

H.J. Vine

# Inclusive and Exclusive

*Remarks on the unity of the body of Christ*

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## There is one body

It is important, in relation to the oneness of the saints of God, to understand the truth of the one body; to grasp in faith the fact of it. "There is one body." This is a fact whether we grasp it or not, but the Holy Spirit has given us the truth of it through Paul, in the Scripture, that we might be always kept in the sense of the necessity of every member of the body of Christ, for all are included in the body. Oh! that we may learn deeply and truly this blessed inclusiveness. That teaching of exclusiveness, which says that certain members are excluded on the principle of the one body, is not the truth of God. Indeed, it is very serious error. That teaching which maintains that wicked persons (those characterized by lawlessness in word or way) are to be excluded from Christian intercourse is according to the truth. The difference between the two is very great. To use the truth of the one body for the exclusion of members, is to act ignorantly, to misapply Scripture, and to injure the saints. To exclude wickedness and those characterized by it as unsuited to the holiness of God's house, is to obey the Word and to preserve the saints, but for the latter other scriptures are needed.

As to the inclusiveness of the one body, we are told, no member can say to another, "I have no need of thee" (1 Cor. 12:21). Every member is necessary. Exclusion is not to be thought of. "God has tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to the part that lacked." And the reason for this

divine wisdom and care is, "That there be no division in the body" (v. 25)! Inclusiveness is the truth here. The teaching of the "one new man," and of access to the Father by "one Spirit" in Ephesians 2:15-18 has the same end in view; as also has the fact that we are "joint heirs, and a joint body, and joint partakers" of God's promise in Christ Jesus. Indeed, the very gospel-preaching of Paul was "according to the revelation of the mystery" (Rom. 16:25); and the right effect of that would bring all the saints "to be likeminded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus; that ye may with one accord, with one mouth, glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore," continues the Apostle, "receive ye one another according as the Christ also has received you to the glory of God" (Rom. 15:5-7). In this way the oneness becomes practical in the love and grace of the truth.

## In a Day of Failure

The outward failure and breakdown as to this very truth amongst those who claim to be the church, or of the church, could not be greater, but it was all foreseen and foretold in the Scripture, and provision has been made in view of the failure in the ministry given through John. So that those who are really "of the truth" may be preserved and maintained in fullness of joy, and according to the oneness of which we speak, in spite of the outward breakdown.

No outward divisions or separations are seen by John, among the living company of true believers on the Son of God, for whom he writes. His Gospel is written that they may have life (John 20:31): his first Epistle that they may know they have eternal life (1 John 5:13). He sees one family, all loved alike by one Father, indwelt by one Spirit. In the Gospel he sees one flock, all having eternal life, and all safe in the hand of one Shepherd. The flock is identified with the assembly by Paul's words in Acts 20:28. It is true that here, as well as in John 10, the Holy Spirit foretells trouble from those who should succeed the apostles. Grievous wolves are spoken of, and also those who would speak "perverted things"; but the one flock, the true assembly, remains.

John 10 tells of the thief coming to steal, to kill, and to destroy; but the Shepherd, the Son of God, holds all His own in the hand of omnipotence. Unlike the thief, the good Shepherd came that His sheep might have salvation, liberty, and life abundantly. The wolf worries and scatters the precious sheep of Christ, and the hireling's heart is on his wages; he cares not for the sheep, and flees when danger

comes; but the good Shepherd knows each sheep by name, and He loves each one with so great a love that He laid down His life for the eternal welfare of every one of them. Notwithstanding all the trouble the thief, the hireling, and the wolf cause, the one flock is safe, because it is in His hand, and in the Father's hand; and He has said: "No one shall seize them out of My hand," and "No one can seize out of the hand of My Father. I and My Father are one." Every sheep is included in the grasp of love and omnipotence. He speaks of inclusive oneness.

Those who are excluded in John's epistle exclude themselves – they go out. That is, they apostatize (1 John 2:11). In the third epistle of John, Diotrephes "cast out" the brethren; this treatment was meted out to the best saints. He could only cast out of the assembly where he had usurped the pre-eminence which belongs to Christ; he could not cast them out of that of which we are speaking. But it should be a warning to us to see to it that we have more than mere talk about assembly, which is dangerous; for even in apostolic days the state in this connection could be such that an apostolic communication could be refused; and even apostles themselves: "I wrote something to the assembly; but Diotrephes, who loves to have the first place among them, receives us not" (3 John 9). Certainly it was the work of an individual whose fleshly pride had made him Satan's tool, and who took and loved the first place among them.

It is a significant fact that the only mention of the assembly in John's writings is in connection with this evil Diotrephean conduct; doubtless this is to cast us back upon the living and inclusive oneness, to which prominence is given in his ministry by the Holy Spirit. The violent exclusiveness of Diotrephes was evil, it excluded the best. It is therefore said to Gaius: "Beloved, imitate not what is evil, but what is good. He that does good is of God" (v. 11). That is the path which is surrounded by the abiding blessings of God.

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