

## **1. The Sovereignty of the Holy Spirit**

### **1. 1. The Local Church Must Have the Sovereignty and Leading of the Holy Spirit**

#### **1. 2. The First Churches in the Bible Began with the Filling of the Holy Spirit**

##### **1. 2. 1. The First Local Church — The Church in Jerusalem**

*John 20:22* And when He had said this, He breathed into them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit.

*Acts 2:4* And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, even as the Spirit gave to them to speak.

From these 2 verses, we can see that the beginning of the church in Jerusalem was initiated by the Spirit.

##### **1. 2. 2. The First Gentile Church — The Church in Caesarea**

*Acts 10:44* While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those hearing the word.

The beginning of the Gentile church in Caesarea was also of the Spirit.

##### **1. 2. 3. The Church in Antioch — Supporting the Apostolic Ministry**

*Acts 13:2* And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

The church in Antioch, which accepted Paul's ministry and strongly supported the apostolic work, was a church that clearly allowed the Holy Spirit to take the lead.

### **1. 3. The Holy Spirit Speaks Freely to the Seven Churches**

*Revelation 2:7* He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The Holy Spirit speaks freely to the churches.

#### **1. 4. When the Holy Spirit Can No Longer Speak, the Church Falls from Grace**

*Galatians 5:4-5* You have been brought to nought, separated from Christ, you who are being justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we by the Spirit out of faith eagerly await the hope of righteousness.

When the Holy Spirit is no longer able to speak, the local church falls from grace.

## **2. Having Christ as Content**

### **2. 1. Only Christ Is the Content of the Church**

*Genesis 2:21-22* So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, and while he was asleep, he took part of the man's side and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the part he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

*Ephesians 5:31-32* For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This mystery is great – but I am actually speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

*Colossians 3:11* Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man; but Christ is all and in all.

- Only what comes out of Adam can be called Eve.
- Only what comes out of Christ can be called the church.
- Everything that comes from the natural life is outside the church.

It is not a matter of how many people, what materials are used, or what good practices are employed. Good practices are only for gaining Christ; we are not for practices themselves.

## **2. 2. Christ as the Foundation**

- Everything must come out of Christ.
- Upon this foundation, we enjoy Christ, pursue Christ, gain Christ, live Christ, and ultimately express Christ.
- A healthy church life always gives people the sense—the “flavor”—of Christ.
- When people come among us, they should sense that these are people who have Christ. (*1 Corinthians 14:25 The secrets of his heart become manifest; and so falling on his face, he will worship God, declaring that indeed God is among you.*)

## **2. 3. The Secret of Having Christ Is to Love the Lord**

- Every local church must never leave the first love toward Christ. (***Revelation 2:4*** *But I have one thing against you, that you have left your first love.*)
- When the prodigal son returned, the father gave him the best robe. The word “best” here in Greek is the same as “first” in “first love.” (***Luke 15:22*** *But the father said to his slaves, Bring out quickly the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.*)
- If all local churches become churches that love Christ, taking Him as the best and first love, they will be strong.

## **2. 4. No Other Characteristics Besides Christ**

- The Baptists have their characteristics; the Presbyterians have theirs; every denomination has its own characteristics.
- The local church must have no characteristics other than Christ, nor take any special revelation, teaching, or practice as the center of church life.

## **2. 5. No Other Person Besides Christ**

- We must not follow or exalt any person, even if certain brothers have helped

us.

- We should not lose the riches given through the leading brothers, yet we must not exalt their teachings above Christ.
- People naturally like to have something or someone to attach themselves to. The Lord' s servants are for the church and are given by God to the believers—but we must not exalt anyone outside of Christ. (*1 Corinthians 1:12 - 13 Now I mean this, that each of you says, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul?*)

## **2. 6. The Church Must Have No Affiliation Outside of Christ**

- The church must not be identified with any particular form, such as being quiet, expressive, organ-based, etc.
- The church must not be identified with particular practices, such as speaking in tongues, laying on of hands, foot washing, etc.
- The church must not be identified with a particular lifestyle system (e.g., Amish).
- The church must not be identified with a particular worship format (e.g., hymn → prayer → Bible reading).
- The church must not be identified with particular teachings (e.g., Plymouth Brethren, Baptist, Presbyterian, Reformed/Calvinist).
- No Organizational Affiliation
  - \* We should have fellowship, not organization. (*1 John 1:3 That which we have seen and heard we report also to you that you also may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.*)
  - \* Fellowship among Christians is most precious, yet unconsciously it can become systematized and organized.
  - \* Organization emphasizes rank—who is greater or lesser, higher or lower. Once organization comes in, the element of life is lost.

