

That They May Be One

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Scripture on the cover

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That They May Be One

Jesus' Prayer for Unity

"That they may be one." These words were spoken by Jesus Christ the night before He died, as He prayed for us to His Heavenly Father (see John 17). Five times He expressed His desire for *our unity* – not only a unity of the original apostles – but also of all who have followed in their footsteps, generation by generation. Please notice the significant repetition of the phrase ***that they may be one*** in Jesus' prayer.

*"And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, **that they may be one**, as We are."* (John 17:11)

"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." (John 17:21)

*"And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that **they may be one**, even as We are one."* (John 17:22)

Our response to this deep desire for unity expressed by Jesus should be to do everything humanly possible to bring about the unity and oneness of the Church of God. It has always been God's Will that His Church, His children, be unified – made *one* by His Spirit. As God's children, we should be laying down our lives to help bring about unification in attitude, direction, and fellowship of the brethren; especially as we find ourselves separated by the imaginary walls of worldly administrations.

"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." (Philippians 2:1-2)

Our individual responsibility in working to bring about Godly unity is a matter of personal salvation. We will not attain to

eternal life unless we develop a Christ-like love for all of the saints (1 John 3:4). The basis of unity and oneness is a genuine care and deep concern for the complete well-being of *all* the brethren. This kind of unity requires nothing less than putting our very lives on the line for the sake of one another. *Oneness* demands the right application of Godly principles when interacting with our brethren. In short, *oneness* requires Christian love. Jesus Christ has given us His doctrines, the seventh of which is to go on to *perfection*, which includes unity of the brethren.

*"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."* (John 17:23)

We cannot see or touch God in our zeal to serve Him, to love Him – but God has given us our fellow man to love in His place. When Jesus walked this earth, those He loved were all unconverted – not yet saints. His love had no bounds; likewise, our Christian love should have no bounds. The love we give must reach abroad; not only to true Christians, but also to those we know in the world – and, yes, even to those who make themselves our enemies. *"If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well."* (James 2:8)

Perhaps it seems improbable that God's children will come together again in one specific fellowship, and yet it is imperative that the saints of God achieve a *unity and oneness* that transcends organizational lines. God's Church is not a *place*! It is a people, yielded to God, who exhibit unity and love for all. God commands all of His children to *be one* with all whom He calls, because we are to be one in His Spirit. *"He that is joined unto the Lord is one Spirit."* (1 Corinthians 6:17)

The diverse world of "the Christian religion" is mystified at these last words of Christ because, if anything, they are definitely not one in unity – nor can they be. The difference is that, through God's Spirit, *we can be*, and we must find that *oneness* Jesus says we must have.

That the World May Know

Why did Jesus so fervently desire that true Christians be unified? God intends that the unity and oneness of His Church be an example to the *entire world!* Our unity would be a proof that we are God's children. *"Jesus said, By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another."* (John 13:35) Unity and oneness within the Church of God would confirm the working of God's Holy Spirit in a way seldom witnessed in the world. Our unity and oneness would demonstrate to the world that, as promised, the Father sent Jesus, and that salvation and hope are coming to mankind. *"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God."* (Ephesians 4:13)

All throughout history, God intended for His people to be a light to the rest of the world. God gave Israel statutes and judgments so that the nations around them would be jealous of Israel's blessings and would want to know Israel's God.

"Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear . . . and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God." (Deuteronomy 4:6-7)

God did not intend to work with Israel alone. Those things that God was doing with Israel were not just for Israel. God intended the nation of Israel to be an example to show other nations that His way of life produces happiness and prosperity. In the same way, those things God is doing today with the Church of God are not just for us. The Father sent Jesus and wants the world to know that fact. God wants all nations to come to Him. We can reveal the true God to the world by letting our light shine in unity and oneness. Ezekiel tells us so in seventy places!

*"So will I make My holy name known in the midst of My people Israel . . . and **the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel.**"* (Ezekiel 39:7)

Jesus said, *"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."* (John 17:23)

First, the modern Israelites will come to know their God – and soon! The Church of God will cause our nations to know – not physically by television or other media – but by our *oneness*. The Church of God must play this important role in God's work at this time. The United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and all the rest of Israel still do not know about the Father and Jesus. Soon all the world will know!

Our singleness of heart as Christians enables us to seek out The Truth and to live by it. By communicating, praying for other Christians, fellowshiping, and showing ourselves friendly, we begin to show love for one another. We need to encourage all brethren who are truly serving God. Preserving the Truth is everyone's duty. By reaching out to others in this way, God's Truth will become clearer to all in the Church, and our unity as God's children will grow.

"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." (Jude :3)

As the Israel of God, the church is the final bastion of His Truth in a world trampling it underfoot. We are children *"in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."* (1 Timothy 3:15, Galatians 6:16)

"God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." (1 Corinthians 1:9-10).

Our Christian love for one another should be able to withstand any storm if our hearts are truly woven together.

"That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ." (Colossians 2:2)

For a while we were, to some extent, a well-functioning group, fitly framed together. God knew that Satan would contaminate the believers with non-believers. Doctrine was relatively consistent throughout the Church. *The members were being fed, and the gospel was being effectively preached throughout the world.* And yet, God was not mocked – He began the process of separating out the non-believers.

"For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." (1 Cor. 11:19)

We Have Failed

We are certainly not living up to Christ's clear instruction. Scripture unequivocally states that within God's Church we must coexist in unity and oneness. The dispersed church groups – as they are today – amount to a disbanding of the children of God, and that is most definitely not God's Will.

Indeed, a terrible thing has happened. We are no longer able to go to the Feast with all of our friends and brethren. The Church of God has become scattered. Families and friendships have been broken up. Large numbers of God's children have little or nothing to do with God's children in other groups. It is deplorable the way friends and brethren have gone in opposite directions. How many "friendships" in the Church were like the morning dew, which vanishes with the first hint of summer heat? Too many of our brothers and sisters have given up any hope of a far-reaching fellowship.

What has happened to the Church of God? The division we are experiencing is destructive to the Body of Christ. We have come to a time when we claim *"fellowship of the Spirit,"* while justifying our separation from other Christians.

Organization is necessary – it is not wrong in and of itself. Somebody has to put the Feast together, provide halls for Sabbath services, publish the Truth, preach the gospel, help to administer third tithe, etc. However, when "organization" begins to supplant the honor, obedience, veneration, and reverence due only to God, we have bowed to an idol.

The Scriptures describe the characteristics that set the true Church apart. Oh, we learned about pork, birthdays, and make-up; but did we learn the most important doctrine of all – *how to support one another fully in our walk in the Truth?* We learned a form of religion, but how many of us acquired the substance of Christianity? The most important unifying doctrine – the one which is so often overlooked – is the *command to love one another* and to help one another into the Kingdom of God. We are told to love our enemies. Certainly, we should willingly extend our love to all the brethren.

Historically, there have always been a few saints who did not seek the approval of men, but held fast to the Truth. Those who looked to men instead of God suffered great ruin. Those who have returned to the world, and its corrupt beliefs, are not able to uphold the Truth. It is only true Christians, led by God's Holy Spirit, who are able to maintain the Truth.

Today the separated children of God can hardly be identified. How can so weak a people preserve the Truth of God? The Body of Christ is made up of many parts. However, if those parts are not fitly joined together, how can the Truth be defended? Safeguarding the Truth is *our* obligation. What if the Truth were not available to our children and grandchildren? What a travesty that would be! We must pass the Truth on. *"To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* (James 4:17)

How many people left the Church over the years because there was a lack of real unity and love expressed among the brethren? Why did so few people, comparatively speaking, respond positively to the preaching of the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God when it was going to the entire world in such

power? Let us not assume that the Church was perfect in every way. It was not! And it is not perfect now! Sadly, within God's scattered Church today, there is precious little desire for unity. No matter what men may think – God is not pleased. Jesus Christ tells us we must work for unity.

