

# Spiritual Understanding of the Church

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Paul said in Ephesians 4:29, *"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."* We bring this message with the desire that it will edify the body of Christ and minister grace unto the hearers, and that you might know the way God has set forth and walk in it with the understanding and power that He gives, so that all that God has purposed in Christ Jesus might be fulfilled.

## God's Purpose in the Church is Eternal

By His Spirit, God is calling all the world to repentance, but He is working His end purpose in only one group of people: the church, the body of Christ on earth, all those who have been called out and delivered from sin by repenting and receiving Christ as their Savior. The church can only be the church if it is on the right foundation. Anything man builds by his own power and knowledge can never be the church, and it will continue to fail. Men must see what God is doing and come out of what man is doing, to come together in Christ with only Christ as Head. For a many-membered body to become one, and for God to bring His church to a place of being *"without spot or wrinkle"* (Ephesians 5:27), Christ must be in control, with each member recognizing Him as Head. Then God's will and purpose will be seen, worked and lived out in His body.

In Ephesians 3:17-21 Paul writes, *"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."* This scripture brings out several important truths. First, that God is able to do *exceeding abundantly* above all that we ask or think, according to the *power* that works in us. Then, that which God is doing is *everlasting* and *eternal*. It is not being done in obscurity, or just for the hour in which we live. God is doing a mighty work of grace that will stand as a testimony and manifestation of Himself throughout all eternity. So what is the work that God is doing? *He is bringing His people together, as one, which shall make us the body of Christ, His church.*

God has already given birth to the church; it is already a spiritual reality in this hour. This is not a mystery that has been hidden, except to those who do not have spiritual eyes to see. God will reveal what He is doing to those who have "eyes to see" and "ears to hear," to those who can discern by the Spirit what God is doing and consent to it. These are those who desire what God is doing, and pursue it--those who believe and appropriate what God reveals by the Spirit. God works His plan in His body by the power of the Holy Ghost, so we cannot fully appreciate what God is doing until we have partaken of the living Word and experienced the outworking of the eternal Christ within our own bodies.

There are divine laws and governments working in the body of Christ, and all gifts and offices are of a spiritual nature. The natural mind has tried to duplicate them, and failed. But God reveals His church to those who are spiritual, and produces it through them. We must look through the Spirit (the eyes of God) to have spiritual understanding and wisdom. This is how we can think as Christ thinks, and see what God has done and what He *is doing*, in the hour in which we live.

Some would want to have fellowship with Christ without having fellowship with His body. Some may have a natural understanding of the church, but this will never bring God's church into being. All that is natural is incompatible. Man's natural movements and denominations cannot come together in the Spirit for the fulfillment of God's plan. Only His divine life will bring us together in oneness. We cannot let any movement of our times, any word of our lips, any desire of our hearts or need of our physical life interfere with or take the place of the expression of the *will*, the *glory* and the *power* of God. When we have let Christ become the head of our individual lives and also the head of the local expression of His body, then alone shall God be glorified.

God is calling out a people unto Himself. He is building a house for His praise that will contain His glory. It is not man who is building, but God who is building by the Spirit. As we move in the Spirit, as we yield to the word of life that proceeds from God, as we recognize that God wants to express Himself in each local area, and as we move in the God-ordained order of the local church, we will see the fulfillment of all that God has purposed and completed in Christ Jesus.

We should always keep in mind that what God is doing is eternal. We are merely seeing the working out of that which God has said is already completed. As far as God is concerned, what He has spoken is done. Now we, as believers and partakers of the Spirit whom God has sent, must be taken up completely with God's will, not only for eternity but also for this hour. As God brings forth the truth by the Spirit, in His time it will fully accomplish *His* purpose.

## **The Church is Spiritual in Nature**

Acts 1:8 says, *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."*

God's plan is divine and must be activated and run on divine power, and that one power is the Holy Spirit who has been sent to glorify Christ and to testify of Him, that Christ in turn might bring all things to God's end purpose: Christ filling all in all. Each of us must come to the place of full surrender and giving of ourselves, or "dying to self," thus receiving life and living in that life which is the expression of Christ. To be filled with the Spirit is to let the Spirit have all, charging every part with His life. This is an indispensable truth of every true, healthy Christian life, and as we all partake of the same Spirit, we will see God's church move in the unity of the Spirit. The body of Christ is one because its members have one life.

Empowered by the Holy Ghost, we will be able to witness unto Christ in our local area, in surrounding areas, and then even unto the uttermost parts of the earth. God has designed for local churches to have a building-up ministry by the ministering gifts (Ephesians 4:11), and He has given apostles to establish other local churches. These men are separated by the Spirit for the work He has called them to. The Lord knows the needs of His body, and He is the one who gives gifts unto the church and works the revelation of Himself into those He has called. God's missionary program is controlled by the Spirit, with the local church being the place of preparation under the authority of the Head.