### **3. The Bible as the Unique Standard**

#### **3. 1. The Bible is our unique and absolute standard.**

Whatever we preach—if it is the pure word of the Bible—we should never refrain from speaking it because of opposition. Whatever we preach—if it is not according to the Bible—even if many agree with it, we must not endorse it.

#### **3. 2. All Practices Must Be Based on the Bible**

All practices must have their basis in the Bible. The matter is not what someone says, but what the Bible says.

#### **3. 3. All Teachings Must Bring Believers Back to the Bible**

All teachings that are based on the Bible must bring the saints back to the Bible itself, not to the teaching. The goal of any proper teaching is not to establish itself as a center, but to lead people into the Word of God.

#### **3. 4. A Healthy Church Life Must Be Full of God' s Speaking**

A healthy church life must be filled with God' s speaking, and with the Word of God as the content of our mutual fellowship and enjoyment.

#### **3. 5. Enjoying the Word Brings Life Supply and Light**

The operation of the Word has two aspects: On one hand, it satisfies us; On the other hand, it gives us direction. (*Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. "By enjoying God' s Word, we receive the supply of life and the light within the Word.*)

## 4. Holding the Ground of Locality of as One

### 4. 1. Oneness in Church

*Ephesians 3:6* that through the gospel the Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus.

The repeated word fellow indicates God's desire for oneness and corporateness. God's plan is not to improve what already existed but to produce something entirely new—a corporate Body in Christ, which is the church. God needs the church because only the church can fulfill His desire for such a corporate entity in the universe. In this Body, Jews and Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members, and fellow partakers, showing that God does not merely want redeemed individuals but desires the church as a corporate entity—the corporate expression of Christ.

#### 4. 1. 1. The Bible places strong emphasis on the unity of the church, and we can see this clearly by reading the following Scripture verses

*Ephesians 2:14-19* For he is our peace, the one who made both groups into one and... He did this to create in himself one new man out of two... so that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

*Galatians 3:26-28* For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female - for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

*Colossians 3:8-11* But now, put off all such things as anger, rage, malice, slander, abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another since you have put off the old man with its practices and have been clothed with the new man that is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one who created it. Here there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised,

barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and in all.

**John 17:11** *I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them safe in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are one.*

**John 17:20-23** *I am not praying only on their behalf, but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their testimony, that they will all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. I pray that they will be in us, so that the world will believe that you sent me. The glory you gave to me I have given to them, that they may be one just as we are one – I in them and you in me – that they may be completely one, so that the world will know that you sent me, and you have loved them just as you have loved me.*

**John 10:14-16** *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me - just as the Father knows me and I know the Father - and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not come from this sheepfold. I must bring them too, and they will listen to my voice, so that there will be one flock and one shepherd.*

**1 Corinthians 1:11-13** *For members of Chloe's household have made it clear to me, my brothers and sisters, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each of you is saying, "I am with Paul," or "I am with Apollos," or "I am with Cephas," or "I am with Christ." Is Christ divided? Paul wasn't crucified for you, was he? Or were you in fact baptized in the name of Paul?*

**1 Corinthians 10:15-17** *I am speaking to thoughtful people. Consider what I say. Is not the cup of blessing that we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread that we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all share the one bread.*

#### 4. 1. 2. The Oneness in Ephesians 4:1-6

**Ephesians 4:1-6** *I, therefore, the prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live worthily of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and*

*gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you too were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

The church is produced by the Holy Spirit bringing the life of Christ—Christ Himself—into the believers, joining them together as one in Him and in His life; it is the Holy Spirit who makes the church one Body. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is the inward oneness of the church and is Himself the reality of that oneness. Every saved person has the Holy Spirit within and thus possesses this inward oneness of the church. For this reason, we do not need to seek or pray for the oneness of the church; rather, we need only to live in the Holy Spirit and not damage the oneness He has wrought within us. In this way, the oneness of the church will be preserved and manifested among us.

The church has not only the intrinsic reality of oneness but also the facts of oneness:

- The church itself is one Body;
- The Spirit who constitutes the church as one Body is one;
- The hope of the church's entering into glory is one;
- The faith by which the church is saved and transferred from the old creation into the new is one;
- The baptism by which the church is separated from Adam and brought into Christ is one;
- The Lord to whom the church belongs and whom it serves is one;
- And the God who pervades the church, dwells in it, and is the Father of all within it is one.

Everything that the church is, has, belongs to, and exists in is one.

