

## Message Four

### The Nature of the Church

AY Hymns: 1199

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:2; 12:12; Eph. 1:19-21; 2:6; 3:16-21; 4:4-6, 16; 1 Cor. 6:17

- 1 Cor 1:2 To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints, with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, who is theirs and ours:
- 1 Cor 12:12 For even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ.
- Eph 1:19 And what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the operation of the might of His strength,
- Eph 1:20 Which He caused to operate in Christ in raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenlies,
- Eph 1:21 Far above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every name that is named not only in this age but also in that which is to come;
- Eph 2:6 And raised us up together with Him and seated us together with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus,
- Eph 3:16 That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man,
- Eph 3:17 That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love,
- Eph 3:18 May be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are
- Eph 3:19 And to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God.
- Eph 3:20 But to Him who is able to do superabundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power which operates in us,
- Eph 3:21 To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever. Amen.
- Eph 4:4 One Body and one Spirit, even as also you were called in one hope of your calling;
- Eph 4:5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism;
- Eph 4:6 One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
- Eph 4:16 Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.
- 1 Cor 6:17 But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.

#### **I. The church is divine, “Christly,” “resurrectional,” and heavenly:**

##### **A. The church is of God—1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:16:**

1 Cor 1:2 To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints, with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, who is theirs and ours:

1 Cor 10:32 Do not become a stumbling block, both to Jews and to Greeks and to the church of God;

1 Cor 11:16 But if anyone seems to be contentious, we do not have such a custom of being so, neither the churches of God.

1. A local church must be a church of God, possessing the divine nature of God—2 Pet. 1:4.

2 Pet 1:4 Through which He has granted to us precious and exceedingly great promises that through these you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption which is in the world by lust.

2. The expression *the church of God* indicates not only that the church belongs to God but also that the church must have the nature of God.

##### **B. The church is “Christly”—1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 1:22-23:**

1 Cor 12:12 For even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ.

Eph 1:22 And He subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church,

Eph 1:23 Which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

1. Every local church must be a church of Christ (Rom. 16:16), being in the element of Christ:
 

Rom 16:16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

a. Christ is the nature of the church, and the church is actually Christ Himself—Col. 3:10-11.

Col 3:10 And have put on the new man, which is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,

Col 3:11 Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all.

b. Anything that is short of Christ or is not Christ is not the church.
  2. The church is a pure product out of Christ—Eph. 4:15-16:
 

Eph 4:15 But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ,

Eph 4:16 Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.

a. This is typified by Eve, who was fully, completely, and purely produced out of Adam; whatever was in Eve and whatever Eve was, was of Adam—Gen. 2:22-24; Eph. 5:30-32.

Gen 2:22 And Jehovah God built the rib, which He had taken from the man, into a woman and brought her to the man.

Gen 2:23 And the man said, This time this is bone of my bones / And flesh of my flesh; / This one shall be called Woman / Because out of Man this one was taken.

Gen 2:24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Eph 5:30 Because we are members of His Body.

Eph 5:31 For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh.

Eph 5:32 This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church.

b. The church must also be of one element—the element of Christ; apart from Christ's element, there should be no other element in the church—Col. 3:10-11.

Col 3:10 And have put on the new man, which is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,

Col 3:11 Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all.
- C. The church is “resurrectionly”—John 11:25; Acts 2:24; Rev. 1:18; 2:8, 10:
- John 11:25 Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes into Me, even if he should die, shall live;
- Acts 2:24 Whom God has raised up, having loosed the pangs of death, since it was not possible for Him to be held by it.
- Rev 1:18 And the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever; and I have the keys of death and of Hades.
- Rev 2:8 And to the messenger of the church in Smyrna write: These things says the First and the Last, who became dead and lived again:
- Rev 2:10 Do not fear the things that you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison that you may be tried, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.
1. The church is an entity absolutely in resurrection; it is not natural, nor is it in the old creation.
  2. The church is a new creation created in Christ's resurrection and by the resurrected Christ; therefore, the church is “resurrectionly”—Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17.
- Gal 6:15 For neither is circumcision anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation is what matters.
- 2 Cor 5:17 So then if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away; behold, they have become new.

