

FIRST UNITED CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST APOSTOLIC

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION
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TOPIC: BECOMING ONE BODY THROUGH PRAYER

The One Body Experience

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling" (Ephesians 4:4).

Acts 2 shows that God's people were unified after being baptized into the body of Christ.

Believer's Togetherness " in Christ .

- **The believers were together** (Acts 2:44). Following the Day of Pentecost, all the believers were together and had all things in common.
 - **God has quickened us together** (Ephesians 2:5). God saved us from sin and made us alive spiritually together in Christ.
 - **God has raised us up together** (Ephesians 2:6).
 - God has made us sit together (Ephesians 2:6). Christ's sacrifice broke down the middle wall of partition that separated the Jews and the Gentiles and created one body out of these two groups (Ephesians 2:13-16).
 - **We are a building together** (Ephesians 2:21-22). "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."
 - **We are knit together** (Colossians 2:2, 19). Paul desired "that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love" and that the body might increase "with the increase of God." This body is constantly growing (Ephesians 4:16). It is like a snowball that is small when it first starts rolling, but as it rolls, more and more snow clings to it, and it increases in size. This body had a small beginning on the Day of Pentecost, but as it has rolled down through the years, it has increased and increased.
 - **We are to strive together** (Philippians 1:27). With one mind we are to strive together for the faith of the gospel.
 - **We shall be caught up together** (I Thessalonians 4:17). We have the promise of being caught up together to meet the Lord in the air.
- We shall live together with Him** (I Thessalonians 5:10). Whether we live or die, we shall live together with Him. We are to live together here and go to glory together. That leaves no place for more than one body. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (I Corinthians 12:12-13). "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. But now are they many members, yet but one body" (I Corinthians 12:18, 20). "That there should be no schism [division] in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another" (I Corinthians 12:25).

The body is tempered (composed) together. "And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be feebler, are necessary For our comely [graceful] parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacked" (I Corinthians 12:21-22, 24). God has not only declared that there is only one body, but He has spoken against it being divided and has urged all Christians to consider one another to be part of the body, particularly the weaker Christians. Indeed, we should bestow honor on them, so they will not lack. In the natural, if we have a crippled arm, a bad ear, or a sore foot, we do not cut off those afflicted parts, thus dividing our body and leaving one part strong and healthy while the cut off part dies. No, if one part is not as strong and as healthy as it should be, we give more attention to it to bring it back to health. The same should be true in the spiritual realm. Jesus prayed for us: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their [the disciples'] word" (John 17:20). And what was the burden of His prayer? "That they all may be one" (John 17:21).

THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER IN THE ONE-BODY FUNCTION

Prayer is the Christian's ladder by Which he can climb into the presence of the Lord. No surrendered child of God will be barren, unfruitful or detached when he lays hold of God in real prayer. If we meet the conditions in His Word, God will answer prayer. God will give the believer the love for the one-body function.

(Acts 16:25- 26). It is important to note that at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, agreed in the oneness of prayer, singing praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed" Chains fell off from men who were bound, and doors opened and closed on their own! It all took place as an answer to one-body functional prayer. Simple agreement.

Acts 12:5-17 describes a similar incident when Peter was in prison. The church in John Mark's home prayed without ceasing to God for him. The angel of the Lord came, and Peter's chains fell off. The angel led him out through the first and second ward and out through the iron gate, which opened on its own. He then came to John Mark's house where the prayer meeting was still going on, and he "declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison" (Acts 12:17). The Church agreed on the same matter, the release of Paul. Disagreement is division. Division is the enemy's tool to create dysfunction in the body.

Acts 5:19). The Jewish authorities had imprisoned the apostles, "the angel of the Lord by

night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth" They served together and were delivered together. No doubt they prayed together. Understand that prayer was common in the church in the days of ACTS; everything was moved by prayer.

Today we have the same privileges in prayer that the first-century church enjoyed, so that the body of Christ can become and remain knitted together in love and full functionality.

ONENESS IS UNDERGIRDDED BY PERSISTENT PRAYER

James 5:17-18 Some may think that the early church who was steadfast together and received answers to prayer were different from us, but this is not so. says, "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." He prayed earnestly. In fact, he put his face between his knees (I Kings 18:42). He sent his servant out to look toward the sea, but he saw nothing. The seventh time he said, "There ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand" (I Kings 18:44). He prayed until he got the evidence; he now had something to stand on.

We should note that Elijah prayed the same thing again and again. This was not a vain repetition, for he was praying with faith and with meaning. Likewise, we can repeat our requests in prayer without being guilty of what Jesus condemned. (See Matthew 6:7.)

