

- ***READ Matthew 7:24-27*** After spending much time sharing much heavenly wisdom and teaching with the multitudes gathered around Him, Jesus shares this parable concerning the differences between those who will listen and heed His words and those who refuse to do so. The point of the Savior is simple: those who are wise will allow Jesus's teachings and truths to serve as a strong foundation while those who are foolish will not allow such a thing to happen. The foundation of any structure is of the utmost importance, and this is no less true when it comes to our faiths.
- While all of the aspects of our faiths are important, there are some aspects that are absolutely integral to building up our faiths to be what God would truly have them to be. While we might discuss and debate which of these points such might be, we would be wise to allow the Spirit to dictate which aspects of our faiths are those that are essential to know and hold up as true.
- In **Ephesians 4:1-6**, we find seven such aspects of faith that Paul states as be matters of fact. Paul states there is *"one body, and one Spirit, just 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."* If we are to be a people who are growing mightily and prevailing then we must make sure that our foundation is established with deep and unwavering roots.
- Some weeks back we looked at how Jesus is the one Lord that is found in these verses, and this morning we want to continue to look at this text and talk about the one body that is mentioned at the very beginning of this list of seven foundational aspects of faith. Let's begin by coming to understand what exactly this one body is.

I. The one body is the one church that Jesus died for.

A. The two terms are synonymous when it comes to describing those who are saved and belong to Jesus Christ.

1. There are two texts that clearly show that the body and the church are one and the same.
 - a) *"And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."* (**Ephesians 1:22,23**)
 - b) *"He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything."* (**Colossians 1:18**)
2. If the body is the church and the church is the body then we can logically conclude that just as there is one body...then there must be only one church.

B. The Scriptures support the idea that there is only one church.

1. Jesus said in **Matthew 16:18**, *"I will build My church."* Jesus speaks of Him only building one church. In the two texts we just looked at in **Ephesians 1:22,23** & **Colossians 1:18**, we see the singular tenses being used to describe Jesus's church and body. There is no evidence within the Scriptures that point towards there being more than one church or body. The only plurality of "churches" that can be seen in the New Testament is in reference to local bodies of God's people not the over arching church or body that Jesus died for.

2. Now someone will hear this being stated as fact and respond with that being an awfully narrow minded way to look at things. However, I am speaking no more narrowly than Jesus Himself often spoke of the reality of things. In **Matthew 7:14,15**, Jesus speaks of the way that leads to life being small and narrow and that there will be few who find it. I don't know about you, but that seems pretty narrow minded of our Lord. Also in **John 14:6**, Jesus says that He alone is the way, the truth, and the life, and this leaves no room for salvation through any other world religion. Again...that sounds pretty narrow minded. His disciples even got into that narrow minded time of mindset because in **Acts 4:12** that *"there is no other name under heaven that has been given amount men by which we must be saved."* To say that there is only one church might seem narrow minded, but if it is consistent with Scripture then it is what it is.
- C. Of course, this doesn't sit well with many people because it flies in the face of mainstream Christianity which is very much divided.
 1. Denominationalism is usually how we would describe the landscape of Christianity in our day and age, and it simply means that Christians and churches have been divided up because of many varying factors. The easiest way to identify the differences might simply be by the names they wear, but the name is simply an extension of the fact that churches often differ in much more than just the name on their signs. Different and even contradicting doctrines, beliefs, and practices all contribute to the religious division.
 2. This isn't to say that all churches must be named the exact same thing. There is no official name that must be worn by a local congregation. The New Testament refers to the church and local churches in many different ways. Sometimes it is called simply a church (used 56 times). Other times it is called the body, the body of Christ, or Christ's body (over 50 times). The church of God or the assembly of God is used 10 times. The churches of Christ can be found in **Romans 16:16**. Sometimes a church is referred to simply as a group of Christians or disciples.
 3. These and many other descriptors are used in reference to the called out of God, yet they are not used to describe different kinds of Christians as we often see today. All of those who are mentioned within the New Testament are all individual members in different locations who all belong to the singular body of Christ. (**Romans 12:5** *"so we, who are many, are one body in Christ"*) They might be referred to in different ways, but they were expected to be unified and reflect the fact that there is only one body and one church. This was Jesus's desire.