3. The church was produced by Christ in resurrection and exists by His resurrection life; thus, the church is a being that can endure death.
- D. The church is heavenly—Eph. 1:19-21; 2:6:
- Eph 1:19 And what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the operation of the might of His strength,
- Eph 1:20 Which He caused to operate in Christ in raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenlies,
- Eph 1:21 Far above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every name that is named not only in this age but also in that which is to come;
- Eph 2:6 And raised us up together with Him and seated us together with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus,
1. The church is in Christ in His ascension; the church has been resurrected with Christ and is now seated in the heavenlies in Christ—v. 6.
- Eph 2:6 And raised us up together with Him and seated us together with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus,
2. The main significance of the church being heavenly is that it is under God's authority—Matt. 28:18; Dan. 4:26, 34-35:
- Matt 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.
- Dan 4:26 And in that it was commanded that the stump of roots of the tree be left, your kingdom will be assured to you after you have come to know that the heavens do rule.
- Dan 4:34 And at the end of those days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up my eyes to heaven, and reason returned to me; and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honored the ever-living One; For His dominion is an eternal dominion, / And His kingdom is from generation to generation;
- Dan 4:35 And all the inhabitants of earth are considered as nothing, / But He does according to His will in the army of heaven / And among the inhabitants of the earth; / And there is no one who can resist His hand / Or say to Him, What are You doing?
- a. The nature of the church is to submit to God's authority.
- b. The particular nature of heaven is that it submits to God's authority; hence, to be heavenly is to have the nature of submitting to God's authority—Matt. 6:10; 18:18-19.
- Matt 6:10 Your kingdom come; Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth.
- Matt 18:18 Truly I say to you, Whatever you bind on the earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on the earth shall have been loosed in heaven.
- Matt 18:19 Again, truly I say to you that if two of you are in harmony on earth concerning any matter for which they ask, it will be done for them from My Father who is in the heavens.

## **II. We need to be watchful and faithful in preserving the nature of the church—13:31-32:**

- Matt 13:31 Another parable He set before them, saying, The kingdom of the heavens is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field,
- Matt 13:32 And which is smaller than all the seeds; but when it has grown, it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of heaven come and roost in its branches.
- A. The church should be like an herb that produces food for the satisfaction of God and man—vv. 31-32a.
- Matt 13:31 Another parable He set before them, saying, The kingdom of the heavens is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field,
- Matt 13:32a And which is smaller than all the seeds; ...
- B. The nature and function of the church were changed, so that it became a “tree,” a lodging place for birds—vv. 32b, 4, 19.
- Matt 13:32b ... but when it has grown, it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the

- birds of heaven come and roost in its branches.
- Matt 13:4 And as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the way, and the birds came and devoured them.
- Matt 13:19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand, the evil one comes and snatches away that which has been sown in his heart. This is the one sown beside the way.
- C. The church, according to its heavenly and spiritual nature, should be like the mustard, sojourning on earth; but with its nature changed, the church became deeply rooted and settled as a tree in the earth—vv. 31-32.
- Matt 13:31 Another parable He set before them, saying, The kingdom of the heavens is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field,
- Matt 13:32 And which is smaller than all the seeds; but when it has grown, it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of heaven come and roost in its branches.

### **III. The church is the mingling of God and man—Eph. 3:16-21; 4:4-6, 16:**

- Eph 3:16 That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man,
- Eph 3:17 That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love,
- Eph 3:18 May be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are
- Eph 3:19 And to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God.
- Eph 3:20 But to Him who is able to do superabundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power which operates in us,
- Eph 3:21 To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever. Amen.
- Eph 4:4 One Body and one Spirit, even as also you were called in one hope of your calling;
- Eph 4:5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism;
- Eph 4:6 One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
- Eph 4:16 Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.

- A. The mingling of God and man is a deep and central truth in the Scriptures—1 Cor. 6:17; John 14:20; 17:21-23.

- 1 Cor 6:17 But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.
- John 14:20 In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.
- John 17:21 That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that You have sent Me.
- John 17:22 And the glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, even as We are one;
- John 17:23 I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.

- B. We must grasp the principle of the church—the church is God mingled with man—Eph. 4:4-6:

- Eph 4:4 One Body and one Spirit, even as also you were called in one hope of your calling;
- Eph 4:5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism;
- Eph 4:6 One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

1. The church is neither merely divine nor merely human; if the church were merely divine or merely human, it would lose its nature.