Something is terribly wrong with the concept of Christians going their separate ways. We should be able to recognize other Christians, regardless of organization. Most brethren would openly admit that "there are Spirit-led Christians in all the groups." What then prevents our "fellowship of the Spirit" with like-minded brethren? *"Stand fast in one Spirit, with one mind striving together for the Faith of the gospel."* (Philippians 1:27)

The Church is not striving together. It is breaking into many sub-parts, all striving alone. *"I will build My Church,"* Jesus said. *"My Church!"* We belong to Christ! Paul said, *"Ye are Christ's."* (1 Corinthians 3:23) When He looks down from His heavenly throne, Jesus wants to see one church – not a lot of isolated groups. So, what is going on? We must begin to look past the artificial organizational lines, and to think of the Church of God as Christ wants it to be – as one. Are we sure that we understand the answer to Paul's question, *"Is Christ divided?"* (1 Corinthians 1:13)

Christ is not divided. We all know that. But do we understand this – that the Body of Christ, His Church, is not supposed to be divided? This is a true principle that must be pondered: The Church of God is not divided. We, the called-out ones, led by God's Holy Spirit, are the Church of God. The Church of God is the Body of Christ. Christ is not divided. Therefore, if we are Christ's, we, too, must not be divided! Are we not the one true Church? Where then is our unity? How is it that we have failed to have the remarkable unity Christ desires in us?

"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." (Ephesians 4:4-6)

The concept of all of us *"being one as Christ and the Father are one"* is the most important and challenging task before Christians at this time. The Church has not humbled itself and become unified – not even to fulfill the last expressed desire of Jesus. We will give an answer to Christ if we fail to do everything possible to achieve unity with all the saints. The reality of unity and oneness among God's children will be His determining factor, not only as to who is protected and hidden in the place of safety, but also for salvation itself. Notice the time setting for our last chance to bring about oneness in the body of believers. God warns us to take the initiative to gather together in unity and oneness, before it is too late.

"Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together . . . , before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you. Seek you the Lord, all ye meek of the earth . . . , it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger." (Zephaniah 2:1-3)

Zephaniah means "Hidden by the Eternal God." God is saying that He hides those who have the goal, not of staying separated from, or of dividing the brethren, but of unifying the hearts and minds of the brethren. If we patiently endure the trials of this life, while making the sacrifice of laying down our lives for the brethren, we will escape the Tribulation that will come on all the earth. Laying down our lives for the brethren is one of the ways we overcome Satan (Revelation 12:11). *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."* (John 15:13)

Restoring the broken bonds of love is the sacrifice of laying down our lives. God's Holy Spirit makes *oneness* possible. Ancient Israel could not please God because they did not have His Spirit. However, God has made it possible for those of us with His Spirit to carry out His Will. We must present to the world this example of unity and oneness that Jesus Christ our Lord desires. God held ancient Israel responsible for breaking His covenant with them – and they *did not* have His Spirit as we do.

God sent Israel into captivity for their failure to be an example to the world. We do not need to make a worse mistake! For

those of us, who are led by God's Spirit, the penalty for such failure would be much greater than national captivity. It is important that we learn from history's example. Israel fell in the desert, and ultimately to the armies of Assyria and Babylon. What will be the result if we fail to become the unified Christian body we were called to be? Not necessarily unified in corporation or organization – but integrated through a common bond of love that knows no bounds!

Some have taken the attitude that they are too good to deal with those who do not measure up to their high standard. This is spiritual arrogance. Our purpose in the Church is not just to be a part of our "special group," concerned only with preparing ourselves; because if we are concerned only for ourselves to the exclusion of others, we are failing.

"Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it." (Luke 17:33)

Those who are only interested in preparing themselves, while neglecting the spiritual welfare of their brethren, have fallen for the deception of Cain. He asked in Genesis 4:9, *"Am I my brother's keeper?"* The answer, for us, must be a humble, *"Yes, I am my brother's keeper."* *"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."* (Philippians 2:3)

Sorrowfully, today our coming together in unity is more of a sentiment than a fact. The scattering and disunity of God's children continues. Isolated and independent Christians are more the rule today than the exception. Too many are inclined to pray *"My Father"* rather than follow Jesus' instruction to pray the collective, *"Our Father"*. The collective *"Our"* rules out a relationship with God that excludes our brethren. It is too easy to fall into the comfortable *"You and me, Lord"* mode. This view that *"He's my God, and not yours"* is much too prevalent in God's Church – and that is not right. That is not what God intends. He is our Father – and that lumps us all together as His children. Christianity is not a spectator activity; it is a hands-on, fully committed group endeavor. Our responsibility and obligation as a

people is to promote the cause of *unity and oneness* among all of God's children. *"This commandment have we from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also."* (1 John 4:21)

The Scattered Church

The Church of God once seemed to have *a unity* – until false doctrines and deceitful ministers lurking beneath the surface appeared – and many members failed to hold fast. Those who held fast were given additional tests; new obstacles to face. Ministers who once seemed on track started preaching watered-down doctrines. Some ministers behaved in an un-Christian manner toward the brethren. Some ministers closed their eyes. A number of ministers arose who claimed the "mantle of authority" and sought personal followings; thereby creating personality-based groups. Some ministers and members oppressed their fellow servants. The saints learned that they could not always rely on others for spiritual support. In that vacuum of spiritual leadership and support, the brethren struggled to make wise decisions – and to work out their own salvation. The Church of God was shattered. *"Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."* (Acts 20:30)

As a church, we were taught "authority" from the top down. That is the way that God will rule His kingdom. We had more than seven hundred professionally trained men ruling over one hundred and forty-five thousand members – implementing a top-down authority. As was revealed during the apostasy, some six hundred of those pastors were not following Jesus Christ. It is our responsibility as members to follow leaders *only* as they follow Christ. The millennial pattern will exhibit a Godly benevolent authority that was woefully absent in much of the Church. Those at the top of the ruling pyramid could not fathom the persecution foisted on some true Christians at the bottom. As a result, the concept of "God's Government" became used interchangeably with "Church Government," at the expense of the well-being of the brethren's spiritual lives.

"How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit." (Jude :18-19)

We have entered the age of new Gnostics. Men teach that they know something that others do not know. They teach that because they alone please God, their group is sufficient unto itself. The teaching that members need not concern themselves with other brethren is absolutely false. These are the last days. Jesus will return before we know it! Scripture clearly tells us that false religious teachers will plague the Church of God – and the Scriptures are not talking about deceived worldly religious leaders.

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come." (2 Timothy 3:1)

"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts." (2 Peter 3:3)

"Grievous wolves [shall] enter in among you, not sparing the flock." (Acts 20:29)

After the death of Mr. Armstrong and the emergence of men who did not regard the Truth, Satan was able to scatter the brethren. Leaders who should have had the ability to maintain the Truth and to hold the brethren together in unity did not do so. Those who are responsible should have grave concerns about the scattering of the brethren. The Truth suffered when so few men of God were willing to take a stand for the Faith. Good people were disfellowshipped while tares reveled in their newfound apostasy.

Groups sprang up – large and small – with the stated intention of preaching the gospel, or doing the Work. God ceased calling large numbers into a church that had fallen into disarray. How could "babes in the Truth" flourish amidst so much confusion and turmoil? Some leaders were reluctant and fearful to declare our long-held, true beliefs. Preserving the Truth was not high on their list of priorities. By the harsh and negligent way people

treated one another, it became clear that the great majority did not understand the true meaning of Christianity.

Too many leaders lowered their standards, watered down their messages, and lost their zeal. Apparently, they were not willing or able to "*cry aloud and spare not*" (Isaiah 58:1).

"For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed." (Luke 9:26)

Others, like Diotrefes of III John, sought the preeminence – neglecting their responsibility to confront false doctrine and to stabilize the membership when the Church was in peril. Large areas of the world were abandoned. Those men failed to represent the way of God that they had been trained to bring to the world. None realized the importance of unity and oneness enough to take action to forewarn the brethren of the scattering.

