

## The Christian Church: What is It?

This is the first in a series that will attempt to lay out a sound, Scriptural theology for unity among the various denominations within the Church of Jesus Christ.

We have repeatedly said that the single most important preparation needed to proclaim the Gospel successfully in North Korea once the doors are open is for the Church to be unified. Before the Nation can become one, the Church must become one. However, bringing true unity in the face of our many divisions and long, painful history of separation is no easy task. It has daunted generations of well-meaning brothers and sisters. Unfortunately, I have no new, magic formula. All I can do is share a few thoughts from Scripture that may point a way for us. Even as I do so, I call on all God's people to continue to pray for the unity of His Body. We begin with prayer and humble hearts.

So, we begin this month with the basic question of what is the Church of Jesus Christ.

The simple word "church" has a rather ordinary meaning. The Greek word used throughout the New Testament, is *ekklesia*, which simply means "the called out ones" or "assembly", those who come together for a special purpose—in this case, responding to God's call. Yet Scripture shows us that that this simple word has deep meaning. It is God's people who are the ones called out, called to be holy, *...the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints...* (I Cor. 2:12). It is those who are called out of this world to be sojourners, strangers, pilgrims. As Peter puts it:

*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims...* (I Peter 2:9-11)

There is another meaning, related to but overriding these, that I would like to focus on. All of the above definitions refer to us as people, as people who come together in Christ, in His name but still as individual people. St. Paul uses another term; one

that speaks of something that is not divisible, that cannot be separated out into individuals. This is the term “body.” That wonderful passage in Ephesians 5:23-32 that calls on husbands to love their wives as Christ loves His church speaks of a man, in loving his wife, loving his own body. This reference to the Church as Christ’s body is one of the most intimate and rich in meaning. In verse 32, Paul calls it a profound mystery. In Colossians, he also calls the church Christ’s body.

*And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. (Colossians 1:18, see also vs. 24)*

As we close out this first in our series about the importance of the unity of the Church, reflect on this fact that the Church is a *body* and not just any body, it is the very body of Jesus Christ here on earth. This is why Jesus, himself, says in Matthew 18:20 that He is present when two or three are gathered in His name. If Christ is every where, then why does He say He is present when two or three are gathered as if He were not other wise? This must mean that He is present in some special way right there and that is so, because people of God have gathered in response to His call. The Church is present, the Church that is the body of Christ. Jesus Christ is present in a very real, organic way because His church is present.

So, what happens when a body is divided? It is maimed or spastic, disabled and ultimately dead. Is that what the Body of Christ has become?