

**Week 10:
The Truth and Practice of the Church**

Weekly Reading Materials

(All reading materials are available at: <http://www.ministrybooks.org/alphabetical.cfm>)

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Week 10 Day 1

- Eph. 1:23 Which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.
- 1 Tim. 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

What the Church Is

Reading: *Life Lessons*, vol. 1, ch. 12, sec. 1, par. 1

KNOWING THE CHURCH

The church is the goal God wants to obtain in His eternal economy. Each one of us who is saved participates in this goal, that God may obtain His heart's desire according to His good pleasure. Therefore, we must also know the church.

The Called Out Assembly, the Body of Christ, the Counterpart of Christ, the House of God, and the New Man

Ibid., par. 2-6; sec. 2, par. 1

I. WHAT THE CHURCH IS

A. The Called Out Assembly

1) "On this rock I [Christ] will build My church" (Matt. 16:18).

The church is what Christ will build through His death, resurrection, and ascension. The term "church" is ekklesia in Greek which means the called out assembly. Thus, according to its literal meaning, the church is the congregation called out from the world by God. It is not a church building or any edifice for the worship of God.

B. The Body of Christ

1) "The church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23).

The church is the Body with Christ as the Head; it is constituted for Christ in His life and Spirit with all those who have believed into Him. It is a living organism and not a lifeless organization, such as the clubs and associations in society.

The body of a man is the fullness of a man to be his expression. Likewise, the church is the fullness of Christ to be His expression. Since Christ is the One who is unlimited, extensive, and filling all in all, He needs a great Body to be the fullness of Himself who fills all in all to express Him in all things.

C. The Counterpart of Christ

1) “Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25).

This word reveals that the church is also Christ’s counterpart. As the Body of Christ, the church receives life from Him for His expression; this is a matter of life. As the counterpart of Christ, the church receives His love for the satisfaction of His heart’s desire; this is a matter of love.

D. The House of God

1) “That you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth [reality]” (1 Tim. 3:15).

To Christ, the church is His Body and His counterpart, while to God, the church is His house. On the one hand, this house refers to God’s dwelling place, and on the other hand, it refers to God’s family, God’s household. These two, God’s household and God’s dwelling place, are just one. God’s household is the very house for God’s dwelling (Eph. 2:19, 22). A person’s house is his place of living, residing, and rest. The church, being God’s house, is also such a place to God. Today, the living God is living, residing, and resting in the church on the earth.

God is living, and the church as His house is also living, having the life of God, living, residing, and resting with God. Thus, the living house of God is the pillar and base of all His reality, which is the reality (truth) of the universe. Everything of this living God is the reality in the universe. Without Him, the universe is vain and empty; yet all His reality is being supported and upheld by the church, which is His living house.

E. The New Man

1) “And having put on the new man, which is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him [Christ] who created him; where [in the new man] there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all [men] and in all [men]” (Col. 3:10-11).

Just as all of mankind is a corporate old man created in Adam, the church is also a corporate new man. Christ, having abolished on the cross all the ordinances which caused discord among men, created this new man in Himself (Eph. 2:14-15). This new man bears the image of its Creator, Christ, who is its life and its content. In this new man, there are no persons of the old creation belonging to any race, religion, culture, or class. Only Christ is all the constituents of this new man and is in all its constituents. The church as the Body of Christ takes Christ as its life for His expression;

the church as the new man takes Christ as its person for the fulfillment of God's will.

The Designation of the Church

It Has No Special Name / It may Be Designated by the Name of Its Locality
Ibid., par. 5-6

IV. THE DESIGNATION OF THE CHURCH

A. It Has No Special Name

The church is unique and has no need of special names. The church is the church; there should not be kinds of churches that are denominated according to their kind, such as the Presbyterian church, the Lutheran church, and the Baptist church. To denominate the church in this way is needless and not according to the biblical revelation.

B. It May Be Designated by the Name of Its Locality

Although the church is unique in the universe, it is numerous in its local manifestation. The many local churches do not differ in nature; their difference is only in the different places where they are. Therefore, we may use the name of the locality in which a local church is to designate that church, such as the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1), and the seven local churches in the province of Asia (Rev. 1:4, 11).