Many movements today have man as their foundation, but to see the true building of God, we must see Christ as the foundation. We must see that God is building by His Spirit. God has put divine functions and manifestations of Himself by the Spirit into His body, for the fulfillment of His own purpose. As we function and move by the Spirit, in God's time we will see the divine and eternal work done which God has purposed in His heart. The revelation of Christ in His body is from God. It tears down what man is building up, and puts the glory back where it belongs: in Christ Jesus. It takes away from the

leadership and authority of man and puts it solely in Christ.

Some today are afraid of the real moving of the Spirit of God because it takes the control out of their hands and puts it into the hands of God where it belongs. When man strives by his own strength to build up his own movements, he can never know the peace of God. But we know there are many throughout the world who desire the word of God spoken to them by the Spirit, that they might move in the Spirit and in the will of God. Here we shall see the fulfillment of the desire God has put in the heart of each believer. We shall have righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Many throughout the world in times past have longed for the real moving of God's Spirit, and many still pray and desire to move in the fullness of God. But many are not willing to receive the word God gives. They question the word because of their own natural understanding, and then try to fulfill a spiritual building by natural means. God has not ordained the fulfillment of the spiritual building by natural means. He has ordained the spiritual to fulfill the spiritual desires of His heart. Through the supernatural He has ordained to bring about the purpose He has spoken in His Son.

Some do not believe that this will take place in our age, but Christ said He came that we might have life now, abundantly (John 10:10). This life is Christ Himself, as the scriptures bear out (Colossians 3:4; John 11:25) Christ came to give us Himself. As we partake of Him, no part of our self-life will be built into that which God has created in the *one new man* (Ephesians 2:15).

God has designed each member of the body of Christ to receive and to be led by the Spirit of God. By His Spirit He moves to bring about His one purpose through His one plan, the church, and no other. As we move moment by moment in God's plan, the Spirit directs the way we should go and the word He would speak through us. There must be a starting forth in faith, taking a leap into God's unknown (because we have not been this way before), before we will be able to see the glory and the revealing of the real body of Christ, and the movement of the Spirit, which the world has so longed for. Then we shall see the manifestation of the fullness of Christ in reality.

## **The Church is One in Reality**

We read from John 17:21, *"That they all may be one; as thou, father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."* Only as we become one as Jesus and the Father are one, will we be able to fulfill the purpose of God expressed here, *"that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."* I Corinthians 6:15 says, *"Do you not know that your bodies are the members of Christ?"* I Corinthians 12:12, *"As the body is one and hath many members, all the members of the body forming one body for all their members, so it is with Christ."*

Christ makes us one in the body of Christ when we receive His atoning work. Then we must go on to grow up into Him and take on the mind of Christ. This is all being done by and through a perfect plan which God ordained from the foundation of the world. That plan is *Christ in us*, and *us in Christ*. As our wills are fully surrendered to His will, His word is made manifest in us. The life of God within us can do only one thing: bring us together in God's order. As we walk in the Spirit and obey the Spirit, we will fulfill God's word which says that we shall be one.

We must each let Christ be our Head, and be properly connected to Him. As each member fulfills his function, directed by the Head through the Spirit, the body of Christ will function in oneness. Members will not be aware of themselves, but only doing what the Spirit is leading and directing them to do. Some would rather seek glory for themselves than function as part of the body to the glory of God, but God has placed each one in the body as it hath pleased Him (I Corinthians 12:18). The Lord said that

unless we are willing to lose our life (our self-life), we will not live (find our life in Christ) (John 12:25). But if we will find our life in Christ and function as a member of His body, we will contain the glory of the presence of Christ by the Spirit. *"But we all with open faces, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord"* (II Corinthians 3:18). As we behold by faith what the Spirit is revealing of Christ, we are being changed into that same image from glory (which is one revelation) to glory (another revelation) by the Spirit.

Our life in the Spirit has no other purpose but to glorify the Head. Christ has given the church His glory, and the church is a glory to Him as it shows forth oneness or unity. The church can only find its life in Christ. When Christ is not the head of a gathering, it is not the church. Man's organizations and movements will only bring about the will and control of man, allowing man to take the place of Christ as head. This is unfaithfulness to Christ, and it causes the members to be conformed to the image of what they are following rather than being conformed to the image of Christ.

