



PathLights

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path"
Psalm 119:104*

October 1, 2017

One Body

by Frank Himmel

I was recently studying Ephesians 4 about the one body [church] and came across some interesting statements by denominational writers. How do they explain verse four: "There is one body...?"

ALBERT BARNES, PRESBYTERIAN: "The meaning is, that as there is really but one church on earth, there ought to be unity. The church is at present divided into many denominations. It has different forms of worship, and different rites and ceremonies... Still there is but one."

That raises some interesting questions. When was it divided? By whom? Certainly not by God! Jesus wanted all His disciples to be one (John 17:21). Paul was repulsed by the idea of dividing Christ (1 Corinthians 1:13). And who introduced these different forms of worship, rites, and ceremonies? The Apostle chided the Corinthians for having different rules governing worship, asking if they had some revelation others did not (1 Corinthians 14:36).

T. CROSKERY, ANGLICAN: "It may not be so easy to realize this unity in the midst of the multiplication of sects and denominations, each with its well-defined lines of doctrine and order, and each more or less sharply distinguished from its neighbor. Yet there is but 'one body'—there is amidst accidental diversities a substantial unity, a unity that covers all truly essential

elements... Some parts of the Church have... given prominence to some truth while other parts have been allowed to fall into the background. The beauty of the Church is manifest in this very diversity. . ."

This writer attributes religious differences to "accident," then covers them with the umbrella of "non-essential elements." But who are we to judge what revelation from God is essential or not? The function of the church is to uphold the truth, not sift it, sort it, or classify it (1 Timothy 3:15).

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Mr. Croskery is right in saying some truths have been given prominence while others were relegated to the background; the fact is, some have been pushed so far into the background that they are no longer even in the picture! But part of the truth is not sufficient. The truth makes us free (John 8:32). We need it all. And while this man thinks all this diversity is beautiful, our Lord said unity is what would attract the world to the facts of the gospel (John 17:23).

A. T. ROBERTSON, BAPTIST: "One mystical body of Christ (the spiritual church or kingdom...)." The term *mystical* is often used by denominational preachers with reference to the body or church. I admit being somewhat "mystified" as to what they mean by it. My dictionary says *mystical* means "having a spiritual meaning or reality that is neither apparent to the senses nor obvious to the intelligence." I suspect this expression is supposed to mean there is a sense in which all denominations are joined together to form one church, though it is neither apparent nor obvious. ▶

No Bible writer ever referred to the church as “mystical.” The church is the relationship of the saved; it is the called out. All the saved are members of one body (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). That body is not divided up into sects, parts, or denominations. The only time the Bible speaks of “churches,” plural, is in reference to local congregations of God’s people (e.g., 1 Corinthians 16:1; Romans 16:16). Yes, it is a spiritual body, yet one in which the connection of its members (individuals) is evident: as they submit to the same Lord, they believe and practice the same things.

CHARLES HODGE, PRESBYTERIAN: “As all true believers are members of this body, and as all are not included in any one external organization, it is obvious that the one body of which the apostle speaks, is not one outward visible society, but a spiritual body of which Christ is the head and all the renewed are members. The relation, therefore, in which believers stand to each other, is that which subsists between the several members of the human body. A want of sympathy is evidence of want of membership.”

I don’t know about you, but I want the members of my body to be more than in sympathy with one another. I want them connected! It won’t do my lungs much good for my nose to be sympathetic toward them if there is no passage to move the air from one to the other or nerves coordinating the effort! The idea of a body whose members are disjointed and engaged in all sorts of contradictory activities is nonsense.

Dr. Hodge’s mistake is an all-too-common one. He begins with the existence of many churches, then interprets the text to match that. That is exactly backwards. God’s word, not our practice, is the

standard. We must begin with it. If our practice does not measure up, we must change our practice, not reinterpret the text.

CHARLES ERDMAN, PRESBYTERIAN: “There is but one church. No matter how many outward divisions may appear to separate Christians, in spite of sects and schisms and denominations and names, ‘there is one body.’ Paul does not pray for church unity. He rejoices in it.”

Of course Paul rejoiced in unity! In his day there were no “sects and schisms and denominations and names.” These came much later. And let us not pass these off so lightly. Disputes and factions are works of the flesh (Galatians 5:20-21). Those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

I believe Francis Foulkes, a New Zealander, rightly assesses how Paul would view these attitudes toward the one church.

The apostle who was so concerned with the practical unity of Jews and Gentiles in the Church, and with the working together of all Christians, would surely have abhorred many of the divisions we accept. Where differences in essential doctrine and contradictions in ethical teaching make such divisions, he would strive to know and uphold the way of Christ in each detail. Where differences are caused merely by superficial things or by selfish individualism of members, he would toil and fight for the breaking down of barriers and the working out of genuine fellowship.

The text says, “There is one body.” Is the church you are a member of the church you read about in the Bible? ■

Service Leaders for the Week			
	Sunday Morning	Sunday Evening	Wednesday Evening
GREETER	Bruce Williams	Greg Winget	Howard Moore
SONG LEADER	Carlos Garcia	Bruce Williams	Albert Lee Harrison
OPENING PRAYER	Mike Zachry	Jason Chandler	
LORD’S SUPPER			
BREAD	Brian Wilson	Brian Wilson	
CUP	Albert Lee Harrison	Albert Lee Harrison	
CONTRIBUTION PRAYER	Adam Gibson		
SERMON/INVITATION	Frank Himmel	Frank Himmel	John Baucom
CLOSING PRAYER	Josh Baucom	John Baucom	Daven Daniel