Week 10 Day 2

Acts 8:1 And Saul approved of his killing. And there occurred in that day a great persecution against the church which was in Jerusalem; and all were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

1 Cor. 1:10 Now I beseech you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion.

The Practice of the Church

The Universal Body of Christ Being the Universal House of God and the Kingdom of God As Well

Reading: *Issue of the Union of the Consummated Spirit of the Triune God and the Regenerated Spirit of the Believers*, ch. 6, sec. 7, par. 2

III. THE THIRD ASPECT OF THE LORD'S RECOVERY—THE PRACTICE OF THE CHURCH

A. The Universal Body of Christ Being the Universal House of God and the Kingdom of God As Well

Finally, we need to see the third aspect of the Lord's recovery, that is, the practice of the church. First, the church as the universal Body of Christ is the universal house of God and also the kingdom of God (Eph. 1:23; 1 Tim. 3:15-16; Matt. 16:18-19). These three—the Body of Christ, the house of God, and the kingdom of God—are just one. The Body of Christ is the house of God, and the house of God is the kingdom of God.

Appearing in Various Cities as Local Churches, with One City Having Only One Church in Order to Keep the Oneness and Prevent Division

Ibid., par. 3-4

B. Appearing in Various Cities as Local Churches, with One City Having Only One Church in Order to Keep the Oneness and Prevent Division

The universal Body of Christ is the house of God, that is, the kingdom of God, appearing in various cities as local churches. The Bible shows us that one city should have only one church for the sake of keeping the oneness and preventing division (Acts 8:1; 13:1; Rev. 1:4, 11). Deuteronomy 12:5-18 clearly tells us that when the Israelites arrived in the good land, they could not choose a place of worship as they liked. They needed to go to the place where God had placed His name, which was the place where God would build His dwelling place. The Israelites needed to worship God there. In the Old Testament God chose Jerusalem. Hence, although the twelve tribes of Israel were scattered throughout the land of Israel, all their males had to go up to Jerusalem three times a year to worship God there. No one dared to set up another worship center besides Jerusalem. Later, Jeroboam rebelled. He set up Dan in the north and Bethel as worship centers and thus was cursed and punished by God, with the result that all the kings of the kingdom of Israel were rejected by God and excluded from the record of 2 Chronicles.

Today the practice of the church that God desires is the same as this in principle, that is, one city having only one church for the keeping of the oneness. One cannot say that he is not satisfied with the church in a certain locality and then start another meeting on the next street with a few of his more intimate brothers. Because Christianity is not willing to be restricted

by one city having only one church, today's situation has become confused and divided.

The Local Churches Are Scattered in Different Places by Geography, yet They Are Not Divided by Any Doctrine or Matter

Ibid., sec. 8, par. 1;

**C. The Local Churches Are Scattered
in Different Places by Geography, yet They Are Not Divided by Any
Doctrine or Matter**

The local churches in the various localities are scattered in different places by geography, yet they are not divided by any doctrine or matter (1 Cor. 1:10-13). Some people suggest that the local churches should be autonomous and that the churches should be independent. However, I must say that to be autonomous is the biggest division. The United States of America has only one federal government, one national defense, one diplomacy, one postal service, one monetary system, and one highway system that connects the whole country. If each state issued its own currency, the entire United States would have to issue fifty kinds of notes, and the market would be in turmoil. It is the same regarding the highways. The entire country has only one highway system. If the highways in each state could not be connected, then the transportation in the entire country would be choked. It is because of all these onenesses that the United States of America has become so strong and so great.

1993 Blending Conference Messages concerning the Lord's Recovery and Our Present Need, ch. 2, sec. 1, II

II. All the local churches are the one Body of Christ separated by the localities of their existence, but still expressing the same one Body, not respectively but corporately.