In many circles today, standards are being dropped in futile efforts to bring about a "oneness" that is only man's doing. All efforts to become one by worldly systems are false because they are worked out by human means, or by compromise. The life of God will not accept sin or compromise. Sin must be purged. It is a divine principle that as we do God's will, we know His teaching (John 7:17). We cannot compromise the doctrines or teachings of Christ. Paul said there were some who compromised and caused many to stumble and go away from the faith. (II Timothy 2:18) So also today there must never be a letting down of scriptural standards for the coming together of the body of Christ. God is bringing His body together by the Spirit, cementing it together by the love that He places in the heart of each member. If we try to bring it together by compromise, sooner or later it will crumble and fall. Only that which is done by the Spirit of God will remain. The work is only done when there are repentant hearts, turned to God and relying upon Him, and His divine power working in each member.

To fulfill God's will, we must see the church brought to a place of oneness in Christ. God does not have an alternate plan. His plan is working through those who are willing to let God's life flow through them rather than trying to realize their own life. It is His life that He intends to bring forth in us, conforming us to His image. The rule of man must be broken and the headship of Christ realized; then our security will not be in man but in God. We must choose whom we will serve. We must start to realize by the Spirit that our goal is not greater numbers, but to have the Spirit and to obey His leadership. There must be a total dedication of love to Christ. We do not pattern our lives after each other, but after Christ, and we move only as the Spirit directs. This is the only way that the body with all its members can be complete.

Anything that is out of the divine order set forth by God will not bring forth the life God has ordained by the Spirit. But as each member is under the direction and leadership of the Holy Spirit, there will be no confusion or division in the body, but every member will function according to the grace given to him, that the needs in each member may be supplied in a spiritual manner. In a spiritual body, the needs are spiritual needs and can only be ministered to by the Spirit, through the body. It will be the strength of God working in earthen vessels, manifesting His glory and His strength in mortal flesh.

God has said, *"The just shall live by faith"* (Hebrews 10:38). God has called us to a walk of divine life, manifested as we exercise the faith God has given to each member of His body. We will not be able to see the way in its fullness until we are willing to take steps of faith, moment by moment. Then God will reveal the way as we walk in it. God has revealed in His word the mystery that was hidden from all ages in the past. He spoke through Paul, making it very clear that it is, and ever shall be *"Christ in*

you"--Christ in the church--*"the hope of glory"* (Colossians 1:27). This glory shall always be in the church as a testimony to God's marvelous, wise design, throughout all ages (Ephesians 3:21). It is the glory of Himself in His body, the church, the people He indwells and has for His very own. These are His sons and daughters. They know no division or carnal power, but are kept together because of the indivisible God.

The way is hidden only from those who refuse to see. Those who have "eyes to see" and "ears to hear" will be able to move in that which God is doing in this hour. It is not some mystical thing, but a glorious work of God made visible in every locality, in the lives of those who are stones in the building that God is erecting for His habitation.

## **The Church is Alive in the Spirit**

Jesus said, *"God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth"* (John 4:24). Only those that have spiritual understanding can fulfill God's requirements. This is not dependent upon us, but on God's revealing to us and our obedience to that revelation. God's requirements can only be fulfilled in the Spirit, not by the works of the law, the keeping of commandments, or by our own goodness. We must cease from our own works and let Christ's power work through us. The working of the Spirit of God through us is the "rest" that God has called each one of us to enter into (Hebrews 3 & 4). We cannot please God or fulfill the plan that God has ordained unless we are willing to enter into this rest. This is not a state that we attain to one time, but a walk in the Spirit. It is not "do's and don'ts," but walking in the light. Only as we live in the life that Christ gives us can we experience perfect freedom, walking in God's perfect will. God is completing His nature in us. This is God's perfect work in each member of the body of Christ: to bring them to His completion, a church without spot or wrinkle.

We worship God in spirit and in truth only as our spirits draw strength and ability from the Holy Spirit. To worship in truth is to fulfill God's word in the power of the Spirit, by partaking of it--by letting it be manifested in our life. Our lives must be completely prostrated before God, lived out in Him for His glory. This is Christ becoming all in all, one expression, through all the local expressions. Nothing is done to please man; all is done to please God. The building and completion is all to God's glory, to offer up spiritual sacrifices. This is God's perfect plan, worked out by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, by complete surrender to Him, that brings about a perfect expression of His body. It is not a perfect expression of us, but of Him. It is not us being perfected; it is His work being revealed in us. We are being made one by the Spirit in His body, as we worship in spirit and in truth.

