

talents and abilities for church and the kingdom of God.

Conclusion:

1. The true Church of Christ is an invisible thing in which are all of the ~~spiritual~~ persons ~~in all of the churches~~ who are dedicated to Christ as they understand Him and His way, and such folks are in many different churches.
2. ~~But~~ our local group, the church we organize here, as a group working and worshiping, rejoicing and grieving, is a place for real Christians, is a real church.
3. As Paul puts it, "we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."
4. Each local church -- our church -- can be a unit of the one true church of Christ.
5. May God use us that we may be a church which exists for our own spiritual profit and for the introduction of more and more people to the joys of Christ.

Theme: The church of Christ.

Scripture: Romans 12:1-8.

Text: Romans 12:5 (RSV) -- "We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

Proposition: Each local church -- our church -- can be a unit of the one true church of Christ.

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Introduction:

1. In Sept. 15, 1955, Christian Advocate (p.10, 27 & 31) is an article entitled "What Methodists think of the Church," by Gerald Myles, a Methodist teacher and leader of Ireland. The introduction to the article makes a good introduction for our theme today, "The Church of Christ." The story is about a minister visiting with one of his members who had not been to church in a long time, and who argued that he could be a Christian without the church. The minister, during the course of the conversation, reached with the fire tongs into the fireplace by which they were sitting, and pulled out a coal and laid it on the rock fender by the fire place. A while later he called the attention of his parishoner to the coal, which now had grown grey and cold. "A christian is like that coal," he said. "He soon loses his warmth and enthusiasm when taken out of the church, as the coal loses its heat when removed from the other coals of the fire." John Wesley once said "there is no such thing as a solitary christian. The church is where christians worship and work.

2. The old Congregationalists, according to the same article, used a term for the church that indicates what we believe to be the nature of the church. It is "the gathered church." A church is a group of people gathered from the world by Christ.

3. We have two ideas: (1) No one can be a Christian by himself, and (2) a church is a group of those who have responded to Christ's call, who know Him, love Him, attempt to do His will. The church is a group of ~~happy~~ Christians.

4. We are thinking today about the true Church of Christ --not a denomination --, what it is, what it means to you and me.

5. In Paul's letter to the Roman Christians the passage which contains our Scripture and text, Romans 12:1-8, is a

meaningful statement of the nature of the church. In this Scripture Paul doesn't use the word "church," but he is writing to the church at Rome, and throughout the whole Book of Romans he is thinking of Roman Christians, or church members. Let's examine Paul's idea of the church, as presented in our Scripture, and see if it can help us understand the Church of Christ of today.

I. The local church is a group of people doing Christian things together.

1. All of them have certain things in common:

a. A belief in Christ.

b. Standards, such as Paul puts forth in verses 1 - 3:

(1) The keeping of wholesome bodies, since they are necessary to spiritual worship and service (v.1).

(2) Differences in their standards from the surrounding world, differences in goodness and the seeking of perfection which demonstrate God's will and their religion (v. 2).

(3) A self-modesty coupled with a confidence that they can do what God wants them to do.(v.3).

2. Each differs, at least in some degree, from the other:

a. Paul gives ~~these~~ some of these differences, and urges that the talents be used to the best of ones ability in v. 4 - 8. He points out (v.4) that ones abilities are indeed gifts.

b. In our case there are also differences of "gifts," or abilities: speaking, leadership, teaching, business, manual skills, etc..

II. Local churches, too, have distinguishing characteristics.

1. This is true of all human organizations. They take on certain characteristics which stand out: Organizations exist which have community service, fellowship, sports, drinking, hobbies, ~~or~~ worship, and other ends and activities as their distinguishing mark, and by which we know them.

2. Churches, as human organizations, often assume certain characteristics which set them apart, and by which they may be classified: "~~Baptists~~" *for instance, and we think*

a. Formal worship coupled with laxness toward social custom -- Roman Catholic, Episcopalian.

c. A claim that its church is the only true Christian church -- Roman Catholic, "Church of Christ."

c. The peace ~~emphases~~ churches, which specialize in social services -- Quakers (or "Friends"), and Mennonites.

d. Churches which emphasize a personal experience of salvation through Christ-- Methodists and Baptist.

e. Churches in which worship is ecstatic, enthusiastic, and loud -- "holiness" groups, Assembly of God.

f. Churches composed mostly of society's "upper crust" -- Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Congregational.

g. Churches composed mostly of poorer people -- Nazarene, holiness churches.

h. Churches composed mostly of the "middle-class" folks -- Methodist, Baptists, Lutherans, etc..

3. Yet, we believe real Christians are in each and all of these, as well as in churches with many other popular distinguishing characteristics.

4. We also believe that the church most pleasing to Christ tries to minister to the most people possible, regardless of class -- tries to reach all classes and groups of folks.

5. Each local church has a contribution to make to the total Christian witness, regardless of where it ~~exists~~ fits into the social scheme, or regardless of its form of worship.

6. This line of thinking is of the essence of Methodism, whose founder said "whoever thinks that a Methodist is a person of this or that opinion is mistaken. A Methodist is characterized by his willingness to think and to let think." ~~He said, however~~

7. We do have a special part, as Methodists, a message of tolerance, an emphasis on personal experiences of God through Christ.

III. Within the great framework of Christianity there is a place for our peculiar emphasis.

1. Our emphasis is neither a liberal nore a fundamentalist one, though we have some of both extremes and all shades of belief in between. Our emphasis is, we repeat, one of tolerance and of Christian experience.

2. ~~With our church we honor~~ As Paul empahsize so we think, that within the church should be folks who keep clean and undefiled bodies, who stand out from the degrading and useless around them, who are modest but still have confidence in their ability to do ~~what God demands of them~~ God's will as they ~~give their talents~~ use the best of

Handwritten notes in the gutter:
... church ...
... some may be like the man described ...
... church ...

Handwritten note at bottom:
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Story 334