rest of the church will visit him; if there is a member of the church in trouble, the rest of the church will join in and will share in that trouble; if there is a member of the church who is in need, the rest of the church will share with reference to that need. There is this sense of communion that is to be activated by a sincere interest in each other.

The entire fellowship of the church which is brought out in the communion of love is pictured for us at the Lord's Supper, where all the church gathers together in fellowship around the table in the warm, informal, spontaneous fellowship of eating together. Believers are to eat together of Christ's broken body and are to drink together of His shed blood, which means that they are as a church to think together that

their salvation comes from Him. In the Apostles' Creed, Christians confess their faith and say they believe "in the communion of saints." The "communion of saints" underscores the fact that all believers are to belong to each other and to have fellowship with each other. This is true not only from person to person, but it should be true from church to church with the result that there should be in the spirit of any one congregation and denomination a feeling of belonging to other congregations in other denominations, for believers are all one in the Lord.

NOT OF THIS WORLD

In trying to understand the church according to what the Bible teaches, we must consider that it is *not of this world*. Something is true about the church that can never be understood as part of this world. By *this world* we mean human beings living according to the senses. This world is what they hear, see, taste, smell, and touch. The whole outlook of human beings is the way the world affects *them*. When they organize any part of the world, it is *for themselves*. It is the most natural thing in the world to look out for one's self. A man thinks: "I like this; I don't like that. I go here; I don't go there. I like this one; I don't like that one. I have this fellowship; I don't have that fellowship. I will be willing to do this, because I think I will get something out of it. That is the way I see it." In the thinking and consciousness of the world, *I* is the central point and from that all other things diminish in perspective. The farther away from *me*, the less important anything is. When *I* have no connection with it, it has no meaning to *me*. This is the general point of view in the world, and on it the world is built. John, in writing about the world, says, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (I John 2:16).

It has been noted in our discussion about the church as *Ecclesia* that the church is "called out of" the world. Christians are reminded that they are "in the world but not of the world." A good way to approach the phrase *not of this world* as it refers to the church, is to look at the Lord Jesus Christ. While it is true that the Lord Jesus Christ appeared in human form, the entire record in the New Testament makes it obvious that He was *not of this world*. That is one reason why the virgin birth is important. He was not born the way other people are born. He was "born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1: 13). This Child was not conceived when a man and woman came together, but it was God who moved in "the fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4), and came to Mary telling her that she was going to become the mother of the holy One who would be called the Child of God. From the time of His birth, throughout His life, His death, and His resurrection, there is no part of the Lord Jesus Christ that can be thought as only human. He had a human form in the sense that His appearance was like a man, but His origin, His power, His performance, and His death were more than human. When men see the death of a human being with his body being placed in the grave, it is natural to think this is the end; but it was not the end of the Lord Jesus Christ. God raised Him from the dead. He was in the world and looked like a man, but He was *not of the world*.

Before leaving His disciples, the Lord Jesus Christ said to them, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). This word still goes out to the church, and the only way to understand this fellowship which is called the *church*, the *body of Christ*, is that its origin is not human. Whatever else might be said about the church, it did not come into existence because good people got together and figured it out. Well-meaning people who understood the social nature of man did not decide that it would be a good thing if all the good folks would join themselves together and make themselves into this company. The origin of the church is in the will of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:18), and the reason

the church has one mind and one heart is because the members have the one Holy Spirit. The only way Christians can actually be of one mind and one heart is to have the mind of Christ and yield to the mind of the Holy Spirit. This attitude of "one mind" can never be arrived at among human beings by getting folks to agree with each other. It is human nature for a person to set some things on the side that are his very own. The only thing two or more persons can agree on is a common project and this puts agreement on a limited basis. They will agree just so much, but they will not agree 100 per cent. The only One with whom we can agree 100 per cent is the Lord, who understands the individual Christian and overrules all his shortcomings and fills up all his deficiencies.

When thinking of the church as being not of this world, it is very important to remember that its origin is from God; because then we can realize that its nature, design, performance, and destiny will be from God. The life of the church, the actual, conscious fellowship and communion which the church has together, is not of this world. This means that it is not because these people all think the same human thoughts, have the same human ideas, have the same human values or the same human purpose, that they are members of the church. It can happen in the church that members belong to others with whom, humanly speaking, they could not associate at all. Sometimes Christians do not even seem to see the same things, yet in the Lord they will come together in one body. The basic communion in the church is communion with the Lord. The reason Christians have fellowship with each other is that they are "members one of another," they are members of the body of Christ, and they belong to Him.

