

Oneness in Action (New Covenant People, Part 2)

John 17:15-27 and various

Back in the spring someone took a chance during one of our monthly congregational sharing times to declare their desire to join 'officially' as a member of Lillooet Gospel Chapel. And for me it set in motion a quest to become familiar with the way we have been helping people make that step of commitment. And see whether it be wise to refresh the process. Now combine that with my desire to see people know God and experience His church. So it has been on my heart for quite some time to preach about what Jesus came to begin...a new covenant people...His church. I hope it will also bring clarity to the question: Why church membership?

I've been involved in local churches for 40 of my 52 years. From Ontario to BC. And when it comes to this subject, I still have to listen to the latest arguments against joining a church. For me, it's pretty much like marriage. You fall in love with your girl and you just make it work...getting along with her family. I fell in love with Jesus and I'm going to find a way to get along with His family. Even pickle Pete. The guy with the chip on his shoulder holding a glass half empty. See, I didn't grow up in a believing home. My dad hadn't heard the good

news about Jesus, God's Son sent to save people from going to hell...till he was 34. My mom had grown up in a United Church. She heard that good news and believed when she was a kid at camp. But her home and church did not teach about an ongoing relationship with God through Jesus. By the time she was bringing me up, I was more familiar with stories from our Child Craft Encyclopedia set than about Jesus. The Bible to her, had become a book of good morals to live by...especially the golden rule. Sound familiar?

When I heard the Gospel and believed at age 9, I was ready. My memory about those early years of faith are not so clear. But my faith did not waiver...I knew Jesus was my Savior and I kept praying, reading my mysterious little Bible and doing the little Good News club studies. And I kept hoping and praying my parents would believe some day.

When my parents came to faith, I was 12. Old enough to remember that change. And all 5 of us began attending a church service on Sundays. The first one was a just plain weird to us. The pastor had a lot of personality but I couldn't make heads or tails of what he was saying and people were interrupting each other's

prayers etc. So we were a little more careful next time. God led us to a church we had to drive to. The pastor was a teacher – verse by verse, explaining scripture and sharing how we could apply it to our lives. Before you know it, my parents were involved in the Sunday school and mid-week Bible Study group and us boys were going to youth group. That experience cemented a picture of instruction, growth and sincerely loving family.

When Darlene and I got married, we agreed to be committed to the local church...membership and full support (time, talents and treasures). And we knew all we had to give of ourselves was from Him anyway. It has always been an adventure and I do not regret it...the good and the bad. I've had as much reason to be disillusioned as any...as far as dealing with hard people, organizations and leadership issues. But God's plan is the church – His believers assembling in places all over the world. It Christ's bride. God has indicated to me – called me to fight the good fight in the local church. So 20 years ago, God called me out of FT parachurch ministry (Christian School) and right into the thick of serving as a pastor. And even as one entering the ministry with significant life experience, God did not spare me some severe lessons. When it hurts

your own wife and children, it's a bitter pill. But Jesus said...behold, I have overcome and I am with you always. And He is. And glory to God, all of us still serve His people.

Local churches are people in various stages of receiving...or rejecting God's grace and truth. Some...victims of wolves in sheep's clothing. Some have been under false teaching. Some don't see how much the world has infected their thinking. Others are still living under the law. Some have enjoyed years of great mentorship and teaching...others not. Some are haunted by past guilt and other have been set free. Some avoid the messiness of human relationships, others...too much. Some have stories of loss and hurt that would make you cry. And yet we all find hope, healing, grace and truth when we get together and glorify God.

The church is full of sinners saved by grace. Jesus is the head of Lillooet Gospel Church but we're not yet home with Him yet. We still struggle with temptation and the powers of this world. And the one expecting perfect love and unity will find it's flawed the moment they walked in. God says *if we claim to be without sin, we're deceived and the truth has left us* (1 Jn 1:8). We gather in need of God's grace in our lives. And God has made the

way for us to receive victory against sin. By the blood of Jesus, God already accepts believers as His new covenant children. How do I know? *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and Just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness* (1 Jn 1:9).

So we all share an awe of God, a wonder at His grace and a desire to please Him. We gather equally needy of His continuing work in our lives. But God's church is not just a rescue hall. He has work for us. Work that cannot be accomplished by a bunch of individuals working alone. His work...not the stuff of our own dreams. One group tried their own ideas instead of God's and it came to nothing but babble (Gen 11). *Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain* (Ps 127:1).

I have good news. God has given us all we need to accomplish His work. Wherever you are coming from on views about the church: I hope you will be refreshed this month.

PRAYER

Last week we explored John's Gospel - Jesus' final prayer before entering the garden and betrayed by Judas. He made sure this prayer was heard by His disciples and passed on to us (Lillooet Gospel Church). We'll do a quick review.

Read John 17:15-27

Jesus prays to the Father for our protection from Satan (v15) by the power of Jesus name (v11). Instead of being crushed by Satan for our belief in God's saving truth, Jesus prays that we would be set aside (sanctified) as His sent ones (v18).

