

Message Four

The Nature of the Church

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:2; 12:12; Eph. 1:19-21; 2:6; 3:16-21; 4:4-6, 16; 1 Cor. 6:17

I. The church is divine, “Christly,” “resurrectionly,” and heavenly:

- A. The church is of God—1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:16:
 - 1. A local church must be a church of God, possessing the divine nature of God—2 Pet. 1:4.
 - 2. The expression *the church of God* indicates not only that the church belongs to God but also that the church must have the nature of God.
- B. The church is “Christly”—1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 1:22-23:
 - 1. Every local church must be a church of Christ (Rom. 16:16), being in the element of Christ:
 - a. Christ is the nature of the church, and the church is actually Christ Himself—Col. 3:10-11.
 - b. Anything that is short of Christ or is not Christ is not the church.
 - 2. The church is a pure product out of Christ—Eph. 4:15-16:
 - a. This is typified by Eve, who was fully, completely, and purely produced out of Adam; whatever was in Eve and whatever Eve was, was of Adam—Gen. 2:22-24; Eph. 5:30-32.
 - b. The church must also be of one element—the element of Christ; apart from Christ’s element, there should be no other element in the church—Col. 3:10-11.
- C. The church is “resurrectionly”—John 11:25; Acts 2:24; Rev. 1:18; 2:8, 10:
 - 1. The church is an entity absolutely in resurrection; it is not natural, nor is it in the old creation.
 - 2. The church is a new creation created in Christ’s resurrection and by the resurrected Christ; therefore, the church is “resurrectionly”—Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17.
 - 3. The church was produced by Christ in resurrection and exists by His resurrection life; thus, the church is a being that can endure death.
- D. The church is heavenly—Eph. 1:19-21; 2:6:
 - 1. The church is in Christ in His ascension; the church has been resurrected with Christ and is now seated in the heavenlies in Christ—v. 6.
 - 2. The main significance of the church being heavenly is that it is under God’s authority—Matt. 28:18; Dan. 4:26, 34-35:
 - a. The nature of the church is to submit to God’s authority.
 - b. The particular nature of heaven is that it submits to God’s authority; hence, to be heavenly is to have the nature of submitting to God’s authority—Matt. 6:10; 18:18-19.

II. We need to be watchful and faithful in preserving the nature of the church—13:31-32:

- A. The church should be like an herb that produces food for the satisfaction of God and man—vv. 31-32a.

- B. The nature and function of the church were changed, so that it became a “tree,” a lodging place for birds—vv. 32b, 4, 19.
- C. The church, according to its heavenly and spiritual nature, should be like the mustard, sojourning on earth; but with its nature changed, the church became deeply rooted and settled as a tree in the earth—vv. 31-32.

III. The church is the mingling of God and man—Eph. 3:16-21; 4:4-6, 16:

- A. The mingling of God and man is a deep and central truth in the Scriptures—1 Cor. 6:17; John 14:20; 17:21-23.
- B. We must grasp the principle of the church—the church is God mingled with man—Eph. 4:4-6:
 - 1. The church is neither merely divine nor merely human; if the church were merely divine or merely human, it would lose its nature.
 - 2. The mingling of God and man manifests the nature of the church.
- C. God’s unique purpose is to mingle Himself with us so that He becomes our life, our nature, and our content, and we become His corporate expression—John 14:20; 15:4-5; Eph. 3:16-21; 4:4-6, 16:
 - 1. The mingling of God and man is an intrinsic union of the elements of divinity and humanity to form one organic entity, yet the elements remain distinct in the union.
 - 2. The will of God is the mingling of God with man, and the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose depends on this mingling—1:5, 9; 3:11.
- D. The Body of Christ is the enlargement of Christ, the enlargement of the One who is the mingling of God and man—1:22-23; 4:16:
 - 1. In the Gospels the mingling of God and man produced the Head; in Acts the enlargement of the mingling of God and man produced the Body of Christ—Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15-16.
 - 2. In Ephesians 4:4-6 four persons—the Body, the Spirit, the Lord, and God the Father—are actively mingled together:
 - a. The Father is embodied in the Son, the Son is realized as the Spirit, and the Spirit is mingled with the believers.
 - b. This mingling is the constitution of the Body of Christ.
 - 3. The processed and consummated Triune God mingles Himself with His chosen people in their humanity, and this mingling is the genuine oneness of the Body of Christ—v. 3; John 17:21-23.
- E. For the church life, we need to see a vision of the mingled spirit—the divine Spirit mingled with our regenerated human spirit—1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:4:
 - 1. The Father is in the Son, the Son is the Spirit, and the Spirit is now mingled with our spirit—John 14:9-10, 16-18; 1 Cor. 15:45b; 6:17; Rom. 8:16.
 - 2. The union of God and man is a union of the two spirits, the Spirit of God and the spirit of man (1 Cor. 2:11-16); the union of these two spirits is the deepest mystery in the Bible.
 - 3. The focus of God’s economy is the mingled spirit, the divine Spirit mingled with the human spirit; whatever God intends to do or accomplish is related to this focus—6:17; Eph. 3:9, 5; 1:17; 2:22; 4:23; 5:18; 6:18.