It is interesting to note that so much of the scattering came about as a result of the inability and/or unwillingness of leaders to humble themselves and to work together – rather than from outside persecution, as was expected. In most cases, at the onset of the apostasy, it was the brethren who led the exodus when the uncertain sound of the voice of strangers was heard. With very few exceptions, the leaders followed afterward. It seems that Satan with his subtleties is always able to blind-side the children of God. As the apostasy set in, the leaders were torn between losing the position they had gained over the years on one hand, and standing for the Truth they had been taught on the other. Some justified their actions by saying, "It would have been unethical to speak against those for whom we worked." That statement reveals a terrible lack of understanding on their part. They had gone along with the apostasy without speaking up. They should have repented and asked forgiveness – that was the correct thing to have done. Those pastors had a huge responsibility to care for the sheep – not just themselves. The attitude of self-exaltation is the attitude that is willing to sacrifice others for the justification and vindication of the self.

"The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep." (John 10:13)

Those leaders who chose retirement when the apostasy began to beat hard against the Church were, in effect, saying, "It's every man for himself." They did not remember that God had trained and prepared them as shepherds all those years to be able to gather and to hold the flock together for protection in times of danger. *"Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"* (Esther 4:14)

Unity of the Spirit

As Paul told the Ephesians in chapter four, their ordinations and spiritual gifts were given for the perfecting of the saints – not their own advancement or enrichment. God's Church is to be a nurturing environment wherein the "least" member is able to provide necessities of importance. We are meant to carry one another's burdens. The gifts of God are meant to be helpful to everyone – not just to benefit the one to whom God has given the gift. *"The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit [everyone]."* (1 Corinthians 12:7)

The division we have today is not unique. Early Church congregations were taken over by heretics, who were not willing to receive God's children. Paul recognized that *"the mystery of iniquity"* (2 Thessalonians 2:7) was already at work as errant brethren attempted to set the apostles as rivals, one against the other.

It is not God's Will that the Church be scattered – any more than it was His Will that Israel go into Assyrian captivity or Judah into Babylonian captivity. Sin brought it about. God's Will always, is to bless His people. Do we understand that we are each individually responsible for bringing *unity* to the body of believers? All of the scattered Christians are still our fellow brethren. God is not going to save just one of the groups. He is not dealing exclusively with one man. No organization possesses a franchise on being "The Church." It is *God's Church*.

It is a shame that we are not of one mind. Too many of our brethren have been taught to disassociate themselves from those brethren not within their own group. They turn their heads when they pass former brethren on the street. The Bride is not prepared to meet Christ while this practice persists in His Church.

We would all like to see the baptism of many totally new converts, but God is not going to exonerate divisive conduct by calling new converts into a contentious body. He will bring an indictment against those who refuse to pursue a path toward unity and oneness with their brethren.

Today, various associations have a policy of not baptizing without a tacit pledge that the proselyte will become a member of their group. Often, these same associations do not allow "outsiders" to take Passover with their members. Oh, these are not written policies – that would not allow for deniability. Nonetheless, these are "policies" when the practices are "winked" at by their headquarters, and when their leaders, in general, go along with the practices. We are *not* commanded, "Go ye into all the world and baptize into your group." When one group encourages its membership to avoid contact with other groups, it is sowing seeds of discord.

Brethren have been disfellowshipped, not for sin or heresy, but for political expediency. Neighboring pastors close their eyes to this heavy-handed practice – not considering that God will hold them just as accountable as the perpetrator. *"If anyone sins by remaining silent when he is adjured to give evidence as a witness of something he has seen or known, [then he shall bear his iniquity]."* (Lev. 5:1 Moffatt)

God will not hold guiltless those who are scattering His flock. Do not be a part of it and do not support it. The faithful brethren must also be praying for those who drove away the outcast members, and must be an example to those who are dividing the Church. Jesus indicts, first, those people who put the brethren out of the Church while they were clinging to the Truth with all their might; and second, He indicts those who have not sought their reunion to the Body of Christ.

"Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against the shepherds . . . neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost." (Ezekiel 34:10, 4)

How can so many leaders and brethren alike, remain complacent about the scattered condition of God's children? No one has the alternative of sitting back with a "ho-hum" attitude – as if everything is okay. *"Endeavoring"* means that the saints must be actively pursuing *unity*. This is not a mere sentiment – or a "take it or leave it" option.

We must be: *"Endeavoring to keep the **unity of the Spirit** in the bond of peace."* (Ephesians 4:3)

So we see that it is not just those in the ministry who stand in jeopardy! The brethren, too, are warned by God not to get caught up with special-interest groups that think, "My church is better than your church." One member cannot seek advantage over or neglect the care of any of the other brethren. All of us must realize that we are being judged right now for how we interact with *all* of our other brethren, wherever they may be. *"Judgment has begun at the house of God!"* It is not only the shepherds who are condemned for their misconduct, but the confrontational brethren also are being judged:

"And as for you, O My flock, thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will judge between sheep and sheep, and the rams and the he-goats." (Ezek. 34:17 James Martin, Keil-Delitzsch)

Discerning the Lord's Body

Today, Church of God groups are operating *independently* from one another. They have no policy to recognize the other groups, or the scattered brethren. The Scriptures do not allow for groups of Christians to co-exist side-by-side without recognizing one another. Unity is required, and unity comes only when we have a right relationship with God and man. Jesus tells us that, as Christians, our priority must be to reconcile, not only with God, but also with one another. Christ taught that reconciliation has a higher priority than even church attendance.

"Be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."
(Matthew 5:24)

It has become commonplace to hear the saying, "We will not have unity in the Church until after Jesus Christ returns." Do not believe it, because there is danger in accepting this statement as fact. It is Jesus' desire that we work toward unity and oneness. If we stop laboring for unity among God's people, we have fallen into one of the Adversary's traps.

Groups are not exempt from the reconciliation that Christ says is necessary. We need to understand from Scripture that God does not allow us to have an attitude of independence from other brethren. Because some groups are not willing to be unified with the other members of the Church, they teach that the "oneness" that Jesus spoke about is only a spiritual concept. Or, they reason that "oneness" cannot take place until the Resurrection of the Just. They claim, "Those who are to be one with the Father and Son also are to be one with one another – a state possible only upon the resurrection of the dead and the Divine marriage to follow." In coming to that conclusion, they make the Scripture of no effect by relegating its intent and fulfillment to the hereafter. *Oneness* is obviously intended by Jesus Christ to apply here and now – how else could it be an example to this present evil world. Notice the purpose of this oneness. Jesus says that the Church of God must maintain and exhibit unity and oneness so that **"the world may believe"!**

*"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.**"* (John 17:21)

True Christians enter the Body of Christ at their baptism. Since our unity with the Father and the Son begins at baptism, then so does our unity with one another. It is *not* at the resurrection of the saints, but at our personal baptism that we are baptized into the Body of Christ – becoming *one* with all other members of the Body. At baptism, a convert is also baptized into the Spirit of God – the spiritual life of God.

*"For by one Spirit are we all baptized **into one body** ... and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."*
(1 Corinthians 12:13)

How much more clearly could it be written? Spiritually, brethren become unified – one in Spirit, and one in the Body of Christ. By definition, it is absolutely impossible to have Christian love for *only a part* of the Body of Christ. We cannot serve some and neglect the needs of other brethren. Artificially erected walls of division among church organizations, separating God's children, are frustrating, meaningless, and destructive. It is a non-Scriptural and un-Godly practice.

"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."
(Ephesians 4:2-4)

That most certainly means that those who will become the Bride of Christ should not be divided. In the Kingdom of God there will be no one who insists on being isolated from other spirit-beings. This brings up a good question. How much will Jesus Christ accomplish when He returns – and how much is our responsibility, *now*, in our lifetime? The answer to this question is crucial. It is very clear what God's intent is – that people learn to live, to love, to work, to associate, etc., together. God wants us to learn how to live with one another *now*, so that we will know how to live *with Him* eternally. *"How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"*
(Psalms 133:1)

The true Church is supposed to be a tight-knit, cohesive family unit – the household of God. Paul says that, by definition, it cannot be fragmented.

". . . Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God [the Church], and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth into an holy

temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit." (Ephesians 2:19-22).

It is the *unity and oneness* among the saints that will make evident to the world that the Father sent Jesus. All of the broadcasts and publications did not convince the world, in a proper way, that God the Father sent Jesus Christ – because only the love of the brethren for one another could do that. The world still does not know. Oh, what an example we could have been – and must yet be! *"O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee: but I have known Thee, and these have known that Thou hast sent Me."* (John 17:25)

The unity among Church brethren would convince the world that Jesus was sent from the Father. We are privileged to know the Father because Jesus revealed the Father to us. And *that* because the Father *sent* Jesus into the world, and then called us. All too often, we in God's Church make the mistake of thinking about ourselves to the exclusion of others. Jesus has not "written off" anybody. Neither should we – especially not the scattered saints! *"[Jesus Christ] is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."* (2 Peter 3:9)

What needs to be done to preserve the Truth? Do we just sit back and say, "Let's wait on God to fix it"? Or does God expect us to do everything we can to preserve the Truth once delivered? We need to ask ourselves, "Do we identify and encourage those who hold fast to the Truth?" God says that we must. Would we recognize Jesus Christ by His actions if He were on the earth today? He would not snub another Christian – would He? We need to find others who also represent the Truth. There must be no competition among the groups. Let us warmly receive and embrace all who have God's Holy Spirit. We must be doing everything possible to help one another in the Faith. Let us show ourselves friendly to all brethren.

The Church of God today is not unified. We are not *one*. We know that we are supposed to *become one* by partaking of the Bread of Life, which is Jesus Christ, our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7). Addressing the division within the Church,

Paul shows that our very salvation depends on our caring for one another. *"For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be **divisions** among you."* (1 Corinthians 11:18)

"Division" was the subject when Paul wrote that the Lord's body was not being properly discerned. He said that we must examine ourselves as to whether or not we are a part of any division before we take Passover.

We cannot hate, despise, or reject any of the saints; as that behavior defines not discerning the Lord's body. We are obligated to extend our realm of fellowship to include all who have the earnest of God's Holy Spirit. Paul characterized our self-examination as properly *"discerning the Lord's body."* Do we understand the full intent of this Scripture?

First of all, we must absolutely grasp the definition of **the Lord's Body** from the Bible itself. ***The Body of Christ is the Church of God.*** This concept of Christ's Body being composed of all Church brethren is solidly established in Scripture.

"For [Christ's] Body's sake, which is the Church."
(Colossians 1:24)

"Ye are the Body of Christ, and members in particular."
(1 Corinthians 12:27)

"...The Church, which is His Body."
(Ephesians 1:22-23)

"Ye are called into one Body; and be ye thankful."
(Colossians 3:15)

"For as we have many members in one body . . . So we, being many, are one Body in Christ, and every one members one of another." (Romans 12:4-5)

"The bread which we break, is it not the [fellowship] of the Body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one Body." (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

"For the perfecting of the saints . . . for the edifying of the Body of Christ." (Ephesians 4:12)

". . . All the members of that one Body, being many, are one Body: so also is Christ." (1 Corinthians 12:12)

Many verses firmly establish that *"the Lord's Body"* is a direct reference to the people of the Church of God. When Paul said that we must be properly *"discerning the Lord's Body,"* he meant that we cannot take the Passover and at the same time be responsible for any of the division: *the broken, shattered condition of the Church.* The Church of God is not to be broken. Now, let's consider more closely what Paul meant by *"discerning the Lord's Body."*

Jesus' Bones Were Not Broken

Prophecy that Jesus' bones would not be broken was fulfilled. Jesus was beaten, nailed, pierced, crucified, and killed. His bones were even exposed. Why was it so important that His bones not be broken? The answer lies in the integrity of "the Lord's Body" – the very people of God who are *"of His bones."* Adam spoke for Jesus and the Church brethren when he said, *"bone of My bones, and flesh of My flesh."* (Ephesians 5:30, 32, Genesis 2:23).

Christ's Church is also intended to remain unbroken and not be shattered into splinters. It is not God's Will that the "Body of Christ" – the Church people, be broken apart. It is His Will that the true body of believers be *unified* in love and in Spirit – being of one mind with each other. The Church of God is not to be broken – it is to be prepared in unity and oneness to be the Bride who will have made herself ready for the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7).

The question has been asked, "Wasn't Jesus' body *broken* to make payment for our healing?" The Scriptures reveal that for our healing Jesus received "stripes" – not broken bones. *"By whose stripes you were healed."* (1 Peter 2:24, Isaiah 53:5)

The Bible manuscripts do not indicate that Christ's body was broken. The King James translators, not realizing the significance

of Jesus' bones *remaining unbroken* (Exodus 12:46), incorrectly embellished the Greek text. They added the words "which is broken" to the following verse – that are not in the original text. *"The Lord Jesus . . . 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."* (1 Corinthians 11:23-24)

What is the correct translation? This is how the scripture should be correctly rendered according to E. W. Bullinger: *"The Lord Jesus . . . took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, this is My body, for you: this do in remembrance of Me."* (1 Corinthians 11:23-24)

Jesus broke the unleavened bread that represented His body. The Greek, *'k'lao,'* Strong's 2806, means only "to break bread," as in the miracle of the loaves and fishes. This word is never used in the sense of breaking bones. It always means to have a meal as the saints did: *"breaking bread from house to house, did eat their food with gladness and singleness of heart."* (Acts 2:46)

Jesus was beaten with many stripes. He was crucified, and He died – but His bones were not broken. *"When they came to Jesus, and saw that He was dead already, they brake not His legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out blood and water . . . these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of Him **shall not be broken.**"* (John 19:33-36). This incredible symbolism has tremendous significance for us today.

God went to great lengths to prophesy about the bones of Jesus. It was told that Jesus would receive "stripes," but none of His bones would be broken. David was inspired by Christ to give us this Messianic prophecy. *"He keepeth all His bones: **not one of them is broken.**"* (Psalms 34:20)

Scripture reveals that we, the saints of God, are also represented by the bones of Jesus Christ. *"For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones."* (Ephesians 5:30)

As the future Wife of Christ, we, the Church of God, are *"of His bones,"* just as Eve was bone of Adam's bones. (Genesis 2:23, Ephesians 5:30)

Healing

The healing that Jesus works for us extends well beyond mere physical concerns, to the complex, vast realm of disorders that can overcome and impair the whole person. Healing encompasses the spiritual, emotional, and psychological facets of our lives. In short, Jesus came to heal shattered lives. In this next verse, where Jesus quotes Isaiah, we see a different Greek word for break. '*Suntribo,*' Strong's 4937, means "to shatter or break into shivers" – translated here as "brokenhearted."

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted." (Luke 4:18, Isaiah 61:1) Jesus came to preach the gospel and heal shattered lives.

Jesus goes further and castigates those shepherds [ministers] who both brought about the scattering, and have not mended the shattered lives of the brethren. Ezekiel 34:4 utilizes the same word for *broken* as is used in Isaiah 61:1 for brokenhearted – it means "shattered."

"The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken [shattered], neither have ye brought again that which was driven away." (Ezekiel 34:4)

There is a direct correlation between our well-being and the unity and oneness we share with all of the children of God, who constitute the Lord's body. Paul said that sickness and death were the result of partaking of the Passover while division existed among the saints. The brethren had not discerned the Lord's body. *"For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep."* (1 Corinthians 11:30)

Discerning the Lord's body means accepting the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in the way it was intended. Our past guilt is

removed, and our past sins are covered when we are redeemed and justified by the precious blood He shed. We are reconciled to God the Father by the death of His Son. We are healed by His stripes. Our salvation awaits us because Jesus was raised to life by the Father, and so we shall be saved by His life. (1 Peter 1:18-21, Romans 5:9-10, 1 Peter 2:24)

We must realize that this entire healing and salvation process is contingent on our having direct positive interaction and *unity* with God's children. If we, who are called of God, do not possess a genuine devotion and Godly tenderness for the brethren, we diminish the sacrifice of Christ and will suffer sickness and death.

