

“One Body” Mark Kolchin

When the Lord prayed for His disciples in the Upper Room “that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us...” (John 17:21), they had little understanding of the meaning of His heartening request. Not long afterwards upon the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they would soon experience and begin to understand the reality of the truth behind these words. It was then that the Church was formed—“a new man” according to Eph. 2:15, the Body of Christ on earth connected to its Head in heaven, the Man in the glory. The event transformed a loosely-knit group of cowering disciples into a unified, singular group that would soon turn the world upside down, Acts 17:6. It was in fact, an answer to His request on the night before His crucifixion.

The unity of the Body of Christ—the oneness of God’s people is a principle truth taught in the NT as it relates to the Church. The Lord referred to it; the apostle Paul expanded upon it through the divine revelation given him. It is also prefigured in the Old Testament scriptures in the life of Israel. Although Israel and the Church are clearly distinct entities in Scripture with clearly distinct destinies, there are nevertheless striking similarities between the two which foreshadow the principle of the “one body”, reflecting both positional and practical sides to this truth. Both sides—the positional and the practical are extremely beneficial when grasped and understood by the follower of Christ.

From the positional standpoint, when the high priest went into the Holy place to minister before the Lord (Ex. 28), the names of all of the sons of Israel were borne upon his shoulders. Their names were permanently etched upon two onyx stones, anchored in gold settings and fastened by chains of gold (vv. 12-14). Israel was continually kept on the breastplate of judgment over the heart as a memorial for the high priest. Not a single tribe was missing. All were represented. The scene depicts the unity of God’s people (in this case Israel’s) and reassured them as their representative ministered on their behalf in the presence of God. Likewise for us who are living in the light of NT truth, it prefigures our security in Christ, kept by the power of God (1 Peter 1: 5) and sustained both by His ability (the chains) and His affection (the heart). It is this knowledge which reassures *our* hearts as *our* Great High Priest and Representative ministers on our behalf in the presence of God (Heb. 9:24). As to the “one body”, Israel was one in the eyes of the high priest. The Church is also one body. Paul stated definitively to the Corinthians: “for by one Spirit we are *all* baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether Jews or Greek, whether we be bond or free...” (1 Cor. 12:13). Every genuinely born-again believer is baptized instantly into the Body of Christ upon faith in Jesus Christ, regardless of nationality or any other social or economic difference. Just as Israel was baptized unto Moses and came under His divinely-appointed leadership (1 Cor. 10:1-2), so too Christians are the “body of Christ” even though members in particular, 1 Cor. 12:27.

In Lev. 23, a wave loaf was utilized in the observance of the Feast of Weeks similarly depicting the concept of the unity of God’s people. This stood in contrast to the individual sheaves used in the Feast of First Fruits. This difference prophesied the unifying work of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost when the disciples were baptized into one body.

The oneness of God’s people is also seen in other ways in the OT. When the 10 ½ tribes wanted to obliterate the 2 ½ tribes for erecting an unsubstantiated altar in Joshua’s day (Joshua 22), it required a special envoy to intervene and avert certain disaster. God providentially protected the dissolution of the nation. In His eyes, they were one though they were at odds with each other. The same is seen in the life

of David, who when feigning allegiance to the Philistines at Ziklag is kept from doing battle with his own brethren, even when he suggested it! (1 Sam. 29). God is gracious—and intent on maintaining a vital principle of the unity of God’s people. It was true in Rehoboam’s time (2 Chron. 11:4) and it was even true back in Balaam’s day when he tried to curse Israel in the wilderness at Balak’s bidding. All the hireling prophet could see when attempting to curse Israel was a “people dwelling alone, not reckoning itself among the nations”, Num. 23:9, in which He has not observed iniquity and in which He has not seen wickedness (Num. 23:21). Amazing! How we could all join in with the same remark: “Oh, what God has done!” (v. 23) God’s people are His people and they always will be. It is true for Israel and it is true for the Church—a lways—a truth substantiated by Rev. 22:12-14 in which Israel and the Church are forever preserved and distinct in the New Jerusalem.

Practically, the Church *should* be one body. But what is true positionally may not always be true practically. Again in writing to the Corinthian believers, the apostle Paul reprimanded them for the divisions that existed in the assembly. Though he would later teach them about the unity of the Body of Christ, he had to address the infighting and other manifestations of carnality that clouded their understanding of the principle of the “one body”. Just as some in Israel distanced themselves from the other tribes for the wrong reasons (Josh. 1:12-15), so too God’s people today can distance themselves from other believers for the wrong reasons as well. This can be for selfish, carnal, and even for trivial matters, all reflecting an ignorance of the Word of God. Paul exhorted the Philippian believers that they needed to strive together for the faith of the Gospel with one spirit and one mind, (Phil. 1:27), the result of studying God’s word and committing to it. That process which admittedly takes time to produce is the outcome of the dedicated work of Christ’s “gifts” to the Church, gifted pastors and teachers who are endued and empowered through work of the Spirit. They are raised up by God to equip the saints “for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of Go unto a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”, Eph. 4:13. As a result, Christians become mature in the faith, no “longer children”, educated along the lines of biblical truth while checking personal pride and ambition, some of the primary reasons why believers compromise the practical side of the unity of the Body.

In the light of increased false teaching and the false religion today, it is imperative that Christians be discerning as to the elements of true faith and true profession and who makes up that “one” Body. This required to differentiate between the “precious and the vile” (Jer. 15:16). By applying the truth of the oneness of the Body of Christ and understanding the importance that God places upon it will have a positive impact upon the practical side of our faith and a corresponding effect upon the world around us. In this way, the prayer of our Savior to His Father will come to pass and believers will truly be one in more ways than one so “that the world may believe”.