Jesus spoke two parables to teach us persistence in prayer. (Luke 11:5-8). "he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity [persistence] he will rise and give him as many as he needeth" (Luke 11:5-8).

In Luke 18:1-8 Jesus told of a widow who came to an unjust judge and asked to be avenged of her adversary. But he would not, at first. Perhaps she had no money to pay him, but finally he said, "Because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me" (Luke 18:5). Then Jesus gave the application: "Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bears long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily" (Luke 18:7-8).

THE ONENESS EXPERIENCE REQUIRES PRAYER IN FAITH

"Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24). Here Jesus clearly shows us that in order to

get results, we must link prayer with faith.

We Must Have an Attitude of Humility When We Pray.

No matter how many prayers God answers for us, we must always stay humble. The answers God gives to us in prayer should give us confidence; nevertheless, we should never boast. Humility is essential. "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven" (II Chronicles 7:14).

We Must Pray according to the Will of God

"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3). We ask for things that seem lawful for us to have, but God, knowing what is best for us, sometimes answers in a different way from what we expect. In such cases, we might not immediately recognize God's answer, because it is disguised. For instance, if we pray for patience, God may allow a trial to come to us, for "tribulation worketh patience" (Romans 5:3).

God sometimes permits us to have our own way. For example, Balaam asked the Lord for permission to curse Israel, and God said no. When Balaam asked God the second time, God said yes, but His anger was kindled against him (Numbers 22:12-22). So if God clearly says no to our prayers, we should not ask the second time, for He has already made known His will. We need not ask God, however, whether it is His will for us to do something that He has already revealed in His Word. For God's Word is His will for His children.

LOVE PROMOTES UNITY, THE ALL-ESSENTIAL COMPONENT

GROWING IN LOVE

The Body of Christ is built up and grows by the exercise of spiritual gifts and by love (Eph. 4:11,12 and 16). Gifts and love are both needed. Hence we find that wherever gifts are spoken of in the New Testament, the exercise of love is also simultaneously stressed (1 Cor. 12 (on gifts) and 13 (on love); Romans 12:4-8 (on gifts) and verses 9 and 10 (on love); 1 Peter 4:10,11 (on gifts) and verse 8 (on love)).

CHRIST-LIKE LOVE

Jesus gave His disciples a new commandment just before He went to the cross. They were to love one another as He had loved them (John 13:34). It is this last phrase that makes Jesus' command impossible to fulfill without God's grace. What is the distinctive feature of the love of Christ? Surely, it is the cross on which He died for us. So when He tells me to love my brother as He loved me, it is a call to follow His example and to die to self in my relationship with my brother. Self-denial is to characterize my relationship

with other members in Christ's Body. This and nothing less than this is true Christian love. When we are told that "we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16), it is not a reference to physical death, but to something far more difficult. It is easier to die once as a martyr than to lay down our self-life many times every day in our relationship with our fellow-believers. But it is to the latter that Jesus calls us. Such sacrificial, unselfish love is the fundamental law of the body of Christ. One who does not carry the cross and choose the way of self-denial cannot fulfil his function in Christ's Body.

Why are we offended and irritated with other Christians? Surely, because Self is still on the throne of our lives. We consider ourselves so important, that we feel we must be respected and consulted by others. We feel that others must behave and order their affairs as we want them to. We expect others to be kind and considerate to us, to 'make much' of us and praise us. Such feelings and expectations are clear evidence of the fact that we know nothing of the cross experientially. Our lives are still dominated by selfishness and revolve exclusively around Self and its interests. True Christian fellowship can never be experienced among believers, if the love of the cross is not made the fundamental rule in the conduct of their relationships. Apart from such love, whatever goes by the name "fellowship" will only be social friendship and not the true communion of the Body of Christ. Such social friendship exists in worldly clubs too. Sadly, many Christian churches and groups are no better than clubs! The members of a Christian fellowship should be closely interlocked one with the other. God has not called us to be an assortment of dismembered limbs thrown together as in an anatomy laboratory, but to be united one with the other as parts of a living organism like the human body. But there is a price to be paid if this is to become a reality - the price of each member denying himself for the sake of others. Blessed indeed is that Christian group where all the members are willing to live by this rule. What are some of the practical implications of living by the law of love?

