The Nature of the Church

I. The church is divine, “Christly,” “resurrectionly,” and heavenly:

A. The church is of God—1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:16:
   2. The expression the church of God indicates not only that the church belongs to God but also that the church must have the nature of God.

B. The church is “Christly”—1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 1:22-23:
   1. Every local church must be a church of Christ (Rom. 16:16), being in the element of Christ:
      a. Christ is the nature of the church, and the church is actually Christ Himself—Col. 3:10-11.
      b. Anything that is short of Christ or is not Christ is not the church.
   2. The church is a pure product out of Christ—Eph. 4:15-16:
      a. This is typified by Eve, who was fully, completely, and purely produced out of Adam; whatever was in Eve and whatever Eve was, was of Adam—Gen. 2:22-24; Eph. 5:30-32.
      b. The church must also be of one element—the element of Christ; apart from Christ’s element, there should be no other element in the church—Col. 3:10-11.

C. The church is “resurrectionly”—John 11:25; Acts 2:24; Rev. 1:18; 2:8, 10:
   1. The church is an entity absolutely in resurrection; it is not natural, nor is it in the old creation.
   2. The church is a new creation created in Christ’s resurrection and by the resurrected Christ; therefore, the church is “resurrectionly”—Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17.
   3. The church was produced by Christ in resurrection and exists by His resurrection life; thus, the church is a being that can endure death.

D. The church is heavenly—Eph. 1:19-21; 2:6:
   1. The church is in Christ in His ascension; the church has been resurrected with Christ and is now seated in the heavenlies in Christ—v. 6.
   2. The main significance of the church being heavenly is that it is under God’s authority—Matt. 28:18; Dan. 4:26, 34-35:
      a. The nature of the church is to submit to God’s authority.
      b. The particular nature of heaven is that it submits to God’s authority; hence, to be heavenly is to have the nature of submitting to God’s authority—Matt. 6:10; 18:18-19.

II. We need to be watchful and faithful in preserving the nature of the church—13:31-32:

A. The church should be like an herb that produces food for the satisfaction of God and man—vv. 31-32a.
B. The nature and function of the church were changed, so that it became a “tree,” a lodging place for birds—vv. 32b, 4, 19.

C. The church, according to its heavenly and spiritual nature, should be like the mustard, sojourning on earth; but with its nature changed, the church became deeply rooted and settled as a tree in the earth—vv. 31-32.

III. The church is the mingling of God and man—Eph. 3:16-21; 4:4-6, 16:

A. The mingling of God and man is a deep and central truth in the Scriptures—1 Cor. 6:17; John 14:20; 17:21-23.

B. We must grasp the principle of the church—the church is God mingled with man—Eph. 4:4-6:
   1. The church is neither merely divine nor merely human; if the church were merely divine or merely human, it would lose its nature.
   2. The mingling of God and man manifests the nature of the church.

C. God’s unique purpose is to mingle Himself with us so that He becomes our life, our nature, and our content, and we become His corporate expression—John 14:20; 15:4-5; Eph. 3:16-21; 4:4-6, 16:
   1. The mingling of God and man is an intrinsic union of the elements of divinity and humanity to form one organic entity, yet the elements remain distinct in the union.
   2. The will of God is the mingling of God with man, and the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose depends on this mingling—1:5, 9; 3:11.

D. The Body of Christ is the enlargement of Christ, the enlargement of the One who is the mingling of God and man—1:22-23; 4:16:
   1. In the Gospels the mingling of God and man produced the Head; in Acts the enlargement of the mingling of God and man produced the Body of Christ—Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15-16.
   2. In Ephesians 4:4-6 four persons—the Body, the Spirit, the Lord, and God the Father—are actively mingled together:
      a. The Father is embodied in the Son, the Son is realized as the Spirit, and the Spirit is mingled with the believers.
      b. This mingling is the constitution of the Body of Christ.
   3. The processed and consummated Triune God mingles Himself with His chosen people in their humanity, and this mingling is the genuine oneness of the Body of Christ—v. 3; John 17:21-23.

E. For the church life, we need to see a vision of the mingled spirit—the divine Spirit mingled with our regenerated human spirit—1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:4:
   1. The Father is in the Son, the Son is the Spirit, and the Spirit is now mingled with our spirit—John 14:9-10, 16-18; 1 Cor. 15:45b; 6:17; Rom. 8:16.
   2. The union of God and man is a union of the two spirits, the Spirit of God and the spirit of man (1 Cor. 2:11-16); the union of these two spirits is the deepest mystery in the Bible.
   3. The focus of God’s economy is the mingled spirit, the divine Spirit mingled with the human spirit; whatever God intends to do or accomplish is related to this focus—6:17; Eph. 3:9, 5; 1:17; 2:22; 4:23; 5:18; 6:18.