

The Unity Series

# One Body

Vol. 2

## Introduction: The *how* of unity

**D**o you love God's Church? This book is for anyone who does. If you love the Church, you will want it be brought to complete unity, right? We know that Jesus longs for the unity of the Church. If that's what Jesus wants, it's what you should want too.

[Jesus said] I pray... for those who will believe in me through their [the apostles'] message, that all of them may be one, Father... I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one... that they may be brought to complete unity (John 17:20-23).

According to what Jesus says here, to be brought to complete unity, we need one thing in particular: glory. What glory do we need? The glory God gave to Jesus—the same glory that Jesus has given us, the glory of eternal life and power. God promised Jesus the glory of reigning forever in the Kingdom, and Jesus has promised us the same thing.

The people who glory in the Kingdom have believed that it's coming. Have you believed? If you have the hope of the resurrection, you have the glory of the Kingdom even now. With that glory, you have what it takes to contribute to the unity of the Church because the Church is that group of people that have decided to seek the Kingdom.

**God's  
way of  
accom-  
plishing  
unity  
in his  
Church  
is giving  
us glory!**

It's one thing to believe in unity, but it's quite another thing to actually accomplish it. God's way of accomplishing unity in his Church is giving us glory! You either have it or you don't have it. You have either believed in the Good News of the Kingdom, or you haven't. If you have the glory, you'll be useful for the Church. Otherwise, you won't be able to contribute to the oneness of the Body.

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# One Body

## B. Metaphorically

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**...meta-  
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sum up  
the es-  
sence of  
what the  
Church  
is about.**

**W**e have seen what the Church is organizationally, now we want to probe into what it is metaphorically. The metaphors that Jesus and the apostles used to describe the Church should not be taken lightly. Although metaphors aren't supposed to be taken literally, they should be taken *seriously* because they sum up the essence of what the Church is about. We will look at six of them in this section. The Bible says that the Church is:

- salt
- light
- lampstands
- a building
- a temple
- a flock
- a field

## 1. Salt

We are the salt of the Earth; but what does that mean? What does it mean for us to be salt? Jesus wrapped up his salt metaphor with using his famous expression “he who has ears to hear, let him hear,” meaning that this is a metaphor that needs to be interpreted carefully.<sup>1</sup> Only people who are spiritually sensitive will be able to interpret what Jesus meant by calling us *salt*. So let’s interpret this enigmatic metaphor by breaking down the passage into four main points:

- When Jesus says “salt is good” he’s referring to its taste. “Salt tastes good” is a beautifully simple truth. Most people think that very thought when we sit at the table for dinner and see a saltshaker within reach. Almost anyone who has tasted salt will enthusiastically agree with Jesus’ expression “salt is good.”
- When our Lord says that we are *the salt of the Earth*, he means that there is something special about us—call it our *flavor*, if you like. In other words, we bring a blessing, a positive effect, to this world (the Earth). In this world, we have a unique effect on the lives of the people around us.

**...Salt  
tastes  
good.**

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<sup>1</sup>Preachers often interpret the salt to mean the power to preserve. They point out that salt preserves meat. There were no refrigerators in the time of Christ and people would preserve their meat by salting it. It’s true that salt was used for that purpose in Jesus’ time, and it’s also true that having the Church in towns and cities will preserve them, but we don’t believe that Jesus was using salt in the sense of preserving.

God would not have destroyed Sodom if it had had at least ten righteous people in it—the equivalent of a church. You can gather that fact from Abraham’s bartering over Sodom (Genesis 18:23-32). In some cases, God will conserve a city if he finds even *one* righteous man in it—so we certainly do have a preserving effect on our environs. However, if salt as a conserving element was what Jesus was teaching, then why isn’t conservation in the context? Jesus was certainly teaching something else, and it’s our duty to teach only what Jesus taught—so we’ll have to avoid the popular interpretations.

- Jesus also added that salt which loses its flavor is useless. That means that if we lose our special effect, God has no use for us in this world. He might kill us or remove our congregation from its place if we are useless, right? Yes, God does that. For example, he warned the church at Ephesus that he would remove them if they didn't repent.

If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place (Revelation 2:5).

- The context of Jesus' salt teachings is very clear: He taught that we are salt in the context of what it means to be a true disciple. So, the issue Jesus was addressing with his salt metaphor is what the special qualities of a true disciple are. Even deeper, he was focusing on the source of our special qualities: our Kingdom hope. The fact that we live for the Kingdom is what makes us different from other people. It is what's unique about us.

#### a. The context

The key to understanding Jesus salt teaching is the same key for understanding any passage of Scripture: the context. Since Jesus compared us to salt in two passages, we are duty-bound to examine the context of both passages. If we interpret them together, we'll have double-affirmation of the context of the salt metaphor.

**...giving up everything in this life.** Both passages are about what it takes to be a disciple. Both of them are about giving up everything in this life. Here's Luke's version:

... none of you can be my disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear (Luke 14:33-35; LEB).

You'll see that Jesus used the word *therefore* after challenging his followers to give up all of their possessions. Ask yourself: What's the *therefore* there for? Jesus is saying that Kingdom living (the kind of lifestyle characterized by giving up possessions) is our "flavor." In other words, the

flavor of salt represents the impact our Kingdom-focused lives will have on the people around us. The impact of our lives on other people is like the impact salt has on food.

With that, here's how Jesus' metaphor can best be broken down:

salt = us  
saltiness/flavor = Kingdom-focused lives  
food = other people

## b. Dare to be different

A Christian is already different, but he has to dare to be different. Our holiness is only useful if we're bold about it, not shy. For example, Paul gloried in his weaknesses. He boasted about it. The apostles revelled in their crosses—and that made them drastically different from other people. If there is no marked difference in our lives, we're useless. If we're useless, we're not worth keeping around.

**Our holiness is only useful if we're bold about it, not shy.**

Why should God keep us in this world if we're not impacting the people around us? Would you keep a burnt-out lightbulb in a socket? There's no reason to keep it there, unless it gives light. In the same vein, would you add tasteless-insipid salt to your food? What's the purpose?

You are the salt of the Earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men (Matthew 5:13).

What made the first Church so unique? Try this: Everyone gave up their possessions. They said something significant by renouncing their material wealth—they made a big statement. They were saying that they did not love the things of this world. Those first Christians professed their love for the Kingdom with more than words. They said it with their actions. That hope in God's Kingdom gave their lives a different flavor, a special feel—and it made them salt.

... always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you (1 Peter 3:15; NKJV).

It's clear that it's not simply salt, but the *flavor* of salt that Jesus wanted to highlight in his teaching, so let's ask ourselves: What flavor do we bring to the lives of the people who live around us? What do we have that spices up our homes, workplaces, schools, neighborhoods, and cities? There has to be something different about us if we're going to be useful for God, and that difference can be nothing other than our expression of hope of the Kingdom of God, because that's what makes us believers.

**Believers are the only people in the world who don't live for this world.** Have you renounced your love for this world? Do you live for the coming world? If you do, you're salt. Believers are the only people in the world who don't live for this world. That makes us the only truly unique people in this world!

## 2. Light

**M**ost of you will easily recall that Jesus called himself the Light of the World, but let's not forget that Jesus calls *us* the light of the world too. We, as his disciples, are *sons of light* (Luke 16:8; NKJV). This means that *light* is another biblical metaphor for the Church.

You are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14).

Think about it: If Jesus called himself *the Light of the World*, and called us by that same name, he's saying that we are like him—he's highlighting the very close relationship we have with him. That relationship is based on two things: 1) the fact that we follow him, and 2) the fact that we have what he has: the light of life.

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life' (John 8:12).

### a. Good deeds

**I**f we do what Jesus does, we shine just like he does. We radiate light in this world through our actions—but how can we be sure that light is shining through us the way it did through Jesus? We can be sure through our good deeds. Our light will shine through our good deeds.



You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven (Matthew 5:14-16).

Our actions speak for themselves—but what do they say, exactly? They’re supposed to say “God is good.” Our actions should motivate others to give glory to God! Indeed, the whole objective of our good works is to get people to give God glory, and to praise him.

The world is a dark place, filled with evil, lies, and sin. The Church is that group of people that shine in the darkness. We enlighten the people who live around us through our lifestyle. When we are faultless, holy, and righteous, we set a high standard for the people who observe us: family, coworkers, colleagues, fellow students, neighbors, and acquaintances.

... [you Philippians need to become] children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world (Philippians 2:15; NKJV).

**...the whole objective of our good works is to get people to give God glory...**

## b. Light from God

Jesus is the Light that God sent into the world; and God sent Jesus into the world to save the world. However, people don’t think they need to be saved. They think they’re doing just fine, even though they are living under a dark cloud of condemnation. They prefer to live in sin and unbelief just like nocturnal creatures that love the darkness and avoid daylight. They don’t want the light of Jesus to expose their sins, so they hate the light.

God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him... This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be

exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light... (John 3:17, 19-21; NKJV)

**...the light we see in Jesus is light from God.** Now, it's important to stress the fact that the light we see in Jesus is light from God. You'll have to read the next passage slowly—Paul wrote it and he was a deep thinker. He wrote about deep truths, so try to take in every word one-at-a-time as you read these three verses. We're confident that if you do, you'll see that God is the origin of Jesus' light.

... the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we... preach... Christ Jesus as Lord... For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4-6; NASB).

You just read a passage that paints a powerful comparison for us. Paul compares the first day of Creation (the one we read about in Genesis 1) to knowing the glory of God. On the first day of Creation, God said "Let there be light" and when people get to know God's glory today, another time occurs in which God says "Let there be light." It's a second enlightenment, but how exactly does it occur? How do we see the glory of God? Through Christ.

Please take notice that Paul says that we see light in the glory of Christ—but Paul's teaching doesn't stop there. He explains the source of Christ's glory too! Jesus is *the image of God*. As God's Son, completely obedient to God's will, Jesus is a faithful representation of God. Jesus is the very reflection of who God is.

Now, get the comparison right: Just as there was darkness in the Beginning, there is darkness in the hearts of unbelievers now. Just as God's fiat—his verbal command—assured that light would shine in the darkness, God's light shines again when someone believes in Jesus. Our Lord's face, the face of a man who has been both resurrected and glorified by God, shows us the glory of God for this reason: You can see all that God has done in Jesus! Have you seen what God has done in his Son? You can see it by faith in the Bible, but you'll have to study it well.

## c. Taking advantage of the light

Jesus was careful to warn his disciples about how hard it would be not to have him with them. He warned them of dark times. He wanted them to take full advantage of his presence.

As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the Light of the World (John 9:4-5).

It's not walking in a dangerous place that makes your walk dark—that was the apostles' misconception of what Jesus said. They didn't think that going to Judea was wise because it was a dangerous place for Jesus—but our Lord corrected their error. He pointed out that we walk in the dark when we do not take full advantage of his presence. Our big opportunity in life is the opportunity to be close to Jesus. That's Jesus' point in this passage.

**Our big opportunity in life is the opportunity to be close to Jesus.**

The disciples said to Him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there [to Judea] again?' Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the Light of this World. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him (John 11:8-10; NASB).

Jesus expressed his role as the Light of the World in a way that challenges us to walk with him. He contrasted our walk with him to a walk in the darkness. For Jesus, there are only two kinds of people: those who walk in the light, and those who walk in the darkness. The people who have light in them are the ones who see Jesus—they see him for who he is, the Son of God. Those are the people who make up the Church.

## 3. Lampstands

Every Christian congregation is metaphorically a lampstand. We know that because the Scriptures say, "the seven lampstands are the seven churches" (Revelation 1:20). That's clear enough, but to truly get a grasp on what it means for a Christian church to be a lampstand, we need to understand the actual design of the OT Tabernacle lampstand.

The Bible's description of the Tabernacle lampstand gives us background information vital for our comprehension of the NT revelation of the Church as a lampstand. The OT has the information we need in order for us to interpret what it means for a church to be a lampstand. Knowing what we're aiming at, let's closely examine the OT description of the lampstand here.

#### a. The Tabernacle lampstand

**G**od told Moses to make a lampstand, just one. It was a very special lampstand, and God told Moses to place it in the Tabernacle. What did that lampstand look like? As you read the following passage (Exodus 25:31-40) phrase-by-phrase, pay close attention to the lampstand's design. Its design reveals the essence of a true Christian church!

**Its design reveals the essence of a true Christian church!**

After each phrase in this passage from Exodus, we add a short commentary to help you to interpret the meaning of the passage:

Make a lampstand of pure gold.

- How precious the lampstand was—it was made of pure gold! The Church is also very precious in God's eyes. The NT says that our faith is more precious than gold (1 Peter 1:7), so our faith is the raw material Jesus uses to give shape to his Church.

Hammer out its base and shaft...

- The entire lampstand was shaped with a hammer. That means that only a highly-skilled artisan could ever craft the lampstand. In the same manner, only a highly-skilled apostle could "hammer out" a church. Furthermore, the use of a hammer indicates that the lampstand was not produced from a mold. On the contrary, it was painstakingly shaped with delicate blows from a craftsman's fine hammer. Doesn't a congregation also take shape only after great effort? And each congregation is completely unique—there's no cookie-cutter you can use to form a church.

... and make its flowerlike cups, buds, and blossoms of one piece with them.

- The fact that the lampstand was one piece represents the unity of the Church. We are one Body. There is no single person in the Church who is disconnected from anyone else in the Church. There was no part of the lampstand that was not connected to the rest.
- We will get to the cups, buds, and blossoms in a moment. For now, it suffices to say there are three units in the beautiful pattern God gave the lampstand.

Six branches are to extend from the sides of the lampstand—three on one side and three on the other. Three cups shaped like almond flowers, with buds and blossoms are to be on one branch, three on the next branch, and the same for all six branches extending from the lampstand.

- Here Moses describes the symmetry of the lampstand. It had six branches, three on each side. The two sides were symmetrical and aesthetically pleasing, balancing the lampstand perfectly. Each branch repeated the three-unit pattern (cup-bud-blossom),<sup>2</sup> and that pattern was repeated on each branch three times. What we're supposed to gather from this is that there were 9 forms on each of the 6 arms, giving a total of 54 forms (making the math of this design:  $9 \times 6 = 54$ ).

**The two sides were symmetrical and aesthetically pleasing...**

And on the lampstand [the central shaft] there are to be four cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms. One bud shall be under the first pair of branches extending from the lampstand, a second bud under the second pair, and a third bud under the third pair—six branches in all.

- At this point, it will certainly be helpful if you can see a

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<sup>2</sup> The Pulpit Commentary gives this interpretation “Cups shaped like almond blossoms seem to be intended. Each branch had three of these in succession, then a pomegranate and a lily-flower” (Retrieved on February 28, 2016 from <http://biblehub.com/exodus/25-33.htm>). Another one of the best Bible translations (the NASB) describes the pattern as “cups shaped like almond blossoms, a bulb, and a flower.” However these parts are translated, the point is always the same: There were 3 units, units representing life; a cup, a bud, and a flower.

picture<sup>3</sup> of what the actual lampstand must have looked like. As you look at it, notice in particular the central shaft and the location of the 4 series of cups, buds, and blossom which the passage describes.



**...the  
beauty  
of the  
Church  
lies in  
the 66  
books  
of the  
Bible,  
wherein  
is our  
faith!**

- We finally get to the point in our study where we can do some surprisingly spiritual math. If you add up the 54 units from the 6 branches (9 units per branch) to the 12 units that were on the central shaft (the series of 3 was repeated 4 times, and  $3 \times 4 = 12$ ), you get a total of 66 units ( $54 + 12 = 66$ ). That happens to be the same number of books in the Bible! That means that the beauty of the Church lies in the 66 books of the Bible, wherein is our faith!
- You may want to test to see whether the number 66 is just a coincidence, or whether it really is a revelation of what the Bible would become after the NT was completed. Testing your faith is very good; so try this: If you add up the 12 central units to the units on just one side of the lampstand (on one side, the units would be 27, because  $3 \text{ branches} \times 9 \text{ units per branch} = 27 \text{ units}$ ), you get 39 units. Now, remember that 39 is also a very special number for the Christian faith: It is the exact number of Bible books in the OT.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Image retrieved on February 27, 2016 from [http://swedenborgstudy.com/books/G.deCharms\\_Tabernacle/images/tab-9.jpg](http://swedenborgstudy.com/books/G.deCharms_Tabernacle/images/tab-9.jpg)

<sup>4</sup>This number is according to the Protestant division of the Scriptures. The Jews consider there to be just 24 books in the Bible (our OT), but they have always had the same content we have. The only difference is that Christians divide the books up differently than the Jews do—here's how: The Jews do not separate Kings, Samuel, or Chronicles each into two books like we do. The Jews also have a book called The Twelve in their Bible. In it are the 12 books we call the Minor Prophets. We separate them.