This walk in the Spirit is characterized by our natural lives being broken. Rather than a life of "spiritual" habits and rituals, our lives are now made up of acts of the life of God. As we are led by the Spirit, we learn to please the Lord in all things, rather than walking after our own desires and ways. Our life may seem inconsistent to others, but to God it will be a life consistently doing His will, being conformed to His image. We must learn to please God rather than man! Too long we have been kept from coming together because of our differences. For Christ's church to come together, our individual habits and rituals must go. The church is the expression of Christ alone. Each member will have his or her function as it pleases the Lord, and God has also put divine laws, gifts, and ministries in His church for the perfecting of the body. To bring this about, we must be under God's master plan, the stern discipline of the Spirit, the life of God. Christ's church is according to pattern, and the Spirit is working out every detail in us, but it is Christ who fills all in all.

This is a love affair: the love and life coming from God, beginning and ending in Him, the Spirit drawing us together. If we possess the life of God, we have no choice but to come together, being subject one to another, seeing the real power of God in the unity of His body. As we are in Him in weakness, God's power works in us mightily. We will find that we cannot manifest Christ unless He is in His proper place as the head of His church. Only as we are submissive to Christ in all things can we experience the full power of God working in His body. We will also be willing to draw life from other members of the body. As the finger cannot function without the arm, so we learn to rely upon the life of God in other members. We begin to move in the oneness of the life of Christ.

The Spirit is leading us to completeness in Christ's church. In the body, we draw life from Him, not from men's doctrines or teachings, and therefore we have a pure flow of life. If we are being led by the Spirit, subject only to Him, we are not taken up with other bodies and movements. There is no private interpretation of the scriptures, but it is the Holy Spirit who reveals truth and teaches us of Christ, the living Word. So we must ever be directed and led by the Spirit, thus fulfilling God's will and having no condemnation, being able to stand as God would have us, perfect in Christ Jesus.

### **The Church is Local in Expression**

As we have already said, it is God's responsibility to build this house, but we as individual members must be willing to be placed in God's house, wherever it pleases Him. There must be a coming together in this hour, a spiritual building up of a spiritual house, for the habitation of God through His Spirit. We must be willing to function in the measure of faith or the gift that He has given us, for the glorification, building up and edification of the body of Christ. The Lord has said in His Word that those who have a single eye, one purpose of heart, one Source, shall have fullness of light in their body (Luke 11:34). So if we see the single purpose of God, and the full manifestation and working of the Spirit in each individual member, then we can receive the light of God and see the divine outworking of all that is of God.

The New Testament church is made up of local expressions of Christ, with God's divine laws, and principle, and pattern in full manifestation. This is a work by the Spirit, the one who draws together God's many-membered body. In our thinking, this must be taken out of the realm of commandments, and become the reality of the Spirit working in the power of an endless life. God has an exact pattern, and down to the very last detail, nothing is left undone or overlooked. To the natural mind it appears to be a form, yet Christ's church is completely spiritual. As we are being conformed by the Spirit, through discipline and in loving obedience to the Head, we will know the real liberty which is in Christ Jesus. Spiritual men and women can see and move in this spiritual life, not having to answer to man or defend themselves. Under the divine authority of the Head and through the ministries that God has placed in the midst, the church will function fruitfully for God's purpose, touching the life of every member.

A local church is comprised of believers in any locality such as a city, town, or village. The church comes together to worship, exhort and edify each other as the Spirit leads, through the ministry of the word of God and the gifts of the Spirit, offering praise to the Lord and making melody in their hearts unto Him. If we possess the life of God which is in Christ Jesus, our gatherings must not be based on personalities, doctrines, creeds, rituals, denominations, fellowships, or *any* idea of man, but come together solely in Christ, with Him as the Head.

We must see by the Spirit that the local assembly is the center of our body life. All our activities stem from the local church. Our whole life is taken up with Christ, and He is in His body. There must first be a real dedication which can only come by a revelation from the Spirit. If this is not settled in our hearts,

we cannot go any further. But once this is settled, we can proceed and begin to draw from the body, with our eyes solely on Christ the Head and our life completely coming from Him.

We also need understanding concerning local bodies coming together. Many today are more concerned with conventions and convocations, or the linking of local bodies of Christ, than with the outworking of His life in the local body. Nowhere has God said that we should join together with other local bodies. The many-membered body, now separated into local expressions in local areas, shall only be brought together in a universal visible expression when Jesus returns and catches the saints away together to meet Him in the air. Any efforts on our part to bring this about before then will only bring confusion and cause division and strife in that which may have begun in a spiritual manner.