The foremost role of the ordained leadership is to teach people in the ways of God – being “helpers of your joy.” (2 Corinthians 1:24) True servants will be living their own lives by reflecting a Godly example for others to emulate. They must have a love for God that is greater than anything else in their lives. This includes any loyalty to their group, buddies; even family. God must be first and visible in how they conduct their lives. They must be cautious not to allow the pomp that goes along with leadership to cause them to get the “big head” and to think more of themselves than they do the brethren.

Elijah was God's prophet. He was used mightily by God. But, have you ever noticed that the people of Israel did not run every detail past him? Elijah was not even aware of any other faithful people (1 Kings 19:10). There were seven thousand Israelites who were *not* in close contact with Elijah – yet they were special to God. Notice how God says it.

“Yet I have left Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.” (1 Kings 19:18)

Those church leaders who are not actively restoring *unity* among God's children are missing the mark. They must become part of the solution, or God will hold them responsible for being a part of the problem. God's children must have ownership of their Faith. There has been an imbalance of “lording it over” the brethren, in lieu of the proper care of the ‘*ekklesia*’ – God's called

out people. When Christ returns, there will be no more separate church associations or church organizations. Everyone will be pulling all together. *"God . . . hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation."* (2 Corinthians 5:19)

Our Faith very much involves our relationships with our fellow man. No one should ever think that he or she stands in good stead with God because of being in the "right" church group. Buildings and organizations do not make a church. Neither should anyone think himself "closer" to God because of his ordination or position.

"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." (1 Peter 1:22)

A Matter of Salvation

We were once a part of a worldwide work – in virtually every nation on earth at one time. Many were called to be Christians. But to what extent are we truly Christians today? How many brethren went on to the perfection that Christ demands of us? *"Let us go on unto perfection."* (Hebrews 6:1)

Church policy designed to protect the organization rather than the brethren is wrong. Discerning the Lord's body is not understood when pastors are directed to distance themselves from cases involving child molestation. True Christianity always involves a genuine care for others, and real service to them.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day made the mistake of measuring their faith too lightly. The Bible gives us God's litmus test of those who count as His Church versus those who follow Satan's way. No one ever wants to believe, "Satan has a hold on me."

*"In this the children of God are manifest [here is how you tell], and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that **loves not his brother.**"* (1 John 3:10)

Here, John explains the essence of Godly Christianity – *righteousness* and *brotherly love*. In God's Church we have stressed righteousness – much more than the unity and oneness of brotherly love. There is no room in the meaning of these verses to place any less emphasis on brotherly love.

A Christian through his actions will be caring, serving, loving – doing what is right for all of our brothers and sisters. This is not possible when there is division. Keeping God's command to love the brethren is not possible when we are not interacting with one another. John goes on to make an astounding claim – a claim that is lost on much of God's Church today. Can we have salvation without fellowship and love for the brethren? Scripture is clear; fellowship is a matter of salvation.

*"We know that we have passed from death unto life, **because we love the brethren**. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death."* (1 John 3:14)

Most people, however, would say that they love the people in their group and, thus, have fulfilled this scripture. But can we agree that *all* those who have God's Holy Spirit are brethren, and that there are many brethren in various groups? If so, our love must extend to those brethren as well, and not just to those in our particular group. This is God's priority for salvation. It is very simple – and it is not optional. If we do not love the brethren, we are headed for death. Almost every person will say, "I love all Christians." Talk is cheap.

We do not get off so easily. John realized that many people would profess a longing for *unity and oneness* – while not lifting one little finger to help bring about an inclusive fellowship of believers.

"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." (1 John 3:18)

Let us not reject the preponderance of Scripture, which proclaims God's demand that His people exhibit the indispensable characteristic of *being unified* – giving rise to a *oneness* with every fellow servant.

"Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (1 John 3:17)

"Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it." (1 Corinthians 12:26)

If all groups fully realized that truly we are all one Body, then all of us would work together toward unity. The *goal of unity* based on Godly love is a much greater concern than all of our jots and tittles matching exactly. All of God's children have grown to varying stages of understanding and conversion. God recognizes that we will be on slightly different pages from one another in our Christian development – giving us occasion to learn to walk and work together. Forgiveness and mercy allow true Christians to interact – no matter what our degree of conversion might be.

"But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him." (1 Corinthians 12:18)

A Christian's Duty

If we could ask Jesus Christ, right now, who would He say should be preserving the precious Truth that we have received? No one has it today, except the scattered children of God. Brethren, we have God's Truth. The Truth is ours to live, to preserve, and to safeguard. Scripture compares us to a building that is built upon a foundation that will not be moved, because we, the saints, are built on that Rock – Jesus Christ. Do not reason that the preservation of the Truth lies with corporations or organizations. No; it is we, personally, who must continue to live the Truth of God.

"He is like a man which built a house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built a house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and

immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.”
(Luke 6:48-49)

Since our Father loves us so much that He was willing to give up His Son that we might have eternal life – and Jesus loves us so much that He willingly and literally died in our place – what must we do to demonstrate that kind of love?

“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” (1 John 3:16)

Thankfully, we can be spiritual sacrifices – that is, we are able to put everything on the line for Godly principles – while maintaining our physical lives. Paul found this to be a reasonable and well-pleasing way to lay down our lives.

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” (Romans 12:1)

Most people will be cordial when approached, but we must be the ones who will take the initiative to reach out to other brethren to build and to restore friendships. We can start easy – with cards for anniversaries, and then letters and calls of encouragement. The next thing you will know, you will have an old friend. God says that when we do the “right thing” in reaching out to, serving, and loving our fellow man, it will be contagious among His children. *“He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in Him.”* (1 John 2:10)

By reaching out to all our brethren, at every opportunity, we willingly make ourselves vulnerable. Paul uses the more expressive phrase *living sacrifice* to convey the meaning. Those who will be forced to endure the Tribulation eventually will see that they have not followed Christ’s example of *laying down their lives* for the brethren. Here is a lesson for us. Remember when the prodigal son “came to himself” and returned home? (Luke 15:17) Then the prodigal son’s elder brother had the wrong attitude and was not happy to see him return. We must not

make that same mistake. We must have the attitude of the father who welcomed his once-wayward son with open arms. Those who have forgotten the importance of unity and oneness within the Family of God must return to basics. We must pray that God will soften our hearts and soften the hearts of those who have not yet "*come to themselves.*" Pray also that those who have left the true essence of Christianity for a substitute form of religion will be able to come home. Our attitude even now must be that of the prodigal son's father. We must work to include the scattered brethren in a common fellowship and show them that they are genuinely respected.

What is a Christian to do? What is our individual responsibility for bringing about Christian unity – now at this present time? Are we living our Christianity correctly?

Our very salvation is at stake. It is extremely important for us to check our spiritual growth. We must be convinced that we are doing the right thing. Do we know how to recognize a true Christian? Have we taken for granted that the faith we practice is the one Jesus came to establish? Do we deduce that "we must be Christians" just because we go through the motions of going to "church" on Saturday? We know that Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God and that the reward of the saved is not heaven. Does that make us Christians? We know about the feast days, place of safety, clean and unclean foods, the beast power, and anointing. Does knowing these precious truths make someone a true Christian?

We have been privileged to understand a great deal of prophecy through the key of knowing who Israel is. We have known the importance of going into all the world to preach the gospel as a witness. We have established our own unique church culture, with sermonettes, hymns, potlucks, and Spokesman Clubs. Do these things make us Christians? No, they do not.

Knowing these things does not make us Christians, *per se*, but we are accountable for what we know. Most of these practices are rather pleasant and gratifying and have brought very little persecution on us. Oh yes, some have been "beaten and

battered” for the Truth’s sake and for resisting the apostasy – but we have not resisted unto blood or death, striving against sin (Hebrews 12:4). More persecution will come upon those who put Christ’s words into practice. Jesus said that all who followed Him would suffer persecution.

