

THE DAILY LIFE OF THE CHURCH

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Mt 16:24

Every Christian is a member of the same Church. This membership has been bought for them at a great price. The supreme sacrifice of God's only Son on the cross of Calvary and the shedding of His blood to redeem us has purchased our membership in this holy organization. There is no other way for anyone to join it. Nothing we can do apart from receiving cleansing by the blood of Jesus Christ can get us in. Beyond this, there is no further joining or obtaining of membership in any "church" organization which is either scriptural or necessary. There is no need for any Christian to "join a church." Every true believer is already a member of the only Church that there is or ever will be (Eph 4:4).

Firstly, every believer's membership is with the Church universally. Secondly, every believer is a member of that smaller part of this universal Church which is in his immediate geographical area. He is a member of the church in his city. Further down the line, every believer is a member of that group of Christians with whom he meets. Although this final state of membership is the one to which we usually pay the most attention, actually it is only the consequence of our being a member of the larger group called "the body of Christ." Our membership in the smaller group with whom we meet is only the result of being a member in the Church as a whole. This reality should govern our understanding of the subject of membership. First we are members of the body of Christ generally. After that, and solely because of that, are we members of any special group or church meeting. Therefore our responsibility is not only to those with whom we meet specifically, but to all Christians in the whole body generally.

In order to convey this proper understanding, perhaps it would be best not to say that we are a member of "a" church.* All of us, as Christians, are members of "the" Church. And, since "the" Church is divided up both physically and geographically, we are also members of that part of "the" Church which meets in a certain place. In the Bible we read of "the" church in a city or "the" church in a house. However, we never read of "a" church anywhere in the scriptures. Although grammatically the phrase "a church" could be a proper usage, spiritually speaking it conveys a wrong impression.

Since the Bible does use the plural of the word "church," that is, "churches," it would be grammatically correct to use the phrase "a church." Yet, let us also notice that this word "churches" never refers to many churches in one city but only to many cities with one church. As mentioned in the note in chapter four, geographically the Church is divided into churches, but locally the church is only separated into church meetings.

To call something "a" church implies very strongly that it is complete within itself. The word "a" also suggests that it is somehow different than, and separate from, all others. Such a concept stands in direct opposition to the teaching of the New Testament scriptures. Therefore, since the phrase "a church" conveys an erroneous impression, it ought to be avoided. Truthfully though, the problems do not lie with our terminology but with our spiritual understanding. While the one Church is expressed in many places and in a variety of ways, it is still the same Church.

By saying all this, I certainly don't imagine that all Christians will rearrange their vocabulary and never refer to something as "a" church. My hope is only that some will see something beyond the sectarian situation which exists today, and perhaps begin to live in a more unified, loving way. With this view, we will begin to experience and practice more of the reality of the church. Eventually, such a change may even alter our vocabulary.

Experiencing the reality of the church, of course, is not at all subject to terminology. The only reason I bring up this distinction is that so often our understanding of words veils us and thereby hinders us from experiencing the truth. Let us therefore diligently seek God, so that we could be experiencing "the" church: in our city, in our homes, in our church meetings—in reality.

Not only are all Christians members of the Church generally, and members of some meeting specifically, we are also members one of another (Eph 4:25). We have been inseparably joined by God one to another. Every believer, whether or not we know him and have daily association with him, has been joined to us and we to him. This is a real, practical daily membership that we all need to be experiencing. There is a spiritual membership which we have with everyone in the entire body, and also a very practical daily membership which we have with those Christians with whom we fellowship.

This fact has a very important application, and that is that the church life needs to be experienced and practiced daily. Every day, we should be doing something for our Lord Jesus Christ in conjunction with other members of His body. Perhaps it is not possible every single day for each of us to associate with other Christians. Yet this does not negate the fact that our Christianity and our experience of the church should be daily rather than weekly or monthly. Every day, we should have some opportunity to fellowship, pray, sing or serve the Lord with other believers. We should experience the church every day.

This idea is not something new. The daily church life was the experience of the early Christians also. In the book of Acts we read: "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:46,47)." Here we see the early believers enjoying and experiencing Jesus Christ every day and this enjoyment having its expression in their daily church living. Jesus Christ, and what He was doing in their midst, had become the focus and the central point of their lives. His salvation and His working in their lives had so consumed their thoughts and their time that they were daily loving and serving Him together in a real, practical way. What a testimony this is for all believers today. How we too need such an experience.

Perhaps the main thing we lack is consecration. If we are to have this kind of wonderful, living, enjoyable church, we need to be consecrated to Jesus Christ and

submitted to Him completely. In this way we can be a vital part of what He is doing. In Romans 12, verse 1, we read: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Our part is to present our bodies. We must have our entire being yielded to God so that He is able to use us, live in us, and move us to be a part of what He is doing.

As long as we are living for ourselves and interested in God only secondarily, it is going to be difficult for us to be participating in the church every day. How we need to be seeking Him every day for what we can be doing in His church! Our attitude, according to the verse which we read in Romans, should be that we are a living sacrifice. A sacrifice is something which was placed upon the altar and totally consumed by fire. This shows us that we should cultivate the attitude within ourselves that we belong wholly to God. In order for Him to use us effectively, we need this kind of commitment. We should hold nothing back from Him so that He can have His way in our lives completely.

