

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“. . . Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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“THERE IS ONE BODY”

PART ONE

by Lee Moses

“*There is one body . . .*” (Ephesians 4:4). Thus the apostle Paul begins his list of seven “ones,” or “the seven pillars of unity,” as they are commonly called.¹ But this first statement in itself brims with meaning. Several times in the New Testament, Paul refers to the church as the “body” of Christ (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Colossians 1:18, 24). He sprinkles the analogy generously throughout the book of Ephesians (2:16; 3:6; 4:12-16; 5:23-32), in which book he clearly defines his terms: “*...the church, which is his body...*” (1:22-23). The church and the *body* are one and the same. When the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write, “*There is one body,*” He taught that **there is one church**. Consider further what this pithy statement teaches.

There are not multiple bodies, at least not as far as God is concerned. One might observe, “Of course there are multiple bodies, because there are multiple churches. There is the Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and many others.” Yes, as a matter of fact, a little over ten years ago one source identified 213 different religious bodies in the United States, noting that their list was far from all-inclusive.² Others have counted far more. However, there were also various different religious bodies when Paul wrote—there were cults of the various pagan deities; there were Jews; there were

different groups within Judaism, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees. But as Jesus said of such groups and their peculiar doctrines, “*Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up*” (Matthew 15:13).

Some may protest, “But those other religious bodies in Paul’s day did not even **profess** to be Christian. There are numerous bodies today which have Christ as their head.” When Paul wrote, the Lord only authorized the existence of one body, and thus, He only recognized the existence of one body. And the Lord has not authorized any new religious bodies since the first century (Colossians 3:17; 2 Peter 1:3). The Lord only recognized one body then, and He only recognizes one body now.

Christ is only the head of one body: “*And he is the head of the body, the church*” (Colossians 1:18). There are numerous technological corporations that would love to have Bill Gates or Steve Jobs as their CEO. But just because someone starts a company and wants Bill Gates as CEO does not make it so. Similarly, many have started their own churches, and professed to have Christ as their head—the mere profession does not make it so (Matthew 15:8-9; Luke 6:46). Not only does such a profession fail to make it so; it is impossible that anyone could start a church other than the body of Christ, and that Christ could be the head of that manmade body. A body

has many members (Romans 12:4-5), but it only has one head. Likewise, a head only corresponds to one body, not to several. Even should a body wish to be controlled by another body’s head, this does not make it so. A church may profess allegiance to Christ, but Christ cannot be head of a body if that body is not **His** body.

Looking forward to Pentecost, as He so often did, Jesus said, “*Upon this rock I will build my church*” (Matthew 16:18). Jesus did not say this in the plural—“I will build my churches.” He said it in the singular—He would build one church. The plethora of manmade denominations in existence today do not have Christ as their originator or head. “*There is one body.*”

Other bodies are not parts of the one body. Denominationalists generally do not acknowledge the different bodies as being different bodies. They believe the various denominations are all parts of the *one body*. Even though the members of the different denominations did different things to become members and to be “saved,” they assert that their churches are in the body of Christ. However, the Holy Spirit denies this.

As the human body is composed of different parts, the Bible sometimes refers to the different “parts” or “members” of the *one body*. To the church at Corinth, Paul wrote, “*Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular*” (1 Corinthians 12:27). The New King James Version translates the last portion, “and members **individually**.” Who were the different “members” or “parts” of the body?

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(continued from page one)

This statement was addressed to the church at Corinth (1:2), and Paul said, “*Ye are.*” The Christians at Corinth were each individually parts of the body of Christ (compare with John 15:1-6).

Yes, different congregations meeting in different locations remain within the *one body*. As was the church at Corinth, the churches at Rome, Ephesus, and Philippi were all part of the body of Christ. However, these were not different bodies—they were simply local assemblies of Christians. They did not distinguish themselves from faithful congregations by using manmade designations (Acts 4:12; 11:26; Romans 16:16; 1 Peter 4:16). They did not have different organizational structures and hierarchies. They all did the exact same thing to become members; that is, they were “*baptized into Christ*” and into His body (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27; compare with John 3:5; Ephesians 5:26; 1 Peter 1:22-23). Other than

their geographic location and the local eldership overseeing the work, there was nothing to distinguish them from each other as separate entities.

When the day of Pentecost came and the church was established (Mark 9:1; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4), the Lord began adding obedient souls to His church (verses 41, 47). They all obeyed the exact same thing to become Christians (verse 38), and subsequently “*continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship*” (verse 42). Sometime later, “*Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them*” (8:5). And “*when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women*” (verse 12). Did they thus form a new body distinct from the *one body*? No, they each did what the Bible instructs

to become Christians, and did nothing at that time to form a distinct body. If a group of people who has done what the Bible says to do to become Christians begins meeting together, are they forming a new body? If they “*continue steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship*,” absolutely not. They remain in the *one body*, individually simply Christians.

As one commercial for chicken nuggets used to say, “Parts is parts.” Only a part can be part of the body—a body cannot be part of the body.

[To be continued next month]

1 For a discussion of each of these, see the series “Seven ‘Ones’ of the Church,” from the August 1998-June 1999 *FCGN*.

2 National Council of Churches, *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches 1999* (Eileen W. Lindner, ed.), 1999.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM NEHEMIAH

by Marvin L. Weir

Most remember that the children of Israel were carried into Babylonian captivity because of their lack of faith in the true and living God. In 605 B.C. Babylon conquered Israel. Among those deported into captivity were Daniel and his friends (2 Chronicles 36:6-7; Daniel 1:1-3). In 598 B.C., Ezekiel and about 10,000 others were carried into captivity. In 586 B.C., the temple of Jerusalem was destroyed and the city burned, and all except the very poor were taken to Babylon (2 Kings 24:20-25:21; Jer. 39:1-10). When the time came where God saw fit to allow a remnant to return to Jerusalem, they managed to restore true worship, but did not rebuild the walls.