- Fine, now how many units are left? There are 27, which is the exact number of books in the NT!<sup>5</sup> At this point, you should be able to recognize that we're not dealing with

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Although there is no absolute consensus as to when the Jewish canon was decided upon, it seems to have been firm by 140-40 BC, during the Hasmonean dynasty. Certainly, there are scholars who argue it was not fixed until the second century AD, but no Jewish scholar today would argue that the books contained in our Protestant Bibles are different from theirs. They are indeed the same books, just divided differently. (Adapted from material retrieved on February 28, 2016 from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development\\_of\\_the\\_Hebrew\\_Bible\\_canon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_of_the_Hebrew_Bible_canon)).

<sup>5</sup>Could this all be a coincidence since the canon of the Bible wasn't even defined concretely until 367 AD (by Athanasius), and then reaffirmed in 382 AD (at the Council of Rome), reaffirmed again in 393 AD (at the Council of Hippo), and finally in 397 and 419 AD (at the two Councils of Carthage)? No—it's couldn't possibly be a coincidence. The Bible you hold in your hand today took its official form slowly, yes. However, it has been the only Bible for at least 1600 years! Its gradual formation only affirms it as the Scriptures. It is a book that has been put together through the steady hand of God, and the scrutiny of believers.

Not only does your Bible have the same number of units as the lampstand, but it is divided into OT and NT in the exact numerical proportion as the lampstand! We believe that God knew (when he spoke to Moses about the lampstand) that the Bible would take this very shape. God was foreshadowing the faith of his people (Jews and Christians) as he described the lamp. Isn't his Word a light and a lamp for us? Yes, it is.

Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Psalm 119:105; NKJV).

Today, if you have a Bible, you hold the fruit of some 400 years of defining, and 1600 years of defending God's Word. It represents great struggle and effort. Thousands of men have labored to define and defend the Scriptures, and many of them sacrificed their lives to do so (such as William Tyndale [d. 1536] who was killed in England for publishing an English translation of the Bible).

We, as God's Church, have been charged to continue to fight for the same cause: keeping and defending these 66 books. That battle

everyday coincidences here.

The buds and branches shall all be of one piece with the lampstand, hammered out of pure gold.

- Drawing on the interpretation we have already provided, this verse affirms that the Word of God is an integral part of the Church. Reflect on this: The 66 books of the Bible were literally *hammered out* because they were revealed to prophets and apostles who wrote down God's Word for us with great effort. Did they not share the revelations of God in the midst of violent opposition and persecution?

Then make its seven lamps and set them up on it so that they light the space in front of it.

- To understand this verse, remember that *seven* represents fullness. We emit a *fullness* of light through our Book, the Scriptures. They sum up the Christian faith.
- Now, we must ask ourselves: What specifically do we illuminate? The light of the seven lamps not only falls on, but is directed towards the bread located on a table in front of the lampstand. There was nothing else in front of the lampstand. Now, the bread that the Church is supposed to shine God's light upon is the bread of the New Covenant. Any time we share the Lord's Supper, we proclaim Jesus' death until he comes. Our job is to prove to everyone that Jesus' body is the only sacrifice God will accept for sins.

**We emit  
a full-  
ness of  
light  
through  
our  
Book,  
the  
Scrip-  
tures.**




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is exactly what makes us the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15).



Its wick trimmers and trays are to be of pure gold.

- The lampstand had accessories too: It had utensils such as wick trimmers and trays. What are they spiritually? They represent the forces which work through the Church to keep its flame alive—the ministries of the Church. The missionary, prophetic, evangelistic, and teaching ministries are particularly important to keep the light of our message burning; and there are many more ministries such as healing, interpretations, service, tongues, and giving.

A talent of pure gold is to be used for the lampstand and all these accessories.

- A talent is the equivalent of 75 pounds (34 kilos). That means that they used the equivalent of about 6 gold bars that looked like the bar you see below (each one weighs 12.4 lbs)<sup>6</sup> to make everything: the lampstand, its wick trimmers (there were more than one), and trays (there were more than one). This information gives us an idea of what the size of the lampstand was.
- The lampstand would have been about the height of a man's arm, similar to the one portrayed in the Arch of Titus,<sup>7</sup> a sample of architecture from Rome that depicts the AD 70 sacking of Jerusalem by the Roman General Titus.

**...the forces which work through the Church to keep its flame alive...**

See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.

- These, the final words of the lampstand passage, are a warning. God wanted to make sure that all of his instructions were followed. Since both Jews and Christians have disobeyed God innumerable times throughout history, this warning should be taken seriously.

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<sup>6</sup>Picture retrieved on February 28, 2016 from [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c6/Gold\\_bullion\\_2.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c6/Gold_bullion_2.jpg). This is the standard Good Delivery gold bar the US government uses for the reserves and international markets.

<sup>7</sup>This image is from the Arch of Titus, found near the forum in Rome, built to commemorate the siege of Jerusalem (Retrieved on December 31, 2016 from an image adapted from <http://revelationrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Arch-of-Titus-Spoils-of-Jerusalem.jpg>).

- While we interpret what God wanted the lampstand to look like, we'll need to rely on his Word, not on illustrations or pictures, to get the meaning he intends us to get. As always, God teaches his people primarily through his Word. Unfortunately, many well-meaning teachers have not understood either the design or the significance of the lampstand. Getting our interpretation from one of those mistaken teachers, could easily throw us into confusion.



#### b. Highlight the bread

**T**here are three other passages that confirm how we should interpret the design and use of the lampstand. The first one shows a truth we already studied: that the lampstand was placed in front of the showbread table. Moses put the showbread table in the Tabernacle, laid bread on it, and then placed the lampstand in front of it. The lampstand's function was to make the bread of offering visible, to highlight the bread. As we already said, the bread was a sign of the covenant to come, the covenant Christians currently enjoy in Christ.

**The lampstand's function was to make the bread of offering visible...**

Moses placed the table in the tent of meeting on the north side of the Tabernacle outside the curtain and set out the bread on it before the Lord, as the Lord commanded him.

He placed the lampstand in the tent of meeting opposite the table on the south side of the tabernacle

and set up the lamps before the Lord, as the Lord commanded him (Exodus 40:22-25).

In the following passage, observe how God reinforces his will for the light of the lampstand to face forward and thereby to shine upon the bread.

The Lord said to Moses, “Speak to Aaron and say to him, ‘When you set up the lamps, see that all seven light up the area in front of the lampstand.’ Aaron did so; he set up the lamps so that they faced forward on the lampstand, just as the Lord commanded Moses (Numbers 8:1-3).

But what does this passage mean? Very simply, it shows that it was very important for God, and it’s important for him even today that the bread of the new covenant be revealed to others through the light of our preaching. How do we do that? How do we preach the Lord’s Supper?

... whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:26).

We declare Jesus’ death every time we break the bread, so by breaking bread, we are preaching the Gospel. We are making Jesus’ sacrifice known and inviting people to benefit from it by participating with us. Whenever we break the bread, we proclaim his death.

### c. Mystery revealed

**N**ow, we have arrived at a critical NT revelation about the lampstand. As we stated in the beginning of our lampstand study, God considers Christian churches to be lampstands. The *mystery* (i.e., metaphor) God presents to us in Revelation 1:20 is seven lampstands, but it’s no great mystery after all because Jesus gives the interpretation of what the lampstands mean, saying “the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”

[Jesus says to John] ‘Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven

**...God considers Christian churches to be lampstands.**

golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man [Jesus]... The mystery... of the seven golden lampstands is this: ... the seven lampstands are the seven churches (Revelation 1:11-13, 20).

Jesus walks among his churches even today. What is he doing? He is enjoying the beauty and light his congregations transmit. We shine upon him, revealing him to be the Bread of Life. The Church's light shines upon Jesus. He admires God's perfect design as we demonstrate faith in the 66 books of the Bible. We conform ourselves to same the pattern God gave to Moses when we teach the complete Bible—what Paul calls “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

The lampstand was made exactly like the pattern the Lord had shown Moses (Numbers 8:4).

#### 4. A building

**T**he Church is a building. It sounds wrong to say that because we often affirm that “the Church is *not* a building.” Many believers use that expression, and rightly so. What they mean is that the Church is not about real estate—and that's true. The Church is about God and it consists of people.

Nonetheless, it's necessary to say that we are a building. Why? Because the Bible says so. Since it does, we have to teach this doctrine. As we teach it, we also affirm a truth that is much stronger than the one expressed in the saying “the Church is not a building.” We affirm that a church should not own a building!<sup>8</sup> On what basis do we affirm that? On this basis: The NT never speaks of the Church meeting in a public building—only in private homes!

Back to the topic at hand: Being a building has important implications. First of all, it means that we belong to God.

**...a church should not own a building!**

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<sup>8</sup>You will not find one Bible verse that says that a congregation of believers had their own building. The passages that speak of believers meeting together only speak of them meeting in homes! There is one exception to this rule: When the only Christians

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It means that God actually owns us. We are his possession

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were all Jews, they met in a wing of the Jerusalem Temple. They did that because it was their right as Jews. Outside of that short-lived circumstance, all other passages that mention a building in which believers met speak of them meetings in houses—yes, all five of them! Here are four for starters:

The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house (1 Corinthians 16:19).

Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house (Colossians 4:15).

For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance! (Acts 28:30-31)

To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker—also to Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier—and to the church that meets in your home (Philemon 1-2).

We mentioned that the members of the first church met in the Temple courts—but we failed to mention this important fact: They did not meet in the Temple to share the Lord's Supper. The three Temple-meeting passages we find in the Bible—the only Bible passages that give any evidence that the Church met in a public place—also mention home meetings in the same context. Why is that important? Because only the home is named as the place where bread was broken, never is the breaking of bread said to have taken place in a public meeting.

Every day they continued to meet together in the Temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together... (Acts 2:46).

One day Peter and John were going up to the Temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon (Acts 3:1).

While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade... all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade (Acts 3:11; 5:12).

The only passage that might be interpreted to mean that there was a public place for a church meetings can be found in 1 Corinthians 11. It's likely that it does not refer to a public place, since

just as every and any building is someone's possession. Buildings always belong to someone.

... you are... God's building (1 Corinthians 3:9).

Being a building also implies that we need to be built up. Notice how the word *built* is used in the following passage:

... built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20).

**...everything  
the  
prophets and  
apostles  
wrote is  
the basis  
of our  
faith.**

Knowing that we must be built *up* is good thing to know—but it's more important to know what we are built *upon*. Well, as it says above, our foundation is the apostles and prophets. That means that everything the prophets and apostles wrote is the basis of our faith. Every building has a solid base to give it stability. Our stability comes from the writings of the apostles and prophets—that is, the Bible. Hebrews 6:1-2 and Ephesians 4:3-6 give concise summaries of what the apostolic doctrine is. Study them well, because in those two passages you'll find the Church's fundamental beliefs.

Another important truth about being a building is that every Christian is interconnected. Just as a building is joined together through fasteners such as nails, screws, cement,

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the early church practice was to have the Lord's Supper along with other meals in the homes and the sharing of the Lord's Supper is the theme of the passage.

... when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers (1 Corinthians 11:20-21).

By any means, the apostle Paul was not at all happy with the way this meeting was being handled. Therefore, the meeting mentioned in the previous passage shouldn't be seen as an example to follow. It got the apostle's disapproval.

Our conclusion is that there is no Bible support for organizing the Lord's Supper in public places. In fact, there's no biblical support for organizing a Church meetings in any public place! The only certain testimony of Scriptures is that Christian meetings should most definitely take place in the homes of believers.

interlinking joints, and adhesive substances, we are joined together in Christ. He fastens us together. Jesus cements our relationships. He is the bond we all share.

... In him [Jesus] the whole building is joined together... (Ephesians 2:21)

The whole concept of us being a building has still another dynamic: buildings go up. Likewise, we rise up heavenward while God does his work in us. In other words, the Church has an upward aim. What is that aim? The glory of God. We aim at glorifying God. We glorify him through obedience, service, worship, prayer, good deeds, and holy living.

**...the Church has an upward aim.**

... In him [Jesus] the whole building... rises to become a holy temple in the Lord (Ephesians 2:21).

Just as a side note, know that this passage is not about *rising* in the sense of being bigger numerically. Of course, we would love to see more people come into the fold—but numerical growth is not the idea behind this passage. The passage is about us rising up in holiness and service to God. That's what God's Church is for: holy worship and service. If we don't have acceptable service and worship, it doesn't matter how many people join us.

We are rising to become a building, but not just any kind of building. We're not becoming a skyscraper, museum, or a sports stadium. We are rising to become a temple! What does that mean?

## 5. A temple

**N**ow, pay close attention to the wording of the passage we just studied, Ephesian 2:21. It does not say that we *are* a temple. That's not the grammar of the passage. It says that we rise *to become* a holy temple. *Becoming* is different from *being*, right? God is saying here that he is not done with the project of building us up. He is not finished yet. As we do his will, we're doing our part to become a temple. We're working on it.

... the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord (Ephesians 2:21).

**...three things we should be working on...**

So when will this project be complete? When will we finally become the holy temple we long to be? The Bible doesn't define an exact time, but we'll definitely be what God wants us to be by the time the Kingdom comes. In the meantime, there are at least three things we should be working on. These things have to happen if we will become a holy temple. As long as they are happening, God's construction project will move along nicely. Here are three things for you and I to work on:

- being stones

... As you come to him, the Living Stone [Jesus]—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house... (1 Peter 2:4-5)

First of all, the *spiritual house* of which this passage speaks is synonymous with *temple*, so we haven't changed subjects here. We're still talking about how we become a temple.

The passage challenges us to ask ourselves whether we are holy building material. Are we the material God will use to build up his spiritual house? To be useful for God, we have to be *living stones*, and that means that we need to be solid in the faith. Jesus, as the Living Stone, was rock solid in his faith, which is why he gets the title *the Living Stone*.

Jesus is also called *the Living Stone* because, just as builders have the duty of selecting stones to be used in construction, the priests and Jewish leaders of Jesus' day examined him, indicted him, and rejected him. Since those men rejected our Lord, we can expect people to reject us. That's actually a good thing because being rejected by the world makes us acceptable to God. Dying to the world makes us alive to God. If we live to God, we qualify as living stones.

Another special quality of stones is the particular shape each one has. Because of the way God works in each one of us, we each have a ministry. Jesus was trained and molded by God, and so are we. Now, Jesus was shaped by God into a cornerstone, and each of our shapes allows us to fit together perfectly—but each one of us fits together in relation to Jesus. That perfect fit makes us useful in the Church. Our individual shapes give us the ability to fit perfectly together into one Church.



- being priests

... you... are... to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5).

Here's a building project worth committing ourselves to, right? Here's a building fund to which we can donate all our resources—but what does God want us to donate? Nothing material. God doesn't want bricks, mortar, wood, or anything similar to those things used for a building fund. He doesn't need money to build this house.

God wants spiritual sacrifices like thanksgiving, love, obedience, and service. He calls us to be the priests who offer those sacrifices. A priest is dedicated to the activity of offering. He is able to give the right offering for any circumstance. Through Jesus Christ our High Priest, our spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to God.

**...a building project worth committing ourselves to...**

- making sure that God dwells in us

... you also are built up together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:22; LEB).

Since the ultimate goal and maximum accomplishment of believers is for God to dwell among us—it will come to pass in the Eternal Kingdom, after the Millennium—, that means that we should love having God among us now, right? How do we make sure that God dwells among us now? Well, God lives among his people now through the Holy Spirit.

The verse above says that when God's Spirit is within us, we are God's dwelling place. Now, the expression *dwelling place* is synonymous with *temple*; so when we have the Spirit of God, God lives among us, and we become his temple. That's why it says in another famous passage that our bodies are "temples of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:9).

If you have the Spirit of God, you are being built up together with all believers into God's dwelling place. So make sure that you have the Spirit. You can do that by exercising spiritual gifts, living in love, and practicing holiness. You know it when you get the Holy Spirit—it's no secret.

## 6. A flock

**...we  
will not  
follow  
anyone  
who is  
not sent  
by Jesus.**

**N**ext, let's consider how the Church is a flock of sheep. We follow Jesus wherever he leads; but there's more to it. It's not just that we follow Jesus; it's that we will not follow anyone who is not sent by Jesus. In fact, we run away from false shepherds. This is because we know Jesus, and we only respond to his voice. We can identify his voice.

