

The New Testament Church The Body of Christ

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — His good, pleasing, and perfect will.

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. Romans 12:1-5

The New Testament Church; the body of Christ. We are members of His body. Everyone of us Christians help to make up the church.

On November 23, 1963, the entire world was suddenly plunged into mourning. A bullet from a communist gun took the life of the president of the United States of America. In the days that followed that tragedy of the assassination of our president, everyone sat around glued to their TV sets, because everything that happened from the moment of the bullet tearing into the body of our president was televised. The dead body as it left the hospital was

transferred to Air Force 1. The sorrow of Jacqueline Kennedy. The crowds that came to pay their respects. The funeral service, the committal service at Arlington cemetery. Everything was televised. During these days, very often the television commentators would say, "The body of our President is in repose." What did they mean when they said "repose"? They meant it was a dead body. There was no heartbeat in that body. The blood was no longer flowing through the veins of that body. There was no air in the lungs of that body. Rigor mortis had set in. It had begun to deteriorate.

The New Testament Church is the body of Christ. There are three words that I want to use in connection with the body of Christ, the church.

I. The first word I want to use is the word repose. I use it in the form of a question. Is the church, the body of Christ, in repose? Is it a dead body? If there is not evangelism, then the church is gradually dying. If there is not missionary activity, then the church is dying. If there is no commitment on the part of the individual members of the body, then the church is dying. If there is no sacrifice on the part of the body, then it is a dying body.

The latest statistics about the church show that the church in America is gradually losing its struggle for the hearts and minds of people in America. During the last 10 years, all churches in America have been losing members to the tune of 9.5%. During the last 10 years there have been 4,826,707 church members lost. Now, the shocking thing is that in the last 10 years the population of America has grown by 11.4%. 24,153,000 more Americans are in this country as a result of the last 10 years than there were before. Yet, during this time of population explosion, the churches of America have lost members. To add further to the problem we observe that there have been over 4,000 churches in America that have died and closed their doors over the past ten years.

Do you understand why I am asking the question: Is the church in repose? Is the church dead?

Adolf Hitler

During the days of Adolf Hitler in Germany some few preachers criticized Hitler and so some of Hitler's followers came to him and they said, "What are we going to do about the church?" Hitler wasn't at all worried about the church in Germany. He knew the church in Germany was dead. Liberalism began with the church in Germany. It was the church in Germany that first said they had no faith the Bible was the inspired Word of God. They had no faith that Jesus was born of the virgin. So, when they came to Hitler and said, "What are we going to do about the church?" Adolf Hitler said, "We are going to do nothing about the church." He laughed. He said, "We're just going to let the church go right on doing what she is doing." Which was nothing. Hitler knew he had nothing to fear from the church of Germany, because it was dead. It was in repose. There was no evangelism. There was no missionary activity.

The Church in Chicago

P.H. Welshimer for many, many years was the minister of the world's largest Christian Church in Canton, Ohio. He was an advocate of New Testament evangelism. He was a great example of a personal evangelist. Under his dynamic ministry, which spanned 56 years, the church in Canton grew to be the largest Christian Church in the world. P.H. Welshimer was invited everywhere as a guest speaker. On one occasion he was invited by the Christian Churches in Chicago, Illinois to come and speak on the subject of evangelism. So, he flew over to Chicago to speak at this church conference. That particular day, they quarreled and argued all day long about what to call the minister of the church. Shall he be called Pastor? Shall he be called The Pastor? Shall he be called Preacher? There was a heated debate, an argument. People even got uptight with each other as they quarreled about this. Brother Welshimer

was totally disillusioned. As he left the conference, which he thought was going to be a soul winning conference, and headed back to Midway Airport in Chicago to fly back to Canton, Ohio, he passed a street meeting. A group of Moody Bible Institute students were holding a street meeting. He asked the taxicab driver to stop and he listened for a few moments. Those young people were really earnest about witnessing to the people on the streets of Chicago. They were trying to win souls to Christ. Brother Welshimer came back to his church, the First Christian Church in Canton, Ohio, and he told his congregation, "I was far more inspired by those students of Moody Bible Institute and their street meeting than I was with that dead church conference, when all they could argue about was what to call the minister of the church."

A Church in Repose

Many years ago I was acquainted with a church that was known as the Lone Oak Church of Christ. On one occasion the preacher of that church came to our preachers' meeting and he was just about as low as a human being can ever get. I said, "Brother Tom, what's the matter with you today?" He said, "We've had two board meetings this last week that have lasted until midnight." I said, "My goodness, what was going on? Surely one of the members was in dying condition and you were having an all night prayer meeting or something?" He said, "No. It was a debate over whether we could plant a second oak tree in the church yard." He said, "Down through the years it's been called Lone Oak Church of Christ because there is just one oak tree in the church yard. Now some of the people want to beautify the church grounds and someone has gotten the idea to plant a second oak tree. The argument is that we cannot plant a second oak, because if we do we'll have to change the name of the church to Lone Oaks (plural) Church of Christ. Other people say, 'No, we'll have to change it to Two Oaks Church of Christ.' For two nights they have debated until midnight

and it's killed my soul." It killed my soul just listening to the story. To think the church didn't have anything better to do than to quarrel about something like that.

I ask you, does repose seem to be a good name to describe the church? Are we dead?

