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Many Are Sick And Some Have Died

Or

*The Little Book of Christian
Harmony*

*by
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Forward

This is a little book on Christian harmony.

It's about Christians being one in Christ.

Many people know it.

Few people do it.

It's not that hard.

We need it.

Selah.

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Acknowledgements

in dream-bound sleep of early morning,
You come to touch my face
to love me
to wake me so evergently —
You woo me from sleep's seductive grasp
and singing kindly
chase away night's phantasies
calling me into jubilee.
You whisper to my ears, "Awake!"
and kiss my eyelids open
and love me as Your precious own...

A Supernatural Curse?

It could have been a scene from some low-budget sci-fi thriller:

A mysterious sickness strikes indiscriminately amongst ill-fated members of a strange, religious community; clueless to prevent physical debilitation, it leads some even to death; nightmarishly, those afflicted discover that the Killer isn't of this earth but is instead a monstrous presence – a fiendish immortal holding in its callous grasp the supernatural right of torment and death over the members of this religious order.

How would you classify a plot like this? Fantasy? Horror? Trash?

Or reality? Because this is what the Christians in Corinth faced two millennia ago. Certain decisions they'd unwittingly made had rendered them vulnerable to an onslaught from the enemy... *they had given Satan a strategic foothold in their religious community.*

1 Cor. 10.27–30 – whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. RSV

Scripture records how God will at times remove His divine protection from human beings to some degree, permitting sickness and even death. Whether the sin of the Corinthian believers had rendered them vulnerable to a vicious attack from the enemy such as this or whether God had Himself brought vengeance doesn't change the essential fact: many were weak and sick and some had even died as a direct result of the sin of “not discerning the body”.

What will be the result today if in our churches we commit the same sin? Are there Christians today who are sick, weak and even dying because of this same sin? If we sin the same sin today, are the consequences the same? Or is it possible that “not discerning the body” is more acceptable to God today than it was 2,000 years ago?

The church across America has rendered itself vulnerable to defeat by the enemy because of this sin. It has left its members defenseless, struck down and even slain because of this sin. And possibly worst of all, its mission to

evangelize the lost is crippled when this sin remains unrecognized or is accepted as unavoidable.

In this “little book”, this sin of “not discerning the body” will be clearly exposed in order to help break its grasp on our lives and our churches.

The message of this “little book” is not simply for pastors – every person in the Body of Christ will either lend their support to its continued division, or *personally* press into a loving unity with their brothers and sisters.

When God’s Word spotlights darkness in our hearts, we have a wonderful opportunity to repent – and repentance is the only means to remove this spiritual sickness, weakness and death from the lives of Christians nationwide and worldwide. With the removal of this curse, the power of our evangelistic witness will be uplifted to heights of revival never seen before in the history of the church. Truly, we have a chance to influence not only every church, but every social group and culture, every tribe, people and nation. In our hands, by the Blood of Jesus Christ, we determine if His justice will reign. It is in our hands (by God’s grace) that we can change the world.

A Spotless Bride

Jesus said,

“I pray not only for My disciples alone, but for all those in the future who will believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one; as You, Father, are one in me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us: *that the world may believe* that You have sent Me.” (Jn. 17.20–21)

“One in Me,” He says, “That the world may believe...”

We believe that Jesus is coming back when the Bride prepares herself for Him; we are the Bride and the earthly “sacrament” of marriage is essentially a shadow of the Love of the Bride and the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

In Rev. 19, the Wedding invitations are announced:

“Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the Wedding of the Lamb has come, and *His Bride has made herself ready*. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

The Bride of Christ in the Twentieth Century has not presented herself well to the unsaved, nor is She ready to present herself to Her Betrothed. America is tired of listening to church leaders when one nationally known Christian leader after another has been caught in flagrant sin. Non-believers don't flock to our seminars and they're not listening to our conferences, our revivals, and our Bible studies. Churches are largely ignored by the unsaved world. The world doesn't have any reason to believe that God sent His Son Jesus into the world to save them from the dominion of darkness because the Church, the Body of Christ, is not manifesting “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”.

Without manifesting our oneness with one another and with the Father, the world will not be persuaded to believe in Jesus. According to Ephesians four, without that oneness, the Church of Jesus Christ will continue to fail and fall short of its mighty calling in Christ. It will continue to be little more than incompetent children helplessly tossed back and forth as by hurricane winds.

Yet there remains a great hope – the unbelieving world may yet come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ! When we *recognize* that we who are “in Christ” are

one, inseparably one, and *repent* of the variety of ways in which we've denied our oneness in Christ, and *restore* the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace – then the world may believe that God has sent Jesus. When blacks and whites repent of their godless color barriers, when Anglos and Native Americans set aside contemporary and ancient grudges, when “high church” and “low church” honor the one Blood of Jesus, when fundamentalists and moderates recognize their unity “in Christ” – then evangelism will be unleashed such as the world has rarely seen.

Where do you stand today in respect to Jesus Christ's demand for unity amongst all who believe? *Do you excuse yourself from that unity?* Have you bought the enemy's subtle rationalizations?

“We can never be one since we will never be able to agree on church doctrine... at most I can be one with those who agree with my church's theology.”

“We are one ‘theologically’, but will never be one in any practical, personal sense as there are too many obstacles in human relationships.”

“I can never fellowship with so-and-so because he's just after my sheep!”

Do you “discern” the Body of Christ? Has Christ's Vision for His Church permeated your heart and your mind until the divisions and barriers erected between Christians here and there have assumed their truly minor place in God's plan? According to Paul, if you are not accurately “seeing” and “recognizing” the Body of Christ, you've left yourself vulnerable to the enemy for sickness, weakness and even death.

Stop and chew on this thought for a few moments:

The barriers to unity in the Body of Christ – be they denominational, racial, cultural, historical, geographical or economic – are able to be overcome quickly and easily.

The words written in this little book are intended to help you *accomplish* that vision and then *hold onto it* in the rough times that are ahead. The barriers we'll face will then be overcome – not by trying to battle each separate “barrier” but by gaining the Vision of Christ for the oneness of His Body and the Passion of God's heart for His children. Remember: Jesus promised that He would build His Church and all the strategies of Hell itself would be unable to overcome it. The time is come for maturity in the Body of Christ and the building up of the Church of Jesus Christ into the unmistakable Presence of Christ in this earth.

Why wait? The day has come for you to throw your very life into *oneness in Christ is now*.

Discerning the Body

From the age of three or thereabouts, virtually every Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday found me in a Baptist church.

Which means I'm no stranger to schism!

In my childhood I observed three church splits: one over people not liking the pastor, one over people not liking how mission funds were banked, and the third I forget why but it was really important!

I can remember how back then I judged other people around my town who went to false churches. In fact, I remember the very thoughts I'd have from time to time about other "Christians".

There was an American Baptist church a few blocks away. I attended high school with some of its young people. I remember thinking, "Well... they're not our church but they're still Baptist..." though I wondered suspiciously why they were "American" Baptists instead of what I was. I assumed they were "liberal".

Still, I decided the American Baptists might make it to heaven. (No joke – I was serious.)

A few blocks in another direction lay the Methodist Church. I knew anyone going to that church couldn't be saved. And I never even thought twice about Roman Catholics making it!

Not only was I not a happy Christian back then, I didn't even know Christians were supposed to be "happy". We weren't "happy" – we were *right*. Politically, doctrinally, socially – we were *right* and other people were *wrong*. Today, I see that much of my unhappiness was due to my not understanding the true nature of the Body of Christ.

When growing up, I didn't "discern the Body of Christ". I didn't even know then that that was a sin. I sure didn't realize the power over my life that particular sin could give to the enemy for sickness, weakness and death.

Many Christians today are stricken by this sin – only to be left confused, bewildered and unable to understand why God allows affliction into their lives.* There are numerous responses to the problem of suffering in the life of the righteous, but one of the most neglected is also one of the most bluntly clear explanations found in the Bible.

In his first letter to the Christians at Corinth, the Apostle Paul explains that these afflictions result from the sin of "not discerning the Body". Let's follow his reasoning as the apostle confronts the Corinthian Christians with their sin. He starts early in the letter with their sin of strife:

1 Cor. 3.1 – And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal?

Paul points to the evidence: they quarreled over what teachers to accept; they took one another to civil court thus shaming the Name of Christ; they allowed gross iniquity in their congregation; their marriages were in disrepair; they didn't understand how to live and act in love to one another but openly judged and despised one another; the ministry of Spirit-gifts was confused and bewildering. On and on in his letter, the apostle exposes these and many more sins of the Corinthian Christians, cataloging the abuse being done amongst their congregation one to another.

The central chapter presenting the *solution* to these problems is chapter thirteen – typically called "The Love Chapter":

1 Cor. 13.1 – Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal...

"Love never fails."

It was through divine love that all the struggles in the church at Corinth could be set aside, all the jealousy cleansed from their midst and all competition laid down. Love – patient and kind, never rude – love was Paul's solution.

But before the *solution*, Paul identified the *problem* and he did so with passion, outrage and anger. The *problem* is highlighted in chapter 11.

* Right now, I can hear readers say, "Oh, no... I can't believe that!" My question is, "What is it about 'eats and drinks judgment upon himself' that God didn't mean?"

1 Cor. 11.17-18 – Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it.

When I celebrated communion in the churches of my childhood, I remember the ministers always read part of this chapter. I never remember them beginning with verse 17, the real beginning of this topic, but rather verse 23: “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you...” The Scripture passage was presented as a discourse concerning *the right way to administer the Lord’s Supper*.

But that’s not what the Apostle is doing. Instead, Paul is confronting the heart of their sin – the sin of not “discerning” the Body of Christ.

In verse 17, the “coming together” of which he speaks is their coming together in a “Love Feast” in memorial to Christ’s Love on the Cross – one of the two almost universally recognized sacraments of the Church, the other being water baptism.

The early church knew the vital need for regularly assembling themselves together. The warning in Hebrews 10.25 to not “forsake their assembling together” was not strange to the early church. The Corinthian Christians came together and did so regularly.

But Paul is saying they’re *worse* off for doing so and would possibly have been *better* off not to have come together at all! “Ye come together not for the better, but for the worse.” Their “coming together” actually worked destruction against them because they “came together” “divided”. Can you imagine Paul saying to *you and your church*, “Hey! Listen up! You’d be better off if you all quit sharing communion once and for all!”

Is he heated or what? Paul says, “First of all...” leading the reader to expect there to be a “second of all”. There isn’t. With Paul, their “division” is the primary sin he condemns and the only one. It’s obvious how divine love would have put all divisions to rest, but these people were not acting in love to one another and apparently did not even see the need for it.

After all – weren’t they being “faithful” to keep the Lord’s Supper together? Paul’s rebuke is strongly reminiscent of the condemnation by Isaiah of the Jew’s “fasts” in which God rebuked the people for being “faithful” to “wrong worship”:

Isa. 58.3-4 – [The Jews complain to God] “Why have we fasted, and Thou seest it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and Thou takest no knowledge of it?” [God answers] “Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit

with wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high.”

Centuries later, Paul rebukes the Corinthian Christians for coming together only to promote their divisions. He presses on:

1 Cor. 11.20–22 –When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord’s Supper. For in eating every one taketh before the others his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken.

What? Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? Or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.