Two men had been working in an office of a certain Christian institution. There had been some tension between them which had broken out into an open quarrel. One of the men was characteristically a German, and the other was characteristically a Jew. The one thought like a German and the other thought like a Jew. The manager of the agency called these two men in, and when he was talking to the young man who was a Jew he said, "You must remember that you are now a Christian and you are to act like a Christian." In a very tense and frustrated way the man said, "Yes, I am a Christian. I believe in the Lord, and I want to act like a Christian. If only that other man would stop acting like a German. As long as he acts like a German, I have to act like a Jew. If he will act like a Christian, then I can act like a Christian." The manager then tried to show him that *he should be the one to start acting like a Christian*. This is the principle of the whole matter.

Think back to what has been said before about a Christian. The word *Christian* does not mean a certain advanced character of meekness, mildness, wisdom, or virtue. It would certainly be fine if every Christian had those attributes. But a person is a Christian when he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of his soul. He is a Christian the moment he believes. He may be only a babe in Christ and this will allow for a great many deficiencies. Among these deficiencies may be quarreling with each other, as the Corinthian church did. However, the ultimate fellowship and communion which wins out in the church is not a degree of human cordiality and friendliness. It is a communion in the Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God. Christians must remind themselves of this truth.

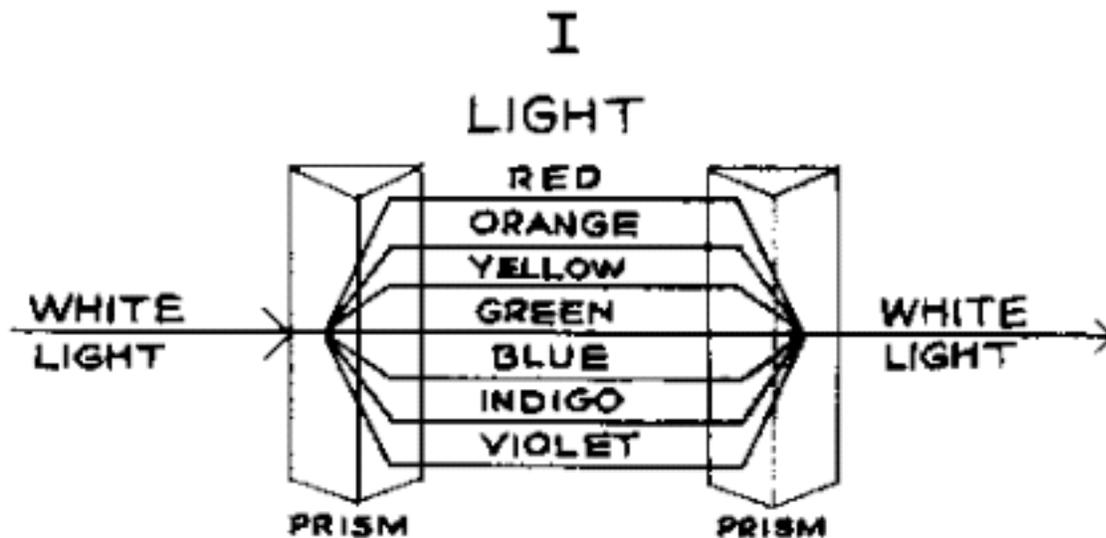
Not every congregation does what the church ought to do. It is possible that one congregation of people may be moved to do something no one else would feel right about. For example: A congregation of people might for several years devote themselves to, and absorb their whole interest in, the building of a particular type of building. When finished, they have simply built a sanctuary that cost twice as much as it needed to, because they wanted to have a big sanctuary to show off in the city where they were. That sort of action does not truly describe the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. True believers in the Lord Jesus Christ unite their hearts on the winning of the lost, and the promotion of good will among members. Wherever a Christian is found, these things will appeal to his heart and mind, because such

things are of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit of God.

Service on the part of any church that is going out to do what the Lord Jesus Himself would do can expect to be inwardly sustained by the Holy Spirit of God. Such service will have to do with the winning of souls to God, because when the Lord Jesus was here on earth He went out to do one thing - "to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19: 10). While it may be allowed that the church may vary its procedure and do many different things, in whatever is done the ultimate purpose must be that it is going to act as the church of God. The Lord Jesus purchased the church with His own blood, built it in His own will, indwells it by His Holy Spirit, and directs it as His body, and we can be sure that whatever it does will be "not of this world."

CHURCH

The Church has unity in origin and in service while operating in many different ways.



White light is made up of seven major colors (parts)



The Church is made up of many parts with diversity in operation.

Artwork courtesy of H. C. Sumral