Therefore, the church is an indivisible entity; any division violates the fact of the church's oneness, damages the church, and is harmful rather than beneficial to its fulfillment.

## 4. 2. Church's Locality in God's View

When the Bible speaks of a specific small locality, such as a city or a small region, it uses the term “church” in the singular.

### 4. 2. 1. Take The Church in Jerusalem for Example

Reading the verses below:

*ACTS 21:20* When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to him, “You see, brother; how many thousands of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all ardent observers of the law.

*ACTS 2:46* Every day they continued to gather together by common consent in the temple courts, breaking bread from house to house, sharing their food with glad and humble hearts.

*ACTS 5:41-42* So they (Peter and John) left the council rejoicing because they had been considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name. And every day both in the temple courts and from house to house, they did not stop teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus was the Christ.

*ACTS 8:1* Now on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were forced to scatter throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.

The Jerusalem of that day was quite a large city, with tens of thousands of believers. Yet the church there appeared as one. Although many of the believers met in various homes or in the temple courts, they were still only one “church in Jerusalem.

It is just like the city where we live on earth today. Within this city, there are many gatherings of saints:

- some meet in homes,
- some rent office spaces as gathering places,

- and others purchase land to build churches for assembly.

Yet regardless of where the saints gather, how they gather, how many people assemble at each place, or whether these believers are locals or strangers. In God's sight, all believers within this city are one.

#### 4. 2. 2. Seven Churches in Revelation

*Revelation 1:20* The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

The seven churches mentioned in Revelation chapters 2–3 are as follows:

Church in Ephesus – Revelation 2:1–7

Church in Smyrna – Revelation 2:8–11

Church in Pergamum – Revelation 2:12–17

Church in Thyatira – Revelation 2:18–29

Church in Sardis – Revelation 3:1–6

Church in Philadelphia – Revelation 3:7–13

Church in Laodicea – Revelation 3:14–22

In Revelation chapters 1-3, when God instructed John to write letters to the seven churches, we can see that although each church likely had many gatherings—whether in homes, small groups, or other meetings—God still regarded each church as a whole, as a single entity. When mentioning these churches, He did not use the plural form “churches,” but the singular “Church in ...,” emphasizing that each local church is one unified body in His sight, regardless of the many meetings that take place within it.

#### 4. 2. 3. Other Examples for a Church in That City

**1 Corinthians 1:1-2** From Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will

of God, and Sosthenes, our brother, to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, and called to be saints, with all those in every place who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.

**Colossians 4:16** And after you have read this letter, have it read to the church of Laodicea. In turn, read the letter from Laodicea as well.

**ACTS 13:1** Now there were these prophets and teachers in the church in Antioch: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius the Cyrenian, Manaen and Saul.

**Rom 16:1** Now I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea.

From the verses above, we can see that although there may be many meeting places and numerous believers gathering in one locality, with each person may come from diverse cultural backgrounds, when God looks upon a city, He always refers to the church in the singular, never in the plural. This reveals that in God's eyes, there is only one church within a single city.

#### **4. 2. 4. When the Bible speaks of a province or a relatively large region, it uses the term "churches," meaning multiple churches.**

***1 Corinthians 16:19** The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, with the church that meets at their house.*

***Galatians 1:2** And all the brothers and sisters with me, To the churches of Galatia.*

***Galatians 1:22** I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ.*

***2 Corinthians 8:1** And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the churches of Macedonia.*

We have already seen that the church is one, and therefore the church's position is the position of oneness. Anyone who has lost the oneness of the church, who has lost the fellowship in the church's oneness, has also lost the church's position. Any

position that exists outside the oneness of the church, outside the fellowship of the one church, is not the church's position. Today, the positions of the Roman Church and the various denominational branches of Christianity, being divided along sectarian lines, are naturally not the position of the church.

We have also seen that the church appears locally; therefore, the church's practical position is also local. The church's oneness and fellowship, like the church itself, are universal in nature but are expressed locally. In each locality, there should be only one church; correspondingly, in each locality there should be only one fellowship and one position. This position is the local position—the position of oneness in the locality. Any position outside this local position is not the church's position.

## **5. Abiding in the Fellowship of the Body of Christ (Other Churches)**

### **5.1. The Oneness of the Body Expressed in the Fellowship of the Local Churches**

A healthy local church must hold the ground of “oneness” in its locality and live in the fellowship of the Body of Christ—especially maintaining much fellowship with the neighboring churches.

If a church remains only in its locality without going out, it may gradually become merely a place for attending services. But when it goes out to visit and fellowship, the Body of Christ is supplied and blessed.