The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his [the shepherd's] voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice...

I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one Shepherd (John 10:2-5, 14-16).

What we see in this comforting passage is that Jesus has a flock, one flock. As his sheep, we are currently in different *sheep pens*. In other words, we meet in different congregations (within different cultures, using different languages) around the world. In spite of that, there is still just one Church because when global missions have been completed, Jesus will return and then there will be one flock, together in the Kingdom. His promise will be fulfilled.

Take comfort that if you are one of Jesus' sheep, you will not follow a stranger. You will recognize his voice. You will not pay any heed to a stranger's voice. That means that you won't be misled by pseudo-pastors or the Antichrist. Sheep never follow a stranger. They know instinctually who their shepherd is. They know who they can trust, and you will too. If you are his sheep, Jesus knows you, and you know Jesus.

## 7. A field

The last major metaphor the Bible uses for the Church is a field. What God means by calling us a *field* is not difficult to understand if you think about what a field is for: a field is for cultivating crops. So we're not just talking about a piece of land, we're talking about *cultivated* land, here. God identifies us with a piece of land where crops can grow. We are fertile farmland, a field destined to be fruitful for God.

... you are God's field (1 Corinthians 3:9).

Most everyone understands the value of property. Real estate can be valuable even in a desert, or on a mountaintop; but it's particularly valuable where land is arable. Valleys and lands where rivers run through are arable lands, and the majority of farms are found there.

The land where a farmer can till the soil, sow his seed, and cultivate crops—yields a profit. The Church is God's field precisely because we are profitable for him. We produce something for our owner: We produce the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of evangelism, the fruit of praise, the fruit of thanksgiving, and good works. All these things glorify God! Our fruit bearing exalts him.

**The Church is God's field precisely because we are profitable for him.**

My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples (John 15:8; NASB).

### a. Different soils

Jesus' famous *Parable of the Sower* demonstrates that there are different kinds of people. Read it carefully, and you'll see that the different kinds of soils represent people—not individuals, but categories of people. Notice how Jesus said "some people are like" this, and *others* are like that. He used the plural form of person, *people*, because the soils are personality types. The first people he described are like soil along a path.

Then Jesus said to them... "The farmer sows the Word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the Word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the Word that was sown in them (Mark 14:13-15).

The Church is a group of receptive people. We are sensitive people—not because we’re emotional or effeminate; but because we have a sensitive conscience. We don’t have hard hearts like the people Jesus is describing here. He is describing people who have been trampled down and hardened by the world—people who are victims of sin.

Now, we are no longer victims of sin because we have forgiven others for their offenses. It’s not that we haven’t been hurt, but the hurt did not make us hard-hearted. If we were hard-hearted at one point, we no longer are. Our hearts have been tilled by God’s mercy. We’ve been broken through repentance and God’s forgiveness has turned us into little children again. Now we are trusting and open—to God at least. We have been made receptive to his Word.

The second soil is the soil that’s rocky underneath:

Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the Word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time.

When trouble or persecution comes because of the Word, they quickly fall away (Mark 14:16-18).

We are not the soil in rocky places because the Church does not consist of superficial people. On the contrary, we are profoundly spiritual people. We are the people who truly meditate and have real reflection. We let the Word of God cast deep roots within us.

**...people who have no depth of thought.**

Rocky soil is shallow soil; it represents people who have no depth of thought. It represents people who are simply emotional, not spiritual. To be sure, the Bible has a place in their lives, but due to the fact that the Word is not anchored within their souls, they are not firm. The Scriptures have no root in them. They agree with the Bible, but they’re not committed to it.

The third soil Jesus taught about is the weedy soil, the soil that is covered with invasive thornbushes:

Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the Word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things, come in and choke the Word—making it unfruitful (Mark 14:19).

People whose lives are subject to thorns are people who cannot overcome worry, worldly desires, or pleasures. They are ruled by these temptations. Since the Church has set it hopes on the Kingdom, we have been set free from the world and its desires.

In addition, Christians constantly resist temptation. We examine ourselves daily in order to be worthy of eating the Lord's Supper. That discipline helps us to make sure that the Word never gets choked out of our hearts.

And finally, after his description of the three soils, we get to our Lord's description of believers. This particular plot, this fertile field, is the Church. We are the good soil Jesus described here:

Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the Word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown (Mark 14:20).

The Church is that group of people that hears the Word of God, and lives according to the law of faith. We are the only people who are fruitful for God. We live love, peace, and joy. We are the ones who do good works, ones that will endure. Yes, our actions will earn an eternal reward if we're productive for God.

As Jesus pointed out, some of us are more productive than others (depending on the measure of faith each one has), but all of us produce a crop for the glory of God.

Jesus spreads his Word throughout the world—amen? Unfortunately, only the Church really receives the Word. Only the Church obeys it so that the Word becomes fruit for God. We are the only ones who, by God's grace, are capable of producing the harvest that God so earnestly seeks. The fellowship of the Church is the only environment in which God's Word can thrive.

**...only  
the  
Church  
really  
receives  
the  
Word.**

## b. The weed problem

The Church is a field, but it's located in the world—which is metaphorically a *bigger* field. Now, be clear on this one: The world is Jesus' field just as much as the Church is by virtue of the fact that God gave Jesus authority over the world.

Being in the world means that we have evil people near us—and they're all around us. Jesus didn't put them there, Satan did. Now, you know that the Devil is crafty and malicious. Satan puts wicked people near us for a reason: He wants to ruin the Church. So Satan strategically sets sinners among us, and those sinners are now in the Church.

Jesus has sown us in the world for the salvation of the world. Meanwhile, the Devil sows sinners in the Church for the destruction of the Church. That's what you'll see if you carefully read *the Parable of the Tares and the Wheat*. We have included the interpretation of the parable in brackets as a tool to help you to read it with clarity. Here it is:

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man [Jesus]<sup>9</sup> who

<sup>9</sup>This and the other interpretations which we have included [in brackets] are taken from Matthew 13:37-43 where Jesus explains his parable. We want you to be able to interpret the parable correctly. If you will interpret it rightly, you have to recognize from the start that although Jesus begins his teaching with the words "the Kingdom of Heaven is like..." that doesn't mean that his entire teaching refers to the Kingdom. Really, only one part does.

If you have come to understand that the Devil will be locked up in the Abyss during the Millennium (Revelation 20:1-3), you'll easily recognize that he will not be able to cause any evil among God's people during that time. Because of that, the part about an enemy sowing seed cannot possibly refer to the Millennial Kingdom. Correct?

Another thing for you to consider is that the harvest of the parable represents the end of this current age—Jesus said so in his explanation. Since only after this current age is finished will the Millennium begin, the correct way to interpret Jesus' words "the Kingdom of Heaven is like..." is in the light of his conclusion "bring the wheat into my barn." The conclusion of the parable

**...the  
Devil  
sows  
sinners  
in the  
Church  
for the  
destruction  
of the  
Church.**

sowed good seed [sons of the Kingdom] in his field [the world]. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy [the Devil] came and sowed weeds [the sons of the Devil] among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

The owner's servants [sincere believers] came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field [the world]? Where then did the weeds come from?'

'An enemy did this,' he replied.

The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

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focuses on the barn because the goal of the farmer is to get the wheat into the barn. In other words, the barn is what Jesus is driving at from the start of the parable—and only the barn represents the Kingdom.

This method of explaining the Kingdom was a favorite style of Jesus. He used it in the Parable of the Ten Virgins too, beginning the parable with the words: "The Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten virgins..." (Matthew 25:1). That opening phrase was not intended to mean that we should interpret the ten virgins to be the Kingdom. Rather, Jesus mentioned the Kingdom because he was driving at the banquet—yes, the banquet which five of those virgins got into! In verse 10, our Lord concludes the parable saying, "The virgins who were ready, went in with him to the wedding banquet." So the banquet should be interpreted as the metaphor for the Kingdom.

If we interpret the passage as saying that the Kingdom is the ten virgins, then we would have to say that the Kingdom is the many churches on Earth now. How could that be true? Especially considering that only half of the virgins of the parable actually got into the wedding, how could ten churches represent the Kingdom? That would mean that although five of them were apostate, they were still in the Kingdom. Would Jesus ever teach that the Kingdom consists of apostate churches? Of course not. There's another reason why we know that the Kingdom is symbolized by the wedding feast, the banquet.

‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest [the end of the age]. At that time I will tell the harvesters [angels]: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned [in Hell]; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn [the Kingdom of the Father]’ (Matthew 13:24-30).

**... the worst sinners—the most deceptive and hypocritical of all—you’ll find in the Church.**

You’ll find sinners everywhere in the world, but the worst sinners—the most deceptive and hypocritical of all—you’ll find in the Church. We worship side-by-side with them now, but there will come a day when the angels separate us from them completely. For now, judgment must wait.

Surely, God expects us to “expel the wicked man from among us” (1 Corinthians 5:13), but we are not about to hold another inquisition. God has not commanded us to weed out all evil people from the Church. There will be no witch trials like there were in Salem. Rather, God has commanded us to deal with cases of sin on an individual basis. We have to deal with them one-by-one.

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case, you would have to leave this world [to avoid them we’d have to leave the planet].

But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people (1 Corinthians 5:9-11).

To be sure, we have a lot of work to do in order to purify the Church. There is discipline that we must administer in God’s time and in God’s way; but while we do that, we also patiently wait for the time when the Church will be completely free from the influence of the world. We’re patiently waiting for the time when the Church will be totally pure—after God has judged everyone.



In the meantime, the only way to be totally free from sinful influences would be for us to leave the world altogether—and that’s not happening until the Rapture. So we stay in the Church, even though there are sinful influences within it.

### C. Spiritually

-A word on *discernment*-

1. A household
  - a. Family relationships
    - i. Be natural
  - b. Do-gooders
  - c. Not strangers
  
2. The pillar and foundation of the truth
  - a. We define the canon
    - i. Catholic additions
    - ii. Luther’s omissions
    - iii. Mormons and Muslims
  - b. God preserves Scriptures
    - i. Preserving through us
    - ii. Eternal words
  - c. From God through men
  - d. The Church and the Spirit
  - e. The pillar of the truth
    - i. Handling the Bible
      - 1) Three-fold approach
      - 2) All the Scriptures
      - 3) Producing faith
  
3. The body of Christ
  - a. A woman who marries well
    - i. Jesus’ fullness
  - b. The mystery of spiritual unity
    - i. Based upon marriage

- ii. Mystery marriage
- c. Discerning the Body of Christ
  - i. Observing the Lord's Supper
  - ii. Ruining the Lord's Supper
  - iii. Practical problem-solving
    - 1) The unworthy manner
    - 2) Discerning or judging
    - 3) Just wait
- d. We are from Jesus' side
  - i. Piercing purposes
    - 1) Fulfillment of Scriptures
    - 2) Proof of Jesus' death
    - 3) A mystery revealed
      - a) The science of the flow
      - b) The mystery of the flow
    - 4) Jesus first, then the Church
    - 5) Spiritually bound to his body
    - 6) Truly his
- e. Qualities of a bride
  - i. Betrothed
  - ii. Prepared for her wedding
    - 1) Her lamp ready
    - 2) Beautified by good works
      - a) Rebecca's beauty
      - b) The model wife
      - c) Caring for the poor
  - iii. Longing for the arrival
  - iv. Body beautiful
    - 1) Each member in harmony
      - a) Starting off
      - b) Belonging, peace, and love
      - c) Contentment
      - d) Wisdom from God
      - e) The talent pitfall
      - f) Spiritual gifts

- g) Haves and have-nots
- 2) Body building
  - a) Husband head
  - b) Connected
  - c) God grows the Church
- v. Covenant keeper
  - 1) Covenant comparison
  - 2) In with the New
- f. Sisters with children
- g. One body with Israel
- h. One bread, one body
  - i. Idol altars
  - ii. Not one loaf
  - iii. Food for thought
  - iv. A hard teaching

**W**e just looked at seven metaphors for the Church: salt, light, lampstands, a building, a temple, a flock, and a field. Those metaphors are accurate, but they are incomplete. None of them reveals the complete truth about the Church. If you want the complete truth, you'll have to understand what the Church is spiritually.

A metaphor is a poetic device. It's a way to help us to understand the way things are. The difference between a metaphor and a spiritual truth is that God gives us spiritual truths not just to help us *understand* how things are—a spiritual truth is the way things *really* are!

Spiritually, the Church is three things: a household, the pillar and foundation of the truth, and the Body of Christ. These three spiritual realities will be the focus of this section of our book. The first two (a household and the pillar-foundation of the truth) will take up very little space compared to the third (about us being the Body of Christ) because there are a handful of passages which state that the Church is a household or the foundation of the truth. Meanwhile, there is a plethora of Scriptures which calls the Church *the Body of Christ*.

**The difference between a metaphor and a spiritual truth...**

Prepare yourself: You're about to delve into a fascinating truth: God's stark emphasis on the spiritual reality that the Church is the Body of Christ. *One Body* is not the title of this book for nothing. One Body is a spiritual reality, an essential truth, and a foundational doctrine.

### -A word on *discernment*-

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Before we proceed, know that spiritual truths require discernment if you are going to understand them rightly. When Jesus gave teachings that were spiritual, he warned his hearers not to interpret them literally. For example, when he commanded people to eat his flesh he made it clear that he was not asking them to become cannibals. He said “the words I have spoken to you... are spirit.” With that, he made it clear that he was speaking in spiritual terms when he spoke of *eating his flesh*.

...the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you...’

Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, ‘Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are spirit and life (John 6:52-53, 60-63).

Because eating the flesh of Jesus is a spiritual activity, you need discernment if you will understand what it's about. You have to see the spiritual reality of eating Jesus' flesh. Since he's not on Earth now, but in Heaven, it's clear that he wasn't talking about his physical body when he said we need to eat his flesh—right?

If common sense doesn't convince you that Jesus was speaking spiritually, consider what Jesus said in the same passage: “the flesh counts for nothing.” So how *do* we eat his flesh if he's in Heaven and the flesh counts for nothing? It must be something that we do spiritually. Indeed it is. During the Lord's Supper we eat the bread and drink the wine—but only by using discernment are we able to see

the body and blood of Christ in the bread and the wine. We do not focus on a physical reality but on a *spiritual* reality when we use discernment. There are two levels of reality, after all.

Discerning spirits is a spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:10).<sup>10</sup> We use it to determine whether people have demons or not. A Christian with this gift is able to look beyond physical appearances and see a person's heart. We use this same grace of discernment with the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper when we see what it is spiritually—we discern that it is the food of the New Covenant. What are we doing when we eat it? We are looking beyond the physical appearance, and seeing the reality of what Jesus says it is.

If you can see the Church for what it is spiritually—congratulations, you are using discernment! You have a special grace from God. As we said, it's a household, the pillar and foundation of the truth, and the Body of Christ. Let's study about how the Church is a household first. May God help you to discern the way in which it is a household.

### 1. A household

There are three<sup>11</sup> NT passages that explicitly state that the Church is the family of God, but the word *family* does not do justice to God's revelation of what we are—rather, the Greek word *oikos* is better translated as *household*. Faithfully-translated versions of the Bible prefer to use *household* over *family* because *household* is closer to the meaning of the original Greek. For one, an *oikos* has

**We do not focus on a physical reality but on a spiritual reality when we use discernment.**

<sup>10</sup>The original Greek words *diakriseis pneumatōn* literally mean *discerning of spirits*. Translations such as the NIV render the Greek as *distinguishing between spirits*; but since the essence of the gift is discernment [that is, being able to perceive the spiritual reality behind someone's personality], and also because the word *between* does not appear in the original Greek, *discerning of spirits* is the preferred translation.

<sup>11</sup>Those passages are 1 Timothy 3:15; Galatians 6:10; and Ephesians 2:19, which we will analyze in this section. However, we don't want to forget to mention that there is one passage that says that we are the household of Jesus. Please read it here, under-

...*oikos* means family but with an emphasis on the mutually beneficial system that unites us.

a much broader meaning than nuclear family—Western cultures normally think of families as nuclear families. An *oikos* is much more than that. It is a full working system, more like a family economy. In other words, *oikos* means *family* but with an emphasis on the mutually beneficial system that unites us. In an *oikos*, we work together to accomplish the same goals.

#### a. Family relationships

From what we've just seen about a working system / family economy, it's clear that the main way to show that we are a household is through our behavior. If the Church is a family, we are supposed to behave in a certain way. In particular, we need to interact in love. We need to work together. We need to act like brothers and sisters, children and parents, in the love that characterizes family intimacy.