God has placed five ministering gifts in His local churches: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, for the *"perfecting of the saints, until we all come into the unity of the faith"* (Ephesians 4:13). In the local expressions of the church, He is able to bring about a perfecting and oneness of the saints so that when the time comes when we all assemble into one, at that great day of the catching away of God's church, they will all resemble Christ. If we try to bring this about by our own efforts, we will miss the Spirit's work. But if we will be diligent in the Spirit in our local bodies, for the fulfillment of God's purpose and the maturing of each member, then we shall see the fulfillment of God in other areas as His apostles are sent. Through their ministries God will give an increase, bringing into existence more local expressions of the one body of Christ.

There is much room for individual fellowship, and the speaking of the Word of God in different local areas. When we say that local expressions or churches should not come together, we do not limit the movements of God's apostles, prophets, teachers, and evangelists. According to the scriptures, they are directed by the Spirit of God to minister to needs, wherever they might be. But there is nothing scriptural to support local churches having fellowship with other local churches, other than the giving of their substance to meet a need. Otherwise, it takes away from the maturing and dedication of the saints, and the authority of Christ as the head of the body.

## **The Church is Practical in Application**

Jesus says in Luke 14:26-33, *"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an embassy, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."*

We see that God's requirements are severe, but the reward is great. As we lose ourselves, forsaking all, we gain all. Until we come to this place of forsaking all, we cannot gain all. As long as we seek to entertain, rather than allowing the Spirit of God to draw believers into the oneness of Christ, we will fail. Only as we start to be God-conscious rather than self-conscious can we begin to experience the oneness of the body of Christ, coming back to God's purpose and realizing God in His fullness as a group of believers. If you have not done so already, will you come together with the other Christians in the area where you live and trust the Spirit to build the church, so that there will be a witness of the

oneness of Christ's body where you live? Christ is now calling out a people to be called by His name. God has not chosen only individuals to reveal His glory, but a many-membered body. In the words of Christ: if you will come after Him, now take up your cross, deny yourself, and follow Him.

Jesus says in John 6:55-58, *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven, not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever."* As we partake of Christ, we shall find that the divine working of the Spirit of God gives us life which is found in His word. The life that was manifested in Christ is now being brought not only to the individual, but to the corporate life of the local church, the expression of Christ, for the outworking of the ministry of the body and to fulfill God's purpose for this hour.

One thing that can bring confusion to believers who start to move in God's plan is to think we must erect a building to house the church. God is not concerned with physical buildings; He is interested in the building He is doing in individuals as He brings them together to give expression to His love. It would be to the benefit of any local expression of the body of Christ not to be taken up with buildings, but to begin by gathering in a home, letting God work in them a divine work of grace and love, and building Christ in them. We can too easily become dependent upon four walls, rather than relying upon the ability of God, the grace of God, and the revelation of God by the Spirit. Buildings can be a pitfall in the life of any local church. We must be very careful to let God lead us, fulfilling His purpose by the Spirit and enabling us to see the pitfalls man has fallen into in the past.

Our fellowship is solely in Christ, and the New Testament church is the only pattern God has set forth in His Word. God's moving today is in the life of Christ, and life is not found in doctrinal statements. Only as we move in the divine life of Christ will the ultimate fulfillment of God's purpose be manifested. We are not conforming ourselves to His image, but God's grace is doing this as we partake of His Word. His grace and love are sufficient to do His divine work, if we will be obedient to His Word. We must receive His Word into hearts of faith and let God work through us. We must come to the end of ourselves and into full dependence and reliance on Christ who is our life. Anything short of this can cause us to miss the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus. Only those who do the will of God will enter into heaven (Matthew 7:21). If we look to others, we will fail to draw from Him our needed grace, strength, and faith. We will then start to draw on doctrines and our own understanding, which can only produce death.

The body of Christ is perfect, *according to God's pattern*. God does not have two plans; there is only one, and He will not make another. This cannot be a natural thing; it must be a spiritual creation. For the divine plan of God to be revealed now, we must let God by the Spirit build the members into a divine habitation for Himself. If this can be settled in our hearts, it will help to bring the unity of the Spirit in the fulfillment of God's plan, the body of Christ in any local area. The church is active. It is moving in the Spirit, not bound by man's precepts or by four walls. It is an expanding organism moving to fulfill the purpose of God in any local area, to express Christ and to reach out and do the work of ministry. But we must never let the work take the place of the life. It is the life of God in His church that will bring forth the work which members are called to do by the leading of the Spirit.

The Lord has said in John 6:63 that *"the words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit and they are life."* We trust that the words spoken here may be spirit and life to each heart, and that you might go on to let

God make you a part of the church in your local area. As you gather together, allowing Christ to control the expression of corporate life in His church, He will bring a fullness of expression in the area where you live, and you, as part of His church, will fulfill His purpose.