What a picture! All the Christians came together in their “Feast of Divine Love” with the rich Christians bringing an abundance of food and drink. By the time dinner was done, these Christians were drunk! I like to say that the *real* reason these people met together wasn’t for the better but for the wüerst!

Yet, even though the feast was right in front of other Christians who were so poor they could hardly bring anything to eat, not a morsel was shared between the rich and the hungry!

Paul cries out, “Do you despise the church of God and shame those who are poor?” Originally written in Greek, the word Paul used was *kataphroneo* which means, “to despise, disdain, think little or nothing of”. And this is vital to understanding their sin: though they were brothers and sisters in *one family*, though they were *one church* and *one Body* – these wicked sinners *despised* the church of God and *thought little or nothing* of the Body of Christ.

Right under the very noses of these rich Corinthian Christians, their brothers and sisters were invisible. Rather than loving and caring for the ones who were poor, they ignored them or worse yet, offensively paraded their “higher status” and wealth in front of needy brethren.

In the twentieth century, we have great opportunities to avoid this sin. For example, we have starving brothers and sisters in third world nations all around the world but through Pat Robertson’s “Operation Blessing” (700 Club) and other similar ministries, we’re sharing the wealth that is ours with those who are in need.

Yet there’s another aspect to the Corinthians’ sin that we may perpetuate: having brothers and sisters under our noses whom we despise. “Who needs them, anyway?” But these brothers and sisters are as much a part of the Body of Christ as we are. They’re as much “in Christ” through faith as we are – but they’re in the church down the street or some other denomination or attended the “Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Conference of 1912” and so we disdain to even notice them.

1 Cor. 11.23–26 – For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread: And when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, “Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me.” After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, “This cup is the new testament in My blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death till He come.

Here’s where we can so easily lose Paul’s point. *What’s the connection between verses 17-22 and verses 23-26?* Notice the word “for” at the beginning of verse 23? “For” is a conjunction joining the previous verses with the following verses. *Paul is not changing his topic.* “Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not. *For* I have received of the Lord...” He’s saying, “I will not praise you *because* of this reason...”

The reason Paul brings the Lord’s Supper into his argument is that He’s trying to make it blazingly clear just what these Corinthians are rejecting! By rejecting their brothers and sisters, they are rejecting the Lord Jesus Himself and His sacrifice on the Cross! By not discerning their brothers and sisters who visibly live and breathe right in front of their faces, they’re *not discerning the Body of Christ.*

Gordon Fee addressed this in his commentary on 1 Corinthians when he said,

The whole point of the section, beginning with verse 17 and continuing through vv. 33–34, is to correct a considerable abuse of the church as it is visibly portrayed at the Lord’s Supper... The Corinthians are missing the meaning of the “body” given in death; but Paul’s present concern is with the further sense, *the church as that body.*¹ [My emphasis.]

In the previous chapter (10), Paul made it clear that he knew these Corinthian Christians understood how systems of sacrifice worked. Where these people once sacrificed to idols to become one with demon “gods”, they have now entered into the one True Sacrifice of Jesus Christ. To drink the Cup and eat the Bread symbolized their having *become one* with Jesus Christ. His blood and body is now theirs and they’re one with Him. They are “in Christ”.

But for any self-righteous “Christian” to deceive himself into thinking that he is “one with Christ” and “united in Jesus’ Body” but yet at the same time he “despises” the church of God is in trouble with God. If that’s what he wants, he won’t get it. It’s impossible. It cannot happen. Despising other members of the

¹ Fee, Gordon; *The First Epistle to the Corinthians; New International Commentary on the New Testament*; Eerdmans, Grand Rapids MI, © 1987; p. 564. [Return]

Body of Christ (as they did at the “love feasts”) was tantamount to denying the Body of Christ Himself.

1 Cor. 10.16–17 –The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

For we being many are one bread and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread [Jesus Christ.]

Though they were *many*, being united with Christ and part of His Body made the *many* into *one*.

1 Cor. 10.27–30 – Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, *not discerning the Lord’s body*. For this cause, many are weak and sickly among you, and many are dead. [My emphasis.]

As a child, I’d been taught that “not all” were “worthy” to partake of the Supper Table of the Lord. I repeatedly heard the serious warning, “If you have sin in your life, you must “examine” yourself so as not to partake of this supper unworthily!”

But that’s *not* what this passage says. Paul isn’t warning us to “look for some sin” in our hearts.

No. He’s very specific in spelling out what we’re to look for. “For whoever eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.”

Not discerning the Lord’s body?

From the context of this passage, verses 17-30

What does “not discerning the Lord’s body” mean?

“Not discerning the Lord’s body” in this passage refers to the Corinthians’ sin of *despising* other members of the Church of God – of *not seeing or loving* their brothers and sisters in Christ with whom they who were *many* had all been made *one*. And this is a sin fostered and propagated throughout the entire Body of Christ by its enemy, the devil.

Fee explains more concerning the word “discern”.

The meaning here probably comes closest to the English word “discern”, meaning to distinguish as distinct and different. The Lord’s Supper is not just any meal; it is *the* meal, in which at a common table with one loaf and a common cup they proclaimed that through the death of Christ they were one body, the body of

Christ; and therefore they are not just any group of sociologically diverse people who could keep those differences intact at this table. Here they must “discern/recognize as distinct” the one body of Christ, of which they are all parts and in which they are all gifts to one another. To fail to discern the body in this way, by abusing those of lesser sociological status, is to incur God’s judgment....²

Paul is here stepping into the prophetic role; by the Spirit he has seen a divine cause and effect between two otherwise independent realities: the present illnesses of many, which in some cases have led to death, and the actions of some at the Table of the Lord who are despising the church and humiliating the “have-nots”.

We cannot look down the street at “the American Baptist” church and say, “We don’t care about you!” We cannot look from white American suburbs into black American ghettos and say, “We don’t need you!” We cannot put brothers in Christ out of our fellowships because they are “sacramental” or they’re “non-sacramental” and say, “We don’t need you!” We cannot fortify the borders along the Rio Grande or harden the boundaries of our Native American reservations and say, “Me and my church and my denomination have got all we need. We’re doing the Work of God throughout this world. We don’t need you!”

How important is this sin? It’s so crucial to God’s program that those Corinthian Believers who were sinning against Christ’s Body by disdainingly their fellow Believers *were getting sick and some even died!*

Did God “kill them”? Unlikely. But at the very least, He stepped back and gave access to the devil into their lives.³

² *ibid.*, p. 564–565.

³ Some readers will have a problem with this concept, but both Job in the Old Testament and a warning by Paul in Eph. demonstrate the reality of the devil gaining access to the lives of godly people. In Eph. 4.26, Paul warns: “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil.” In the original Greek language, for “give place” Paul used the word *topos*, which has several related meanings. Strong’s defines *topos* as “(1a) place, any portion or space marked off, as it were from surrounding space; (2a) the condition or station held by one in any company or assembly; (2b) opportunity, power, occasion for acting.” Seeing that Paul is here addressing those who have “put off the old nature” and “put on the new”, he is *not* saying that the devil can have special access to the lives of *unsaved* people but people who are saved and walking in the Spirit. If the Spirit-filled Christian responds wrongly to anger in his life, the devil will be given an “opportunity” or “occasion for acting” in that person’s life. In this same fashion, if Christians break the covenant of Love that Jesus has established amongst those who are His, they will experience a special vulnerability to sickness, weakness and even death.

I Have No Need For You!

As brothers and sisters in the family of God, we must be delivered from particularism. “Particularism” is a lie from the Gates of Hell that...

Whatever our church does has spiritual value.

Whatever other churches do is not my concern at all (and is probably of no value anyway.)

We’re are sufficient unto ourselves – we don’t need others!

We do need others! Hear what Paul says to us:

1 Cor. 12.12–13, 20–21 – For just as the [human] body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, *so it is with Christ*. For by *one* Spirit we were all baptized into *one* Body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of *one* Spirit...

As it is, there are *many parts* yet *one body*. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”

Paul’s teachings here are *non-optional*. If you are a leader in the Body of Christ, Paul does not give you in terms of others who share the same Blood as you. If you are a member of Jesus Christ’s true Church, within these words the Apostle Paul is commissioning *you* to reach out across any walls and barriers to manifest your oneness with any and every member of the Body of Christ God in your proximity.

Over half a century ago, the Chinese minister, Watchman Nee explained that to “need one another” doesn’t mean that an individual church cannot labor

individually. It simply means that individual churches cannot consider ministry work as belonging *exclusively to themselves*. Whether they do the work or brothers and sisters in another church do it is no problem anymore – *so long as someone does it*. Whichever church or believers actually do the work of God makes no difference as the glory doesn't go to any particular person or church but all glory goes to the Lord.

The Lord distributes His work to all, and everyone has his share. We must not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. We should be faithful to the portion which the Lord has given each of us; but we should also respect the portion He gives to others.”⁴

Nee goes on to say that many immature Christians “possess a kind of competitive attitude in which they are always comparing what they have with that which others do not have and what they do not have with that which others have. Actually,” Nee explains, “such comparison is absurd... If we are asked which is better – the hand or the eye – we can only answer that the hand and the eye are both good.”⁵

In the powerful book on the church by Chuck Colson, *The Body*,⁶ he tells of a group of young people in Louisville, Kentucky, at Shively Christian Church who understood that the unity of the Body of Christ makes competitiveness meaningless.

These young people of Shively *Christian* Church were fiercely competitive with the young people of Shively *Baptist* Church in all things – especially softball! One week the youth pastor at Shively Christian Church finished a Bible lesson with instructions that the young people were to split up into five groups, each group going out that afternoon to “be Jesus in the city” for the next two hours.

When they came back, the first group had worked for two hours in the yard of an elderly man in the church. The second group bought ice cream treats and delivered them to a number of the church's widows. The third group visited a church member in the hospital and the fourth went to a nursing home to sing.

When the fifth group stood up and announced what they did, everybody groaned. These young people from Shively Christian Church had gone to their archrival, Shively Baptist Church's pastor, and asked if there was something they could do. The pastor sent them to the home of an elderly widow where they mowed grass, raked the yard and trimmed hedges.

⁴ Nee, Watchman; *The Body of Christ*; pub. by Christian Fellowship Pub. Inc., New York; © 1978; p. 15.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Colson, Charles; *The Body*; pub. by Word Pub., Dallas; p. 113.

When they were getting ready to go, the woman called the kids together and thanked them, saying, “I don’t know what I would have done without you. You kids at Shively Baptist Church are always coming to my rescue.”

“Shively *Baptist* Church!” interrupted their youth minister. “I sure hope you set her straight and told her you were from Shively *Christian* Church!”

The kids smiled and said, “Why, no... We really didn’t think it mattered!”

And, of course, they were right.

“Because of this, many are weak and sickly among you, and many have died.”

How many Christians in our churches today, are “weak”, “sickly” or have even “died” because they never clearly discerned the Body of Christ, unwittingly bringing shame and contempt upon Christ? Have you unwittingly aided and abetted the enemy in fostering disharmony and disunity in the Body of Jesus Christ?

Does that seem too harsh?

Just consider any of the shamefully fought battles between and amongst high-profile Christians, churches and denominations, battles that non-Christian media eagerly splash across the TV screens of America. Only those few who are totally caught up in their own religious self-righteousness can claim that these quarrels bring honor to Jesus.