... you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the Church of the Living God (1 Timothy 3:15).

The guidelines for right behavior in the Church are no secret. They are laid out for us in the Bible. As you read the guidelines, notice that each relationship should be handled like a family relationship. For example, the young men are to treat the young ladies as sisters; they are to treat the older women as mothers; and they are to treat the older men as fathers—with all the respect due to a father.

[Paul advises the young pastor Timothy] Do not rebuke an older man, but appeal to him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity (1 Timothy 5:1-2; LEB).

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standing that Jesus presides over God's household. Jesus doesn't have a household that's distinct from God's:

... Christ is faithful as the Son, presiding over God's household, and we are his [Christ's] household if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope of which we boast (Hebrews 3:6; Mounce).

We should teach believers to “act their age” and to behave according to their God-ordained roles. For example, the role of teaching young women to be good mothers corresponds to older women. Why? Well, older women have already experienced the task of raising children. They’ve been through it, and are ordained by God to share what they know.

Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good.

Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the Word of God... so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive (Titus 2:2-5, 10).

Did you notice that the purpose of the family-style behavior of church members is to give us a good testimony? How will outsiders ever believe in the Gospel we preach if we can’t act according to God’s natural revelation? Why would they be attracted to a Biblical faith—which is a special revelation—if we, the very people who say we trust in the Bible, can’t follow the rudimentary laws of nature?

Indeed, this is exactly what is happening in the Muslim world. They see the way Westerners behave and consequently Muslims turn away from the Bible. Why? The people Muslims suppose to be Christians (because they call themselves Christians) don’t live even according to the natural order of things—family values have been lost in the West. Of course, it’s an error for Muslims to suppose that just because most Westerners go to “Christian” churches, that makes all Westerners Christian—but that’s the way they think.

Middle-Eastern Muslims notice that Western men are not responsible husbands, they notice that Western women are not responsible mothers, and they notice that Westerner

**How will outsiders ever believe in the Gospel we preach if we can’t act according to God’s natural revelation?**

families don't make hardly any effort to protect the virginity of our daughters. They see rampant homosexuality and conclude from what they observe that the Bible is powerless. They say in their hearts "Why believe in the Bible?" for this reason: They have stronger family values than the "Christians" they observe in America and Europe.

### i. Be natural

**T**he people of the world understand what is natural. They know God's natural order, because they are a part of Creation just as much as any Christian is. Unbelievers know that a husband should love his wife, and that a wife should respect her husband. They also know that a father should discipline his children. By instinct, unbelieving mothers care for their children. Every culture in the world teaches that children should honor their parents. Non-Christians know these things.

The greatest patrimony of the human race is its traditions. Human traditions, from culture to culture, reflect the wisdom that has been handed down to us from our ancestors. Even through false religions (such as Mormonism, Islam, or Buddhism) parents pass down the wisdom of how to live well to new generations. How then is it possible that we who have received a higher and more exact revelation of God through the Scriptures, should ignore, overlook, or dare to violate the principles of natural wisdom revealed to us through God's creation? After having received the greater wisdom of the Scriptures, how could we transgress the lesser wisdom of tradition?

**After having received the greater wisdom of the Scriptures, how could we transgress the lesser wisdom of tradition?**

God forbid that outsiders would ever be offended by Christians who don't follow the natural, pure, healthy, and sound customs of the human race. If we offend them by denying wisdom, they will give no credence to our preaching. For example, if they see that a Christian man does not provide for his family, won't they realize he's worse off than they are?

Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8).



First we are natural, then we are spiritual. First we are sons of Adam, then we are children of God. If you can't run a family, you can't run a church. One is more basic and more simple than the other. The family is natural, and it originated in God just as much as the Church originated in God. If we can't love our natural family, how will we ever love God's family? If we don't accept discipline from our natural parents, how will we accept the discipline from our Father in Heaven?

... we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of Spirits and live! (Hebrews 12:8-9)

People who learn discipline from their parents are more able to accept the discipline the Invisible God gives them. The skills we gain in family life are transferrable to life in the household of God—and vice-versa! For example, let's say that you didn't have a solid upbringing. You may have been raised by incompetent parents or you may have been an orphan. There is still hope: You can learn the skills of parenting and family life through the Church. From your church experience, you can transfer those skills to your home life. Surely, that's what happens in the lives of a great number of Christians.

Natural affection—the ability to love our children, parents, spouses, and siblings—is ours. It belongs to all Christians because we are children of the God who created the family. He made the natural as well as the supernatural. All believers should foster and nurture natural affection. With natural affection, we have a foundation for loving our Christian brothers and sisters. They are our siblings in the household of God. Without it, we will fail both in the natural sphere of family as well as in the spiritual sphere of the Church. Without natural affection, we are just like sinners—people who do not know God.

... as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind... Being filled with all unrighteousness... disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful... (Romans 1:28-31; KJV).

**If we can't love our natural family, how will we ever love God's family?**

... in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves... disobedient to parents... without natural affection (2 Timothy 3:1-3; KJV).

## b. Do-gooders

We are supposed to be helpful to everybody, but especially to the people of the Church. If someone needs help, it's natural for us to give preference to a brother or a sister. Most of us will give preference to a brother over a stranger, and that's perfectly fine; it's a wholesome and natural instinct. Likewise, a Christian instinctively assists a fellow Christian. He'll choose helping his brother in Christ over assisting an outsider because the Christian in need is part of his spiritual family.

... while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith (Galatians 6:10; NASB).

We are commanded in this verse to *do good* to our fellow Christians, but how do we go about it, exactly? It all depends on the opportunities God affords us—and the possibilities are endless. They include visits, prayer, bringing medicine, assistance, or supplies, teaching, giving money, or providing food and clothing. It can be something as simple as helping someone to do their chores. The important thing is that we seize the opportunities God affords us.

**...seize  
the op-  
portuni-  
ties God  
affords  
us...**

... we are his [God's] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10; NKJV).

The Church is a community of do-gooders. Because we love God and because we are convinced that the rewards for righteousness are so great, we have a passion for good works. The Good News of Jesus produces that zeal in us.

... [Jesus]gave himself for us, in order that he might redeem us from all lawlessness and purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good deeds (Titus 2:14; LEB).

The Church is clothed in righteous acts—that’s how the Bible puts it; but what does *clothed in good works* mean? It’s an expression that means that good works are what characterize our lives.

It was given to her [the bride of Christ] to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints (Revelation 19:8; NASB).

Good works define who we are, the same way a man’s clothing demonstrates the kind of person he is. You can tell who’s a cowboy, who’s a businessman, and who is a soldier by the way they dress. Everyone sees your clothes, and everyone sees your good works likewise.

### c. Not strangers

**A**nother aspect of membership in the family of God is that having such membership will dramatically change your relationship to the Jews. Previously we were strangers to Israel, now we are children of Abraham just like the Jews are. We are part of the same family. We used to be distant, now we are near. God has taken us in like foreigners. We have immigrated to spiritual Israel, having obtained citizenship among God’s people.

... you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19; NKJV).

We are like the Egyptians who left Egypt along with the Israelites, joining them in their great exodus. We have made a decision to be part of God’s people, renouncing our Earthly citizenship to be part of God’s Kingdom. Those Egyptians left the most powerful and prosperous nation on Earth to unite themselves to a community of believers—believers in Yahweh. Citizens of the most wealthy country on Earth joined the despised Jews, people who had been the Egyptians’ slaves for 400 years. It was no easy decision to identify themselves with such a lowly group.

**We are like the Egyptians who left Egypt along with the Israelites...**

We are like the Gibeonites of Joshua 9 who chose rather to be woodcutters and water carriers among God’s people than to oppose Israel in battle. We are like Rahab—she gave aid

to the Israelites so that they could take Jericho, and chose to be part of Israel rather than to oppose it. We are like Ruth, a Moabite who decided to accompany her mother-in-law to the land of Israel, renouncing her false gods so that she might be a part of God's people.

... where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God! (Ruth 1:16; LEB)

## 2. The pillar and foundation of the truth

**W**e are the pillar and foundation of the truth—but have you ever paused to think about what that means, exactly? Does it mean that we know the truth, have the truth, or *are* the truth?

... [We are] the Church of the Living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15).

God is saying something unique here, and it's something that you won't understand unless you think architecturally. To understand it, start with this: Everything rests upon a foundation, even the pillars. The pillars of a structure, built upon the foundation, will hold up the roof, upper floor, or terrace. Got it? Okay, now we are both the foundation and the pillar of the truth. That means that we have two functions: We establish the truth, and we hold it up too.

**...we have two functions: We establish the truth, and we hold it up too.**

### a. We define the canon

**L**et's first look at the fact that we are the basis for the truth. Have you ever thought about where the Scriptures came from? They didn't just drop out of Heaven. They came from God's very people. The prophets and apostles God revelations from God. Then they wrote the Scriptures, and delivered those Scriptures to believers—that's us.

The canon of Scriptures that make up today's Holy Bible took shape as pastors met together and decided which of the writings (which during their time were circulating among the churches) were truly inspired by God. The result of their decisions is what makes the Bible what it is today!

God had already given the OT Scriptures to the Jews. Paul calls that special privilege of the Jews, “the giving of the Law;” but God has done something greater with us. He has entrusted the complete Scriptures to us, the Church.

... what advantage has the Jew? ... Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God (Romans 3:1-2; NASB).

... Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers [patriarchs] and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came... (Romans 9:4-5; NKJV)]

**He has entrusted the complete Scriptures to us, the Church.**

We believe in the Scriptures the Jews passed down to us. We also believe in the NT which the Church fathers passed down to us. Indeed, we believe in all of the Scriptures, and it would be a heinous sin if we were ever to leave out any books.

... from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed... (2 Timothy 3:15-16)

Here’s a challenging question: How did the Church know exactly which books should be included in the canon? The history of how the Scriptures took shape are intriguing because the canon was not simply set in stone neatly in just one meeting. Now, some of us may imagine that, but if we study history a little, we find that Church elders only came to a final agreement on which books would be included in the NT canon somewhere between 367-383 AD—a 16-year timeframe!<sup>12</sup> Even by the time Jerome finished the

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<sup>12</sup> For your information, in 367 AD Athanasius (the champion of Trinitarianism) wrote a letter in which he stated that the 27 books of our present NT were canonical, and in 383 AD “Pope” Damasus commissioned the Latin edition of the Bible. Jerome only finished that translation—known as the *Vulgate*—in 405 AD. That means that the complete Bible wasn’t available as an actual book until the 5<sup>th</sup> century! Remember this also: Although that first complete Bible was written in the common tongue, Latin,

Latin translation, one that would be understood by most any citizen of the Roman Empire, some Church elders still opposed certain books being in the canon—particularly 2 Peter, James, Hebrews, Jude, and Revelation.

#### i. Catholic additions

**the  
Council  
of Trent  
(1546 AD)**

It took until about 330-350 years after the death of Christ for the Bible (as we know it today) to take shape. Nonetheless, many battles for the Bible's full acceptance would continue long afterwards. For example, at the Council of Trent (1546 AD) the Pope declared that the Apocryphal books were part of the Bible (effectively adding seven books to the Scriptures). The Pope also insisted that sections should be added to Daniel and Esther. It was in 1546 AD that the books of Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach-Ecclesiasticus, 1 and 2 Maccabees, and Baruch were added to the Roman Catholic Bible.

The Protestants resisted this change, offended by the brazen conduct of Rome. In the fear of God, the Protestants retained the Bible books as they were—remembering God's warnings against adding to the Scriptures:

You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it (Deuteronomy 4:2; NASB).

Every word of God is tested; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words or he will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar (Proverbs 30:5-6).

#### ii. Luther's omissions

We just saw how the Church has fought to safeguard the Bible from having books added to it, but it has had to fight to keep books from being taken out of it as well. Martin Luther put Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation at the end of his German translation of the Bible, noting that the other 23 books were “the true and certain chief

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it wasn't in print. Printing machines hadn't been invented yet. Jerome's Vulgate was carefully written down by scribes, and only the very wealthy could obtain a copy.

books of the New Testament...” Luther added that “The four which follow have from ancient times had a different reputation.”<sup>13</sup> By that, he meant that he did not consider four of our NT books to be Scripture! Does that make you uncomfortable? It should.

The Christians who resisted Luther’s error did well. They acted in a way that the true Church, the foundation of the truth, should act. God’s warning against taking away from the Scriptures is firm:

Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it (Deuteronomy 12:32; NASB).

Martin Luther had a low view of the Book of Esther and of Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation. In a famous quote, Luther said that James was “an epistle of straw.” Are you offended by that? True believers in Luther’s day were offended. Luther also said of the book of James: “I do not regard it as the writing of an apostle.”<sup>14</sup> That’s not just error, that’s heresy. When Luther commented on Revelation, he said that he could “in no way detect that the Holy Spirit produced it,” but in that very same book we find this warning:

**Luther said that James was “an epistle of straw.”**

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the Tree of Life and from the Holy City, which are written in this book (Revelation 22:18-19).

Why did Luther not fear enough to take those warnings seriously? We don’t know, but he has risked his eternal salvation by doing so.

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<sup>13</sup> Retrieved on March 12, 2016 from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luther\\_Bible#View\\_of\\_canonicity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luther_Bible#View_of_canonicity).

<sup>14</sup> Retrieved on March, 2016 from <http://www.bible-researcher.com/antilegomena.html>

## iii. Mormons and Muslims

The battle for the Scripture is still being waged today. We have to fight against Mormons (who have added four books to the Scriptures, including their *Book of Mormon*), and against the Muslims (who say that the Qur'an is the very summing-up and culmination of the Scriptures). Mohammed, their prophet, actually taught that the Qur'an replaced both the OT and NT, making them obsolete! For a Muslim, there is no other true Scripture but the Qur'an. In their delusion, they have come to believe that the Qur'an has eclipsed the Scriptures—even though, in the vile tradition of their prophet, practically none of them has ever read the Scriptures.

God has spoken about the kind of people Muslims have become: they don't know the Testimony of God, nor has it dawned on them what truth is. It's amazing that a people so committed to starting their prayers at the break of dawn, really have no dawn at all. They are in darkness.

To the Law and to the Testimony! If they do not speak according to this Word, it is because they (Isaiah 8:20; NASB).

...God has worked for about 2,900 years through the publically-scrutinized ministries of dozens of prophets and apostles...

Mohammed says he got the revelation of the Qur'an in a cave by himself. However, it's preposterous to think that the entire Scriptures could possibly be based upon the private revelations of one illiterate 40-year old man, a man who had never read even one verse of the Holy Scriptures. If you believe that they can, then you may want to follow Mohammed. Outside of the fact that he was a pedophile and raider, he seems to have been a pretty nice guy.

Your other option is to affirm that God has worked for about 2,900 years through the publically-scrutinized ministries of dozens of prophets and apostles—as well as through the diligent and careful conservation of the Scriptures through the teachers of Israel and the Church. Your other option is to investigate whether the 66 books of the Bible have any contradictions, or whether they be true. If they do not contradict one another, then there is something supernatural about them. They must be divinely inspired if men from different backgrounds and generations all speak one consistent message.



What has the Church done as the bearer of the truth? Can other people trust the fruit of the Church's labors? We believe that they can because for hundreds of years the Church safeguarded, recorded, translated, studied, tested, and defended the Holy Scriptures. Why have Christians made such an effort? Because God has magnified his Word—he has given it greatness and honor.

You have magnified your Word above all your name (Psalm 138:2; NKJV).

We believe that it is of the utmost importance to defend God's Word, and with it, God's reputation. God's very fame depends upon the credibility of the Bible. We defend Scriptures for the honor of God's name.

#### b. God preserves Scriptures

To be sure, it's God who has conserved his Word for these many centuries—but he has done it through his people. The people of God have safeguarded the Scriptures from those who would destroy it. Whatever damage any particular generation may have wanted to do to the Scriptures, has been prevented until now. Why? Because God promised that he would preserve it, and he has preserved it—through his people!

**The people of God have safeguarded the Scriptures...**

The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. You shall keep them, O LORD, you shall preserve them from this generation forever (Psalm 12:6-7; NKJV).

One time God had Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe, write Jeremiah's prophecies on a scroll. When King Jehoiakim took the scroll, he burned it passage-by-passage in his fireplace.

The king [Jehoiakim] sent Jehudi [his servant] to get the scroll [of Jeremiah's prophecies], and Jehudi brought it... and read it to the king and all the officials standing beside him... Whenever Jehudi had read three or four columns of the scroll, the king cut them off with a scribe's knife and threw them into the firepot, until the entire scroll was burned in the fire (Jeremiah 36:21-23).