“Yes, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” (2 Timothy 3:12)

“They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.” (John 16:2)

Taking a stand for Godly principles is a right cause, and does not cause division worthy of being disfellowshipped from the Church. Those who have “put us out” were only putting us out of their organizations – not the Church of God. Men who were serving only an organization rejected us. God has not rejected us. They said, “shame on you,” as they made outcasts of us. But that is okay. It is good to be rejected for the right causes. Christ left us an example, that we should follow in His steps. God prophesied that His people will have *gone out* in order to follow the Truth.

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out.” (Revelation 3:12)

If nothing that has happened in the Church so far has been enough of a bother to take a stand against – to cause us to be a living sacrifice – then we should question whether we are awake or asleep. There are some members and ministers who have not seen cause to rock the boat in their organizations. So far everything is okay with them. They have been able to put up with the doctrinal changes, political practices, and church policy on the way other members have been mistreated.

The Work of God

It is God the Father who does the work of producing believers in Jesus Christ. It is only when we assist in that cause – Christianity – that we are doing the works of God. Jesus was

asked, *"What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him [Jesus] whom He [the Father] hath sent."* (John 6:28-29)

How many brethren are being taught that they are in the right organization, and that they are doing "the Work" of broadcasting and publishing the "good news" to all the earth? As shocking as it may be to some, that is *not* the sum total of the Work of God. Let us ask ourselves a serious question. Should we expect God to call new brethren into a group that does not practice the true essence of Christianity? If the group does not possess the essential quality of Christianity, how can the new proselyte grow in grace and knowledge?

The end result of all evangelism should be that those from the world will begin to believe in Jesus Christ, will repent, and will come together in *unity and oneness* – loving God and one another as Christians. God makes it very clear that preaching and doing many wonders are *not* His highest priority.

"Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work [lawlessness]." (Matthew 7: 22-23)

Compare the last word *lawlessness*, with this next verse, which describes God's priority for us. God says that not loving our fellow man is "*lawlessness*." What does God say is the opposite of "lawlessness"? *"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."* (Galatians 5:14)

Jesus Christ also makes it clear that interpretation of prophecy is *not* the number one priority of a true Christian. Sure, God's prophecies are meant to inform, to comfort, and to encourage us. Prophecy is given for our assurance of what will shortly come to pass – not so that we will spend all of our energies trying to figure out the "when, where, and how." Having prophetic

understanding, in and of itself, does not qualify us for the Kingdom or get us into the place of safety.

"Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not charity [agape-love], I am nothing." (1 Corinthians 13:2)

Notice how Scripture brings us back to what our priority should be! If we are not practicing *agape* charitable love for the brethren – no matter what other priorities we might have – we do *not* have the correct Godly priority. Our propensity to love one another grows proportionately as we pray for those brethren with needs and problems. The saddest part of all is that most groups today, either openly or subtly, discourage contact with brethren in other groups. This is our time of testing. Prominent people within God's Church hob-knob among themselves to the exclusion of the brethren.

This un-Christian practice is only winked at by some. Regular members are rarely invited to gatherings for friendly fellowship. This is not proper. If Godly respect is missing within congregations, how will respect for *all* scattered brethren be taught? Have we learned so little, that a class system is still perpetuated in God's Church today?

". . . When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbors; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind." (Luke 14:12-13)

Harm to the Body of Christ occurs because people lack the courage to confront wrongdoing. They use baseless excuses like "it is not right to hurt someone's feelings." Have we come to the point where anyone who attempts to rectify a wrong will soon find himself or herself *persona non grata*? We should never think that it is "safer" not to go to the aid of a fellow member who has fallen from the good graces of the ordained leaders. Our goal is not to be in their good graces – but God's. When anyone is wrong – he or she must be admonished to change. *"None calleth*

for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity.” (Isaiah 59:4)

Is it difficult to confront this kind of wrongdoing in the Church? Yes it is! Many have incurred the wrath of those prominent men who, lacking humility and understanding, try to maintain the status quo. Perhaps they think that somehow it will all be okay – it is permitted because of rank. Or, maybe they do not really believe that there will be an accounting before Jesus Christ? *“But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at naught thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”* (Romans 14:10, 12)

Paul had to correct Peter for his divisiveness when he was respecting persons. Peter was participating in the exact same kind of alienation that is destroying our Church today (Galatians 2:12). Peter learned from Paul’s loving correction and later wrote that no one should be left out.

“Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” (1 Peter 4:9-10)

Respect of persons cannot be condoned, because it is divisive. We are told to follow Paul’s example and to go to our brother and to point out his fault. His salvation is at stake, and so is ours.

“Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us.” (1 John 4:11-12)

By interacting this way with other Christians, God’s love is perfected in us. When God’s love is perfected in us, we become deeply concerned about the spiritual welfare of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Love is not superficial contact like at choir practice, potlucks, and summer camp, but a discerning

involvement that puts a fellow laborer back on track when he or she falls.

"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one converts him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death." (James 5:19-20)

"And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." (Jude :23)

Our community of fellowship must resemble Christ's concept of the Kingdom of God. Until it does, we cannot rest satisfied. We are obligated to become involved in bringing about unity and oneness among all the children of God. We disqualify ourselves if we sit on the sidelines and suppose that someone else will do it for us. How do we begin to find *oneness* – care and love for one another – in the brotherhood of the faithful? How many of us have the same dreams and hopes of love, unity, and kindness for one another?

We have seen the kind of unity and oneness Jesus Christ indicates we should have with all members. Without an unseen hand from somewhere – or a great charismatic leader literally ushering various church leaders into a collective enterprise – it falls to the individual members to fulfill the role of the end-time Church to become one in unity. The biblical evidence is that God's Will is for individual members of the Body of Christ to work together to create a unity that transcends all obstacles.

Our salvation depends – not on our being in the right group – but on how we relate to one another. Jesus could not have made it clearer when He gave us the definition of Christian love. *"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."* (Matthew 25:40,45)

We need to respect our brothers and sisters for who they are, even if they seem to be stumbling just a little at the moment. When any one of God's children is unwilling to get together or to confer with other Christians, it is division – and it is wrong.

Division in the church is as real today as it was in the first century. Let us take the initiative to show ourselves friendly.

"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." (Hebrews 10:24-25)

It is easy to say that this "assembling of ourselves together" refers only to individuals meeting with some church group on the Sabbath. But that is a self-serving and limited interpretation. Paul is saying that groups of Christians must not be exclusive of other Christians. When an independent group, no matter how large or small, thinks that it is sufficient unto itself – that group has accepted a division that amounts to heresy. It is the same today as in Paul's day: groups of brethren avoid assembling together in violation of God's instruction. We need to be reaching out to others – renewing old friendships. *"Then they that feared the Lord spoke often one to another."* (Malachi 3:16)

There Is Only One Church

God has only one Church – consisting of all the called-out saints. *"As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one Body, being many, are one Body: so also is Christ."* (1 Corinthians 12:12) We need to be involved with brethren from other groups as much as possible and to show Christian love to *all* of the children of God. It is important to seek out others who are like-minded in wanting to bind up the wounds of the past and truly to let Christ's love live in us. Jesus has one Church – and only one!

*"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend **with all saints** what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge,*

that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God."
(Ephesians 3:14-19)

Loyalty to organizations that supplants loyalty to the Body of Christ is misdirected. Organizations should magnanimously set the highest standard of outgoing openness. Loyalty to God and His Truth must be the central theme for members of God's Church today. Jesus said, *"I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,"* so we know the Church will survive. We need to be part of the solution.

God's word and church history give testimony to the fact that the Church of God will not die out. It now falls to all of us, as brethren, to take up the mantle of true Christianity. So many prominent leaders have not. There exists a state of self-satisfaction in many groups. This gives us the opportunity – no, the responsibility – to build fellowship among God's children. Make no mistake about it! We are up against a most formidable foe. Satan has done his dirty work. People will say when we approach them, "You must want me to join your Church." "You are not with our organization. Obviously you have missed the mark somewhere." Every biblical verse we cite will be scrutinized for every nuance of difference as we attempt to rebuild bridges of trust.