Sent for what?

To be something. That we may be one...just as Jesus and the Father are one. Jesus revealed some ways the He and the Father are one. We looked at those last week (glorifying, revealing truth, saving purpose, all things shared, eternal existence of oneness). If we take that a step further we can **see** God's oneness right here.

All God's new covenant people are:

1. **Saved by receiving God's truth** about Jesus by faith (v20) – one way to know God
2. **Empowered to love** by His indwelling presence (23,26) – one way to be like God
3. **Entrusted with God's saving plan for the world** (18, 21, 23) - one mission

So if you find acronyms help you remember: God reveals His oneness to the world by making His churches **Saved Empowered Entrusted**. Knowing God (by truth and experience) is a very strong theme in Jesus' prayer (2-3, 6-8, 14, 17, 26). As is Christ's desire for the oneness of God's love to be expressed through us. And so the church could be

defined as God's loving truth on display. And remember that the middle E - Empowered by God within us - is the center of being able to **see** God's oneness continue. Our competency (v23) is achieved by Christ in us, through the Holy Spirit (v22). So we continue to experience God oneness:

1. Protected by the name of Jesus (v11)
2. Indwelt by the glory of God's presence (v22, 23,26)
3. Transformed in our mind by the truth (v6-9, 14,26)
4. Sent by Jesus to make disciples who obey Him (v18)
5. Filled with joy as we experience God's love (v13)

It is very humbling to be chosen for this great work...to be God's messengers about how to know God through Jesus and receive eternal life.

Today I want us to be thinking about what happens when we put our wants and desires away and let God have His oneness (in truth and love) with Lillooet Gospel church. We assemble today for a Sunday service at 'the chapel'. But we assemble as God's people, Christ's body, indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit, wherever 2 or 3 are gathered in Jesus name. Here's what I mean when I say Lillooet Gospel Church. It applies to those who SEE God's oneness (Saved, Empowered, Entrusted). And are:

1. treating this local group of believers as their spiritual family,
2. striving to apply the biblical teaching here
3. supporting the leadership (elder board) that helps us remain faithful to our purpose and plan to carry out God's truth and love

Everyone is welcome to gather, learn and serve. God brings us together in amazing ways from diverse backgrounds to demonstrate His love. But God will not let us coast along casually. By His truth and Spirit, He convicts us. We are either bearing fruit for Him (glorifying) or not. We either speak and live life or death. As we exercise the faith God has given us, He will fit us more and more together for His work. And we will become more and more aware of how much we need one another. That's the way God made His new covenant people...each unique yet interdependent. Here's a few ways that Christ's love gets expressed tangibly among us (when He's boss):

- Accepting one another (Rom 15:7)
- Serving one another (Gal 5:13)
- Encouraging one another (1 Thes 4:18; 5:11, Heb 3:13)
- Admonishing one another (Col 3:16)
- Praying for one another (James 5:16)
- Hospitality to one another (1 Pet 4:9)
- Carry one another's burdens (Gal 6:2)
- Forgiving one another (Col 3:13)

- Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph 5:21)
- love one another sincerely (Rom 12:9, 1 Pet 1:22)

Commitment to the local church is really a step of obedience. So is baptism. But it's also a relationship like marriage (Eph 5). I fell in love with Darlene...and made it work to get along with her family. I fell in love with Jesus and make it work to get along with His family. Jesus sacrificed Himself for the church...His bride. Those who condemn the bride are on thin ice...just like you'd be with me, if you talked down about my wife. Jesus is the only one who truly completes us. And He chooses to meet needs (give and receive love, instruction, mission) through His local church. There are several wonderful metaphors to describe us: the community of the Spirit (Luke), the body of Christ (Paul), the temple of God (Paul, Peter), the bride of Christ (Paul, John), the people of God (Peter, Paul). I've based this series on Christ's prayer - just after He proclaimed that the new way to be in right relationship with God - the new covenant - by Jesus blood poured out for us. So by belief, we become God's new covenant people.

One way of expressing love that is harder to give and receive is correction or warning. We must be

unCanadian to do it. It intercepts those headed toward spiritual danger by graciously bringing scripture to bear on sin or faulty doctrine. Sound doctrine is healthy teaching from the bible that guides people to live out their faith in Christ with integrity (devoted disciple of Jesus). Sound doctrine is teaching lived out. It's our nature to put things off or not getting into a potentially messy situation. But rarely does it help to walk away and leave someone to sin or flounder in the waves of human reasoning. On rare occasions, after correction is ignored (and always with the hope of a restoration), people holding to sin or false teaching must be treated as someone lost (Matt 18:17). Jesus said...like pagans or tax-collectors (remember how He treated the lost: Mk 2, 13-17; 7:24-8:10). *My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.* James 5:20

And who serves as Jesus' servants to oversee sound doctrine, discipline and direction in the local church? That will be our topic next week.