Hear Jesus’ heart:

Jn. 17.20-21 – Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me.

If we are “one” even as the Father and His Son are one, “the world will believe that You have sent Me.”

As Colson points out, the world isn’t paying much attention to our televangelists, our “revivals”, our “Christian bestsellers”, our conferences or our Bible studies: the world is looking at *how we behave*. When the unsaved world fails to see that Jesus’ followers are *one* and fails to see us loving one another – it will never be persuaded to believe that God has truly sent our Savior, Jesus Christ, into the world. Evangelistic efforts are cut off at the knees.

What makes this situation most unacceptable is that its solution, difficult as it might appear, is in fact a simple one. And the Apostle Paul addresses it in his letter to the Ephesians.

Making Every Effort

James Thurber, I believe, is the one who quipped, “It is better to have loafed and lost than never to have loafed at all.”

When I read Paul’s exhortation in Ephesians 4, all I can think is that the Church better quit loafing before all is lost. Read the verses carefully and see if you can spot Paul’s main point. What is it he wants from us? (Look carefully – it may be tricky! Even Peter said Paul’s writings were easily misunderstood!)

Eph. 4.1-6; – I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; *endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* There is **one** body, and **one** Spirit, even as ye are called in **one** hope of your calling; **one** Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism, **one** God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all. [Emphasis mine]

There’s none so blind as he who will not see? There are some who can read the above verse and still not see Paul’s main point – blindingly obvious as it is:

Paul orders us to be one.

Paul orders us to be one.

Paul orders us to be one.

Paul orders us to be one.

Paul orders us to be one.

God orders us to be one.

Recently I came across a statement by J. I. Packer that it’s about time for Christians who believe in the fundamental truths of Scripture to come together

for fellowship and witness regardless of denominational identity. All he's saying is what Paul said in his letter to the Ephesian Christians.

In the first verse, Paul "beseeches" or "begs" us to walk worthy of the "vocation" to which we are called. Whenever I preach on this I have to make sure people read "vocation" here, not "vacation".

God has not called us Christians to a vacation – some "groovy Jesus trip". He's called us *to work*. A vocation is a career, someone's long-term, regular occupation. If a person pumps gas for a summer that's a job; if they buy the station and pump gas the rest of their life that's their vocation.

But if every Believer in Jesus Christ has been divinely enlisted to *go to work*, just what is that work? Let's look at some of the job description Paul throws in here: this vocation requires humility and gentleness towards others, being slow in receiving offense from others and able to hold up under the pressure of other people...

But what's the vocation to which all Believers in Jesus Christ have been called?

Love. To live and walk with others in love. And in so doing, to build up the Body of Christ into full stature!

That's not so easy. What's easy is getting mad at everyone we've got to live around. It's easy to see how other people who consider themselves "Christians" are phonies. It's easy being offended at how the Pastor handles a problem in the church. It's easy getting angry (especially self-righteously angry) when someone else in the church comes against our favorite person or program.

How true it is that it's hard to soar like eagles when you live with a bunch of turkeys.

I remember hearing of an old southern preacher who was a bit hard of hearing. He was hobbling with his cane down the sidewalk until at the corner he turned and entered the crosswalk on his way over to the general store. A teenager, speeding through town, saw him and hardly slowed as he whipped around the corner and came within a hair's breadth of running the old minister down – just grazing past so the fellow fell backwards into the muddy street. The car sped out of town as the old preacher held his cane high, shaking it and screaming, "You blasted kids! You blankity-blank morons! Don't you know I'm a man of God!"

Doesn't the world know by now that we're "men and women of God"?

How long's it going to take before they realize that we Christians – Children of the Most High God – reflect in our daily lives the Savior of this World, the Conqueror of Evil, the Shepherd of Love?

It won't take long – as soon as we start doing it. As soon as we *get to work* and get our *vocation* out of the mud. After all, it isn't as if Paul's command here is complicated: "Endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

I remember hearing another translation which says, "*Make every effort* to keep the unity in the bond of peace." The New English Bible says we're to "spare no effort". *Make every effort* doesn't guarantee success. Some brothers and sisters simply won't obey God and cooperate. But if there's any lack, let it be on the part of another and not myself. Meanwhile, I'll "make every effort..."

In his book, *Expository Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians*, Leon Morris comments on verse three, "keep the unity":

Paul now turns to the importance of Christian unity (v. 3). This is not the achievement of believers; it is something that is done for them by Christ. They are not commanded to bring this unity about, for Christ has done this. They are to "keep" it, that is, to ensure that it continues. That believers are to bear with one another surely implies that sometimes they will not see eye to eye and that one believer will think that another is in error. Though among other [secular] groups that might be thought cause for quarrels, that is not the way Christians should behave. When we consider the grievous quarrels believers have had with one another through the centuries, it is clear that some of us have given insufficient attention to the apostle's injunction. But whatever mistakes believers have made, that is no cause for us to forsake the command Paul gives. Unity among believers is of first importance and we are to show diligence in maintaining it. There may be occasions when we cannot succeed, but that should never be our fault. We should all put forth our best effort and be diligent to maintain unity.

I am not denying that sometimes the differences between believers have been so strong that schism was the necessary result. Nor am I denying that in the modern church it is sometimes necessary for a strong stand to be made in the face of firm opposition from other believers. But I am saying that nothing gives us license to ignore the apostle's direction. Whatever be the case with other people, and no matter where there are divergent opinion, nothing gives us license to cease to act in love or to let unity slip away.⁷

⁷ Morris, Leon; *Expository Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians*, pub. by Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI; © 1994; p.115.

So, what do we do?

Make every effort.

Looking for a Loophole

There's got to be a loophole.

"Paul's only talking about me loving the people in my own church."

Actually, that's not much of a loophole. Can you promise to "keep the unity in the bond of peace" even within the four walls of your own church? Show me that blessed, peaceful church and I'll join it! I belong to the best church I've ever been in my whole life but we still need "make every effort" to keep unity amongst ourselves.

More to the point, Paul's words here in his letter to the Ephesians cannot be circumscribed by the four walls of a church. "There is one body," means that he's addressing the Church, the Body of Christ. He's not just addressing the Ephesian Christians since it'd be foolish to think they encompassed the entirety of the "one body" to which Paul referred.

The Ephesian Christians were part of that "one body" – and so are *all those who have in faith are in Christ*. As Paul says in the opening of Ephesians four...

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

For two thousand years and twenty centuries, every man, woman and child of the uncounted thousands and tens of thousands who has in faith called upon Jesus Christ to save them are one.

That's it. One.

And they still are today.

The faithless rejection of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace that characterizes Christian after Christian, church after church and denomination after denomination is a faithless rejection of the miraculous reality of oneness brought about by the Spirit of God through the Body and Blood of Christ.

But isn't there ever a "right" time to exclude a person from fellowship with the church?

Paul does make a couple of clear-cut exceptions to our maintaining fellowship. They're not any "loophole" though. In fact Paul's exceptions are designed *specifically to maintain the unity of the Body!*

Rom. 16.17-18; – Now I beg of you, brethren, take note of those who cause divisions and hindrances contrary to the teachings which all of you have learned, and *avoid them*. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. [My paraphrase.]

1 Cor. 5.9-13; – I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you *not to keep company*, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.... Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. (My italics)

This is the vital point: In both instances, to ignore the wickedness of any of these "brothers" would bring increasing division in the church. The "brother" who actively works against unity is to be carefully watched and avoided. The "brother" who without apparent conscience pursues a sinful lifestyle – dangerous to our corporate life in Christ – is to be put away from fellowship.

In his book, *One Body In Christ*, Kokichi Kurosaki makes a distinction between those who *call* themselves "Christians" and those who *are* Christians. He challenges us to understand that this separation – "marking" and "avoiding" – is *not amongst Christians*:

Such "believers", if they prove incorrigible, will have to be considered as *unbelievers* (Mt 18. 15-17;). However, such separation is not among Christians, but is rather the expulsion of those who cannot be accepted as Christians in spite of what they profess.... There is a fundamental difference between immorality or Christ-denying doctrine and the variations in doctrine or practice found among individual Christians who basically have Christ as the center of their faith. While the former will corrupt

and destroy the Body of Christ, the latter will make up the completeness of it.⁸

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also gives instruction on “excluding brethren” from a different angle:

Mt. 7.15–21; – Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither [can] a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven.

Notice, though, Jesus is not saying here, “Mark them and shun them.” His point here isn’t to judge these “spiritual leaders” *in order to condemn them*. His point is for you to judge the spiritual fruit in their lives *so you won’t follow them*. Leave condemnation to the Righteous Judge.

⁸ Kurosaki , Kokichi; One Body In Christ,; pub. by Voice Christian Publications, Inc.; Northridge CA; © 1968; p. 58.

What God Has Cleansed, Call Thou Not Common

What, then, does it mean to “make every effort”?

In The Message to the Ephesians, Stott says,

[Paul says to] be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This is a very strange exhortation. Paul first describes the church’s unity as “the unity of the Spirit” (meaning a unity which the Holy Spirit creates.) Next, he argues that this unity is as indestructible as God himself. But then, in the same context, he also tells us that we have to *maintain* it! What can he mean? What is the sense of urging the “maintenance” of something “indestructible”, and of urging us to maintain it, when it is a “unity of the Spirit”, which He created and is therefore presumably Himself responsible for preserving?

There seems to be but one possible answer to these questions, namely that to maintain the church’s unity must mean to maintain it *visibly*. Here is an apostolic exhortation to us to preserve in actual concrete relationships of love (in the bond of peace, that is, by the peace which binds us together) that unity which God has created and which neither man nor demon can destroy. We are to demonstrate to the world that the unity we say exists indestructibly is not

the rather sick joke it sounds but a true and glorious reality.⁹ [Emphasis mine.]

The church I've pastored for years now lies about seven or eight miles from the largest Native American reservation in California – the Hoopa Reservation. On this reservation they have a number of churches: one Baptist, one Assembly of God, one Church of God of Prophecy, one Roman Catholic, one Full Gospel Tabernacle, one Presbyterian and others – including several home churches. And in my town we have churches from Village Missions, the Nazarenes, the Assemblies of God and Gospel Outreach.

Trying to picture this mix of denominations, I'm reminded of Peter's vision in which he saw – lowered down from heaven – a huge net. Shocked, Peter felt repulsed to see “all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air and all manner of beasts both common and unclean including Presbyterians and Pentecostals and Roman Catholics and Baptists... And God spoke and said, ‘What God hath cleansed, that call thou not common.’” [Acts 10. 12ff; my paraphrase!]

Within each of these organizations there are people who are religious but not true Believers in Jesus Christ. But within each of these organizations there are people who are true Believers in Jesus Christ. These – these who in Heaven's Reality are united in the Blood of Jesus – these are one with us and we cannot disregard them as though we have no need of them.

1 Cor. 12.21 - “Can the eye say to the hand, I have no need of thee?”

Here's what pricks me: can the largely Anglo churches in my hometown of Willow Creek say to the largely Native American churches on the reservation, “We have no need of you”? Can the largely Native American churches on the reservation say to the largely white churches in Willow Creek, “We have no need of you”?

The Apostle Paul's answer, obviously, is, “No!”