How do we begin to fellowship openly in a loving, meaningful way? This must be our desire, because it is Christ's desire. One on one is the only way to be truly unified. Christian love involves daily action in the lives of others. That effort is best achieved person to person. First the unity and oneness of God's children must be cultivated. Those who are properly living their Christianity are the "seed in good ground" in the parable of the sower. Jesus said that they will bring forth the fruit that He desires.

"But that [seed] on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience." (Luke 8:15)

What does Jesus Christ expect the elect to be doing right now? God promises that He will not allow His chosen elect to be

deceived. He prophesied that our sons and daughters will speak the Truth – just about now – at this end time. That means that there will be a people of God, living their Christianity at His return.

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." (Acts 2:17)

Even though we, in our physical fellowships, are separated by many miles, the true brethren can become *one* in Spirit. We must have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts to be a part of the restoration of the common brotherhood of believers. We cannot love the brethren unless we love God. The key to *oneness* lies in our surrender to God our Father and Jesus Christ. When we are surrendered to Them – not seeking to please men or an organization – we begin to find *oneness* with one another.

"But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (1 John 3:17)

It is understandable that the churches of this world are unable to come together in unity, but it is inexcusable that the true Children of God are making so few attempts to be *unified* in the way Christ intended. When the Bible talks about *love*, it is not a feeling or an emotion. Christian love is a practical involvement, a caring, and consideration for others according to all Godly standards. This *love* is our gateway to God – and there are no shortcuts. We must be actively involved in extending Godly love to every one of the saints. *"He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."* (1 John 4:8)

"And this is His commandment, That we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment." (1 John 3:23)

John repeats Jesus' command that Christians also lay down their lives for one another. Nothing less is sufficient. Jesus laid down His life – died – so that we might live. That is how much

He loves us! *"This is My commandment, That ye love one another, **as** I have loved you."*

Let us read this Scripture like this:

*"This is My commandment, That you love one another, **in the very same way** that I loved you."* (John 15:12)

Brethren, are we willing to go that far to establish *unity and oneness* with our brothers and sisters in Christ? When we are led by God's Holy Spirit, we will lay our lives down just as Jesus Christ did. We will take a stand against all cruelty – and not close our eyes to it. Every time our brethren are abused, we will come to their aid and support them against their evil persecutors. If it costs us our jobs, savings, security, being put out of organizations, or even our lives, we will lay our lives down for one of our brethren – as Jesus gave us example. This is our Christianity in action – not merely sentiments, platitudes, or religious-sounding talk. Every time any of our brethren is in need, we will "put it all on the line" for any one of them.

"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die." (Romans 5:6-7)

What better test of our Christianity could there be? Yes, the scattered plight of the Church of God is a terrible predicament – and a wonderful opportunity to show God where our heart resides. The fact that the Church is prophesied to go through trials and scattering is not a reason to welcome or embrace the devastation in the Church of God. Ezekiel foretold that Jesus Christ would definitely gather the scattered flock upon His return. This is an indication that we will not be completely successful in "rounding up" all of the dispersed brethren into one fellowship. That indication in no way undermines the command to love one another or Jesus Christ's desire *"that they may be one."* Christ is just as emphatic when He says that He will require His flock at their hand – those responsible for driving away the brethren. *"God will hold the shepherds to account for the loss of the flock,"* (Ezekiel 34:10, The Soncino Chumash, page 230).

There is an indictment here of those who do not seek their brethren who were scattered. Jesus Christ denounces those who are not practicing real Christianity.

"The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and cruelty have ye ruled them." (Ezekiel 34:4)

There is no division allowed here – *"no schism in the body."* For some there is the temptation to draw back – to be an independent Christian – and to say, "I've had it with people!" or, "I've had it with ministers!" Some members have had "enough" of organizations – which is understandable. Too many of God's children learned wrongly to look to the organization rather than to God. Organizations can be taken over by men of error. The mistake that "independent Christians" make is that, when they stop trusting organizations, they forget the **scattered brethren also**. This is Satan's trick, and it has worked all too well.

"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?" (1 John 4:20)

God's word dictates that we always do what is Scripturally right and best for our brothers and sisters. What do we do when we sincerely reach different conclusions as to the meaning and intent of God's Word? We need to keep in mind that, while seeking fully to know God's Will, everyone is going to have a slightly different understanding because of his or her background and experiences. The answer is not to disfellowship innocent brethren, as has been too often done – especially when the member was retaining the truth, and the one doing the disfellowshipping was supporting an administration advocating false doctrine.

"Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake." (Luke 6:22)

Organizations that believe they must be obeyed because they possess "authority" have lost sight of John 17:17: "*Thy Word is Truth.*" The Church of God is supposed to be one unified, organized body with Jesus Christ as its head – but it is not (Ephesians 5:23). What we have instead, is Christ the head – with lots of bodies! When we understand how wrong that concept is, we realize that an "independent" Christian is a contradiction in terms. A Christian must walk in light and truth and seek unity and oneness with his brethren. There is a sense of pride and arrogance in some of the groups that proudly proclaim their independence. Sometimes, it is the result of a "backlash" from the heavy-handedness and abuses of the past, but still it is not right to seek to be self-reliant, because the saints need one another. True Christians seek fellowship with all of their brethren. "*If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.*" (1 John 1:7)

There is absolutely no justification for being "independent." Christianity demands that Christians interact with all other Christians. That was God's design from the beginning of creation. "*For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.*" (1 John 3:11)

We may easily express our love toward God in heaven, but it is not properly demonstrated on earth until we truly love one another. "*For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have shewed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.*" (Hebrews 6:10)

If we do not possess loving concern for other Christians, we are not being led by God's Holy Spirit. Some have said in the past that all this talk about "love" sounds like "Protestantism." Christian love, tempered by God's commandments, yields Christian godliness in us. We cannot know and love our Father, unless we are actively serving our brethren.

"*Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born [begotten] of God, and knoweth God.*" (1 John 4:7)

Brethren, do we grasp the importance of these instructions? Can we see how sorely deficient we have been in this area? The apostasy should have caused the true saints to pull together, yet we scattered because this dimension of loving one another was woefully lacking in so many of us. John, too, saw the lack of Christian love in the Church. He wrote after all was said and done in the first century Church of God. John had seen all the Gnosticism, false teachers, heresy, separation, division, and playing church. John then emphasized the spiritual need for genuine, loving concern for every brother and sister, because that is what was missing in the Church then – and it is still missing today!

Our Father gave us the model of love by withholding nothing essential for our lives. That is the same pattern we must also build upon in expressing our love toward all others. Late in life John understood this standard so well.

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."
(1 John 4:9-10)

A Marvelous Work

God will soon designate two great witnesses to proclaim His Truth to the world during the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord. However, there are scriptural indications that another kind of witness will occur just before the Tribulation. Indeed, God is going to work a marvelous work.

"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My Spirit." (Joel 2:28-29)

Peter recognized a partial fulfillment of this prophecy at the first New Testament Pentecost (Acts 2:17). As this takes place in a greater way at the end of the church age, God will, once again,

thrust some of His people into the public's focus. That does not mean that everything will be "peaches and cream"! The Church is warned to expect persecution in the last days, but it has not yet occurred in a big way. Yes, we have all suffered hardship and affliction in our jobs and personal lives, but none of us has faced torture or death due to our beliefs.