Week 10 Day 3

- 1 Cor. 10:17 Seeing that there is one bread, we who are many are one Body; for we all partake of the one bread.
- Rom. 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The Unique Church Should Not Be Divided into Sects or Denominations
Reading: *Issue of the Union of the Consummated Spirit of the Triune God and the Regenerated Spirit of the Believers*, ch. 6, sec. 8, par. 3

**D. The Unique Church of God Is Expressed
as Many Local Churches throughout the Whole Globe, yet They Are
Still the Unique Universal Body of Christ and Should Not Be Divided
into Sects or Denominations**

In the practice of the church, although the unique church of God is expressed as the many local churches throughout the whole globe, the churches are still the unique universal Body of Christ and should not be divided into sects or denominations (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

There Should Not Be Any Hierarchy—Religious Organization or System
of Rank
Ibid., par. 4

**E. There Should Not Be Any Hierarchy—
Religious Organization or System of Rank**

In the practice of the church, although there are the apostles who establish the churches, and within each church there are elders who manage the church and deacons who serve the church, besides the order of these holy services, there should not be any hierarchy—religious organization or system of rank (1 Cor. 9:1-3; 1 Tim. 3:1-13). In the Catholic Church today there is a hierarchy of the pope, the cardinals, the archbishops, the bishops, and the priests. In the Protestant churches, there is also the system of rank of the pastors and the common believers. All these should not exist, and these practices are not scriptural.

The Local Churches in the Various Localities Take God's Eternal Economy
as Their Center to Bear the Unique Testimony of Christ
Ibid., sec. 9, par. 1

**F. The Local Churches in the Various Localities Take God's Eternal
Economy as Their Center**

to Bear the Unique Testimony of Christ

In the practice of the church, although there are many local churches, they all take God's eternal economy as their center to bear the unique testimony of Christ. They do not teach any doctrine that is unrelated to God's economy and has nothing to do with the testimony of Christ. In 1 Timothy chapter one Paul wanted Timothy to remain in Ephesus to charge certain ones not to teach things that are different from God's economy (vv. 3-4). In the practice of the church, we should not teach any doctrine that is unrelated to God's economy and has nothing to do with the testimony of Christ. If we do, this will cause division.

In These Local Churches There Should Be Righteousness, Peace, and Joy in the Holy Spirit as the Reality of the Kingdom of God

Ibid., par. 2

G. In These Local Churches There Should Be Righteousness, Peace, and Joy in the Holy Spirit as the Reality of the Kingdom of God

In the practice of the church there should be righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit in the local churches as the reality of the kingdom of God (Rom. 14:17). The kingdom of God is the sphere in which God exercises His authority so that He may express His glory for the fulfillment of His purpose. In such a kingdom, what matters is not eating and drinking but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Righteousness denotes that which is right and proper. Those who live in the kingdom of God should be right and proper toward others, toward things, and toward God; with them there should be nothing erroneous, improper, crooked, slanted, or biased. This requires that they be strict in dealing with themselves. Peace is the fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:11 and note). It characterizes the relationship that those who live in the kingdom of God should have with others and with God. If we are righteous, right, and proper toward others, toward things, and toward God, we will have a peaceful relationship with others and with God. Thus, we will have joy in the Holy Spirit and, in particular, before God. In this way, we will be filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:52) and will live out righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, which are the reality of the kingdom of God. This proves that the normal church life is the kingdom of God on the earth today.

Week 10 Day 4

- Eph. 4:3 Being diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace:
- Rev. 3:8 I know your works; behold, I have put before you an opened door which no one can shut, because you have a little power and have kept My word and have not denied My name.

The Ground of the Church

The Genuine Oneness of the Body of Christ—the Oneness of the Spirit

Reading: *Elders' Training, Book 10: The Eldership and the God-Ordained Way* (2), ch. 7, sec. 11, par. 4

B. The Ground

1. The Genuine Oneness of the Body of Christ—the Oneness of the Spirit

The ground of a local church is the genuine oneness of the Body of Christ, that is, the oneness of the Spirit. Ephesians 4:3 charges us to be diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit. The oneness of the Spirit is the oneness of the Body of Christ, which is the basic element of the unique ground of a local church.

In the Limit of the Boundary and Jurisdiction of a Locality—the Ground of Locality

Ibid., sec. 12, par. 1

2. In the Limit of the Boundary and Jurisdiction of a Locality—the Ground of Locality

The genuine oneness of the Body of Christ must be practiced with the unique ground of locality within the limit of the boundary and jurisdiction of the locality in which a church exists, that is, on the ground of locality, as with the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1), the church in Cenchrea (Rom. 16:1), the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2), and the seven churches in the seven cities in Asia (Rev. 1:11). All these churches were on the local ground, the ground of locality.