FORGIVING LOVE

Consider first, the area of mutual forgiveness. No one who denies himself can ever harbor bitterness or a grudge against another or fail to forgive another human being. Resentment exists only in hearts where Self is still on the throne. Jesus once told a parable of a servant who, though forgiven much by his master, could not forgive his fellow-servant a paltry debt. His master, on hearing this, handed over the unmerciful servant to the torturers to be punished. "So", said Jesus, "shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart" (Matt.18:35). However one interprets being handed over to the torturers for punishment, that is exactly what Jesus said would happen to those who adopted an unforgiving attitude or even harbored an unforgiving spirit against any of his fellow-believers. Notice that Jesus emphasized that forgiveness must be from the heart. In other words, it must be wholehearted and not an external ritual. Telling someone that you forgive him is meaningless if there is still bitterness in your heart. When we violate God's law of love, we hinder the working of the Body of Christ. But that is not all. We harm ourselves as well. "The moment I start hating a man, I become his slave. I cannot enjoy my work anymore, because he even controls my thoughts. My resentment produces too many stress hormones in my body, and I become fatigued after a few hours of work. The work I formerly enjoyed is now drudgery. Even vacations cease to give me pleasure. The man I hate hounds me wherever I go. I cannot escape his tyrannical grasp on my mind." Hidden grudges and

bitterness are ruining the effectiveness, and even the physical health of many Christians and Christian workers throughout the world today. Jesus taught that we were to take the initiative in restoring fellowship, even where a brother feels (rightly or wrongly) that we have hurt him. "If you are standing....offering a sacrifice to God", said Jesus, "and suddenly remember that a friend has something against you, leave your sacrifice there beside the altar and go and apologize and be reconciled to him, and then come and offer your sacrifice to God" (Matt. 5:23, 24) Likewise He said, "When you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins too" (Mark 11:25). Jesus calls us in all situations to deny ourselves, swallow our pride, and "go the second mile" in seeking to restore fellowship wherever it has been broken

LOYAL LOVE

"If you love someone, you will be loyal to him no matter what the cost" (1 Cor. 13:7). Loyalty involves not saying anything behind a person's back which one is not prepared to tell to his face. Backbiting is the pastime of cowards. This does not mean that we are not to give an adverse report about a fellow-believer when asked for our opinion about him in a marriage proposal or by a prospective employer. In such situations, we must remember that our loyalty to God and to His work supersedes our loyalty to our fellow believers, and commits us to truthfulness. But where truth permits, we should cover our brother's faults as much as possible.

PATIENT LOVE

"Love is very patient. It is not irritable or touchy" (1 Cor. 13:4, It is easy to bear with the faults of others and to be patient with them when we are willing to deny ourselves. If we die to self, we cannot be irritated or offended by the conduct of others. We shall be delivered too from touchiness and impatience. A love that cannot bear patiently with the faults of others is merely sentimental and human. The love of Christ is of an altogether different quality. The Bible commands us: "BE PATIENT WITH EACH OTHER, MAKING ALLOWANCE FOR EACH OTHER'S FAULTS BECAUSE OF YOUR LOVE" (Eph. 4:2-TLB). Here is a verse that should be written in bold letters before every church and Christian fellowship. Patience is one of the clearest evidences of the love of the cross. We are all fallen human beings. When we see our own faults honestly, it is easier to be tolerant of the faults of others. Our impatience and irritability are usually a measure of our self-righteousness.

UNPREJUDICED LOVE

"If you love someone, you will.....always expect the best of him" (1 Cor. 13:7). Because of the self-centredness of our natures, our evaluation of others is usually based on selective perception - that is, we see in others only what we want to see. If we detest a person, we see only his weaknesses and believe everything evil that we hear about him; and likewise, when we adore an individual, we see only what is good in him and believe everything good that we hear of him. We see people through "colored glasses." Hence the phrase, "Love is blind"! To give but one illustration of selective perception: Many of us have pre-conceived ideas about how people from

certain communities and races behave. And when we hear a rumor or a scandal about one of them (which may be totally false), our prejudices are immediately reinforced, we believe the gossip without question and fellowship is destroyed. To avoid such pitfalls, we should seek to rid ourselves of all pre-judgments (or prejudices) against communities or races or any other category of people. It is also a helpful discipline to remember the good points of those whom we do not naturally like, and to recognize the weaknesses of those whom we idolize. We must judge those we dislike with mercy, and those we admire with realism. We should never judge others on the basis of hearsay, nor jump to conclusions on the basis of what we see. A person's behavior may appear suspect. But there may be a good explanation for it. We should seek to put the best possible interpretation on the actions of others, at all times. It was said of Jesus (in a prophetic reference), that He would not form a judgment by hearsay or even by appearance, but would seek to arrive at a righteous assessment of people (Isa. 11:3,4). So must it be in the Body of Christ