Such an attitude of consecration will enable us to begin experiencing the church. One result of this consecration may be that we will find it necessary to rearrange our priorities. Jesus Christ and our part in His body, needs to have first place in our lives. In all things, He should have the pre-eminence. Where we work, what we do during the day, with whom we associate, and many other things should all be subjected to Him. Instead of arranging our lives for ourselves the way we would like them to be, and then trying to fit Christ and a little bit of the church in also, let us first seek God's will for our lives, and how He would have us be functioning in His body. And then let us take a job, buy a house, raise a family, according to what would help us best accomplish this purpose.

If we live so that everything we do is for Christ and for His church, many of our decisions in life become simpler. Also, our ability to understand and to know God's will increases greatly. The reason for this is obvious. Without our being distracted with so many other things, it becomes easier for us to hear the voice of the Lord. Let us therefore put self, concern for self, and living for self aside, and begin to live for Jesus Christ only. Then, the scriptures teach us, these other things will be added unto us. The other things which are necessary for our daily living will follow in due course. If we would only set our minds to do God's will and to live daily in the church according to His leading, we will enjoy a great blessing. God will see to it that we have the other things which we need.

Another item which is necessary in order to experience the church life is the leading of the Holy Spirit. Just as our church meetings should be led by the Holy Spirit, so it should be with our daily living. Every day we should walk in the Spirit. We need to seek God through Jesus Christ to be full of the Holy Spirit; and as we are filled with the Holy Spirit, to walk according to His leading. As He leads, we will begin to experience and enjoy the reality of the church.

Jesus Christ has much work for us to do every day. In the scriptures we find several lists of functions which the believers might do. Giving, helping, ruling, administrating, showing mercy, healing, and so on, are just a part of the many spiritual activities which we as believers can be doing daily (see Rom 12:6-8, I Cor 12:28,29). There are many functions and ministries for each one of us in the body. All of them are something which we need to do every day. As we walk in the Spirit, He will lead us to be fulfilling these many duties and responsibilities. Perhaps He will simply lead us to call another believer on the phone for some fellowship. Perhaps He will lead us to pray

with someone, visit the sick, or go with another believer to share the gospel with the unsaved. There are an unlimited number of possibilities. Our part is to seek God and be obedient.

God is still working (Jn 5:17). As we follow Him every day, He will also lead us to have contact with the other members of His body and to be working with them and for them. We can be co-workers together with God to accomplish His purposes on the earth. In this way, we can help build up the Church and prepare His bride for that great wedding day.

In order to do this, we do not need to have someone telling us what to do. We also do not need a man in some position of authority to direct our movements. We need only to walk in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. There is also no need to be a member of some kind of human organization in order to have something to do. God has so much work for us to do today: there are still many unsaved, there are still so many needs in the world and in the church today for us to meet. Surely as we open to the Holy Spirit, He will lead us to accomplish some of these things for Him and He will also empower us to do them.

Another important facet of the church is that when each member is sensitive and obedient to the head, all the members of the whole body will be coordinated. Just as the human body, when it is functioning properly, is completely coordinated, synchronized and performs perfectly that which the head directs it to do, so it is with the body of Christ. There is no need to try to gather all Christians under one man's leadership or an organizational structure in order for their efforts to be effective. All we need is for each member to be sensitive and obedient to the leadership of Jesus Christ, and then the whole of His body will be expressing Him in a coordinated way.

May we consecrate ourselves to Jesus Christ today, seek Him that He could rearrange our priorities, and daily walk with Him in the Spirit to be fulfilling what He wants us to do. Let us realize that there is much work for each of us to do. If God would open our eyes so that we could see the tremendous need around us, our hearts would be overwhelmed. No doubt He would love to meet many of these needs through us individually and corporately, if we would only be open to His leading.

There are so many shortages in the church that need to be filled. Teaching, ministering and helping of every variety need to be done continually. Also in the world as a whole, there is a great need for the love of God to be shed abroad. As we open to Him, no doubt He will fill us with His Spirit and lead us to begin to experience the church in this way every day.

As you can probably see from what we have been discussing, the daily church life comprises the bulk of a proper church experience. Church meetings are actually a very small part of the church. Essential though they may be, they are only a smaller part of the total experience of the church. The daily church life, the daily walking in the Holy Spirit and living and ministering according to His leading, is actually the greater part of the church. Without a daily church life, our meetings will be shallow and empty. Unless we have a daily walk with Jesus Christ and contact with and experience of His body, we will have very little of Him in our church meetings.

An excellent example of this principle is found in an Old Testament feast: the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost (Ex 34:22, Lev 23:15-17). When the Hebrew people came to this feast, they brought with them the first fruits of their labors. They brought the tithes and offerings of their wheat, of their flocks, and of all that they had been working on and growing during the year. Thus when they came together to worship and make their offerings to the Lord, they did not come empty handed. They brought something

of the fruit of their labor during the year.

This feast is a marvelous type of what our Christian meetings should be. Each one of us needs to be laboring in Christ during the week, so that when we gather together we will have some fruit to offer both to the Lord and to the other brethren at the meeting. In this way, our meetings will be rich and full of the substance of Christ.

Believers must have a daily living church experience. The living out of Christ's life by His members is the genuine expression of the church today.