But have I tried to “make every effort” to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace with these many brothers and sisters? Have I made every effort available to me to manifest the unity that is ours in Christ with these brothers and sisters – that the world may be persuaded that the Father has sent His Son, Jesus, as Savior into the world?

The answer is largely – no.

Is the “spiritual unity” amongst the followers of Jesus Christ in our community so clearly manifest to non-believers who daily eyeball the lives of professed Christians that they believe that God “hast sent” Jesus?

⁹ Stott, op. cit.; p. 152.

Not so much that anyone would notice.

I've made a few attempts: trying to get ministers from both my town and Hoopa together for fellowship at a Minister's Breakfast. (That happened once.) I've participated in an all night vigil of prayer and fasting with six or seven ministers from both communities. (Once successfully. The next time it ended in a group quarrel.) Later, I supported bringing an excellent instructor on "Spiritual Warfare" to the reservation for an inter-church seminar. (Once.)

In fact, my hope to build a bridge between off-reservation and reservation Christians has, in itself, been naive. Recently, the local school district hired me to facilitate some public forums throughout the school district. I already knew that many Native American Christians have cultivated powerful feelings of offense against Anglos for the attempted genocide of their people a century and a half ago. What I did not know is that many native Christians have concocted a form of Christianity that allows them to hang onto racial hatred and still "do church". A generation ago in the American south (where my parents are from), white churches still had a form of Christianity that allowed whites and blacks to stay apart from one another – and defend the separation as "godly".

In Revelation 7.9, it says,

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, *from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues*, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." [My emphasis.]

Again, if we're going to stand together before Jesus Christ at the gates of eternity, we better work on it now.

That just about covers my twenty years in this area. I may have forgotten a thing here or there, but I don't think I can claim to have "made every effort" to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

But I know what God's calling for. He's calling for a lot more. He's calling for the community of Believers in Jesus Christ to reach out over organizational barriers and self-satisfied walls of isolation to manifest the unity that is theirs already in the Body and Blood of Christ! Actually, it might be better to say that God's not calling for us so much to erase denominational barriers as to relate to one another in love despite barriers of denomination, doctrine, race, culture, etc. And He's calling for something else – He's calling for me to do a lot more reaching, too.

A Pox On Church Unity!

As a young conservative Baptist in the 60's, I read lots of tracts on the Red Plague of Communism and the threat of the World Council of Churches. The pamphlets were inflammatory and filled with extravagant accusations against "enemies" ranging from Khrushchev to the President of the United States to Billy Graham to numerous church organizations.

Over the years, I been able to sort a lot of stuff out and am glad to say I now have the highest respect for Billy Graham.

Much of the rest of it seems to have been fairly accurate though! Communism really was trying to grab as much real estate throughout the world as it could – denying God, closing churches and persecuting Christians all the way. And the World Council of Churches has maintained the same, irrational goal as it ever did: that of trying to unify church *organizations*.

People who spend a great deal of effort on trying to bring two or more church traditions together on the basis of watering down their creeds to some low common denominator have missed the point.

The Body of Christ is one Body. It doesn't need to become one because it is one.

We already are one. When we're "in Christ" we *are* one.

Our unity is a completed fact.

The problem which remains is not *how* to become united but *when to honor it*.

The basis of our union is the *reality* of being in Christ. When a person believes in Jesus, according to Paul in Romans 6, the Holy Spirit baptizes that person "into Jesus Christ" and becomes one with Jesus. Thus, when I believe in Christ

and am made one with Him, Jesus' death becomes my death; Jesus' resurrection becomes my resurrection; Jesus' new life and His victory over sin and death becomes my new life and my victory over sin and death.

I've never felt comfortable with trying to make the word "baptism" here in Romans 6 apply simply to water baptism. The transformations brought about this "baptism" are too great to be caused by *water* – only by *faith* and *the Power of God*.

The Greek word for "baptism" is *baptizo* meaning "to be immersed." According to James Montgomery Boice, the word *baptizo* shouldn't be mixed up with the word *bapto* for "dip". He writes,

The clearest example that shows the meaning of *baptizo* is a text from the Greek poet and physician Nicander, who lived about 200 BC. It is a recipe for making pickles and is helpful because it uses both words. Nicander says that in order to make a pickle, the vegetable should first be 'dipped' (*bapto*) into boiling water and then 'baptized' (*baptizo*) in the vinegar solution. Both verbs concern the immersing of vegetables in a solution. But the first is temporary. The second, the act of "baptizing" the vegetable, produces a permanent change. When baptism is used in the New Testament, this word more often refers to our union and identification with Christ than to our water baptism. Consider this, for example: in Mark 16:16 it reads, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved". Christ is actually saying that mere intellectual assent ["believes"] is not enough. There must be a *union* with him ["baptized"], a real change, like the vegetable to the pickle!¹⁰

My brother-in-law, Steve Peters – has used a memorable illustration of *baptizo* drawn from one of the common uses of the word in Paul's day. When a person dyed cloth, he took perhaps some wool cloth – dingy gray – and "baptized it", dipping into a vat of dye. If the dye were red, the cloth of course came out of the vat red. The fabric and the dye were inextricably and permanently united. The red could not be taken out nor the wool separated from the dye. So are we when the Holy Spirit responds to the cries of faith from sinners and *baptizes* them *into Jesus Christ* – His death, resurrection, victory and the whole ball of wax becomes theirs through their *union in Christ*.

This is why, when trying to put an end to the Corinthian Christians' disharmony, Paul turned to the Lord's Table in 1 Corinthians 11. How could they not discern, *not recognize*, the unity of Christ's body? By thinking so little or nothing of those with whom they were united by Christ's Blood and made

¹⁰ Boice, James Montgomery; "Bible Study Magazine"; May 1989. Italics mine.

one, they opened themselves up to sickness and even death! By neglecting a brother's hunger while they feasted, they *denied their very identification with Christ*.

And so it is today.

We must not take lightly Paul's command to "make every effort". We must not casually set aside Christ's declared purpose in His High Priestly prayer that we all be one even as He and His Father are one. The longer we leave up barriers of self-righteous judgment, of culture, of denomination, of race or of divisionary habit so that the world is unable to see the *reality* of the Body of Christ – united, one heart and one mind – the longer we Christians will remain ineffective and absurd in the face of this world's need.

The Myth of Organizational Unity

The World Council of Churches (WCC) was formally constituted on Aug. 23, 1948 at Amsterdam by an assembly of 147 churches from 44 countries. Most participants were Protestant liberals – many of whom denied the deity of Christ, His Virgin Birth, His work of salvation on the Cross or even His historical existence. At that same conference the WCC adopted its motto: ONE WORLD – ONE CHURCH.

The fallacy is their *method*: remove any barrier to combining all Christian organizations into one, great world organization. But Jesus never prayed that all who believed on His Name would form one denominational organization. He prayed that “they all may be one; as You, Father, are one in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that You have sent me.”

Understand this:

If a person joins a *church*, he’s united only with the members of that church organizationally.

If a person joins a *denomination*, he’s united only with the members of that denomination organizationally.

But if a person becomes *one with Jesus Christ*, he’s united with every other person throughout all time and throughout the entire world who has also become one with Jesus Christ. Such a person has not joined an organization but an organism.

The unity Jesus prays for is not *organizational* but *spiritual*. When church leaders come together at the WCC and try to resolve doctrinal disagreements in order to combine organizations, that oneness is not the same kind of oneness

that exists between Jesus and His Father. Jesus and His Father do not *belong to the same organization* and they do not *subscribe to the same statement of faith or ecclesiastical liturgies*.

In his book, *The Gospel of John*, James Montgomery Boice refers back to history to illustrate the failure of organizational unity. He writes:

In the early days of the church there was much vitality and growth but little organizational unity. Later, as the church came to favor under Constantine and his successors, the church increasingly centralized until during the Middle Ages there was literally one united ecclesiastical body covering all Europe. Wherever one went – whether north, east, south or west – there was one united, interlacing church with the pope at its head. But was this a great age? Was there a deep unity of faith? Was the church strong? Was its morality high? Did men and women find themselves increasingly drawn to this faith and come to confess Jesus Christ to be their Savior and Lord (for this is what Christ promised, that if the church were one, men and woman would believe on Him)? Not at all! On the contrary, the world believed the opposite.¹¹

Jesus and His Father are *one*.

When people have gotten off track in trying to combine religious organizations, they've missed the point again: if you're "in Christ" you're *already, unavoidably, inextricably one* with all others who are "in Christ".

So we're not talking *mergers*. We're talking *love* for the brethren, the cessation of hostilities and repentance from religious pride and particularism.

¹¹ Boice, James Montgomery; *The Gospel of John*, pub. by Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI; © 1978; p. 439.

What About Doctrinal Distinctions?

Should we just ignore our differences in belief? Should we fellowship with anyone and everyone who claims to be a “Christian”?

This is important: There will never be an authentic, printed, wallet-sized membership card for those who are “in Christ” – we must learn to recognize them by their love. After all, their love is the test John applies in his first letter. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.”¹²

About ten years ago, apparently hundreds of pastors and churches received a free video in the mail from Sun Yung Moon’s Unification Church. I watched part of one video with astonishment. Here’s a cult that to my understanding believes its leader is the reincarnation of Jesus Christ, and yet in its promotional video it made itself sound like an conservative evangelical church group. I think it even called members of the cult, “Christians”.

John Stott addresses the issue of “authentic” Christianity when he explains,

There is room for differences of conviction among us as to the precise form or forms in which God wants Christian unity to be expressed. But we should all be eager for some visible expression of Christian unity, provided always that we do not sacrifice fundamental Christian truth in order to achieve it. Christian unity arises from our having one Father, one Savior, and one indwelling Spirit. So we cannot possibly foster a unity which pleases God either if we deny the doctrine of the Trinity or if we have not come personally to know God the Father through the reconciling work

¹² 1Joh 3.14: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death."

of his Son Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Authentic Christian 'unity' in truth, life and love is far more
important than 'union' schemes of a structural kind...¹³

True Believers in Jesus Christ share a common group of beliefs – all drawn from Scripture. These include such fundamentals as the Virgin Birth of Jesus, His deity, the effectiveness of His substitutionary death on the Cross for our sins, His bodily resurrection, the authority of Scripture, the Second Coming of Christ and our eternal hope.

Believing in Jesus Christ, a person is then baptized by the Holy Spirit into Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Spirit that person is led into the truth of Jesus Christ. Anyone who denies these clear cut, Biblical views is not being led by the Holy Spirit into Truth but is being led by the Father of Lies into spiritual deception.

When we speak of “Christian brothers and sisters”, we’re not thinking of Christians as members of variously ordered and directed “Christian organizations”. Nor are we thinking of Christians as people who seem to represent some manner of “Christian piety” or hold to a “Christian outlook”. People can belong to organizations, live “piously”, hold to a Biblical morality, and yet never be “in Christ”. What we have in view are those who – having responded in faith to the Good News of Jesus Christ – have by the Spirit of God been united with Christ; forever one with Him and one with all the others who have likewise by faith entered into the Body of Christ. This is not doctrine, not organization. This is *the reality of relationship with Christ*. Those who are in relationship with Jesus are in a relationship of unity with all others “in Christ”.