Did the king's actions detain God's prophecy? No. Word got back to Jeremiah of what happened, and God inspired Jeremiah to prophesy again. Baruch wrote down the prophecies all over again. That is just one example of how God has always made sure that his Word is conserved—no matter how strong the opposition is, God preserves it through his people.

#### i. Preserving through us

God continues to conserve his Word, and now he does it through the Church. How does God conserve his Word? Is it because we have a secure vault in some location where we protect a copy of the original Bible? No—there's something in this world much safer than the strongest vault of a Swiss bank. He has hidden his Word in our hearts.

**He has hidden his Word in our hearts.**

I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you (Psalm 119:11).

Even if our enemies throw us in prison, God's Word can't be bound. It's free. It's unstoppable. While he was bound in chains in a dank dark Roman jail, Paul still declared with confidence: The Word of God remained unchained!

... I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's Word is not chained (2 Timothy 2:8-9).

God has made a covenant with the Church: His Word will be on our lips, on the lips of our children, and on the lips of our descendants forever. This promise means that God's Word will be preserved through the Church. We are the receptacle of the Scriptures. We are its safe box.

'As for me, this is my covenant with them,' says the LORD. 'My Spirit, who is on you, will not depart from you, and my Words that I have put in your mouth will always be on your lips, on the lips of your children and on the lips of their descendants—from this time on and forever,' says the LORD (Isaiah 59:21).

## ii. Eternal words

In spite of the strong opposition, the Scriptures remain to this day. Many have tried to destroy them, but the Scriptures are eternal. God's Word will last forever.

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever (Isaiah 40:8; NASB).

Jesus reaffirmed this truth. Being that he spoke God's Word, our Lord applied Isaiah's prophecy about God's Word to his own words. He boldly proclaimed that his words, God's Words, would never fade away!

Heaven and Earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away (Matthew 24:35).

In addition, our Lord Jesus proclaimed that God's Word would remain until the end of time. He promised us that every word of it, even the least dot on an *i* or cross on a *t*, would all be accomplished. Do you believe that? Do you believe that God will conserve his Word until the very end?

... truly I tell you, until heaven and Earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished (Matthew 5:18).

Try as they may to change it, no enemies of God can break the Bible. Powers that oppose God's Word include: Satan himself, humanism, demons, the Antichrist, the Apostasy, Islam, and Catholicism (Great Babylon). There are many more, and they are very strong powers, but the words of the Bible are permanent. The Scriptures have the strength to resist all these forces. Jesus insisted that:

**...no enemies of God can break the Bible.**

... the Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35; LEB).

Like David, we don't doubt that God's Word will last forever—all of it from Genesis to Revelation will endure the test of time. It has already lasted for thousands of years!

The entirety of your Word is truth, and every one of your righteous judgments endures forever (Psalm 119:160; NKJV).

...no  
human  
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lished in  
Heaven.

What is the basis for our confidence? When we state that God's Word is eternal, what are we trusting in? Our confidence is based upon the fact that no human being could ever undo what is established in Heaven. God's Word is established there first; and then on the pages of our Bibles. Even if someone were to burn every Bible on the planet, God's Word would still be settled in Heaven.

Forever, O Yahweh, your Word is settled in Heaven (Psalm 119:89; LEB).

### c. From God through men

The Scriptures are the words of men, indeed—but not just any men. The men who wrote the Scriptures were holy men—they were men filled with the Holy Spirit! This filling means that they didn't speak on their own. They spoke on God's behalf. The words the prophets and apostles wrote did not come from their own private interpretations. They didn't speak according to their human will, but according to God's will. This is the first thing you need to know if you're going to get anywhere spiritually: All Scripture is God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16).

... know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Who did Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus come from? Well, they certainly came through a man, a man named Moses—but they did not have their origin in the man Moses. Moses was not an independent voice, he was a dependent voice, since Moses depended on God to reveal his Word to him. That's why the first five books of the Bible came from God. They came from God *through* Moses.

Who did Romans, Ephesians, and Galatians come from? They also came from God. Did Paul know he was speaking from God when he wrote his letter? Yes he did. Paul called his message *a revelation*. It was revealed *through* Christ Jesus, but it came to Paul, and Paul wrote it down.

... the gospel that has been proclaimed by me...  
it is not of human origin. For neither did I receive  
 it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it  
through a revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11-  
 12; LEB).

Apostles like Paul were God's instruments. They were his voice—but you must remember that men like Paul are part of the Church. Paul is part of the Body of Christ. That means that God worked through something greater than his apostles as God revealed his Word—God worked through the Church the apostles were a part of. The truth you must comprehend is that the Scriptures were given to humanity through the Church! If you understand that, you'll understand precisely what makes the Church the foundation of the truth.

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#### d. The Church and the Spirit

**W**e are the Church, holding to the testimony of Jesus. His testimony—that is, the things that Jesus spoke—are the very things that we speak. Just as a wife says the same thing her husband says, so do we say what Jesus said. It's a woman's duty to agree with her husband, and not to contradict him. The Church is a good wife, the bride Christ chose for himself.

Repeating what Jesus has said is our solemn duty. It's also the job of the Holy Spirit. Notice that everything the Spirit makes known to us, he has to receive first from Jesus. Our Lord Jesus made this very clear. The Spirit only says what Jesus has told him to say.

... it is from me [Jesus] that he [the Spirit of Truth] will receive what he will make known to you...  
 the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you (John 16:14-15).

Anyone who speaks by the Spirit will transmit Jesus' words. That's exactly what the Holy Spirit inspires us to do. Now, to interpret the following passage well, understand that *when we say what Jesus says, we are giving the testimony of Jesus*. That's what his words are called: the testimony of Jesus. Also, understand that the inspiration we get to speak Jesus' testimony is the *spirit of prophecy*. That

spirit is the source of our boldness. It's not easy to speak what Jesus spoke, but with the spirit of prophecy, we can.

... I [John] fell down before his feet to worship him [an angel], and he said to me, 'Do not do that! I am a fellow slave of you and of your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy' (Revelation 19:10).

This spirit of prophecy is a spirit. Since angels are spirits, it could be an angel, but it seems to be much more than an angel. It's more like the Holy Spirit, but it's not because, like the *spirit of life* (Romans 8:2) and the *spirit of adoption* (Romans 8:15), the spirit of prophecy comes from the Holy Spirit. Interesting stuff? It sure is.

**... prophecy is the greatest gift the Holy Spirit gives to the Church...**

How important is this particular spirit, the spirit of prophecy? Well, since prophecy is the greatest gift<sup>15</sup> the Holy Spirit gives to the Church, we're betting that it is very important. As the Church uses the spirit of prophecy more, we fulfill our role as the foundation of the truth. That's because prophecy is truth—the truth about the future!

... I [Jesus] will send him [the Advocate, the Holy Spirit] to you... and he will tell you what is yet to come... (John 16:7, 13).

Are you following our point here? The Holy Spirit reveals prophecy and truth to us, so it's the Holy Spirit's influence that makes the Church the foundation of the truth. If we didn't have the Spirit, how could we ever be the foundation

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<sup>15</sup> This is according to what is written in 1 Corinthians 14:1-5, 39, which says:

... eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy. For... the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort... the one who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues... Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy...

of the truth? We couldn't. Precisely, when Jesus called the Holy Spirit *the Spirit of Truth*, he meant that the Holy Spirit guides the Church to all truth. The Spirit is constantly guiding us to the truth—not just *some* truth, but *all* of it.

... when he, the Spirit of Truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth... (John 16:13).

In summary, the Holy Spirit is the Teacher the Church can't do without. No human being can replace him. The Spirit deserves the credit for the revelations we have gotten, and nobody else—man or angel—deserves that credit. We honor him. Furthermore, we don't need anybody else. With the Spirit, we remain in the very God and Father who sent the Spirit—and that's exactly what we want.

As for you, the Anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his Anointing teaches you about all things and as that Anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him (1 John 2:27).

#### e) The pillar of the truth

**W**e've covered what it means to be the *foundation* of the truth, now let's not forget what it means for us to be the *pillar* of the truth. Quite simply, it means that we lift the Scriptures up. We hold up the Scriptures by announcing them, arguing for them, and defending them. We preach.

**...we lift the Scriptures up.**

Wasn't that Jesus's priority? Read the Gospels, and you'll see that Jesus was dedicated to preaching the Scriptures. He taught everywhere he went, and he committed his apostles to preaching as well.

Jesus went around teaching from village to village. Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two... They went out and preached... (Mark 6:6-7, 12).

Paul, committed to being faithful as Christ's apostle, adopted the same priority as Jesus and the Twelve—preaching.

... from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the Gospel of Christ (Romans 15:17).

Later, Paul charged his protégé Timothy with keeping preaching as his priority too.

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ... Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine... (2 Timothy 4:1-3; NKJV)

Even after Jesus had ascended, and the Twelve Apostles were left to run the Church, their priority remained the same: the preaching the Word of God. They didn't let themselves get distracted from preaching. Along with prayer, it was one of their two primary commitments in the ministry! They devoted themselves exclusively to prayer and preaching.

... the Twelve summoned the community of disciples and said, 'It is not desirable that we neglect the Word of God to serve tables. So, brothers, select from among you seven men... whom we will put in charge of this need. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:2-4; LEB).

### i. Handling the Bible

**T**o fulfill the preaching tradition handed down to us by Jesus, we must handle the Holy Scriptures with the utmost care. Any sincere pastor will be extremely careful about how he interprets the Bible. He will strive to be an *approved worker*.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth (2 Timothy 2:15; NKJV).

#### 1) Three-fold approach

**K**nowing that we should teach is one thing, but knowing how to do it is quite another. How are we to teach in the Church? What method should pastors follow? Is there a Bible-based method the apostles used? There is. Paul left

... a  
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some wonderful advice for Timothy, who was ministering as a pastor-teacher in a congregation during the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD:

Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, and teaching (1 Timothy 3:13; NASB).

According to this passage, pastors should use a three-fold approach to preaching. That approach has an order consisting of:

- reading: We read a passage of Scripture.
- exhortation: We appeal to the emotions.
  - This can be either a rebuke a word of encouragement, or both.
- teaching: We appeal to the intellect.
  - In this part, preachers use explanations and examples.
  - This part often includes the *application*, which can sting.

Today, this method is known as *expository teaching*. It is a powerful technique because it starts with the Bible, not human ideas or human wisdom. Although he didn't use it all the time in every situation, we can prove that Jesus most certainly used this method.<sup>16</sup>

**expos-  
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teach-  
ing.**

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<sup>16</sup> You can get a sense of how Jesus used this approach when you read about his visit to Nazareth, his home town:

... on the Sabbath day he [Jesus] went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him... [Our Lord started with Scripture.]

He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.' All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips [Those gracious words were exhortations.]...

'Truly I tell you, he continued, 'no prophet is accepted in his hometown.' [That's the doctrine, the meat of his teaching.] All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this (Luke 4:16-17, 21-22, 28).

**...a study straight through the Bible allows Christians to benefit from a balanced spiritual diet.**

We teach the Bible passage-by-passage<sup>17</sup> for the spiritual health of our hearers. Doing a study straight through the Bible allows Christians to benefit from a balanced spiritual diet. We trust that God put his Word together in such a way that it transmits the complete truth. Studying it passage-by-passage, we receive the Word in bite-sized portions. People who learn by going through the Bible passage-by-passage have a more thorough understanding of God's Word than people who learn the Scriptures according to the topics that seem most fit to their pastors.

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You'll notice that the last part of Jesus' discourse was the teaching. He wrapped it up by saying "Truly..." which means that he was giving the true interpretation of the passage, as it was applied to his old friends in Nazareth. That application is what made people so angry.

Jesus gave a clear application of God's Word to his hearers, and as he applied it to them, they demonstrated that they understood exactly what he was saying. They got the gist, but they didn't like it. The anger with which they reacted was so intense, they wanted to kill him!

The truth hurts, but Jesus didn't let up on the teaching. Rather, he was so Bible-focused that he gave further support to his teaching with examples from Scripture! He explained his message (No prophet is accepted in his hometown) by reminding the people about Elijah's visit to the widow of Zarephath, and Elisha's experience with Naaman. Both those experiences clearly demonstrated that prophets are often so rejected by their own people, that they have no recourse but to minister to foreigners.

<sup>17</sup> Some prefer to call it *verse-by-verse*, but the Bible shouldn't be taught along the man-made system of verses. It should be taught along the passages that Spirit-inspired pastors are able to "rightly divide" (2 Timothy 2:15). We don't have the division of Scriptures just spoon-fed to us through numbers. The verses you see in your Bible today were numbered by a man named Robert Estienne used this system while printing the Greek New Testament in 1551. It was the first numbering system to gain popular use (Retrieved on December 6, 2016 from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chapters\\_and\\_verses\\_of\\_the\\_Bible](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chapters_and_verses_of_the_Bible)).

With the Scriptures as his starting point (as dynamic as they are), a preacher can always find ways to mix both encouragement, rebuke, and solid doctrine together. We not only believe in the maxim “Scriptures interpret Scriptures,” we also believe that the best commentary on the NT is the OT, and that the best commentary on the OT is the NT. The Bible is the greatest tool available to a pastor-teacher—a tool sufficient for any issue, topic, or question.

**Scriptures interpret Scriptures...**

A reading of the Scriptures is only useful when we complement it with the right exhortation and teaching. Obviously, it's not enough to just read the Bible. Someone has to explain the Scriptures to those who wish to understand it. The two passages below illustrate how necessary it is for teachers to explain the Bible:

... the Levites were teaching the people from the Law while the people were in their places. So they read the book from the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that they [the people] could understand the reading (Ezra 8:7-8; LEB).

Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ Philip asked. ‘How can I,’ he said, ‘unless someone explains it to me?’ (Acts 8:30-31).

Preaching should always drive at doctrine, a summarized truth. Teachers have to be experts at expressing doctrines concisely. People need to hear truth, and to have truth applied to their lives. When a preacher has finally applied the truth to his hearers—that's when they decide whether they will obey God or not. A preacher can decide to teach, but if the listeners refuse to learn, he has taught in vein. If they don't respond accordingly, they have a problem with God. That's why we start with Scriptures. By doing so, we make it abundantly clear that people are dealing with God. If they refuse the Word and disobey, their problem is not with the preacher. It's with God.

## 2) All the Scriptures

...the  
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tion.

As God's Church, we believe that the entire Bible is useful for instruction. We believe that it can equip us completely to do the will of God. Faith in the Bible produces righteousness. The Bible inspires us to act rightly and to do good. It is sufficient for every aspect of our lives. Paul said to Timothy:

All Scripture is... useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

We don't have to add psychology, philosophy, or any kind of human wisdom to the Scriptures. We don't need to put a magazine, commentary, or other book next to the Bible. We don't need any notes within the pages of the Bible to help us to interpret it either—those Bibles (which are called *study Bibles*) are filled with human interpretations. What business do human interpretations have in the pages of your Bible?

## 3) Producing faith

When the Scriptures are taught correctly, they can penetrate to the deepest part of our being. The Word of God cuts right to our heart.

... the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, both joints and marrow, and able to judge the reflections and thoughts of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

Because it is so powerful, hearing the Word of God can generate faith in a person's heart. But it must be the Word of God you hear if you are going to have saving faith. Your faith takes the shape of its object.

... faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17; NKJV).

Without faith in the Bible, we cannot please God, because God is the author of the Bible. Without the Bible, there is nothing trustworthy to believe in. That's exactly why we

preach the Bible. We want people to have a faith that pleases God.

... faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see... without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:1, 6).

Who else teaches the Bible faithfully? In this whole world, who else preaches the truth but the Church? Who else is willing to stand for the truth in a world full of lies—this realm of falsehood? Only the Church. We are the column of the truth, holding it up high—hoping that God’s light might shine in the darkness of man’s heart.

### 3) The Body of Christ

**W**e have finally arrived at the very topic from which our book gets its name: *One Body*. Now, it’s easy for someone to feel confused when they hear the expression “the Church is the Body of Christ.” It’s a confusing expression unless you’ve really taken time to study the Bible passages that explain what it’s about. Many people will be tempted to think that the expression *the Body of Christ* refers to Christ’s literal body—but the Bible is referring to his *spiritual* body. So the big question is: What is a spiritual body?

To answer that question, we have to go back to the Beginning. The backdrop for the doctrine of One Body is in Genesis 2. There is a grand truth revealed through the Creation story there, and this is it: When God made Eve, he formed her out of Adam’s body—his rib, in particular. Do you get it? Eve was from Adam’s body, making her *one body* with him.