In 536 B.C., Zerubbabel led the first return from Babylonian captivity. In 457 B.C., Ezra leads the next return of God’s people. In 444 B.C., Nehemiah leads the final return. While in captivity, Nehemiah learned about the conditions of his brethren and the temple. He prayed to God that he might be able to return to Jerusalem. His prayer was answered. Upon Nehemiah’s arrival, he set about the task of repairing the walls and God’s house. The Lord’s church today can learn valuable lessons from Nehemiah’s plan to rebuild the temple walls of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah **investigated** and saw the great need to restore the walls of the temple. The work was too important to ignore. God’s house had been

in disarray far too long. Thus, Nehemiah led the effort to begin the task. We need brethren today who will take a serious look at the needs of the Lord's church. Some congregations carefully maintain the physical structure but are in spiritual shambles. More people are needed who will insist that God's pattern for worship and Christian living be followed. We need brethren like Nehemiah who will take the lead in encouraging others to do God's will.

Nehemiah called for **volunteers**. No one was coerced to help. No bait was dangled before people to entice them to help. Nehemiah wanted people to help who truly loved God. He knew that one who willingly volunteers to do God's work will be a happy worker and devoted to the task at hand. It is no different today in the Lord's church. God's wants **willing** laborers in the kingdom who lovingly respond to His commands. Unless one is willing to "*deny himself, and take up his cross daily*" (Luke 9:23), he is not likely to volunteer to do much work in the Lord's vineyard.

The people were **united** in their efforts to repair the temple wall, or they would have not been successful. The brethren worked side by side, cooperating one with the other, and steadfastly remained dedicated to the task at hand. They refused to be distracted by worldly people and worldly matters. Brethren today must understand the necessity of speaking the same thing and being "*perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment*" (1 Corinthians 1:10). Protection from false teachers is needed just as badly today as was protection from Nehemiah's enemies, "*Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites...*" (Neh. 4:7-8). Nehemiah says of his devoted workers that "*they all builded the wall and they that bare burdens laded themselves; every one with one of his*

hands wrought in the work, and with the other held his weapon" (verse 17). In doing the Lord's work today one must not forget to have in his hand the "*the sword of the Spirit*" (Ephesians 6:17). May we always strive to "*give diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (Eph. 4:3)!

Nehemiah's volunteers **cooperated** in rebuilding the wall. All had a job to do, and each one did his individual task. Each member of the body of Christ today has a job to do as they contribute to the needs of the kingdom (compare with 1 Cor. 12:13-27).

Nehemiah did not allow his people to become **discouraged**. Enemies from within or without did not deter the workers from their task. The devil never wants God's work to succeed. A stumblingblock will always be provided courtesy of Satan.

Some today say that the work of the Lord's church cannot be accomplished in the way the Lord intended. Such is false thinking and far from the truth. Let us never become discouraged in building upon a solid foundation (compare with Acts 4:12; 1 Cor. 3:11; Matthew 27:24-27).

Nehemiah's volunteers had a **mind** to work. They did not show up for only two hours per week. They did not possess the attitude that someone else could and should do the task. They **prayed** to God that they could be used for His service and glory – and God did use them!

If we as members of the body of Christ possess the proper attitude and have a mind to work in His vineyard, the Lord will also use us to His service and glory. May we all have the spirit of Nehemiah!

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GOD ON A SHELF

by Lee Moses

The great sin of the nations surrounding the Israelites, which became the demise of the Israelites themselves, was *idolatry*. How foolish a notion it is, that one would fashion an idol from his own imagination, believing that such a thing could function as God! Consider the words of God recorded by the prophet Isaiah:

Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing? . . . The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house. He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it. Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god. . . . And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it: and shall I make the

residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? (44:10,13-19).

God, though all-knowing, is portrayed almost as confounded as to why any would worship an idol that very obviously was not the one true God. People had made “gods” that they could worship when they desired, and when they were done, they could then place their god upon a shelf (possibly a shelf made from the same tree from which the god was made). Could they not see that there could never be efficacy in a manmade idol?

However, sometimes people blind themselves to the truth when the truth is not equal to what they personally desire. Contrariwise, those who follow the Lord make their own desires conform to His, having an appreciation for all of His magnificent qualities. David, glad for the constantly abiding presence of the Lord, offered the following words of praise to Him: “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there” (Psalm 139:7-8, ASV). The apostle Paul wrote, “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God” (Romans 11:22). Unfortunately, most people do not want a God that is constantly abiding with them. They do not want a God that will judge them, that has a severe side. People want a god that is there for them when they want it, yet unobtrusive when they do not. People like the idea of a god that they can simply put on a shelf when they are done with it.

gods can be put on a shelf, but **God** cannot. Who made whom in Whose image? (Genesis 1:26-27). Who rules the universe? (Psalm 89:11; 103:19). Man’s will must conform to God’s. If you notice that the God you serve has been spending a lot of time on the shelf lately—if you disregard His word, speak irreverently at times, set an improper example for others, or miss services of the Lord’s church for convenience’s sake—maybe it isn’t **God** that you are serving at all, but merely your god that you have created.

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GOD’S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God’s commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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