2. The mingling of God and man manifests the nature of the church.

- C. God's unique purpose is to mingle Himself with us so that He becomes our life, our nature, and our content, and we become His corporate expression—John 14:20; 15:4-5; Eph. 3:16-21; 4:4-6, 16:

John 14:20 In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

John 15:4      Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.  
John 15:5      I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing.  
Eph 3:16      That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man,  
Eph 3:17      That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love,  
Eph 3:18      May be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are  
Eph 3:19      And to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God.  
Eph 3:20      But to Him who is able to do superabundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power which operates in us,  
Eph 3:21      To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever. Amen.  
Eph 4:4      One Body and one Spirit, even as also you were called in one hope of your calling;  
Eph 4:5      One Lord, one faith, one baptism;  
Eph 4:6      One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.  
Eph 4:16      Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.

1. The mingling of God and man is an intrinsic union of the elements of divinity and humanity to form one organic entity, yet the elements remain distinct in the union.
2. The will of God is the mingling of God with man, and the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose depends on this mingling—1:5, 9; 3:11.

Eph 1:5      Predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,  
Eph 1:9      Making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself,  
Eph 3:11      According to the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord,  
D. The Body of Christ is the enlargement of Christ, the enlargement of the One who is the mingling of God and man—1:22-23; 4:16:  
Eph 1:22      And He subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church,  
Eph 1:23      Which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.  
Eph 4:16      Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.

1. In the Gospels the mingling of God and man produced the Head; in Acts the enlargement of the mingling of God and man produced the Body of Christ—Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15-16.  
Eph 1:22      And He subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church,  
Eph 1:23      Which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.  
Eph 4:15      But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ,  
Eph 4:16      Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.
2. In Ephesians 4:4-6 four persons—the Body, the Spirit, the Lord, and God the Father—are actively mingled together:  
Eph 4:4      One Body and one Spirit, even as also you were called in one hope of your calling;  
Eph 4:5      One Lord, one faith, one baptism;  
Eph 4:6      One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

- a. The Father is embodied in the Son, the Son is realized as the Spirit, and the Spirit is mingled with the believers.
  - b. This mingling is the constitution of the Body of Christ.
3. The processed and consummated Triune God mingles Himself with His chosen people in their humanity, and this mingling is the genuine oneness of the Body of Christ—v. 3; John 17:21-23.
- Eph 4:3      Being diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace:  
 John 17:21    That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that You have sent Me.  
 John 17:22    And the glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, even as We are one;  
 John 17:23    I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.
- E. For the church life, we need to see a vision of the mingled spirit—the divine Spirit mingled with our regenerated human spirit—1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:4:
- 1 Cor 6:17    But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.  
 Rom 8:4      That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit.
- 1. The Father is in the Son, the Son is the Spirit, and the Spirit is now mingled with our spirit—John 14:9-10, 16-18; 1 Cor. 15:45b; 6:17; Rom. 8:16.
- John 14:9    Jesus said to him, Have I been so long a time with you, and you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how is it that you say, Show us the Father?  
 John 14:10    Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works.  
 John 14:16    And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever,  
 John 14:17    Even the Spirit of reality, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him; but you know Him, because He abides with you and shall be in you.  
 John 14:18    I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you.  
 1 Cor 15:45b ... the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit.  
 1 Cor 6:17    But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.  
 Rom 8:16      The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God.
- 2. The union of God and man is a union of the two spirits, the Spirit of God and the spirit of man (1 Cor. 2:11-16); the union of these two spirits is the deepest mystery in the Bible.
- 1 Cor 2:11    For who among men knows the things of man, except the spirit of man which is in him? In the same way, the things of God also no one has known except the Spirit of God.  
 1 Cor 2:12    But we have received not the spirit of the world but the Spirit which is from God, that we may know the things which have been graciously given to us by God;  
 1 Cor 2:13    Which things also we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things with spiritual words.  
 1 Cor 2:14    But a soulish man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he is not able to know them because they are discerned spiritually.  
 1 Cor 2:15    But the spiritual man discerns all things, but he himself is discerned by no one.  
 1 Cor 2:16    For who has known the mind of the Lord and will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.
3. The focus of God's economy is the mingled spirit, the divine Spirit mingled with the human spirit; whatever God intends to do or accomplish is related to this focus—6:17; Eph. 3:9, 5; 1:17; 2:22; 4:23; 5:18; 6:18.
- 1 Cor 6:17    But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.

Eph 3:9 And to enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is,  
which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things,  
Eph 3:5 Which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has  
now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in spirit,  
Eph 1:17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a  
spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him,  
Eph 2:22 In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.  
Eph 4:23 And that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind  
Eph 5:18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissoluteness, but be filled in spirit,  
Eph 6:18 By means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit and watching  
unto this in all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints,