

"ALL ONE BODY WE" -- REALLY?

(Message by:
Bro. David Rule)

In speaking on this special occasion, I have given my words a title: "'All One Body We' - Really?" It was suggested by the words of one of the great marching hymns of the Christian faith, which were written in 1865 by a minister named Sabine Baring-Gould. At the end of the third stanza appear these words:

We are not divided,
All one body we, One in
hope and doctrine, One in
charity.

Those lines have been severely criticized over the years. Some have even labelled them as "simply not true". It is the criticism that is not true. It is something like saying that our county school system is hopelessly divided because we have three different kinds of

schools: Elementary, Middle, and High.

Well, yes, in a sense, then, the school system is divided; but the truth is that it is one system, with schools which have different emphases and different reasons for being. They do not teach exactly the same things, but what each does teach is part of a master plan or fundamental curriculum of education.

So, yes, the Church is divided, in one sense; but, in another sense, it is one Church, with the separate church groups' having different emphases and different reasons for being. Yet, all belong to the Master, Jesus Christ; and all are a part of His plan. And, as the Apostle Paul asked: "is Christ divided?" (I Corinthians 1:13). Clearly, no!

The Apostle went on, in his First Letter to the Corinthians to

declare, "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body..." (I Corinthians 12:13a, KJV). He also pointed out that there are many members but that there is only one body. And, of course, there is only one Head.

The year after "Onward, Christian Soldiers" was written, Samuel J. Stone wrote a hymn which, using another figure for the Church, begins,

The Church's one Foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord.

That is true. Each of our churches is founded on the Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes we may think that some of the stones in the structure are not quite so good as other stones; but all are a part of the building which is being put up on the Foundation. We are to rejoice that the building is going up; and our attention should be focused on the quality of our own

materials which are being put into it.

"All one body we." Yes!

Really!

The hymn continues, you recall:

One in hope and doctrine,
One in charity.

"One in hope." There is not a Christian here whose song can be anything but that of Horatius Bonar:

My hope is in the Lord Who
gave Himself for me, And
paid the price of all My
sin at Calvary. ~~

Or, of Edward Mote, who wrote:

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and right-
eousness ;
I dare not trust the sweetest
frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

People, we are one in hope!

"One in doctrine." We shall look at that in a moment.

"One in charity." Make that, as the word "charity" means, in the New Testament use of it, "love".

Someone may reply, "Ah! I have you there! You Christians don't love one another."

My friends, if we don't love one another -- both within our own church group and in other groups -- we have no right to claim the title, "Christian". The Apostle John wrote very plainly:

"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." (I John 3:14, KJV).

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." (I John 4:11, KJV).

"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." (I John 3:18, KJV).

"He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." (I John 4:8, KJV).

We may not love so fully as we ought to love. Neither do we trust so firmly as we ought to trust; but

we do have faith. Neither do we pray so much as we ought to pray; but we do pray. So also, we do not love as we ought to love; but we do love. Yes! All of us gathered here this afternoon -- clergy and laity alike'-- love one another -- or else!

Now, back to "one in doctrine". There are those who would say, "Now, for sure, I have you over a barrel. You Christians are anything but 'one in doctrine'.

What is doctrine? It is teaching that is laid down as true by the one who gives it. Some of it is fixed; some of it is flexible. Fixed teaching is that which is so clear and conclusive that it is not subject to change. Flexible teaching is subject to interpretation. For example, we believe and teach that good government is essential to the life of a nation of people.

There are different interpretations among us concerning what constitutes good government. The understanding of persons in another part of the world might be quite different from our understanding. We are all agreed on the basic idea. Our differing interpretations do not subtract from that agreement

In like manner, for example, we agree that Jesus is coming again and that certain events will happen before, at, and after His coming; but exactly what will happen before, at, and after His coming is a matter of interpretation. Those differences do not mean that we are not one in the fundamental teaching that Jesus will come again.

From the beginning, in the Powell County Ministerial Association, we accepted one another as brothers in Christ, acknowledging that, while

we might differ in some interpretations of Scripture, we all nonetheless accepted the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God. Being Bible-based and Bible-believing, we recognized that we could be cooperative in our ministry to this county. So, on the basis of our common faith, we have worked together for fifty years

What is that common faith?

We believe in God, the Creator and Maker of heaven and earth -- indeed of all things, visible and invisible. (Genesis 1).

We believe that all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23).

We believe that the wages of sin is death, that the soul that sins, it shall die. (Romans 6:23a; Ezekiel 18:4b).

We believe that Jesus is the

Christ, the only-begotten Son of the living God. (Matthew 16:16; John 3:16).

We believe that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. (I Corinthians 15:3b).

We believe that Christ rose again the third day according to the Scriptures and that, because He lives, whoever lives and believes in Him will never die. Indeed, the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (I Corinthians 15:4b; John 11:26b; Romans 6:23b).

We believe in repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 20:21b).

We believe that in Christ Jesus "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace"; for, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful

and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness". (Ephesians 1:7; I John 1:9).

We believe that, "if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." (I John 1:7, KJV).

What these doctrines, in which we are one, say is that, if you are here today without the Lord Jesus Christ as your own Savior, you desperately and decidedly need Him. You cannot save yourself; only Jesus can do that. You cannot make your own way, because Jesus is the only Way. If you are here today without the Lord Jesus Christ as your own Savior, you are as spiritually dead as a doornail is dead, in whatever way a doornail is dead. Only the Lord Jesus Christ can give you life;

you certainly cannot give it to yourself. Your greatest need is to repent of your sins and to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your own Savior.

This is not the end of the matter. There is more to the common doctrine which we hold.

We believe that, as Christians, we all should be worshipping, working, witnessing, watching, and waiting, as we anticipate the "blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ". (Titus 2:13). This means that, just as He Who has saved us is holy, so we also are to be holy. It means also that, instead of being weak, we should be strong in the Lord. Instead of being weary, we should be "stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (I Corinthians 15:58a).

We believe that "righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people". (Proverbs 14:34, KJV). If this is true, as it certainly is, then it is equally true that, righteousness exalts a county; but sin is a reproach to any county. We love this county too much to see it in shame before God. So, from the beginning of our organization fifty years ago, we have worked for the moral and spiritual welfare of Powell County. We believe that we and you, as Christian citizens, have a responsibility to be the salt of our county and the light of our county. This means concern and active participation in seeking to minister as Christians, in Christian ways, to the spiritual, religious, moral, social, and civic needs of the people. In short, Christians need to exert Christian

influence, never being silent or reticent. And, if it should be that one suffer as a Christian, then, difficult though it may be, let that person not be ashamed but, rather, glorify God in the matter.

There are many other points which might be noted. Suffice to say simply, "One in ... doctrine..." In the essentials of doctrine, we really are!

At the beginning of my sharing with you, I said, "'All one body we'— really?" And I repeat, "Yes, really!"

Even as we recognize and respect differences, we realize that, in the midst of and in spite of those differences, we are still one in Christ, as Jesus prayed that we would be. So, we have good reason and right to sing in the words of a hymn by John Oxenham:

In Christ there is no East or
West,
In Him no South or North;
But one great fellowship of
love
Throughout the whole wide earth.

In Him shall true hearts every-
where
Their high communion find;
His service is the golden cord
Close binding [Christian] kind

Join hands, then, brothers of
the faith,
Whate'er your [name] may be.
Who serves my Father as a son
Is surely kin to me.

In Christ now meet both East
and West,
In Him meet South and North;
All Christly souls are one in
Him
Throughout the whole wide
earth.

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Tabernacle by:
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