### **5.2. Not Isolated, Not Independent**

No local church can be isolated, much less independent.

Not being isolated causes them to treasure the fellowship of all the local churches.

Not being independent causes them to value the fellowship with the apostles, to appreciate the servants of the Lord who labor both among them and among the

churches. They not only support them, but also receive supply and protection from them.

Isolation at the beginning eventually leads to independence. Long-term lack of fellowship results in independence. Every local church must have a deep realization: its growth is connected both to the neighboring local churches and to the servants of the Lord.

### **5. 3. The Lord Walking and Speaking to the Churches**

The Lord speaks to us through the epistles written by the apostle John to the seven local churches in Asia. (*Revelation 1:11* Saying, *What you see write in a scroll and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamos and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.*) Today, the Lord is still walking among the churches and is willing to speak to them.

Without local churches, the Lord Jesus would not have a proper ground to speak to His people. (*Revelation 2 – 3 (summary statement) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*)

### **5. 4. The initial and healthy condition of most local churches is represented by the church in Ephesus.**

This church is admirable, evidently blessed by the Lord, and full of riches. The following six churches develop from this initial condition. Some churches may manifest the condition of Smyrna; some may become like Pergamos; some may resemble Thyatira; and some may experience two or three conditions simultaneously.

### **5. 5. Among the seven churches, two serve as models that must never be departed from**

Outwardly: Ephesus — representing the healthy condition of the church

Inwardly: Smyrna — representing the church under trial

### **5. 6. The entire book of Revelation unveils the complete divine revelation of**

## **God’ s New Testament economy.**

Only by knowing the local churches can one enter into the reality described in Revelation.

Chapters 1 – 3 form the foundation of the whole book. From the very beginning, Revelation speaks of Christ and the local churches. Christ carries out God’ s New Testament economy through the testimony of the local churches.

## **6. Growing into the Golden Lampstand — Becoming the Lord’ s Testimony**

### **6. 1. The Testimony of the Local Church Is the Testimony of the Golden Lampstand**

Christ is the light, and the believers become luminaries. *Philippians 2:15 (latter part) You shine as luminaries in the world.* ( “Luminaries” can also be translated as shining ones.)

The totality of these shining ones becomes the shining testimony of the golden lampstands in each locality.

*Revelation 1:20 the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*

The light of the lampstand does not come from the stand itself, but from the seven lamps—signifying the light produced through God and man together. The seven lamps shine toward one another and together shine before God. The seven golden lampstands in Revelation are the seven local churches (representing all the local churches).

These lampstands grow and must grow into the testimony God desires. The church life is a life of growth. When the saints grow, the church grows, and God gains His testimony.

Growth in life is the healthy growth of the divine life within us. The increase of gifts, power, and riches is necessary, but none of these equals growth in life.

## 6. 2. The Characteristics of the Golden Lampstand

### 6. 2. 1. It is of pure gold

- The lampstand being pure gold signifies that our growth must be the growth of the divine life and nature within us.
- This gold must be bought—it requires a price. (*Revelation 3:18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may be rich.*)

### 6. 2. 2. It is beaten into shape

First, God requires you to pay the price to gain the gold; then you offer what you have gained to Him so that He may shape it by hammering—forming His testimony according to what you have.

This is not only passively accepting dealings through outward circumstances, but actively participating in the fellowship of Christ’ s sufferings, living in the experience of being shaped.

### 6. 2. 3. The lampstand has no fixed size

This signifies that growth is without limit. (*Philippians 3:12 Not that I have already obtained or am already perfected; but I pursue, if even I may lay hold of that for which I also have been laid hold of by Christ Jesus.*)

It also signifies that growth is according to our measure. The larger the measure of the lampstand, the more God’ s shaping, and the more the saints grow in life.

## 6. 3. Satisfying God’ s Desire

- The local church is centered on God and His will. What we seek is the kingdom of God and His righteousness. (*Matthew 6:33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*)
- It is guided and regulated by God’ s Word—the Bible. Guidance enables us to walk, and regulation ensures we walk properly.

- It is not centered on human needs or preferences. Many Christian groups today face difficulties because they reverse this order—placing human needs and tastes at the center, which results in practices such as bands and dramas becoming the focus.
- The church life may care for human needs, but human needs must not become the center. The church life cannot ignore human needs, yet it must not follow them.
- A healthy church life must be centered on Christ. What we speak, what we fellowship, what we emphasize, what we pursue, and everything in our living must be related to Christ.