II. There is a second word I want to use. That word is expended. This word became popular during World War II. Our government built boats called PT Boats. You remember them very well. They were very fast. The PT Boats were made out of plywood. They were expendable. They had a machine gun on board. It was the purpose of the PT boats to delay the great Japanese navy as they were trying to take over every island nation and most of the other nations in the south Pacific. Those who served on PT Boats knew they were expendable. They were left behind while the others went on. They were expected to stop the enemy if they could, but probably the best they could do was delay the enemy. In the end they would lose their lives on these plywood boats no matter how fast they were.

The question I have on my mind is this . . . are we expendable members of the body of Christ? Is the church itself expendable? Down through the years God's greatest servants have been expendable.

The Expendables of the Faith

Let's think about the great prophets of God in the Old Testament times. Hebrews 11, beginning in verse 32, describes these great expendables of God.

And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the other prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of

lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned, they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated — the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith . . .

They were the great expendables and because they were willing to be expended in God's service, God's word was made known to the people.

John the Baptist was one of God's expendables. He paved the way for the coming of Jesus and in doing so, his head was placed on the chopping block. But, he was willing to do this so that the world might know about Jesus.

Jesus, Himself, was expendable. He expended Himself there in the garden as He prayed until His sweat became great drops of blood. Finally, in reality, He was expended upon the cross of Calvary.

The great Apostle Paul was chosen by Jesus Christ to be the special apostle to the Gentiles, that he might be expended. As Jesus called Paul, He said in Acts the 9th chapter and the 16th verse, "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Paul was the suffering apostle. He preached the Word of God at great cost. In II Corinthians the 4th chapter, verses 8-10, Paul said in describing his suffering:

"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body."

And, again in II Corinthians, chapter 11, beginning with the 23rd verse, Paul talks about his sufferings:

Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from the rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face the daily pressure of my concern for all the churches.

Paul was expendable. From the year 40 AD until 312 AD God expended His church everywhere. During those years, members of the church were tossed to the lions, they were boiled in oil, they were burned at the stake. What happened during those years when the church was expendable? The church grew. It multiplied. Every member of the church went everywhere preaching the Word, souls were added to Jesus daily. The Church has always grown when the members of the church were willing to be expendable.

Are you an expendable member? Are you willing to sacrifice for the cause of Christ? Are you willing to sacrifice your time for the cause of Christ? Is your heart burdened right now for some soul that you are trying to win to Jesus Christ? Or are you in repose?

III. There's a third word I want to use. That word is raptured. Webster's Dictionary says that rapture means the act of being transported. Jesus is getting ready to transport His church, up in the air, into the clouds and beyond. Are you ready for the rapture?

I Thessalonians 4 says:

Brothers, we do not want to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of the men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.

Are you ready for the rapture?

Christian, it may be in any moment, the trumpet is going to sound, Jesus will descend from heaven with a shout, and those who have died in Christ will be resurrected. They will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Those of us who are alive at the coming of Jesus will be caught up above and we will meet the Lord in the air if we are in Christ. But, those who are not in Christ will be left behind.

A.W.O.L. Fishing!

I want to use a hypothetical illustration, because it is the purpose of this sermon to cause everyone of us to think. Think more earnestly than you have ever thought before. It's time for serious thinking. Is the church in repose? Is the church expendable? Is the church ready for the rapture?

The hypothetical question is this: Just suppose that you willfully plan to skip the church service and you decide that you are just going to go out to the river bank and be AWOL and fish. It's

the Lord's day and let's suppose the Lord Jesus Christ decides to come back, to rapture His church on His day, the Lord's day, and lo and behold there you are out on the river bank. Jesus sends forth the call, "Where is the body?" and suddenly you hear that call at the trumpet blast and you wake up and realize what you have done. You say, "Oh, Jesus I have been a part of the body, but Jesus, the body, of course, is in Your house meeting around the Lord's table and here I am, a member of the body, I am not in your house. I am not with the body. You see, Lord, I am detached from the body today. I am out here fishing. I know I should've been in Your church, Lord. If you'll give me just 5 minutes, I'll throw this fishing pole down and I'll get with the body." But, it's too late. You see, He's going to come in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, just like lightning, and there won't be time to throw the fishing pole down and get back to the church and meet with the body.

You are a part of the body, that means when the body meets, we are to be here as a part of the body gathered around the table faithfully. The Lord's day is the Lord's day, every Lord's day. God expects us every Lord's day. Are you ready for the rapture?

Left Your Membership Behind!

Here is another hypothetical question: You move away from your home town, where you have always been a member of the body, the church. You move someplace else and you don't affiliate with the church, you just drift along, you visit here, you visit there and finally you lose all interest. The Lord comes. He says, "Where is the body?" You say, "Well, Lord, you know, I joined up in Kentucky 25 years ago. My name has always been on the church book up there. And, Lord, I was faithful all the time I lived in Kentucky, but since I have moved I have never been able to find a congregation like the home congregation. Lord, I intend to get with the body. Please give me just a few moments and I'll run and get with the body." But, it's too late. You left your membership behind in

Kentucky and through the years you have drifted all the way, far away, from the Lord and now He came and you were not ready for the rapture.

Where is the body is the question. The smallest unit of the body is you, because everyone of us, as Christians, are members of His body, the church. So the question comes right to me and to you personally. Am I in repose? Am I expendable? Am I ready for the rapture?

Oh, I pray that if you know in your heart that you have a decision to make, will make it right now. There is no time to lose. We've already lost too much time. Whatever time is left we must dedicate it to God and give Him our best. There are those that need to come and accept Jesus and be baptized. There are those here that need a church home, who could place your membership today. Perhaps there are many of us, in our hearts, who need to rededicate our lives to Christ. Will you face that question: What will you do with Jesus?