"They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." (John 16:2)

Events are going to occur that will cause the world to hate the true children of God. What could bring this about? God has not provided us with any specifics yet, but He does give us some clues. *"The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits."* (Daniel 11:32)

It may be that those who, in a humble and upright manner, come together in Christian unity will be used by God in some truly spectacular way. *"Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I **work a work in your days**, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you."* (Acts 13:41)

"And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." (Malachi 3:17)

Those with a Philadelphian attitude of brotherly love, who are vigorously pursuing *unity and oneness* with all brethren, will be delivered from the Tribulation by Jesus Christ. *"I also will keep thee from the hour of [Tribulation], which shall come upon all the world, to [tribulate] them that dwell upon the earth."* (Revelation 3:10)

The end-time Philadelphian brethren will feature a love for the weak brethren, as well as the strong in God's Church. Not only will they be upholding doctrinal Truth, they will be selflessly imparting an enthusiastic love – even toward those who oppose themselves. The era of brotherly love is fast fading away, and the loveless era is becoming the comfortable norm. The last

Church era, Laodicea, is slated to go into the Tribulation that will come on all the world – in order to wake them up!

We can choose to be fervently serving one another with a brotherly love – and bypass the Tribulation – or we can lay aside zealously for complacency. The choice is ours. During the Tribulation, God will graciously present one last opportunity to those Church brethren who have not yet learned to lay down their lives, to do so. Those in the Tribulation will physically lay their lives down in death for having neglected to be spiritual sacrifices prior to that time. (Romans 12:1, Revelation 12:11)

Look at how Jesus describes the spiritual condition of the last era of the church. *"Thou art lukewarm . . . wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked . . . be zealous therefore, and repent."* (Revelation 3:16-19)

When Christ returns, there will be a people whose love for one another – a true Christian love – distinguishes them from those who confuse their social life for Godly service. Somehow, in God's great providence, He will protect that little flock from the horrors of the Tribulation. From their protected place, this small body will be a light and an example to their Christian brethren left behind. *"Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing."* (Luke 12:43)

Those church members who are caught in the Wrath will have one last opportunity to experience the love of God. It will become abundantly clear to them that they had not met the criteria for deliverance. They will finally realize that God wanted them to show that they believed Him by *"so doing."* Those brethren in the place of safety will be a witness that God has a certain level of performance that must soon be met. The rest will finally learn that true Christianity is no "gravy train."

Delaying until the time of the Tribulation to learn to love one another will bring about a physical death sentence. At that time, physical death will be the only way to overcome Satan and to gain eternal life. **Failure to love one another will mean loss of salvation.** For those brethren caught in the Tribulation it will be too late to escape with their lives, because they had been

unwilling to lay their lives down for the brethren the way God intended. They will have never truly learned to love all of Christ's brethren. They had not yet done the third thing necessary to overcome Satan. *"And they overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death."* (Revelation 12:11)

If we have not learned what it means to *lay down our lives* for all the brethren, we will go through the Tribulation. Many seem to think that we are more privileged than the other church eras – and that we will just breeze into the Kingdom of God without learning to put God's Will into our lives. Read about the tribulation and death suffered by the righteous brethren of Smyrna in Revelation 2. We, too, will by no means escape, if we have not done what is required of us – laying down our lives. Unlike Cain, who had no regard for his brother, we are our brothers' keeper. We must stand by each one of our fellow saints, no matter what the price – even our lives.

"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." (1 John 3:16)

The Church of God is shattered into many estranged parts. Jesus Christ prayed the night before He died *"that they may be one"* – unified. It is important to regard *all* people who have God's Holy Spirit as brethren and to love and to esteem them, regardless of group affiliation. The true Church of God goes beyond organizational boundaries to include all brethren who share our common Faith.

Those who promote the concept of separate organizations do not know the Scriptures or realize the harm they are bringing on God's children. Leaders should set aside pride, recognition, security, and title for the unity and oneness of the flock. *"[Jesus] made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant."* (Philippians 2:7)

We Christians are empowered by God's Holy Spirit to overcome our self-serving human nature. Our Christianity demands that we follow the example of Christ and lay aside our

own self-interests – preferring the good of all others – which is Christian love. We can do it – albeit in different ways because we are all unique. With all of our brethren, we must be patient and sensitive to their different levels of tolerance and their different pain thresholds. Some brethren were totally devastated and disillusioned by the apostasy, while others were not shaken at all. Our dissimilar backgrounds and past experiences cause us to evaluate situations in different ways.

Yes, we are to be a “witness” to the world – *“That the world may know.”* (John 17:23) What better way is there to witness than by living our Faith with one another? Preaching and publishing the gospel means little if our message of God’s way of life is not apparent in our relationships with others. One way we proclaim the gospel is living according to the rules of the Kingdom of God now.

There is an awful lot of work to be done. God has placed each one of us in the Body of Christ where it pleases Him. Let us reach out at every opportunity God gives us to let our light shine. We have to keep on doing what we were called to do.

When we were baptized, we were not affiliated or bound to any one administration, organization, or group. We should meet with all of God’s saints who are happy to fellowship with us; otherwise we should hold our peace. We are trying to serve the whole of the Body of Christ. It is to the Body of Christ that we regard ourselves as being affiliated – not first and foremost to a particular group. We have been given the blessing of having the opportunity to reach out to all who desire unity and oneness.

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty [freedom]; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.” (Galatians 5:13)

The Wife of Christ

The Church of God is to wed Jesus Christ at His return. The church that marries Christ will not resemble the scattered church today. It will be those whose hearts and lives have been welded together in unity and oneness who will share in the great wedding

feast. The problem with this scenario is that most of the brethren, who think that they "know" that they are going to be "the Bride of Christ," will not have anything to do with one another.

"The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready." (Revelation 19:7)

Jesus is not going to return to an estranged people who will not have anything to do with one another. The Wife of Christ is not one specific organization out of all the different groups. Nor is it a loose federation of scattered Church brethren. The Spirit that is shared in common by those who constitute the Wife of Christ is the strongest bond that exists. The Bride of Christ will have God's Holy Spirit in common. It is only the greater prepared Church that is called the Wife. Jesus will only have *one* Wife.

So, where do we go from here? What must the Bride do to make herself ready for the marriage of the Lamb? She will be ready! But, we are not ready now because we have not developed a real caring for one another. God expects us to be anxiously concerned for the spiritual well-being of all of the brethren. The breach that exists among the remaining children of God must be healed. The will of God is perfectly clear.

*"That there should be **no schism** in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another."*
(1 Corinthians 12:25)

It is not good enough to say that we were not the cause of the problem, because God demands that we must be part of the solution. How can we bind up the wounds of those who are afraid of being hurt again? Church division is a spiritual illness. Whose job is it to apply the healing balm? The answer is that it is every Christian's responsibility, before God, to give moral support to all others – not only to those in their own corporation or group. We must have *a mind for unity*. We will not be prepared for the wedding with Christ, until we all come to that same mind with all Spirit-led brethren.

"Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men." (1 Thessalonians 5:14)

We are running out of time to show God that we consider all of the brethren to be the Bride of Christ. Soon, those who are truly prepared for the marriage of the Lamb will come together in mind, attitude, and Spirit, no matter which organization they are in. It will be a miracle when it happens. The lines must be crossed – the barriers will come down.

The true Church of God often has been a grass-roots effort. God called Herbert W. Armstrong by having his wife Loma meet another woman, who "just happened" to be a member of the true Church of God. Brethren can courageously and fearlessly cross any artificial line that would separate those who are led by God's Holy Spirit. We are small. We are the *diaspora* – the scattered ones. But we will be *one in unity*.

We are a special, chosen people. We are the children of God – the Family of God. We love and care deeply for one another. With all of our substance, we must zealously be teaching the brethren to love one another. The division and scattering of God's children must be healed. One by one, we can be the example to the world that Jesus Christ prayed we would be. We must develop an ever-widening circle of friends and brethren we would die for, if need be. Our propensity for Christian love must develop and expand.

This message of *unity and oneness* must have the highest priority for all of the Church of God. We must be dynamically enlarging our sphere of involvement beyond those who make us comfortable. We must reach out to the entire Church of God – and beyond. God will have a people who are *one* so that the world may learn of Him.

*"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be **perfectly joined together**..." (1 Corinthians 1:10)*

Let us take up the challenge!

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