Refresh your memory of this fundamental moment in human history by rereading the Creation story:

...the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.

So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib

**Eve was from Adam’s body, making her *one body* with him.**

he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called *woman*, for she was taken out of man’ (Genesis 2:20-23).

**Eve was bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh.**

Adam said it best: Eve was *bone of his bones* and *flesh of his flesh*. In other words, Eve was his body. It’s through that specific revelation that we understand that the expression *the Body of Christ* means the *Eve* of Christ, the *wife* of Christ—and there’s no other candidate that fits the bill for being the Bride of Christ more than... the Church.

The expression *the Body of Christ* can only be rightly interpreted by people who believe in the creation of the first woman as it is presented to us in Genesis. Since Genesis is under great criticism from the most well-known and influential scientists,<sup>18</sup> there will be few people who believe in the fundamental reason why the Church is the One Body of Christ.

Nonetheless, all the couples married subsequent to Adam and Eve’s time tell the same story as Adam and Eve—how? Through the bodily unity they share. When any man is united to his wife, they become one body. The Bible tells us:

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh (Genesis 2:24).

So what scientists may deny about Genesis, they won’t be able to deny in the present world. Men and women are joined together as one body every day. People get married. None of us would be here if that weren’t true, because we were all born of a woman who conceived when she became one flesh with a man. So the testimony of one body lives on, even in the sight of those who deny Genesis and the Garden of Eden.

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<sup>18</sup> These men and women aren’t really people of science at all. They are the ones who promote *naturalism*, a belief that this world has no supernatural forces acting upon it. They don’t even believe in God.

## a. A woman who marries well

**Y**ou've got to hand it to women who marry well—they do pretty well for themselves; but there's no bride in history who has done better than the Church because the Church is married to the richest and most powerful man in the universe—Jesus. Our Lord Jesus was appointed by God to be head, king, and leader over absolutely everything. He's a good man to be close to. The day Jesus begins to rule in the Kingdom, we'll know fully the advantages we have in this special relationship with him.

**...the Church is married to the richest and most powerful man in the universe...**

Observe how the following passage—frequently mistranslated and rarely interpreted well—states that God gave Jesus to us. He gave Jesus to us—but do you know how so? Get this: God gave Jesus to us in marriage.

... [God] gave him [Jesus] (as Head over All Things) to the Church, which is his [Jesus'] Body, the fullness of him who fills all in all [Jesus] (Ephesians 1:22-23; NASB).

Did you notice that Jesus is called “him who fills all in all” here? That's a title for him, a title that has a lot to do with us. How so? Because it clarifies our role as Jesus' partner—because we are his fullness! In other words, we are the ones who have made it possible for Jesus to fill all in all, just as a wife makes her husband complete. We are Jesus' help-mate, his counterpart.

Then Yahweh God said, 'it is not good that the man is alone. I will make for him a helper as his counterpart'... But for the man there was not found a helper as his counterpart (Genesis 2:18-20; LEB).

What a consolation that God has given his Son to us! Consider this fact: God didn't just give us the crucified Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, God gave us the resurrected Jesus for the rule of his Kingdom. He gave Jesus to us as Head over All Things—that's another title for Jesus, a title which proves that God has given us someone great.

Do you follow the logic of the passage? God made his Son great, and that's for our benefit. We, as Jesus' Church, have been joined together with someone very powerful.

God is like a king who has given all authority to his son—the prince—for love of the prince’s bride. God wants his daughter-in-law to benefit from being married to a very powerful man. That’s what this passage means. Think about these words very carefully: God “gave Jesus as Head over All Things to the Church.”

### i. Jesus’ fullness

**...we are the fullness of Jesus...**

We just read in Ephesians 1:23 that we are the fullness of Jesus—but do we really understand that? In what way are we Jesus’ fullness? As we just said previously, we are his fullness in the same way that a wife is her husband’s counterpart. Doesn’t a woman make her husband complete? Can a man have a family by himself? Of course not. Is a man fulfilled by himself—no. He needs a helpmate to be fulfilled, just as Adam needed Eve.

Now, Jesus fills all in all (that’s what the passage says), but he does it through us. How did Adam fill the Earth? He did it through Eve. He begat his children through Eve—and that’s what makes Eve Adam’s *fullness*. Correspondingly, we are Jesus’ fullness through our efforts to complete the evangelistic work he initiated. Is your congregation doing their part? We are finishing the work he started. As we suffer just like he did, we complete his preaching of the Cross to the world.

... I do my share on behalf of his [Jesus’] Body, which is the Church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions... (Colossians 1:24; NASB).

This passage reminds us that Jesus had afflictions—he carried his Cross in this world. Amen, but recognize that Jesus’ Cross is not enough to reach everybody. As it says above, something is “lacking in Christ’s afflictions.” If we carry our cross today, then Jesus’ suffering will reach “the farthest part of the Earth” (Acts 1:8; LEB) through us. We know that Jesus suffered when he was on Earth, and we know that the fruit of his suffering was the salvation of many, but those who still don’t have salvation need to have it made available to them. That’s why each one of us has to “do our share” on behalf of the Church. Isn’t that what Paul said *he* did? We fill up what is lacking in Christ’s work



when we suffer for righteousness—we make the Gospel known to more people. We complete what Jesus started.

### b. The mystery of spiritual unity

This becoming one body can be seen not only in marriage, but in any sexual relationship between a man and a woman, even in the wicked sin of fornication. There is a pure way to become one body with someone, and an impure way—but both ways undeniably lead the fusion of two to one. The pure way to oneness is through marriage, the impure way is fornication.

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, ‘The two will become one flesh.’

But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit (1 Corinthians 6:15-17).

What shall we do with this passage? There is a contrast Paul is making here, and we can’t afford to ignore it: He’s saying that bodily unity is one thing, and spiritual unity is quite another. A man unites with a woman through his body, but we become united with Jesus through the spirit. Fornication will contaminate a man, but unity with Christ will purify a man.

Are you truly part of the Church? If you are, then you have been joined to Jesus. You are one with him in spirit. You have experienced the mystery (revealed through marriage as explained in Ephesians 5:32) that Christ and the Church are one. All believers experience that unity when they are born of the Spirit.

Yes, there is an actual point in time when you unite yourself with Jesus—the moment you are baptized in the Spirit. Either you have experienced the baptism of the Spirit, or you haven’t. You’re either one with Christ, or you are not.

**...bodily  
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## i. Based upon marriage

We have just discovered that the doctrine of one Body is based upon the ancient truth that a man and his wife are one flesh. That truth continues to be revealed to us through the marriages we see every day. We see the one Body doctrine every time we look upon a married couple—not in their sexual intimacy of course (which is private), but in their interaction. We see one body in their relationship. If they are walking the order established by God, then the leadership of the husband and the submission of the wife will reveal the spiritual truth that Jesus is the head of the Church.

More than any other women in the world, Christian wives must be submissive to their husbands. Why? In order to demonstrate the Creation principle that husbands are the heads of their wives, and so for the Christian woman to say to the world that she believes that Jesus is the head of the Church. If she is not submissive, she is denying that Jesus is the head of the Church. She is denying the doctrine of one Body as well, because the Body must have a head.

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything (Ephesians 5:22-24).

The submission of a wife to her husband is a revelation: it demonstrates the Church's submission to Christ; but there is more to it. In like manner, husbands can demonstrate the relationship of Jesus to his Bride. How do they do that?

**...husbands can demonstrate the relationship of Jesus to his Bride.**

They mainly do it by loving their wives, giving themselves up for them, making them holy, spiritually washing them, and presenting them in holiness.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word, and to present her to himself as a radiant Church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Paul uses the topic of husbands and wives as a springboard to introduce the doctrine of one Body. One leads easily into the other, and it's all based on common sense: A man loves his wife just as he loves his own body. Loving your wife is actually another way of loving yourself—why? Because your wife is your own body!

In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the Church—for we are members of his Body (Ephesians 5:28-30).

Paul makes a simple argument from nature here: Nobody ever hated their own body. Anybody could say *amen* to that because it's natural to care for our own bodies. Paul's lesson is not a lesson in the obvious facts of nature, however. Paul wants us to see the spiritual reality behind the natural facts: "Just as Christ does the Church." In other words, Jesus cares for his Church—and we are members of that Church.

## ii. Mystery marriage

Paul sums up the one Body issue by calling it a mystery, a *profound mystery*—not the unity of a man and a woman, but the unity of Christ and the Church. Why is it a mystery? Because you have to be spiritually sensitive to understand it. You have to discern what happened on a spiritual level when Jesus came to us from Heaven: He left his Father in Heaven in order to unite himself to us. He didn't become one with the Church physically, of course. Rather, he became one with her spiritually through his greatest act of love: The sacrifice of his body at Calvary.

'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:31-32).

**...discern what happened on a spiritual level when Jesus came to us from Heaven...**

### c. Discerning the Body of Christ

The Lord's Supper is a unique activity in Church life, an activity we should appreciate deeply. During the Lord's Supper, we renew our commitment to the New Covenant by eating together. We participate in the very body and blood of Christ. We do that by breaking the bread and drinking from the cup; but just eating and drinking isn't enough. To participate worthily in the Lord's Supper, we need to discern Jesus' blood in the wine, and his body in the bread. Don't forget that discernment is seeing the spiritual reality of a natural event.

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 10:16; LEB)

Do you notice the way Paul phrases his question? It's in the negative form. When somebody asks you "is it not?" that means that your answer should be an enthusiastic, "Of course it is!" This is what God wants us to say in answer to the question. He wants us to say, "Yes, we are truly participating in the body of Christ and we are truly participating in the blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper." God wants us to eat it as if we were eating the meat of a lamb sacrificed and cooked over the fires of his own altar. We must perceive that spiritual reality in the physical breaking of bread.

Okay, if you can affirm in your heart that the bread is Jesus' body and the wine is his blood—you've taken care of the easy part. Now you have to discern the Body of Christ on another level—his body is not just the bread; it's his Bride, the Church!

**...you  
have  
to discern  
the  
Body of  
Christ on  
another  
level...**

### i. Observing the Lord's Supper

As they ate the Lord's Supper, some believers in Corinth were not discerning Jesus' body. Does that sound serious to you? For Paul it was. Paul treated this like a great sin, and exhorted the Corinthians strongly—indeed, he said that God had taken the lives of some of the church members because their offense was so serious. Does this sin sound serious to us today? Do we even understand what this sin of not discerning Jesus' body is? Let's try to over-

come the confusion surrounding this sin so that we might never be guilty of it.

The first thing we need to understand to understand this sin is to know that the Lord's Supper was part of their meals. The early Christians shared the Lord's Supper on a daily basis. They integrated the Lord's Supper into their meals, which they ate together in their homes.

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... Day by day continuing with one mind in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart (Acts 2:42, 46; NASB).

As you can see, the Lord's Supper was far from being a ritual. Rather, it was a beloved tradition that didn't require the presence of a pastor or elder. The true Church didn't (and still doesn't) have a leadership position called *priest*. On the contrary, as God's Church, we consider each of ourselves to be priests.

... you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession (1 Peter 2:9).

... [Jesus] who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood... has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father (Revelation 1:5-6).

You [Jesus] have made them to be a Kingdom and priests to serve our God (Revelation 5:10).

Our beloved Lord's Supper tradition is based on Passover, particularly on one Passover celebration held 2000 years ago: the one our Lord Jesus shared with his disciples at the Last Supper.

... on the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread the disciples came up to Jesus, saying, 'Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?' And he said [to the man in whose house they would eat], '... I am celebrating the Passover with you with my disciples.' And the disciples did as Jesus directed them, and they prepared the Passover... (Matthew 26:17-20; LEB)

**They integrated the Lord's Supper into their meals, which they ate together in their homes.**

In the spirit of the Last Supper, we share the bread in simplicity. That's part of the tradition. Due to the fact that Jesus broke the bread "while they were eating," he established a tradition of simplicity. He integrated the breaking of bread into the very dinner he was sharing with the disciples, giving us an example to follow.

And when it was evening, he was reclining at table with the twelve disciples... while they were eating Jesus took bread and, after giving thanks, he broke it, and giving it to the disciples, he said, 'Take, eat, this is my body.' And after taking the cup and giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins...' (Matthew 26:26-28; LEB)

**...the most special tradition of God's people...**

The Lord's Supper has eclipsed the Passover as the most special tradition of God's people—and that's no tragedy; it was God's plan from the beginning. He meant for the Passover to be absorbed by the Lord's Supper. The Jewish Passover was just a shadow of the reality that shines through the Lord's Supper! The true and most blessed food is not the meat of the Passover lamb, but the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' (John 1:29)

To participate in the Lord's Supper the right way, we have to learn from the first Christians. Keep in mind that the Early Church participated in the Lord's Supper daily. Remember what we read in Acts 2:46, that "day by day... breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together..." The Lord's Supper, their remembrance of Jesus, was a common event—as common as breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The Lord's Supper was integrated into their meals, and into their lifestyle.

## ii. Ruining the Lord's Supper

The apostle Jude called the meals shared by believers *love feasts*. Jude pointed out that there were people in those meals who were eating with ulterior motives—they

ate to ruin Christian fellowship, not to strengthen it. These ugly stains (Jude literally called them *spots*) were people who had no fear of God—for them it was perfectly fine to contaminate the purity of the Church. How did they contaminate it? With selfishness.

These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves... for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever (Jude 12-13; NKJV).<sup>19</sup>

These men were hypocrites, trying to pass as Christians. The time they spent in fellowship was actually time they invested in loving themselves, not the brothers and sisters who were at the table with them.

People like that were in Corinth too. Those were the ones the apostle Paul rebuked. He pointed out that they would go to the Church meal, but not to eat the Lord's Supper. The people in Corinth were not as bad as the ones Jude rebuked, but they were just as guilty of drifting away from the purity of the Last Supper. Similar to the perverse men at Jude's congregation, the ones in Corinth weren't coming to the Lord's Supper to share the body of Christ, but just to fill their stomachs.

**...they would go to the Church meal, but not to eat the Lord's Supper.**

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<sup>19</sup> Peter warned us of these same hypocrites in a passage that is strikingly similar:

... they are stains and blemishes, carousing in their deceitful pleasures when they feast together with you (2 Peter 2:13; LEB).

To comprehend the issue Jude and Peter are dealing with, it will help if we understand the subtle play on words (*apatas* meaning "deceits," and *agapas* meaning "love feasts") in the original Greek version of 2 Peter 2:13. The Pulpit Commentary brings that to light for us:

... Peter will not use the honourable name for the banquets which these men disgrace by their excesses. He calls them ἀπάτας [*apatas*], not ἀγάπας [*agapas*]—deceits, not love-feasts. There is no love in the hearts of these men. Their love-feasts are hypocrisies, deceits; they try to deceive men, but they deceive not God.... The Greek word συνευωχούμενοι [they feast with you] occurs elsewhere only in Jude 1:12. The false teachers joined in the love-feasts, but made them the occasion of self-indulgence.

... when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the Church of God and shame those who have nothing? (1 Corinthians 11:20-22; NKJV)

...the fundamental activity of the Lord's Supper is sharing.

Paul's big rebuke here is that the Corinthians were not demonstrating real Christian love. They were not caring for poor hungry believers. That's why he rightly charged them with coming together *not* to eat the Lord's Supper, but to take each one his *own* supper. From that very important statement, a black and white contrast, we understand that the fundamental activity of the Lord's Supper is sharing. There is no place for being selfish in the Lord's Supper. Precisely, the Lord's Supper is that special moment in which the Church most clearly manifests itself as one Body.

The reality behind the Lord's Supper is our identity as one Body. That's the whole idea behind it. It's why we take the Lord's Supper bread and cup into our hands. Especially at the moment we break the loaf of bread, we are identifying ourselves as Jesus' one Body. Breaking it means that we are his covenant partner, his bride.

At the moment you have the bread in your hands, if you do not have a clear conscience, then you should not eat of the bread. Since the covenant is not being fulfilled, something is terribly wrong, so you must abstain. Better for you to take some time by yourself and confess your sins before the Lord. Each of us must examine ourselves before we participate in the Lord's Supper.

### iii. Practical problem-solving

**N**ow, although it sounds like Paul might be writing about deep theological issues, a straightforward reading of the passage at hand (1 Corinthians 11) will show you that it's not about theology. Rather, Paul was dealing with an entirely practical situation: insensitivity. Prosperous believers were not sharing with poor believers. They weren't just not sharing a meal, they weren't sharing brotherly love.