This unity must be kept despite the reality that ultimately no one can say for sure which others are or are not “in Christ” and, therefore, or are not brothers and sisters. Only God knows who His people are. People we’ve always thought to be brethren may turn out to be false brethren.

In His parable of the field in which an enemy sowed weeds, Jesus similarly taught that trying to go on such “hunts”, to “root out” the “phony Christians” would do more damage than good. In the parable, the servants who discovered the weeds asked, “Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?” But the owner of the field said, “Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.’”¹⁴

How, then, are we to act to those who claim to be Believers in Jesus Christ?

¹³ Stott, op. cit., pp. 154–155.

¹⁴ Mt 13.24–30.

We're to act in faith, in hope and in love.

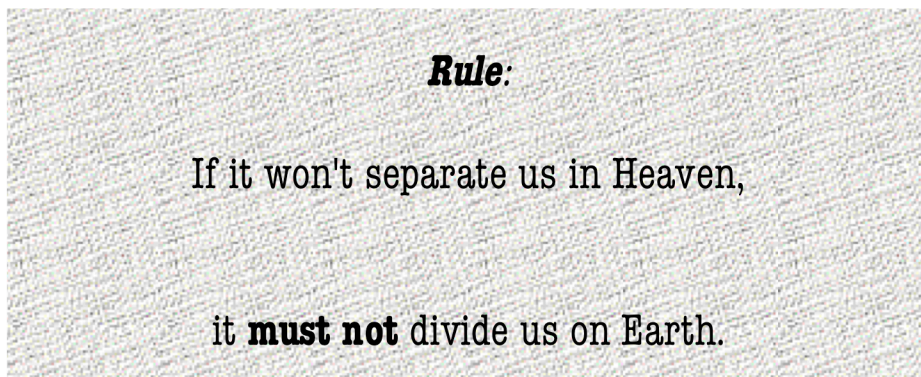
We're to look for God's opportunities for manifesting our unity in Him; we're to expect to find Spirit-filled communion with the others who are also "in Christ". We may be reluctant, even disappointed at times, but in faith we prepare to stretch out our hands with a willingness to trust, to be one with them and together call upon the Lord.

Those standing at the Judgment Seat of Christ – proven truly to be "in Christ" – form a vast group. These are our brothers and sisters. This is the Body of Christ within which there will always be ecclesiastical or doctrinal distinctions but no spiritual divisions and no hindrances to love one for one another.

Over two centuries ago, James Boswell (the famous biographer of Dr. Samuel Johnson) once came into Johnson's house in a passionate, angry state of mind. To Johnson, he explained how, mere moments before, he'd been rebuffed rudely by a certain person.

But Boswell cooled down when his friend Johnson merely laughed and said, "Consider, sir, how insignificant this will appear twelve months from now!"

We need this same attitude towards the multitude of things that arise to threaten our "keeping unity". Anytime something does arise, we would do well to heed Dr. Johnson's advice: Stop and consider how insignificant that disagreement or offense will appear when we're standing in front of the Great White Throne of Christ in Eternity.



Seventeenth century preacher and author, John Bunyan, wrote about ministers who – rather than making every effort to keep unity – take every opportunity to peck and scratch it away. He says,

O, how have some men made it their business to preach contentions; and upon their entertainment of every novel opinion to preach separation! How hath God's word been stretched and torn, to furnish these men with arguments to tear churches! Have not our ears heard those texts, that say, "Come out from among them, and be separate," and "Withdraw from every brother that

walketh disorderly,” – I say, have we not heard these texts that were written to *prevent* disorder, brought in to countenance the greatest disorder that ever was in the church of God, even schism and division.¹⁵

¹⁵ Bunyan, John; *Christian Behavior: A Holy Life The Beauty of Christianity: The Fear of God: and An Exhortation to Unity and Peace to Which is Added A Caution to Watch Against Sin*; pub. by American Baptist Society, Philadelphia; repub. in 1970 by Reiner Publications, Swengel, PA; no ©; p. 32.

What About Traditional Differences in Worship?

Some people jump to the conclusion that all churches have to worship the same, think the same and have the same kind of church services.

I'm sure glad they don't.

John Stott makes this point clear:

Although there is only one body, one faith and one family, this unity is not to be misconstrued as a lifeless or colorless uniformity. We are not to imagine that every Christian is an exact replica of every other, as if we had all been mass-produced in some celestial factory. On the contrary, the unity of the church, far from being boringly monotonous, is exciting in its diversity. This is not just because of our different cultures, temperaments and personalities... but because of the different gifts which Christ distributes for the enrichment of our common life.¹⁶

For years, I've been richly satisfied with the style of worship in my church. But I'm still fond of slipping into a Black church given the opportunity. Parnell Lovelace in Sacramento, California pastors one of my favorite churches. How my spirit and soul rejoices to sit under his preaching – *“Come on, my Babies! I'm talking to you!”* – and his church's worship – wild and wonderful as it is!

But I doubt I'll ever preach like that and I know I'll never be able to sing or dance like that!

I have Christian brothers and sisters who would feel uncomfortable as well in our church. Our service is informal; its worship is sometimes rowdy what with

¹⁶ Stott, op. cit.; p. 155.

handclapping, dancing and flag waving and then sometimes it's very, very still. But brothers and sisters and I are still one in Christ even if they prefer what they consider a "more respectful" and quieter service.

In his book, *One Body In Christ*, Kokichi Kurosaki writes from his perspective as a Japanese Christian who has viewed missionaries in *competition* instead of *collaboration*. He says,

We should not deny or seek to avoid the fact of variety in doctrinal and practical matters....The different emphases of many denominations and sects are *not* bad in themselves. These very differences would profit the whole Body if each group would only be humble enough to recognize the value of the others, instead of making their differences the basis of exclusivism and separation... If we will *respect* different tendencies, in love for each other, this variety of the local groups of Christians will contribute to the Body of Christ, rather than hurt it.¹⁷

Such variations are healthy. God provides them in order to broaden the outreach of the church. The Apostle Paul went from chapter 11 – demanding a respect for the oneness of Christ's Body – to chapter 12 in which he lays out God's plan for the most incredible diversity possible – ultimate variation within unequivocal unity of God's Spirit.

1 Cor. 12.4–6 – Now there are [differences] of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

The word "differences" used three times is the Greek word *diairesis* and it means "a distinction or a difference; in particular, a distinction arising from different distributions to different persons".¹⁸ Paul says that the *one Holy Spirit* is divinely responsible for this variety.

"There is..."

one Spirit, but differences in "gifts": *charisma* or God's "grace or gifts denoting extraordinary powers, distinguishing certain Christians and enabling them to serve the church of Christ, the reception of which is due to the power of divine grace operating on their souls by the Holy Spirit."¹⁹

¹⁷ Kurosaki, op. cit.; pp. 54–55.

¹⁸ Strong's #1243.

¹⁹ Strong's #5486.

one Spirit, but differences in “administrations”: *diakonia* or “service, ministering.”²⁰

one Spirit, but differences in “operations”: *energema* or “the thing wrought” or worked upon; that which is brought about by work.²¹

Here what Paul is saying? He’s saying,

“There is unity but differences...”

“There is unity but differences...”

“There is unity but differences...”

In his wonderful little book on unity, *One Body in Christ*, Kokichi Kurosaki explains concerning these differences in unity:

[Paul has given] a strong admonition against the sectarian spirit of the churches. The God-given differences, which should contribute to the fullness of the one Body, have become cause of division instead of unity. Each sect and denomination has its own institution and creeds. When there is a difference among the members of a church, some of them separate themselves from their fellow-Christians and form their own institution and creed. Such an institution and creed clearly distinguishes that group from the others and thus becomes the cause of division.²²

As soon as God makes all men and women the same, all local church services will be the same. If someone speaks Spanish, it’s not a sin for him to go to a church whose preacher preaches in Spanish. If someone enjoys expressing emotion, it’s not a sin for him to go to a church whose services allow for the free expression of emotion in worship.

But it is a sin when Christians write off as useless or insignificant the Christians in other churches who do speak Tagalog or are another race or prefer a more somber, liturgical service.

Can we say of one another, “Stay away! Keep your distance! You have offended me! I have judged you and found you wanting! Our traditions are different! Your worship is strange! I have no need of you!”

Not according to Paul.

²⁰ Strong's #1248.

²¹ Strong's #1755.

²² Kurosaki, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

Profaning the Covenant of Our Fathers

In his third letter, John (the Apostle of Love) cries out,

1 Jn. 3.1 – Look at this! What manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we are called children of God! [My paraphrase.]

What manner of love is this? It's the *same kind* of love we're to manifest amongst ourselves as children in His Family.

All families have their times – good and bad. I heard someone once say that being in a family is like having a bowling alley in your head. Things can get rowdy on occasion. But families portray unshakable, committed, multiple relationships better than any other human institution. This is why God uses the picture of a Family to point us in the direction of what kind of relationships we're to have as followers of Jesus Christ.

In Malachi 2, the prophet's protest to the Jews is that they're all one family. They have one father – God who created them all. So, since we're just one family, Malachi asks,

Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our ancestors? [Mal. 2.10.]

This same challenge applies to the Church today: Are we not God's children ("and so we are")? Why then do we "pollute" the greater covenant of the Blood of Jesus?²³

The word here in Malachi translated "faithless" is the Hebrew *bagad* and according to Strong's it can mean several things: to act or deal treacherously, faithlessly, deceitfully; to offend."²⁴

What Malachi is here saying is, "Okay, boys. Let's have a little talk here. Aren't we all members of the same family? Then where's your faithfulness to one another as brothers!"

The word for "profaning" the covenant is Hebrew *chalalto*: to profane, defile, pollute or desecrate."²⁵ It means to make it common, unimportant, a "little thing". And the "covenant" referred to here is the agreement made between God and their father, Abraham.

Back in Genesis, God promised Abraham that He would cause his wife, Sarah, to miraculously bear a child and from that child would come countless multitudes of children. Furthermore, God promised that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through his offspring – and since Jesus is physically descended from Abraham, then truly all the nations have been blessed!

²³ Some people don't understand how *fundamental* the concept of "covenant" is to the work of Christ. And thus they don't realize that to violate this Covenant is to "violate" Jesus Christ Himself. Consider these verses about His New Covenant:

Luke 22.20: In the same way, after the supper He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you."

1Cor. 11.25: In the same way, after supper He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

Heb. 10.29: How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified Him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

²⁴ Strong's #0898.

²⁵ Strong's #02490.

This promise of a family was a wonderful thing for Abraham. In Gen 17.17ff, just before destroying Sodom and Gomorra, God visited him. He asked the angels accompanying Him, “Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For *I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord*, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him.”

God selected Abraham for a particular reason: *He knew Abraham would establish a pattern in his descendants*, a pattern of honoring and obeying the Lord that would last through the generations and thus prepare the way for Jesus, the Messiah.

Through Abraham, God created the Most Important Family on Earth.

Now, according to Paul, we’re children in that same Family by our faith. We, also, are Abraham’s children even as Isaac was:

Gal. 3.7 – Know ye therefore that they, which are of faith, the same, are the children of Abraham.

Malachi’s point was that by treating one another selfishly and treacherously rather than in love, the Jews in his day were “polluting” the great covenant God had made with Abraham. And the point for today and now is that when we separate ourselves from one another as children in God’s Family, despise one another, quarrel and even hate one another – not only do we despise the Body of Christ and the Family of God but we *pollute* our Covenant in Christ’s Blood!