II. Jesus desires that His one body be unified. (John 17:20,21)

- A. Just before Jesus's betrayal, He spent much time praying for unity among His followers.
 1. Just after praying on behalf of His handpicked Apostles concerning how they would carry on after His departure, Jesus then turns His attention towards all of those who would believe in Him. *"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me."*
 2. We should fully recognize how in sync the Father and the Son are in all things, and Jesus is saying that this is what He wants for all of those who claim to believe in Him. Again...if we look around us at the Christian world we quickly realize that this desire of Jesus simply isn't being achieved. So what can be done to make this unity a reality?
- B. It begins by submitting to the proper authority...Jesus, His Apostles, and other inspired writers.
 1. Back in **Ephesians 1:22,23** & **Colossians 1:18**, we see Paul stating that it is Jesus who is the head of His church and body. As the head and as the one who gave His life so that the church could be established, it would make sense that He would have the right to dictate how those within His body ought to believe and practice.

2. In fact, Jesus says in **Matthew 28:18** Jesus says that all authority has been given to Him in heaven and on earth, and He must be respected as such. If everyone would acknowledge Jesus as the head and respect and follow His authority then we wouldn't have the rampant denominationalism that is so intertwined into the Christian world today. If men would lay aside their doctrines and theologies that are founded in men's wisdom and just submit to the will and doctrines of Christ then things would be so much better off. This is what Jesus wants.
- C. Jesus wants for all people, no matter how different they might have been, to become united in one body.
 1. Paul says as much in **Ephesians 2:16-19**. Speaking of the Gentiles and the Jews, he states that those who were once enemies and separated from one another could now be reconciled into one body through Jesus's sacrifice on the cross.
 2. Through Jesus and submitting to His will they could all have access *"in one Spirit to the Father."* They could all be *"fellow citizens with the saints"* and be *"of God's household."*

III. Through unity of faith and obedience, those who are part of the one body can be saved.

- A. We can be saved by being joined to the one body of Christ.
 1. How can we be joined to the body? We can be joined to it in the exact same way that we see people in the first century being joined to the body of Christ. In **Acts 2:47**, we see Luke recording, *"And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."* But how were these people being saved? Let's look back a few verses to **v.41**. *"So then those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls."* Putting this together with what is seen in **Acts 2:38** and we can quickly understand that those who want to be joined to the body of Christ must repent of their sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.
 2. Paul echoes these same thoughts when he says in **I Corinthians 12:13**, *"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."* Through a willingness to be changed by the Holy Spirit and being baptized into Jesus Christ we can be joined to the one body and be saved through it. **Ephesians 5:22-27** does an excellent job of tying all of these thoughts together.
- B. Sadly, those who fail to be faithful and obedient will be barred or expelled from the body of Jesus Christ and not be saved.
 1. Those who fail to submit to the authority of Christ and go beyond it or fall short of it will find themselves cut off from being in union with Jesus and the Father. *"Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teachings of Christ does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son."* (**II John 1:9**) This thought of John goes hand in hand with what we saw from Paul's writings in **Ephesians 2:18**.
 2. This is true of Christians and even whole churches that fail to submit to the teachings of Jesus. Again, this sounds harsh, but this is what we see from what Jesus says to some of the churches of Asia in **Revelation 2:5 & 3:16**.
 - a) *"Therefore remember from where you have fallen and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent."* (**Revelation 2:5**)
 - b) *"So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth."* (**Revelation 3:16**)
 3. A failure to be faithful and obedient to God will leave us on the outside looking in when it comes to the body of Christ that He died for the salvation of. He wants us all to be saved and has given us every opportunity to join in...may we do so to the salvation of our souls and the glorification of our great Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

There are some teachings of Scripture that might seem difficult to accept because it is so different from what we see all around us today. We look around and we see so many different so called bodies of Christ, but what we see simply isn't consistent with what we read of in Scripture. Regardless of what is popular or done by the majority, may we be a people who are dedicated to being a part of the one true body of Christ. May we all find salvation in His church, and may it all be done to His glory. There is truly one body, and Jesus loved it so much that He gave His life for it, so that it might be saved.

PRAYER *Our loving Father in heaven...we are so thankful for the love of Your Son that brought about the establishing of His body and church. We ask that You would help for His desires of unity to be realized in us as we submit to His authority and headship. Help for us to be faithful and obedient to Your Son in all things so that we might always be in fellowship with Him, Yourself, and the Spirit. May we shine as lights to those around us, and may we all find salvation in being in His body. Thank you for the unity that we have in this place, and may you bless our shepherds as they lead us in this way. All of these things we ask in the name of Your Son, Jesus the Christ...amen.*