Many rich believers were being insensitive to the needs of the poor. They were stuffing themselves with food while the needy—who were right there with them—were going hungry. Is that any way for Christians to act in at the Lord’s Supper? Of course not.

... he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the Body rightly... But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged (1 Corinthians 11:29, 31; NASB).

Pay close attention to what has been written in this particular passage. It demonstrates that the issue was not the actual bread. Paul does not rebuke the Corinthians for their attitude towards the bread;<sup>20</sup> rather, he corrects their attitude towards the Church. He rebukes them for looking down on poor Christians. That’s his concern and that’s his argument: that the body which the Corinthians had to “discern rightly” was the one Body, the Church—that is, themselves.

**...the body which the Corinthians had to “discern rightly” was the one Body, the Church...**

It would be a misinterpretation to say that the Corinthians sinned by not treating the bread as the mystical body of Christ, as if they did not believe strongly enough that the bread was Jesus’ body. Paul is not speaking in that tone at all. Paul was not promoting mystical beliefs like transubstantiation or consubstantiation. Rather, he was promoting the practical spiritual exercise of self-examination. He was solving the practical problem of wealthy Christians looking down on the poor. Paul was actually trying to solve a social problem, but a social problem as it manifested itself within

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<sup>20</sup> Most of the theological debates between Catholics (who hold to transubstantiation), Lutherans (who hold to consubstantiation), and Evangelicals (who say that there is no substance of Christ at all) center on the bread itself. They have tried so hard to answer the question “What is the substance of the Lord’s Supper bread?” that they have misunderstood the apostle’s point altogether. The apostle Paul was not talking about the substance of the bread at all here.

We are to believe that the bread is spiritually (which means *really*) the body of Christ, but that was not his point. Here he is talking about the Church as the spiritual Body of Christ.

the Church. He was not trying to change society—he was trying to save the Church.

The body which Paul commanded them to “judge rightly” (an expression that means *discern correctly*) was the Body of Christ—that is, the Church. The Corinthians were not erring on the side of not discerning Jesus’ body in the bread. They had been taught by the men God sent to them that Jesus’ physical body is in Heaven, and that his *spiritual* body—the one we need discernment to see—is the Church.

### 1) The unworthy manner

Since eating the bread or drinking the cup of the Lord “in an unworthy manner” (1 Corinthians 11:27) is a sin that incurs sickness or death, it’s important to understand exactly what that sin is—right? You don’t want to get sick or die, do you? So let’s study exactly what the unworthy manner of eating and drinking the Lord’s Supper is. The Bible says that it’s eating while “not judging [that means not *discerning*] the body rightly.” Look at what Paul says here:

... he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the Body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged (1 Corinthians 11:29-31; NASB).

The key for interpreting this passage is understanding that Paul makes it absolutely clear right in the verse what he means by *the Body*. Implementing the poetic device of Hebrew parallelism, Paul repeats the concept of *judging rightly* by firstly saying that we have to “judge the Body rightly” and secondly, by saying that we have to judge “ourselves rightly.”

With parallelism as our clue, the word *ourselves* becomes the key to interpreting the passage. Through it, we understand that the *Body* Paul is referring to is us! He’s talking about the Church when he commands us to judge/discern the Body—he is not talking about the bread of the Lord’s Supper. We have to discern *ourselves*; that is, we have to

**Paul makes it absolutely clear right in the verse what he means by the Body.**

understand what the Church is spiritually—and is it not the Body of Christ?<sup>21</sup>

## 2) Discerning or judging

Many translations err here by overusing the word *judge*. That's a weakness of the NASB translation, which we shared with you above. By using the word *judge* so much, the NASB translators unwittingly confuse Bible readers. The meaning of the passage is better understood through the Mounce translation you can read here:

For the one who eats and drinks without discerning [*diakrinō*] the Body, eats and drinks judgment [*krima*] on himself. That is why many of you are weak and sick, and quite a few are dead.

But if we had been discerning<sup>22</sup> [*diakrinō*] ourselves, we would not come under judgment [*krinō*]. But

**...the NASB translators unwittingly confuse Bible readers.**

<sup>21</sup> This truth is the heart of our book. If you don't understand anything else, please make sure that you grasp this reality. Even the design of the book cover was intended to provoke you to reflect about how to receive the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner. As you can see now, you do it by discerning the Church.

<sup>22</sup> We are obligated (out of the love of the truth) to modify the Mounce translation in this phrase, changing the word *examining* to *discerning*. Our reason is very simple: Paul just used the same word [*diakrino*] one verse earlier (in v. 29), and there Mr. Mounce translated it as *discerning*—why change the same word just one verse later? Mr. Mounce has no license to change the translation of the same Greek word when it's found in the same context. Obviously, he's allowing his own theological opinions to influence his translation of the Bible. Well, we won't let Mr. Mounce to contradict himself or to manipulate the Scriptures. We'll set things straight.

When Paul exhorts each Corinthian to examine themselves in v. 28, Mr. Mounce rightly translates the verb as *examine*. Mr. Mounce does that because Paul does not use the word for *discern* [*diakrino*]. Paul uses the word *dokimazō*—a completely different word! That's another big reason why it's totally inappropriate for anyone to translate the word in v. 30 (the one we are footnoting) as *examining*.

when we are judged [*krinō*] by the Lord, we are being corrected by discipline, so that we will not be condemned [*kata-krinō*] along with the world (1 Corinthians 11:29-31; our modification of Mounce).

**...how to discern the Body of Christ.**

Since the basic lesson in 1 Corinthians 11 is how to discern the Body of Christ, the verb *discern* should play an important part in the translation, right? Observe how the word *discerning* really appears twice in the passage. Mounce shows that.

You can easily perceive from Paul's words how important discerning the Body is. It's a matter of life and death. It's a matter of health or sickness. The word *diakrinō* should definitely be translated *discerning*, otherwise we will mix up the action of *discerning* with the action of judging. That wouldn't help Bible students, because *judging* is a different word—*krinō*.

In the passage, those two actions are carried out by two different parties: The Lord Jesus judges, *we* discern. Put the two together, and what do you get: If we don't discern what we are, Jesus will judge us. That's the truth these vital verses outline for us. This passage was written so that you would understand the relationship between discerning and judgment, not so that the relationship between the two would become clouded.

### 3) Just wait

**P**aul sums up his issues with the Corinthians with this command: Wait for each other. It's that simple. He didn't get into theology, but practical advice: If you discern that you are among believers, be patient with them. You are part of each other as one Body. Waiting for other believers is brotherly love; it's the respect Jesus commanded us to give one another. God will bless the Lord's Supper only if

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It appears that Mr. Mounce is imposing his own interpretation on the passage instead of remaining true to the original Greek. What truth is he avoiding? What is the truth that's so hard for him to face? That we, as God's Church, must see ourselves for what we are spiritually: the Body of Christ. He's denying a fundamental doctrine.

we eat it together with patience. Love is patient, and if we fail to love each other, it will lead to judgment.

So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you come together it does not lead to judgment [*krima*] (1 Corinthians 11:33-34; Mounce).

Paul goes on to give a surprisingly simple solution to the problem of impatience: It's not "Be patient." Rather, it's "Don't come to the Lord's Supper hungry." That was his rule. Is it too simple? Is it too direct? Not at all. Since Jesus may punish people who come to church meals thinking only of themselves, Paul tells them to take care of themselves first. Because we tend to be more selfish when we're hungry, Paul's guiding principle is: Eat at home first. In other words, make sure that you do not subject yourself to the temptation of overeating. Jesus taught us to pray "Lead us not into temptation" precisely because when we are tempted, we may fall into sin.

The way to control the flesh is by avoiding temptation. We can't let our flesh get out of hand. If we get too hungry, it could lead to the sin of gluttony or selfish eating. Just as Paul's advice to those who were burning with the desire to get married was "Get married;" his advice to those who were burning with the desire to eat was "Eat."

#### d. We are from Jesus' side

**W**e already explained that to understand the truth of One Body, you have to have good foundations in the Creation story. In it, you see that Eve was one body with Adam—but what was the reason they were one body? Simply because God made Eve out of the substance of Adam's body. Now, we invite you to reflect upon how (like Eve from Adam) the Church proceeds from the body of her husband, Jesus.

This is the fundamental truth we want to address: Blood and water issued from Jesus' side on the Cross—and those two became the very substances God used to make the Church.

**...the Church proceeds from the body of her husband, Jesus.**

... one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water (John 19:34).

How similar is this passage from John to the creation-of-Eve passage from Genesis? In order to create Eve, God put Adam into a deep sleep, right? On the Cross, God put Jesus into a deep sleep too—the sleep of death. Notice how God put both Adam and Jesus under his “anesthesia” right before they got incisions in their sides.

Refresh your memory and read again about how God opened Adam's side. Before you read the passage however, we suggest that you recall *why* God did it: He needed to take out a rib, the very rib God would use to make Eve.

So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.’ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh (Genesis 2:21-24).

What was God looking for when he performed this surgery, just a rib? Of course not. God was looking for something greater than a rib; he was looking for a helpmate for Adam. God was looking for a partner who would be suitable to assist Adam in all of Adam's Garden labors.

**God was looking for a partner who would be suitable to assist Adam in all of Adam's Garden labors.**

...the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found (Genesis 2:20).

God's way to produce that helpmate was creating her from Adam's body. That was the wisdom of God. How so? Because this method would assure that the two would instantly be one body. God knew that there had to be a strong bond, a unifying force, working between the two.

Following this very same line of thought, here's another question: What was God looking for when he opened Jesus'

side? The answer is that he was looking for a substance from Jesus' body, the very substance he would use to create Jesus' helpmate. God extracted the water and the blood he would use to create Jesus' Eve—the Church.

### i. Piercing purposes

The piercing of our Lord's side had three purposes: First and foremost, it was to fulfill the prophecies of the Scriptures. God's Word had to be fulfilled according to prophecy. Secondly, it proved that Jesus really died—he was clinically dead. We need solid evidence for Jesus' death because without the death of Christ, there's no payment for sins. Thirdly—and this is the part that we have already explained to you—it revealed a mystery. We're going to spend most of our time in this next section describing that mystery to you, a mystery which Paul has designated “a profound mystery” (Ephesians 5:32).

### 1) Fulfillment of Scriptures

Jesus came to fulfill the Scriptures, but how does a person actually fulfill Scriptures with their life? Although he didn't attempt to force anyone to pierce him with spears, when Jesus allowed the soldiers to take him from Gethsemane, he willingly exposed himself to violence. That violence would lead to the piercing of his side. When he chose to deliver himself to his enemies, Jesus knew what he was doing. He was choosing to allow for the fulfillment of the Scriptures.

... do you think that I cannot call upon my Father, and he would put at my disposal at once more than twelve legions of angels? How then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that it must happen in this way? ... But all this has happened in order that the Scriptures of the prophets would be fulfilled (Matthew 23:53-54, 56; LEB).

The Christian faith must be focused upon on the fulfillment of Scriptures. It has to be what we seek because the Bible is all we believe in. When we see the Scriptures being fulfilled, we feel affirmed in our faith in God. Why? Because the Scriptures are the Word of God, and when they are fulfilled, God's words are being fulfilled. That's when God is showing himself to be true, when his words are fulfilled in our lives.

**Jesus knew what he was doing. He was choosing to allow for the fulfillment of the Scriptures.**

The Christian faith is essentially faith in God; therefore, every time the Scriptures are fulfilled, our faith in God is strengthened. For example, knowing that Jesus was pierced with a spear strengthens our faith in God. How so? Well, it's something that God promised would happen many centuries before it happened. God fulfilled his word in Christ at the moment Jesus was pierced. When the Jews looked upon Jesus at Calvary, they were "looking on the one they have pierced."

These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: 'Not one of his bones will be broken,' and, as another scripture says, 'They will look on the one they have pierced' (John 19:36-37).

## 2) Proof of Jesus' death

**T**he piercing of Jesus' side is proof that Jesus really died. The Roman soldiers, professional executioners, had to make sure that their job was done. Certainly, Jesus looked dead on the Cross—but they had to be sure of it. Roman soldiers were under orders to make sure that a condemned prisoner was completely dead before they left the site of a crucifixion.

Under a command to execute Jesus, they were prepared to break his shins with a club—that was the custom, the way to finalize a guilty man's death on a cross. However, since Jesus appeared to be already dead, they simply jabbed a spear into his side. They pierced him to make sure that he was really dead, and not just unconscious. They had to be sure that Jesus hadn't just passed out, like other criminals sometimes did.

**If it weren't a patent truth that he was dead, then our forgiveness would not be certain.**

For believers, the death of Christ is vitally important because if he hadn't died, there would not have been a complete payment for our sins. We wouldn't be redeemed. If it weren't a patent truth that he was dead, then our forgiveness would not be certain. God, in his kindness towards us, has given us the concrete evidence that Jesus really died. That's why God allowed for this event to take place, the piercing of Jesus' side—for us.

... you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now he has recon-



ciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in his sight (Colossians 1:21-22; NKJV).

... according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22; NASB).

### 3) A mystery revealed

We have just seen two very good reasons for the piercing of Jesus' side, but the one that most concerns us (the one that corresponds to the theme of this book) is that it reveals a mystery—the ancient mystery of one Body. Here's the verse that describes what happened immediately after Jesus died:

... one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water (John 19:34).

#### a) The science of the flow

The intriguing question here is why did blood and water flow out of Jesus' side? What did it mean? If you can understand the meaning of this flow, you will understand the mystery of how the Church came to exist. This mystery is as old as Eden; but before we look it, let's look at the science behind what happened. For blood to come out of a man's body is quite normal—but why did water mingle with the blood?

**...the mystery of how the Church came to exist.**

The scientific explanation for the double-flow is that the soldier jabbed his spear into Jesus' pericardium. The pericardium is the double-walled, fluid-filled sack that surrounds the heart. It's the membrane around your heart—everybody has one. When a person's body undergoes great duress due to blood loss, this sack fills up with water.<sup>23</sup> When the Roman soldiers thrust the spear into our Lord's side, the water that

<sup>23</sup> This clinical explanation of what Jesus underwent physiologically—a hypovolemic shock that produced pericardial and pleural effusions—was adapted from information retrieved on March 3, 2016 from the website <http://www.gotquestions.org/blood-water-Jesus.html>.

had filled his pericardium flowed out through the puncture wound.

Jesus' blood loss, a consequence of the brutal scourgings he got from both Jews and Romans, produced hypovolemic shock (meaning shock his body entered into due to the low [*hypo*] volume [*volemic*] of blood available in his body). Jesus' blood pressure dropped, and so did he! Our poor Jesus collapsed under the weight of the cross. That's why Simon the Cyrene had to carry Jesus' cross for Jesus after Jesus' fall.

When a person goes into shock, their heart races to pump blood—but in a situation where there isn't enough blood available (as was Jesus' case), then a sustained rapid heart-beat will cause fluid to gather in the pericardium. The fluid also gathers around the lungs—a phenomenon called *pleural effusion*.

A person in shock needs to have their bodily fluids replenished, so what happens? Their kidneys shut down to conserve fluids. Consequently, they feel very thirsty. Does all that we are describing sound familiar to you? Doesn't it sound like Jesus' situation on the Cross? Well, it's exactly what happened to him.

#### b) The mystery of the flow

We've just analyzed the science of the piercing of Jesus' side—now let's get to the mystery of it. If you remember the Genesis passage that describes the creation of Eve, you'll recall that Yahweh<sup>24</sup> put Adam into a deep sleep, and then performed a brief surgery. Yahweh opened Adam's side to remove one of Adam's ribs. With that rib, the Lord would shape Adam's wife.

... the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

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<sup>24</sup> It was really the Word, the preincarnate Christ. This was not Yahweh, Father God. We discuss the interpretation more fully in our book *One Lord*.

The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called *woman*, for she was taken out of man.’ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh (Genesis 2:20-24).

Correspondingly, God put Jesus into a sleep, the sleep of death, and allowed Jesus’ body to undergo hypovolemic shock. The shock occurred for a specific reason: God needed water to be available in order to draw it from Jesus’s side. God knew exactly what he was doing. He knew exactly what he was making: A source of water within Jesus from which he could draw the fountain.<sup>25</sup> He did it all this in order to create Jesus’ helpmate, the Church.

In summary, Jesus’ wife was created by God. He created her from the substance that issued from Jesus’ own body. It’s a perfect parallel to what happened in Eden. The water and blood that poured out of the body of Christ were the substances God used to make the Church—but let’s look more deeply into why those are the necessary substances. Was the Church really created by water and blood? How is that possible?

