

## The Nature of the Church

The first aspect we need to consider with respect to the church is its **nature**. The church has a *nature* and a *condition*. The condition of the church may be positive or negative, but the nature of the church is always positive. The condition of the church fluctuates from day to day and from year to year, but the nature of the church never changes.

In 1 Corinthians 1:2 Paul says, *“To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints, with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, who is theirs and ours.”* In this verse we see five precious things related to the nature of the church. **First**, the church is the church of God. **Second**, a genuine church is expressed in a locality. **Third**, it is the church of Christ. **Fourth**, the church is composed of the saints who are sanctified and called. **Finally**, the church is in fellowship with all the saints who call on the name of the Lord in every place; in other words, a church is in fellowship with the universal Body of Christ. These are five significant matters related to the nature of the church.

Despite its condition of being frail, weak, and full of imperfections, the church in Corinth was a genuine church. In that church we see that there were believers who were **fleshy, fleshly**, and **infants** in Christ. Some believers committed gross **sins**, such as those that do not even occur among the Gentiles. A brother in that church [**sued** another] and brought [him] to court. Moreover, the **saints took sides**, saying, “I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ”. These examples illustrate the condition of the church in Corinth.

**God** would say that the church in Corinth is the church of God. Christ would say that the church is a genuine church. The **Spirit** would testify that the church in Corinth is in Christ and with Christ as its element and sphere. Paul affirmed that, in spite of all its problems, the church in Corinth was a church composed of sanctified and called people (1:2). Furthermore, the Bible clearly reveals that this problematic church was in fellowship with all those who call on the name of the Lord in every place. Our focus should be on the nature of the church. To know the condition of a church merely requires human wisdom and discernment, but to see and to bless the nature of the church **requires divine revelation and exercise**.

We need to look beyond the condition of the church to see the nature of the church. Balaam was hired to curse God’s people, but what he eventually spoke was blessing (Num. 22—24 ). God saw no iniquity in Israel (23:21). The church is divine, “Christly”, “resurrectionly,” and heavenly. [To be divine means] that the church possesses the divine nature of God; [to be “Christly” means] that Christ is the element and sphere of the church; [to be “resurrectionly” means] that the church is an entity absolutely in resurrection; and [to be heavenly means that] the church is under God's authority.

## Preserving the Nature of the Church

From Genesis 1:11-12 we see that in God's creation everything is after its kind. Therefore, the vegetables will always be vegetables, and the birds will always be birds. Monkeys can never become human beings. Nevertheless, this mustard seed became a tree. This is contrary to God's will. Originally, the church was ordained to be the smallest, the weakest, and the least noticeable. However, the church has become

Christianity, signified by the tree. Today the composition of Christianity is very complicated. This is due to the invasion of the church by Gnosticism during the second and third centuries, as portrayed in the second parable. From then on, under the hand of the Roman Catholic Church, the church brought forth many shameful things. Under one command, tens of thousands of soldiers were baptized in one day. By becoming Christians, people had the privilege to receive four ounces of silver and two changes of white raiment. Alas! The church became a tree! The birds of heaven signify the evil one, Satan (Matt. 13:4). He is most clever, and he knew where he could settle down.

### **The Nature of the Church – the mingling of God and man**

The church is neither merely divine nor merely human – if the church were merely divine or merely human, it would lose its nature. We shouldn't make the church "more human" or "more divine"; rather, we should seek to be mingled with God, and the mingling of God and man will manifest the nature of the church.

The church is a group of people who are mingled with God; they may be strong and active in their mind, emotion, and will, but God is mingled with them, and they are mingled with God. We see an example of this on the day of Pentecost: even though the Lord's disciples were not very strong, capable, or learned, they were mingled with God and God was mingled with them, and Peter's speaking had a great impact.

If there's a group of people who are open to the Lord to be mingled with Him, and they allow God to work Himself into them and work on them, then that is the church. How can we have the reality of the church in our locality? It is not only by meeting together and calling ourselves "the church" but by allowing God to work Himself into us and to mingle Himself with us. Then, we will not merely understand doctrinally what the church is but there will be a genuine building work, a genuine mingling of God with man to be the church...When the mingling of God with man and man with God is built up within us in a considerable way, many problems in the church will spontaneously disappear. (*Excerpt from the Ministry of the Word*)

God's masterpiece is absolutely new because it is the mingling of God and man. We may also say that the church is a hybrid, the blending together of two lives. Our opposers accuse us of teaching that the church is God. However, we do not say this. But we do say that the church is the mingling of God and man. God's masterpiece, His greatest workmanship, is the working of Himself into man and the constituting of man into oneness with Himself to produce the church.

As we have already pointed out, this masterpiece is a poem, an artistic work that expresses the wisdom, design, and beauty of the maker. The church is God's poem that speaks forth His wisdom. According to 3:10, God's manifold wisdom will be made known through the church. Hymns express the wisdom of the hymn writers. In the ages to come, in the millennium and in eternity, there will be a unique hymn, the church, which will express the wisdom and design of God. When we see the New Jerusalem, we may extol God for the beauty, wisdom, and design manifested in this marvelous production. The New Jerusalem will be God's poem, His masterpiece. When we behold this masterpiece of God in the midst of the new heaven and new earth, we may say, "This is the best hymn ever written in the universe!" (*Life-study of Ephesians, Chapter 21*)