No wonder many are weak, sick and some have even died!

(Abba, Father!)

Rom 8.15–16 – All of you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but you have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, “Abba, Father!” The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

Father!

The “Father” upon whom we call as divine children is not called “Father” *symbolically*. I read once that “intellectually honest” Christians “in fact” realize “deep down” that God’s only an idea or some Platonic pattern of “perfect fatherhood”. This is not true. The truth is that deep down, Transcendent God really is Father.

As Father, He’s the founder and head of a family – a group of beings related by nature both to Him and to one another. God’s family is as real to Him as any earthly family. No one can call on Him as “Father” who is in any sense unwilling to call His other children “brother” and “sister”. When a person

refuses to love, he is dishonoring and rejecting the Father and rejecting His Family.

John warns of this:

1 Jn. 4.20-21 – If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

On this same line, James Montgomery Boice says,

Salvation is described in the verses that use this image as God begetting spiritual children, who are therefore made members of His spiritual family through His choice and not through their own... This fact has two important consequences. First, if the family to which we belong has been established by God, then we have no choice as to who will be in it or whether or not we will be his or her sister or brother. On the contrary, the relationship simply exists, and we must be brotherly to the other Christian, whether we want to be or not.

The second consequence is related to this, simply that we must be committed to each other in tangible ways.²⁶

The carnal mind is quick to shift the ground of its argument. When Christians begin to take seriously the divine call to receive as brothers and sisters those who have been despised, it then raises the question, “Just who are qualified to be His children?”

²⁶ Boice, op. cit., p. 441.

Who's "Qualified" to be God's Child?

Consider this: for any of us to call God "Father" is presumptuous for people who were once His "enemies" – people living selfish lives, rebellion and bondage to sin. Certainly, we can fall down and cry, "God! Be merciful to me a sinner!" But is it legitimate for us to stand so full of brass and casually call out, "Hey, Dad!?" He, the Creator, and we but creatures?

Our calling upon God as "Father" doesn't come from any special "fitness" in and of ourselves. This privilege comes to us *despite* our lack of fitness. That we can call upon God as "Father" arises solely out of His gracious initiative as John again explains:

1 Jn. 4.19 – We love Him, because He first loved us.

There was no initiative on our part. People become Christians not by loving God but by God loving them.

1 Jn. 4.10 – Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

We call Him "Father" because He first loved us and through the blood of His Son, cleansed us of our sins and enabled us to be acceptable to Him. But He went further in His love – more than "washing" His earthly creatures, He "adopted" us and so what qualifies us to be God's children is His great love.

1 Jn. 4. 11 – Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

Along this same line, Karl Barth observes,

Men become and are God's children, then, by God's grace, which is his possibility and not theirs, by the goodness of the Father. It is not originally intrinsic to them, nor is it accessible to their own grasping... Rather, it is freely intended for them and addressed

and promised to them, as this grace and goodness becomes a present event in their life and thought... so that they acquire thereby the genuine freedom to cry, "Father."²⁷

Members of the Body of Christ cannot look suspiciously at other members who are in different denominations or social classes or races and disdain them due to some self-styled rules of unacceptability – because we were all unacceptable until God poured His love out upon us. So He tells us that we are to treat one another with that same divine love that we have received – and the “transformation” which God’s love worked upon us then may work “transformations” in the lives of those whom we love as we were loved. So Peter declares,

1 Pet. 4. 8 – And above all things have fervent [love] among yourselves: for [love] shall cover the multitude of sins.

²⁷ Barth, Karl, *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatic IV, 4 Lecture Fragments*; translated by Geoffrey W. Brimley; pub. by Eerdmans Pub. Co., Grand Rapids, Mich.; © 1981. p. 73.

Our Father, Who Art in Heaven

Jesus teaches us to pray, “Our Father, Who art in heaven...”

Notice though, Jesus doesn’t say, “Pray in this manner – ‘My Father...’”

We’re instructed to call on God not as one child of God in the singular but as a child amongst the Children. Jesus says to retire into a place of solitude (our “closet”) to pray, yet even when most alone, we pray as one amongst a group. “*Our Father...*”

Our “prayer path” to God is a *communal* or *collaborative* path. We cannot walk it alone. “Our Father...”

What then happens to our “prayer path” to God if we inwardly divorce ourselves from the rest of the Body of Christ, disdaining to love all those who are His? Peter sheds light on this:

1 Pet. 3.7 – Likewise, husbands, live with your wives with understanding and compassion, giving honor unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered. [My paraphrase.]

Here are two (husband and wife) whom God has certainly designed to be one – to care for one another selflessly. But when this union is not respected, when they no longer approach the Father in prayer as one, their prayers are hindered.

The oneness between husband and wife and the oneness amongst God’s people are not significantly different, as both unions are virtually alike according to Paul who says,

Eph. 5.29-32 – No man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of His body. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

Notice here one of the most incredible revelations of the end times: Paul brings forth the ancient marriage formula from Adam in the Garden – “leaving’ and “cleaving”. Is he talking about men and women? Subsequent “Adams” and “Eves”?

No. He’s talking about Jesus Christ and His Bride, the Church.

See this: “This mystery is a profound one...” What “mystery”? The mystery of a man leaving his father and mother and being joined to his wife to become one flesh. *This* is the “mystery”. But then Paul says that the “mystery” refers to the marital union of “Christ and the church”.

Again, I say, the oneness between husband and wife and the oneness amongst God’s people are not significantly different. Any person, allowing a hindrance to the union between himself and his spouse, will experience a hindrance in prayer between he and God.

Furthermore, Jesus warns that if a brother knows of an offense another brother has against him, he must not offer a sacrifice to God but must first leave it beside the altar, go and be reconciled before he returns to complete his offering to God. (Mt. 5.23-24)

But why does Jesus require this?

Because, God does not wink at disharmony in the Body of Christ. Because of disharmony, “many are sick, weak and dead.”

(Is this true?)

(Is this the Scripture?)

(Does the Scripture mean anything?)

In Paul’s letter to Corinth, he referred to real people – people who had become sick, weak or even died. The disharmony we see in our life and the lives of other professing Christians must result in sickness, weakness and death – whether or not we recognize it’s the Hand of Father God trying to bring correction to His Family.

Cutting across all barriers raised by men of race or nation, denomination or society and standing out against all other divisions, there arises in this world the Children of Light – the community of people who have the freedom and the right to call upon God as “Father”. They are a people – not an organization. They are a people freed of sin and death who are *related, mutually responsible*

and *united* to one another. Again, Barth says (but first take a deep breath, then read carefully):

[The Body of Christ] is not a heap of individual existences which, brought together by social need, binds itself by common agreement for a common purpose. It is the *plurality* of people who, individually, in virtue of the gathering, upbuilding, and enlightening unity of the Father who reveals the Son and the Son who reveals the Father, and in virtue of the awakening and illuminating Spirit of God the Father and the Son, are constituted a *unity*, a totality, by which each individual stands or falls, and in which each individual is in the closest possible relation to the other.²⁸

“The closest possible relationship to each other.” Isn’t this a fair reiteration of Jesus’ words (but first take a deep breath, then read carefully),

Jn. 17.20–23 – Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And the glory which thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made [mature] in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me.

God demands we relate in “the closest possible relationship to each other” – in the same oneness as exists between God as Father and as Son. In his book, *The Gospel According to St. John*, Rudolf Schnakenburg says of this union,

The unity existing between Jesus and the Father is not only the fundamental model for the unity that should exist between believers – it is the basis for making it possible in their lives. Any explanation that points simply to external harmony, reunion or ‘horizontal’ oneness is inadequate. The unity to which this text refers is based on God himself and his love. It is a unity that penetrates believers ‘from above’ and also impels them to be one in brotherly love.²⁹ [My emphasis.]

²⁸ Barth, *ibid*, p. 203.

²⁹ Schnakenburg, Rudolf; *The Gospel According to St. John*; pub. by Crossroad, New York; ©1982; p. 191.

The Gates of Hell

There's yet another astounding weakness in the Body of Christ today.

Jesus directs us to pray as a child amongst the Children of God instead of as one child of God in the singular. So also, Jesus' assurance of victory over the devil are promised to the Body of Christ and not to any one child of God in the singular.

Mt. 16.18 - And I say also unto thee, thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Notice, the assurance of victory is not to a "singular child" but to the Church, the communion of Believers in the Body of Christ. To any who forsake the unity of the Body and go their own way, there is no promise of victory or protection from the enemy.

Even in Paul's classic passage on our protection from demonic assault, his words are addressed to the Body of Christ and not to a singular person within it:

Eph. 6.10-18 - Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that **ye** may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For **we** wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto **you** the whole armor of God that **ye** may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having **your** loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And **your** feet shod with the preparation of the

gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith **ye** shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

Notice first, Paul's address is not to an individual, such as Timothy. He's addressing the entire church. And it cannot be only the church at Ephesus, or all sense is lost in God's recording these words for our sakes. Paul's words are being directed to all the Body of Christ – even to us today.

Not only does Paul begin by addressing the Church as a whole, but then every directive that follows is still addressed to the Church in the plural. Many people when reading the KJV see the word “ye” and think it's just a quaint, old way of writing “you”. It isn't. The KJV translates the pronoun for “you” differently, depending on whether in the Greek it's singular or plural. In the KJV, “you” is usually singular but “ye” is plural. Reread the passage above and notice the pronouns that I made bold: these are all plural pronouns, not referring to “a” child of God singularly but to all the children of God united in the Body of Christ.

A person may choose not to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; he may choose to ignore Paul's admonition to watch and care for “all the saints”; he may turn a blind eye to Jesus' prayer that we all “be one, just as the Father and I are one”. But in so doing, he dishonors the Body of Christ and no longer stands within the protection of God's armor.

Is it any wonder such a person brings “damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.” And that he may become “weak and sickly” and even die?

Show Us the Father

Shortly before Jesus' crucifixion, He spent time helping to prepare His followers for the difficult days ahead. Trying to explain why He'd have to go to be with His Father, in John 14 He told them He was going to prepare places for them in His Father's house.

Jn. 14.5-11 - Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; henceforth you know Him and have seen Him."

Then Philip says to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied."

Jesus says to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I say to you, I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father Who dwells in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me; or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves. [My emphasis.]

God is invisible, according to my experience and John's too.³⁰ Yet, when the disciples looked at Jesus, they were seeing God the Father. But they obviously didn't *know* they were seeing the Father.

³⁰ 1 Jn 4.20: "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

In the same way, we're supposed to be "showing Christ" to the unsaved people around us. When we're doing so, people may not *know* that what they're seeing is Christ – but they'll know something special is going on. Non-believers often react with comments like, "I don't know what it is about you, but whatever it is I want it too!" Other times they may say, "There's something really special about you."

Jesus' disciples didn't know what they were seeing either, but Jesus put His finger on it: "You see Me, you see My Father."

In another place in John, Jesus referred to this divine manifestation. In the last prayer John records prior to the Crucifixion, Jesus prays that we...

Jn. 17.21-23 – ...all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. *And the glory which Thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me.* [My emphasis.]