The Condition of the Church

Ibid., par. 2

C. The Condition

The condition of a local church may fluctuate and may differ from that of all the other local churches, just as the conditions of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 differed from one another. The church in Ephesus was in one condition, and the church in Smyrna was in another condition. All the seven churches were different in their conditions. However, although the conditions of the churches may differ, the ground of the local churches remains the same. Because the condition of a church may fluctuate, our recognizing of a local church should be based upon its nature and ground and not upon its condition.

Week 10 Day 5

- 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.
- 13 For also in one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit.

The Fellowship of the Body of Christ

Reading: *Elders' Training, Book 10: The Eldership and the God-Ordained Way* (2), ch. 7, sec. 2, par. 1, 3

A. The Fellowship of the Body of Christ

We need to see in a brief way the fellowship of the Body of Christ. In our physical body there is a current of blood, which we may call the circulation of the blood. This current, or this circulation, is going on continuously in our physical body. If this circulation, or this current of blood, were to stop for only a few minutes, we would die. Thus, it is the circulation of our blood that keeps us alive. The health of our body depends on the circulation of our blood. We may say that this circulation is the fellowship of our body.

The fellowship of the Body of Christ is very similar to the circulation of the blood in our body. We have been enlightened to see that Christ has a Body and that we are members of His Body, that is, members of Christ Himself. Just as our physical body has many members, Christ's Body also has many members. And just as a man has only one body—this is a principle ordained in God's creation—Christ also has only one Body. If we do not understand the church as the Body of Christ, we should simply look at our own body. We can understand Christ's Body by knowing our own body. I have learned a great deal concerning the Body of Christ by learning to know my own body. If we learn to know our body, we will know the Body of Christ.

The circulation of the blood is the fellowship of our body. The fellowship of Christ's Body also is a kind of circulation. In our physical body we have the circulation of the blood, but Christ's mystical Body does not have blood. The fellowship in Christ's Body, then, is the circulation of the Spirit. The Spirit today is the "blood" in Christ's Body. If there were no blood in our body, our body would be dried up and would be dead. Likewise, if Christ's Body did not have the Spirit, it would be like a corpse. Thus, the fellowship of the Body of Christ is simply the circulation, the current, of the Spirit—not the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God, but the Spirit. In the New Testament

the Spirit denotes the consummated Spirit, the Spirit who has been consummated, compounded, and mingled, and who is now dispensing. In this Spirit there is divinity, that is, God's divine nature, and there is humanity, that is, man's human nature. There is also Christ's person, Christ's wonderful, all-inclusive death, and Christ's empowering resurrection with His ascension. All these elements have been compounded into this one Spirit. When this one Spirit is circulating within the Body of Christ, divinity, humanity, Christ's person, Christ's death, and Christ's resurrection all are circulating. How wonderful this is!

The Body of Christ Being Uniquely One Universally
Ibid., sec. 3, par. 1

*1. The Body of Christ
Being Uniquely One Universally*

The Body of Christ is uniquely one universally (Eph. 4:4-6). Individually, we are members of the Body of Christ, and all the local churches are parts of this one unique Body of Christ. As those who are in the Body, we need to realize that we are one with all the saints in the entire universe. Ephesians 4:4-6 depicts a oneness that is universal: "One Body and one Spirit, as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." In these verses we can see that the Triune God is mingled with the Body. The Body mentioned here is not local; rather, it is universal. This is the universal oneness of the Body of Christ.

The Fellowship of the Body of Christ Also Being Uniquely One Universally
Ibid., par. 2; sec. 4, par. 3

*2. The Fellowship of the Body of Christ
Also Being Uniquely One Universally*

Since the Body of Christ is uniquely one universally, the fellowship of the Body of Christ also is uniquely one universally.

When I came into the recovery, I realized what the recovery was and that it was uniquely one. The one who brought the recovery to China among us was Brother Watchman Nee. If I would not have taken the way of the recovery, I could have had a work in northern China, but I gave that up. I fully realized that the Lord has only one Body, one work, one Bible, one revelation, and one current, one flow, in one fellowship. At that time Brother Nee was being used by the Lord. I never tried to speak anything different from his teaching. This does not mean that I did not have any other

teachings, but my speaking always followed Brother Nee's speaking in order to keep the unique fellowship in the Lord's unique recovery. I felt that it was a glory to participate in the Lord's recovery in such a subjective way with Brother Nee. I thank the Lord that He had mercy upon me in helping me to have the best choice. In Moses' blessing in Deuteronomy 33, there is the term "the choicest things" (vv. 13-16). I realize that the Lord has been giving me the choicest things throughout my years in the recovery. This is due to His mercy in placing me and keeping me all the time in His recovery. As long as we are preserved in the Lord's way, we are preserved in the oneness in the unique fellowship. There is only one Lord, one Body, one Bible, one divine revelation, one speaking, one recovery, one fellowship, and one way to practice the recovery.

To Keep the Universal Oneness of the Body of Christ

Ibid., sec. 6, par. 3

E. To Keep the Universal Oneness of the Body of Christ

This fellowship is to keep the universal oneness of the Body of Christ (John 17:11b, 20-23; Eph. 4:3-6). Ephesians 4:3 charges us to endeavor to keep the oneness of the Spirit. We can keep this oneness because it is our possession already. We have this oneness; thus, we only need to keep it. Regardless of how weak we may be, we still have this oneness. This is because we still have the circulation of the "blood," the circulation of the Spirit. If we did not have this circulation, we would be spiritually dead. As long as we have life, regardless of how weak we may be, we have this oneness. It is the possession of every believer. What we need, then, is just to keep this oneness. When we keep this oneness, we are in the unique fellowship of the Lord's recovery.

Week 10 Day 6

- 1 Cor. 1:10 Now I beseech you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion.
- Titus 3:10 A factious man, after a first and second admonition, refuse,

Knowing the Sects

Sects Being of the Flesh / Refusing Factions

Reading: *Life Lessons*, vol. 2, ch. 1, sec. 2, par. 1-3

III. SECTS BEING OF THE FLESH

1)“And the works of the flesh are manifest, which are...faction, divisions, parties, envyings” (Gal. 5:19-21).

In Greek, the word for party or sect (haireisis) is the same as the word for heresy (haireisis anglicized), which means to label something new in order to be different, resulting in a distinctive party—a sect.

The verses here tell us clearly that sects come from men’s flesh. They also show us that there are always factions and divisions before the formation of a sect, and envyings after its establishment. What a shame! Is this not the very condition among Christians today? Should we not refuse this work of the flesh by following the Holy Spirit in us who sanctifies us?

The Factors Constituting Sects / Endeavoring to Keep the Oneness of the Body of Christ

Ibid., par. 4-8

IV. REFUSING FACTIONS

1)“A factious man after a first and second admonition refuse” (Titus 3:10). In confronting factions among the Christians, the Apostle Paul gave his younger co-worker a frank and bold charge, which is also a charge to us, to refuse a factious person after sufficient admonition in love. This is to reject factions without lenience or compromise according to God’s heart’s desire and the truth of the Bible that the Body of Christ may not suffer damage and that the truth of God may not be adulterated.

V. THE FACTORS CONSTITUTING SECTS

The following three key elements are the factors which cause the Christians (not counting the nominal ones) to be divided, to be constituted as sects.

A. Special Creeds

The common faith of true Christians is unique. It includes the Triune God, the person and work of Christ, that is, the being of Christ and the doings of Christ, and the divine authority of the Bible. Besides these truths of our fundamental faith, to consider other matters to be the Christian faith (such as the method of baptism of the Baptist denomination, the system of church administration of the Presbyterian denomination, the tongue-speaking of the Pentecostal denomination, the head covering and foot washing of other groups, or general doctrines such as the time and number of raptures, the interpretation of prophecies, and the understanding of certain parts of the Scriptures) and to make them special creeds is to label something new in order to be different and will result in sects.

B. Special Fellowships

With the existence of special creeds, Christians will be divided into different groups, having special fellowships in their different circles outside of the believers' common fellowship. Such special fellowships cause those believers who practice them to be constituted as sects separate from the believers in general.

C. Special Names

Special creeds not only lead to special fellowships, but they also produce special names, such as the name of a certain denomination or a certain church. These special names, in a more tangible way, cause those who so label themselves to be constituted into named sects, resulting in denominations. A denomination is a named sect. Therefore, those who know the Body of Christ must never bear such special names. The believers should only possess the unique and honorable name of Jesus Christ, and not exalt any other name besides this preeminent name. It should not be a glorious thing for one to say that he is a believer of a certain denomination.