The glory that the Father gave to Jesus, Jesus has given to us – *that we may be one just as Jesus is with His Father.*

Some people would say, "Great! So, Jesus gave us some 'glory'. Right. Just what I needed. 'Glory'. What's 'glory' anyway? Maybe I'd be happier if He gave me a fat bank account or an El Dorado."

What is this "glory" He's giving to us?

When Jesus first came into this world in the flesh, He came, you might say, "trailing clouds of glory":

Jn. 1.14 – And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

He was flesh and blood, fully a human being, but the "glory" upon Him revealed He was His Father's Son. "Glory" is the term the Bible uses to describe those rare, weird and wonderful occasions we humans can see glimpses in the natural realm of God Himself.

"Glory" in the Bible has had many strange manifestations. After spending time in God's presence, Moses returned from the mountain with his face glowing so brightly it had to be veiled in order not to frighten the congregation in the wilderness. When Solomon dedicated the Temple to God, the glory of God descended and all the priests fell down – much as the soldiers who came to take Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemene all fell to the ground. When the glory of Jesus' eternal and incorruptible body was revealed to Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, they fell down paralyzed before the

unbearable shining light coming from Jesus. So did Paul on the road to Damascus.

We cannot see God directly. In the Old Testament are warnings that to do so would bring death. But we can see God's "glory" – reflections, as it were, of God Himself within our world.

When Jesus came, the Father had given Him His glory. Thus, when people looked at Jesus they saw the Father. Jesus manifested the Father to them.

When Jesus left, He prayed to His Father for that same glory to be given to His followers as well. Paul refers to this "glory" and its results when he says,

2 Cor. 3.17-18 – Now the Lord is that Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face *reflecting as in a mirror* the *glory* of the Lord, are changed *into the same image from glory to glory*, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. [My paraphrase.]

The Father gave His glory to His Son, and whoever looked upon the Son saw the Father. The Son gives His glory to His Followers, and whoever looks upon His followers sees Christ. Because the glory of God is on them, His disciples are like mirrors, reflecting Christ's glory outwardly in ever increasing brightness and accuracy!

In some places of Europe, the streets are centuries old. Built originally for horses and carts, today they are barely large enough for tiny, European compact cars. In pictures, I've seen how some cities have mounted large mirrors at intersections where these tiny lanes cross other roads. As a driver approaches such an intersection, even though he cannot see around the corner, he can look up at the mirror placed well above the road and see any oncoming traffic.

Pretend that you are coming to such an intersection. If around the corner but just out of sight there is a stoplight, in the mirror you can see its reflection. Thus, you can tell if it turns green or red. Even though you're unable to see the stoplight directly, you could "see" it via the mirror.

When Jesus left His home in Heaven and became a flesh and blood human being, He arrived in Bethlehem, bringing with Himself His Father's heavenly glory. Before He left His disciples, He answered His disciples' doubt with, "Having seen Me, you have seen the Father." Jesus was like a "mirror": looking at Him, people saw His Father. Everything Jesus did reflected His Father's will; everything Jesus spoke reflected His Father's Word.

If Jesus had not manifested His unity with His Father, the "reflection" would have disappeared. The "glory" would have been gone.

And why did Jesus do this? Why did He give us His glory? Jesus says,

Jn. 17.23 – *That they may be one, even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me... that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me.* [My emphasis.]

Now Jesus has given us His glory so that through the Holy Spirit *we too can reflect Jesus Christ to the world.*

Jesus didn't ask for God's glory to come upon a person here and a person there! He asked for the glory to be given to the Body. If the Body of Christ does not "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace", it's just as if *the mirror cracked!* The reflection in a cracked mirror is distorted.

And the reflection in a "cracked" Church is distorted – leaving unbelievers unpersuaded. No wonder the world in our day doesn't believe the Father sent Jesus and that God has poured His love out upon us all! All the world sees when it looks at the "one Body" of Jesus Christ is the distorted, broken image of God.

The world cries out, "Show us the Father!" In its thirst it cries, "Show us Jesus!" In its misery, it cries out, "Show us the love of God!"

Can the Church turn to the world and say, "Have we been with you so long, and yet you do not know us, World? He who has seen us has seen Jesus; how can you say, 'Show us Jesus'? Don't you believe that we are one in Christ and Christ one in us?"

Truthfully, the world has not seen the glory of Christ *via* the church's Spiritual unity in the bond of peace.

Yet, our hope is strong. All it takes for the world to be persuaded that God the Father has sent His Son our Savior is a Spiritually united Church. If the Church were to manifest its oneness in affectionate love tomorrow, tomorrow would be the first day in an evangelistic harvest such as this world has never seen.

And the transformation from a disunited, "cracked" Church to a gloriously united Church need not be slow. It takes but a moment – a moment to *recognize* that we who are "in Christ" are one, inseparably one, a moment to *repent* of the variety of ways in which we've denied our oneness in Christ and begin to restore the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace – *then* the world may believe.

How'r Ya Doin', Pilgrim?

In preparing this little book, I came across some of John Bunyan's exhortations to the Body of Christ, preached by him some two hundred years ago. His description of the "fruit of disharmony" is as powerful a kick in the pants today as it was back then. There's no dust on this sermon!

John Bunyan, best known for his allegory of the Christian life, *Pilgrim's Progress*, wrote other books as well. One is entitled *Christian Behavior: A Holy Life The Beauty of Christianity: The Fear of God: and An Exhortation to Unity and Peace to Which is Added A Caution to Watch Against Sin*.³¹

Let's give the stump to an early colonial preacher for one, short chapter.

He says,

Where unity and peace are wanting, *precious time is spent to no purpose*: "How often have many [Christians] redeemed time (even in seed time and harvest) when they could scarce afford it, to go to church; and by reason of these divisions, come home worse than they went, [having] spent their precious time to so little benefit?"

Bunyan brings to mind Paul's admonition in Eph 5.16; to make the most of the time available to us because the days are evil; we're not to waste our time unwisely. According to Bunyan, participating in any divisiveness in the Body of Christ is a waste of precious time, giving the enemy a greater foothold in our lives.

³¹ Bunyan, op. cit. The following quotes are taken from his chapter, "Fruits of Unity and Peace", pp. 16-28.

“Where unity and peace are wanting, *there you will find evil surmising and evil speaking.*” He quotes Gal 5.14-15; which warns, “You shall love your neighbor as thyself. But if you bite and devour one another, take heed that you are not consumed by one another.”

Bunyan explains, “No sooner is the bond of [love] broken, which is as a wall [of defense] about Christians, than they begin to make havoc and spoil of one another; then there is a raising of evil reports and taking up evil reports against each other. Hence it is that whispering and backbiting proceed... Hence it is that we watch for the [failures] of other... But where [love] is, there we are willing to hide the faults and cover the nakedness of our brethren. ‘[Love] thinketh no evil,’ (1 Cor 13. 6) and therefore cannot surmise, neither will it speak evil.”

Where unity and peace are wanting, there can be no great matters enterprised: “We cannot do much for God, nor much for one another. When the devil would hinder the bringing to pass of good in nations and churches, he divides their counsels, (and as one well observes), he divides their heads, that he may divide their hands.” He goes on to say, “If Christians that are divided be ever famous for anything, it will be, that they have often met together, and talked of this and the other thing, *but they did nothing.*”

Where unity and peace are wanting, there the weak are wounded and the wicked are hardened: “Unity may be compared to precious oil. (Ps 133. 2;) It is the nature of oil to heal that which is wounded, and to soften that which is hard. Those men that have hardened themselves against God and his people, when they shall behold unity and peace among them, will say, ‘God is in them indeed,’ and on the other hand, are they not ready to say, when they see you divided, that the devil is in you that you cannot agree!”

Divisions, and want of peace, keep those out of the church that would come in; and cause many to go out that are [already] in: “It is unity that brings men into the church, and divisions keep them out. It is reported of an Indian, passing by the house of a Christian, and hearing them [arguing], being [asked] to [come] in, he refused, saying, ‘Aabamach dwells there,’ meaning that the devil dwelt there. But where unity and peace are, there God is; and he that dwells in love dwells in God.”

He adds, “Hence it is that Christ prays (Jn 17.21;) that his disciples might be one, as the Father and he are one, that the world might believe the Father sent him. As if [Jesus should] say, ‘You may preach me as long as you will, and to little purpose, if you are not at peace and unity among yourselves.’”

As want of unity and peace keeps those out of the church that would come in, so it hinders the growth of those that are [already] in: “Divisions are to churches like wars in countries: where wars are, the ground lieth waste and untilled, none takes care of it. It is love that edifieth but division pulleth

down... When men are divided, they seldom speak the truth in love; and then [it is] no marvel they grow not up to him in all things, who is the head.”

Where unity and peace are wanting, our prayers are hindered: “The promise is, that what we shall agree to ask, shall be given us of our heavenly Father. No marvel we pray and pray, and yet are not answered; it is because we are not agreed what to have... Divisions hinder our prayers, and lay a prohibition on our sacrifice. ‘If thou bring thy gift to the altar,’ saith Christ, ‘and there remember that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave thy gift, and go, and first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.’” (Mt. 5. 23-24;)

“It is a *dishonor and discouragement to Christ*, that His family should be divided. When an army falls into mutiny and division, it reflects disparagement on him that hath the conduct of it. In like manner, the divisions of families are a dishonor to the heads, and those that govern them. And if so, how greatly do we dishonor our Lord and governor, who gave His body to be broken, to keep His church from breaking; who prayed for their peace and unity; and left peace at His departing from them for a legacy, even a peace which the world could not bestow upon them.”

Where there are no peace and unity, there is no sympathy with one another: “Where divisions are, that which is the joy of the one, is the grief of another; but where there is unity, and peace, and [love] abound, there we shall find Christians mourning with them that mourn, and rejoicing with them that rejoice; then they will not envy the prosperity of others, not secretly rejoice at the miseries or miscarriages of any.”

What, If Anything, Can be Done?

Kokichi Kurosaki writes from an Oriental perspective. In Japan and China, as well as the rest of the world, various missionary groups have ministered for centuries – often in a competition with each other that was direct, deliberate and heinous. With this historical perspective in mind, no wonder Kurosaki writes the following:

At present, there are all the sects and denominations standing side by side. Each thinks that it is the only true Church, or at least the most correct expression of it. Each believes it is their duty to convert others to their faith. They put large “labels” on themselves, showing the special points of their faith. They advertise their own brand of Christianity to get as many converts as possible. They put special weight and importance on their trademarks or special creeds, making them as conspicuous as possible. They condemn the goods of other “dealers” as of inferior quality and admonish people not to buy them.

Thus, on the Christian market the different brands are competing with each other in their selling campaign, just like businesses in the world. Sometimes they may have joint campaigns against paganism, but finally they are not satisfied until each boasts of its own superiority over the others. In this way, the churches can never have true unity, however much they may say they want it.

On the other hand, unity is quite possible if Christians simply live in fellowship with God and with Christ, and at the same time with one another, accepting the differences in the understanding of the doctrines and other smaller distinctions as reasonable variations due to individual, personal distinctions. As we realize that this variety will, in many cases, make the life of the Body of

Christ more complete and abundant, we can even respect differences and in love mutually help to make the Body of Christ grow.³²

Yet, how can we begin to manifest our unity in Christ in new and effective ways – ways that literally persuade the world of the reality of Jesus, Son of God?

The One Solution

There is one Solution – only one. There are ideas to impart to others and Action Steps that many can take. But as for a Solution, there is one. If it is not implemented, no theories and no Action Steps can do anything.

The Solution is that those who are “in Christ”, *live in Christ*.

Jesus made His complete dependency on His Father clear when He said He could do *nothing on His own* – He did only what He saw His Father doing. All ministry which produces eternal fruit, comes initially from Eternity. Everything that affects this world, the Church and all our lives *comes from the Presence of God*. Everything comes out of God’s Presence.

When Paul sought to “mend” the Corinthian division, he led them into the Presence of God *via* the Lord’s Supper. When Jesus promised we could ask whatever we wanted and it’d be done, the promise came *via* our abiding in the Vine (which is Christ.)

We need to persuade others to both embrace and manifest the unity of the Body of Christ. But more importantly, we must do what we may to lead others into the Presence of God – into the Tabernacle of David, that Holy of Holies opened to us through the Veil of Christ’s flesh. Here, in His Presence, the sinful wickedness that leads to division in Christ’s Body will burn away. In His Presence, we become one with Him and one with those that are one with Him.

In this place of Worship, as Jesus is one with the Father, and the Father one in Christ, we also become Holy Participants in the Divine Union.

Paul’s Admonitions

Understand this: no amount of “right thinking” will “bring unity in the Body” – but for those who are being led by the Spirit and the Presence of God, the Bible gives some admonitions to follow. These are from the Apostle Paul (out of Eph. 4 and Phil. 2) and then follows a list of Four Vital Steps that you and I can take.

The Apostle Paul, in Ephesians 4, gives a number of action principles toward manifesting unity in the Body of Christ.

³² Kurosaki, *op. cit.*, pp. 70–71.

Eph. 4.1-3 - I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Four aspects of the unity lifestyle:

- Live with one another with “lowliness” (humility)
- Live with one another in “meekness” (gentleness);
- Live with one another in “longsuffering” (patience and slowness in avenging wrongs),
- Live with one another in “forbearing one another in love” (enduring the difficulties of human relationships.)

Then in his letter to the church at Phillipi, he gives *eight aspects of Spiritual fellowship*:

Phil. 2.1-4 - If [there be] therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, [being] of one accord, of one mind. [Let] nothing [be done] through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

- be likeminded
- have the same love
- be of one accord
- and of one mind
- do nothing through strife
- do nothing through vainglory
- in lowliness of mind, esteem others better than self
- look to the needs of others before the needs of self

In Addition – Four Vital Steps:

1. *Love one another.* We are to live and relate to one another according to God’s *agapao* love, caring for other Believers in Christ no matter what local church or denomination they attend. If they are “in Christ” then we are commanded to love them and if we do not, then we are still “dwelling in death.” (1 Jn. 3.14;)

2. *Respect one another's rights to be different and believe differently on non-essentials.* If for the last four hundred years, Calvinists and Arminians haven't been able to settle the question of free will and predestination, they probably won't make it by this Christmas either. I'm not saying that doctrinal disagreements aren't important: sometimes they are and sometimes they aren't. All I'm saying is that if the Holy Spirit has baptized you into Christ and He has baptized another person into Christ, you are one and no doctrinal distinction had better violate that unity.

3. *Repent of the sins of particularism and presumption.* "Particularism" is the belief that it's not important to fellowship with other Christians in the Body of Christ if they go to other churches. It's the belief that what we have in "our church" or "our denomination" is all we need – flying in direct contradiction to the commands of Paul who denounced saying, "The eye cannot say unto the hand, 'I don't need you': nor again can the head say to the feet, 'I don't need you.' ... God has placed every member of the body together according to how it has pleased Him... *that there should be no division in the body; but [that] the members should have the same care one for another.* And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it." [My emphasis.]

Years ago, my late wife Janet went to a Bible college belonging to a denomination other than that in which she grew up. One day, after an exciting chapel presentation on world missions, one of Janet's college friends spoke excitedly of "our movement around the world". But when Janet agreed with her how wonderful it was to be a part of that worldwide movement, her friend objected, "But it's not your movement. It's *ours*."

Similarly, the sin of "presumption" is a stubbornly held pride about how much better "our church" or "our denomination" is than others.

*Repentance from the Roman Catholic Church*³³

Chuck Colson tells of Ranerio Cantalamessa, chaplain to Pope John Paul II, who publicly repented before a crowd of thousands in London in 1991. To a crowd sitting in stunned silence, this man high up in the Roman Catholic Church repented for once believing that Protestants could not be part of Christ's church.

First Baptist Church repents to the Second Baptist Church

Colson goes on to show that repenting from the sin of presumption can heal cultural differences as well as denominational differences. He tells of white Christians in Evanston, Ill. – one hundred and fifty years ago – who forced black members to leave the First Baptist Church. The blacks founded the Second Baptist Church and for over a century the two churches stayed separated. Then in 1991, First Baptist, which had three hundred members, presented a resolution to Second Baptist, which then had

³³ This example and the next comes from Colson, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

3,000 members, asking their forgiveness. Soon afterwards, the two churches began planning a number of joint services and the two churches are now working together in ministering to the needs of their community.

Southern Baptists repent to all African-Americans

On June of 1995, the national news media reported the dramatic repentance of the largest denomination in the United States. The Southern Baptist denomination came into being over a century ago through a denominational split: northern Baptists refused to support slavery or the continued subjugation of African-Americans. The Southern Baptists refused to take a stand against the slavery empire of the South.

But on June 20, 1995, this nation watched as leaders of the Southern Baptists repented of their support of slavery and their continued support of oppression by whites of blacks. In response, a black minister stood and on behalf of African-Americans, expressed forgiveness.

The need for repentance for allowing or propagating disunity in the Body of Christ is not over yet. And this heart of repentance can go beyond mere denominational divisions. When peace begins to be spread abroad in a community, many lives become affected.

Recently, in Northern California, the city of Eureka made a historic decision to return a portion of Indian Island to the Wiyot Indian tribe. Eureka is the only city in California to return a sacred site to its native people.

The Wiyot Tribal Chairwoman, Cheryl Seidner, is the descendent of Jerry James, a survivor of the genocidal massacre on Indian Island a century and a half ago. As an infant, he was found after the massacre of women and children, underneath his dead mother. Seidner said, "We don't hold people today accountable for the actions of the past, but we *can* hold them accountable for not recognizing past injustices."

In this same region, in the Northern California city of Redding, an Assembly of God church (Bethel Church), is built on land that once belonged to a local Indian tribe. Some time ago, they were led by the Lord to reach out to this tribe and offer an act of repentance for the injustices done to them. Though no local ordinances required it, Bethel began to pay a monthly sum of money to this tribe, demonstrating respect and honor.

4. Reach out – deliberately and persistently – to build bridges to those Christians of different spiritual traditions, different cultures, different races and different churches. What binds us together is stronger than what divides us.

Reaching out to build bridges of love to previously neglected brethren has enormous implications. It means that we can cooperate together in doing the works of Jesus Christ whether these are witnessing, taking care of widows and orphans, funding Christian outreaches or persuading the lost that the Father really did send Jesus into a lost and dying world.

Yet, “reaching out” is easier said than done. One might say “old habits rise eternal from the ashes of failed resolutions!”

It’s not enough for a person to *recognize* that he or she’s fallen far short of “keeping the unity” with all their brothers and sisters in the Lord. It’s not even enough for a person to *repent* of the sin of not discerning the Body of Christ.

We need to take our *repentance* into the fields of effective action! We must break out of our old blindnesses and our destructive, “knee-jerk” emotional prejudices.

Once I asked a close, Christian friend – who happens to be Hispanic – if he ever noticed any prejudice on my part in our relationship. As I loved this brother and had only the greatest of respect, I was startled to hear in what ways he saw me still perpetuating racial stereotypes.

Just because we want to change doesn’t mean we will be able to even see the changes that need to be made! But the Lord is raising up many ministers in the Body of Christ who can help you and I to wisely and wittingly repent of particularism, racism and other ungodly walls in the Body of Christ.

Conclusion

The New Millennium is upon us. This generation promises to be the most fruitful and successful years of the Church of Jesus Christ since He Himself walked upon the face of this earth. There is an evangelism explosion throughout the world – especially within those countries whose governments have until so recently suppressed any visible form of the Church or its Community of Believers.

Still, God's people have not always responded well to God's Plans. Since Adam, His people have too often ignored His Voice and light-heartedly sailed at cross-purposes to the Wind of His Holy Spirit. If those who are Christ's today turn from His divine purposes for our day, these next few years could just as well be years in which the Church of Jesus Christ is rendered impotent – its worldwide forward thrust blunted and halted.

Many factors are critical to the success of the Body of Christ. In America, a battle is being waged for holiness and godliness in the lives of Christians caught up in the grip of America's ghastly luxuries. Commitment to the Person of Christ and the Purpose of God seems to be running a faint fourth (at best) behind personal comfort, financial success and family fun.

Truly, the Voice of God is calling to His Church to prepare herself as the Bride eagerly anticipating her Groom. Like a mighty flood of waters, the Spirit of God is pouring across America and the world, drawing His Church to a repentance bringing cleansing, raising God's standard of holy living, healing her with His Word and refreshing her with joy.

But one of the great battles being waged today is greater and more foundational than even these crucial, spiritual concerns. This Great Battle, if

won, will provide the vehicle for the success of these other vital concerns. If won, it will provide the Body through which all other priorities will be fulfilled.

Jesus Christ promised His victory over the devil and all his strategies would be through the Church, the Body of Christ – comprised of all Believers in Christ united as one even as, says Jesus, “The Father and I are one.” Far too many Christians today have failed to properly “discern the Body of Christ” and have settled into a comfortable delusion that if their individual “walks with Jesus” Christ are “okay” then the Victory of Christ will be theirs.

But, as this “little book” has shown from Scripture, the great Victory of Christ over the enemy is promised to the *one, united Body of Christ* – not to individuals who fail to recognize the Body of Christ and refuse to relate to it according to God’s designs.

The message of this book – the reality of our Oneness in Jesus Christ – is one of the greatest evangelistic messages available to the Church today. It’s a simple message but one that can change the face of the Church throughout the entire world. This book is little but its message is enormous – its bark is smaller than its bite!

God has set many people in His Body today to proclaim this same, simple message – it’s being heard throughout the whole Body of Christ. From small church pulpits to the colossal conferences of the Promise Keepers, the message is one: “I pray not only for My disciples alone, but for all those in the future who will believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one; as You, Father, are one in me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that You have sent Me.”

What will persuade the unbelieving world to faith in Jesus Christ? The recognition that we who are “in Christ” are one, inseparably one, and our repentance of the ways in which we’ve denied our oneness in Christ, and the restoration of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. When these things are done, then the world will believe that God has sent Jesus.

As I said in the beginning of this “little book”, the barriers to unity in the Body of Christ – be they denominational, racial, cultural, historical, geographical or economic – can be overcome quickly and easily. Not through trying to battle each separate “barrier”, but by gaining the Vision of Christ for the oneness of His Body and the Passion of God’s heart for His children.

It is for that purpose this little book has been written. Why wait until the year 2000? The time to be one in Christ is *now!*

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