**Jesus’ wife was created by God. He created her from the substance that issued from Jesus’ own body.**

#### 4) Jesus first, then the Church

**P**aul’s teaching about a man and his wife reaffirms the great Bible maxim that a married couple is one flesh. He calls the one flesh doctrine *a profound mystery*.

This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:32).

By saying this, Paul doesn’t mean to say that the actual joining of a man to his wife is a mystery. On the contrary, the intimate physical union between man and wife is completely natural. The *mystery* is what God intended the natural union

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<sup>25</sup> You may know the hymn *There is a Fountain* written by William Cowper in 1772:

There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel’s veins,  
and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains...  
The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day; and there  
have I, though vile as he, washed all my sins away... Dear dying  
Lamb, thy precious blood shall never lose its power, ‘til all the ran-  
somed church of God are safe, to sin no more.

of a husband and wife to reveal to us. It's supposed to reveal to us the reality that Christ and the Church are one body!

We already know that the Church is the bride of Christ, but what do we make of this truth: "Adam was formed first, then Eve" (1 Timothy 2:13)? Is Paul simply stating the obvious? That doesn't sound like something Paul would do. He's a man of profound meditation, a deep thinker. Is Paul just reminding us of the created order; or rather, is he hinting at a hidden mystery, one which undergirds the visible created order?

In order to interpret Paul well, you may want to ask yourself: Who had life first, Christ or the Church? It was Christ, right? Yes, it was, because we were dead in sins before Christ came along and chose us. If you know that, then ask yourself: What was Jesus' situation before he had a bride? The answer is that he was trying to find a helper—someone to serve God with him. He needed someone to say and do what he did, but he couldn't find any one group that was suitable for him—the closest he got was a handful of still-carnal apostles.

**God actually created a partner suitable for Christ.**

So what did God do to solve that situation? God actually created a partner suitable for Christ. God did so by putting our Lord to sleep—the sleep of death. Then, God opened Jesus' side. Water and blood flowed from Christ's body, and God used the water and the blood to create Jesus' helpmate, the Church.

### 5) Spiritually bound to his body

**T**he Church is the *spiritual* body of Christ. Although the Church is not made of bone and flesh like Eve was, God still saw it fit to create the Church through the physical body of her spouse, Jesus. Our Lord Jesus gave his physical body on the Cross, endured great pain, and produced the flow of blood and water that would be our life. Do you understand how that water and blood constitute our life? It's simple: By washing ourselves in baptism, and drinking his blood, we are joined to Jesus. That's it. Baptism and blood are substances that bond the Church in an eternal covenant. That's what makes us one Body with our Lord Jesus.

And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his [Jesus'] name (Acts 22:16).

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? (1 Corinthians 10:16).

He saved us through the washing [that's the water] of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

## 6) Truly his

When a man and a woman become a couple, nobody just takes their word for it that their union is legal. There has to be official proof that they have been legally joined in marriage. We just spoke of the water and the blood—it's our double-testimony that we are joined to Jesus.

Now, a double testimony is strong, but there is a third testimony for salvation in Christ. Yes, there are actually three ways for us to be joined to Jesus. God wants us to have the triple testimony—do you? You'll need it if you want to be absolutely sure of your eternal life. The three together testify to the fact that we are really Jesus' beloved spouse, confirming that we truly belong to him. They are: the water (baptism), the blood (the Lord's Supper cup), and the Spirit.

**God wants us to have the triple testimony...**

This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood... there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement (1 John 5:6-8).

Jesus comes to us by the water of baptism and the blood of the Covenant. As John says, Jesus comes to us “by water and blood.” In addition to these two covenant signs, Jesus also sends his Spirit. The water and blood testify to the fact that we are in covenant with Christ, but the Spirit is a further witness. The Spirit testifies to us about Jesus, glorifies Jesus, and makes the things of Jesus known to us.

When the Counselor comes, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth... he will testify about me... Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you... when he, the Spirit of Truth comes... he will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears... he will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you (John 15:26; 16:7, 13-14).

Could God have made it any clearer that Eve was the wife of Adam? No. It was an unmistakable fact; and how much more unmistakable is the fact that the Church belongs to Jesus? We have gotten much more from Jesus than Eve ever got from Adam because we have the triple testimony of water, blood, and Spirit. We are indisputably the bride of Christ—and that's something we *need* to be sure about. So it's good that God has made it so firm.

Eve became the body of Adam—and Adam's missing rib testifies to that. We become the spiritual body of Jesus—the wound in his side testifies to that. From it poured water and blood, and they speak. Eve became one body with Adam the moment God created her, and the Church became one Body with Christ the moment she was created. When was the Church created? On Pentecost, because on that day Jesus' baptism water, covenant blood, and Holy Spirit were all applied to us. Pentecost was the day Jesus got his legitimate, eternal helpmate.

#### e. Qualities of a bride

**A** bride has many special qualities, but her most desirable quality is purity. In fact, the very reason why brides get dressed up in white on their wedding day is to highlight their purity. The Church is pure because we have repented from our sins. Jesus has washed us from our sins.

There are other important qualities of a bride we can learn about through God's Word. These deserve our attention in this book. As we review the passages of the Bible that highlight the Church as Jesus' bride, we get to know ourselves better. We get to understand what the Church is in God's eyes.

**A father must present his daughter to her future husband with her virginity intact.**

#### i. Betrothed

**G**ood fathers are protective of their virgin daughters. They are committed to conserving their daughters' purity. The reason why a father makes this effort is so that his daughters might marry well. A father must present his daughter to her future husband with her virginity intact. It was a law in Israel that fathers should conserve their daughters' virginity. This law was so strictly enforced that fathers actually had to be prepared to offer evidence that their

daughters entered into marriage with their virginity intact!<sup>26</sup>

So, now that you recognize that it's the responsibility of a father to protect his daughters' virginity, recognize that this is not just some archaic, impractical, and outdated OT teaching. The Christian NT also reaffirms the fact that it is the father's decision whether he will give his daughter in marriage, or keep her a virgin. Christian fathers<sup>27</sup> have authority over their daughters, and by God's grace they must bridle their daughters' sexuality.

... if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter, if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry. But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well.

So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in

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<sup>26</sup> We know this because of the following passage, on which uses the expression "proof of virginity." This refers to a cloth that is laid over the bed on the first night of marriage. The young lady who lost her virginity that night had to keep it as evidence that she had not been penetrated previously (the hymen hadn't previously been broken), and she was supposed to give the cloth to her parents. If it had blood on it, the blood was the evidence that she had conserved her virginity until her first night of marriage.

If a man takes a wife and, after sleeping with her, dislikes her and slanders her and gives her a bad name, saying, 'I married this woman, but when I approached her, I did not find proof of her virginity,' then the young woman's father and mother shall bring to the town elders at the gate proof that she was a virgin.

Her father will say to the elders, "I gave my daughter in marriage to this man, but he dislikes her. Now he has slandered her and said, 'I did not find your daughter to be a virgin.' But here is the proof of my daughter's virginity." Then her parents shall display the cloth before the elders of the town, and the elders shall take the man and punish him (Deuteronomy 22:13-18).

<sup>27</sup> We recognize that other translations see the subject as being the fiancée, and not the father. However, the spirit of the Scriptures favors the interpretation that this passage is referring to the father.

marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better (1 Corinthians 7:36-38; NASB).

Now, let's not get sidetracked. The main issue here is how do we apply this truth to the Church? Try this: Like good dads, Church elders have to be protective of the congregations they lead. Paul said that he had a good kind of jealousy for the Corinthian church, a *godly* jealousy. What he meant was that he felt passionate about the Church, so passionate that he wouldn't allow the Corinthians to get tangled up in false doctrines. Paul worked tirelessly to present the Corinthian congregation pure to her bridegroom, Christ.

For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2-3; NASB).

**...Jesus will reject congregations that are not pure...** When he returns, Jesus will reject congregations that are not pure the same way a noble bridegroom would reject a potential bride who he found not to be a virgin. Jesus wants each church to be devoted to him. Her devotion should be simple and pure—free from worldliness. Who makes sure that a church is devoted to Christ but the elders? Good pastors work to foment pure devotion to Christ in their churches just like fathers should work to foment purity their daughters.

One last word about this passage: It proves that pastors are supposed to actually betroth their congregations to Christ! Since that's the way things are, good pastors should feel the same "godly jealousy" Paul felt. Good fathers feel the same zeal when they seek for their daughters to be prepared for their wedding day. Pastors do their part by guiding people

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Admittedly, it's hard for modern-day Westerners to understand how patriarchal cultures work, but we *must* if we're going to understand the Scriptures. A challenging analysis of the passage can be found at the following link: <http://lukeplant.me.uk/blog/posts/1-corinthians-7-36-38-marry-or-give-in-marriage/>.



to repentance and to confession of sins, and by protecting the Church from worldliness. That's how they can conserve the purity of the Church.

## ii. Prepared for her wedding

There is going to be a great Wedding Feast, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. What a great event it will be. All Christian churches are invited, each and every one of them—but not all will be ready! Not all are preparing themselves.

**All Christian churches are invited...but not all will be ready!**

Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!  
For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready (Revelation 19:7).

The Church's primary duty in this world is to make herself ready for her big day. Do you remember how Esther prepared for her wedding? She went through a year's preparation in beauty treatment, baths, oils, perfumes, and then—when the day finally arrived—she used her best perfume: God's wisdom. What was that wisdom? Esther only took with her that which the eunuch in charge of the virgins told her to bring.

When the turn came for Esther... to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested (Esther 2:15).

The Christian congregations that are going to make it into the Wedding Feast have to do the same as Esther. We should only take what the Holy Spirit advises us to bring. The Holy Spirit is King Jesus' eunuch, in charge of churches everywhere. What will he have us present before our Lord Jesus but love, spiritual gifts, and our works done in Holy Spirit power? As we prepare to present ourselves before our Lord Jesus, we need anything and everything the Holy Spirit is willing to give us.

## 1) Her lamp ready

Each Christian congregation is like a young woman, a virgin. If you ask, you'll see that every congregation thinks that it will be married to Jesus when he returns, but the sad reality is that not all of them are prepared for Chris-

Many congregations will never get into the Wedding Feast. Many of them will be shut out. Only the wise congregations will enter—but what is the wisdom a congregation needs to qualify for the Wedding Feast of the Lamb?

... the Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep (Matthew 25:1-5).

As we can see from the passage, the fundamental distinction between the two basic kinds of churches is that some are wise and some are foolish. It's clear from the passage that the wisdom of the successful virgins is *preparedness*. Notice how they bring extra oil with them, along with their lamps. The virgins who enter are prepared for a possible long night. They face the reality that the bridegroom could delay longer than expected.

**The virgins who enter are prepared for a possible long night.**

All of the virgins had oil in their lamps—can you interpret what that means? It means that all true churches have the authentic gift-producing anointing of the Spirit. However, it also indicates that some churches don't have enough anointing to get them through the darkest hour. Among the virgins, only half had the extra oil, oil that allowed their lamps to ignite again after the lamps had gone out.

At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'

Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived (Matthew 25:6-10).

When the Tribulation comes, there will be a three-and-a-half year window before the return of Christ. At that time, every congregation will have to be in possession of enough anointing for itself. The anointing of the Holy Spirit won't be easy to come by during the Tribulation period. Everyone on the planet (Christians included) will be very busy just fighting for survival—we'll be looking for food, water, clothes, and shelter.

Since there will be lots of worrying, the anointing will be even harder to find—and it's hard to find even now! People seeking the Holy Spirit won't just simply run into an anointed believer, receive the laying on of hands, and *voilà*. It will be a time of struggle to survive, and the distractions will make God's anointing even harder to find.

The following section of the passage again reinforces exactly what made the five virgins (the ones who entered into the wedding) so wise: They were ready! They are called “the virgins who were ready.” Ready for what? Ready for overcoming the darkness that would soon envelop them. They didn't leave anything to chance. They made sure beforehand that they had all the necessary oil. That was their victory.

The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’ But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don't know you’ (Matthew 25:10-12).

With these verses, we've got to clarify one final matter about this passage: What did the groom mean by “I don't know you”? It's not that he didn't know the names, faces, or identities of the unprepared virgins. He actually knew all that. What he meant was that he couldn't comprehend the thinking of the four unprepared virgins. In other words, he didn't *get it*, he couldn't fathom the kind of attitude that the five foolish virgins had. It made no sense to him that anyone who was awaiting their wedding night *wouldn't* make a concerted effort to be prepared. He was astounded by their carelessness, even insulted by it!

**Ready for overcoming the darkness that would soon envelop them.**

Those five young ladies demonstrated that they were unworthy of marrying the bridegroom. They didn't make the effort that would have qualified them to become his wives.

## 2) Beautified by good works

**G**ood works are befitting to a woman who professes godliness. In other words, if a woman says she believes in God, she should show it through her actions. That is how she adorns herself—that's how she makes herself beautiful.

... I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold, or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness (1 Timothy 2:9-10; NASB).

**Good works are befitting to the Church...**

Women should heed this passage of Scripture, but our focus in this book is the Church, and our task is to prove what the Church is, not what women should do. Good works are befitting to the Church; in fact, the Church's zeal for good works is one of her primary qualities. Good works are what characterize her.

... [Jesus] gave himself for us, in order that he might redeem us from all lawlessness and purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good deeds (Titus 2:14; LEB).

The Church is clothed with good works. In preparation for her wedding day, God gives her the particular privilege of clothing herself with righteousness. What is righteousness, then? Righteousness is the glory that comes from right actions. The Church's good works will make her gloriously beautiful for her big day, her wedding day with Christ. She makes herself ready not through artificial appearances, but by performing good deeds.

... the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.' (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people) (Revelation 19:7-8).

## a) Rebecca's beauty

The sign that Rebecca was the right bride for Isaac was precisely what we are pointing out. It was her good works. It wasn't her physical beauty, or her words, or the clothes she was wearing which qualified her to be the bride of Isaac—no. Eliezer, Abraham's servant, on his mission to find a bride for Abraham's son Isaac, asked God for a very specific sign. He asked God to allow him to meet a young woman who was fervent for good deeds.

Finally after having arrived in Nahor, a town in North-western Mesopotamia, he asked God to give him the sign, saying this:

“May it be that when I say to a young woman, ‘Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,’ and she says, ‘Drink, and I'll water your camels too’—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master.”

Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel son of Milkah, who was the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor. The woman was very beautiful, a virgin; no man had ever slept with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jar and came up again.

The servant hurried to meet her and said, “Please give me a little water from your jar.”

“Drink, my lord,” she said, and quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink.

After she had given him a drink, she said, “I'll draw water for your camels too, until they have had enough to drink.” So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, ran back to the well to draw more water, and drew enough for all his camels. Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the LORD had made his journey successful (Genesis 24:14-21).

**...a  
young  
woman  
who was  
fervent  
for good  
deeds.**

## b) The model wife

**E**liezer was successful. God’s Word says that it is a great accomplishment to find a good wife. It is a blessing from God.

He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD (Proverbs 18:22; NASB).

What exactly is a good wife? Well, Proverbs describes a good wife in detail in chapter 31:

A wife of noble character who can find? ... She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands. She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar. She gets up while it is still night; she provides food for her family and portions for her female servants.

She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night.

In her hand she holds the distaff, and grasps the spindle with her fingers... When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet. She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple... She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes...

She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness... Honor her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate (Proverbs 31:13-19, 21-22, 24, 27, 31).

**The famous “wife of noble character” passage is actually a cryptic description of a noble congregation...**

Impressed? Could you find a woman like that? You’d be hard-pressed to find a woman like that these days—but that’s not our subject matter. This is: The Holy Spirit is trying to find a congregation that’s like the Proverbs 31 woman. Indeed, the truest and most beneficial use of the passage is to apply it to churches. The famous “wife of noble character” passage is actually a cryptic description of a noble congregation—busy and active for Jesus. God

is seeking hard-working congregations to be joined to his Son—and God has sent his Spirit to find them.

### c) Caring for the poor

We cut out many verses from the above passage for the sake of space, but there's one that we would like to highlight here because it is about a special good work—a good work that deserves our undivided attention: the work of caring for the poor.

She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy (Proverbs 31:20).

Just like the Proverbs 31 woman, a model church will satisfy the needs of the poor, especially the needs of their poor brothers and sisters in Christ—sister congregations in financial need. Consider how some churches of the times of the apostles (like the ones in Macedonia and Achaia) gave donations to poor churches:

... a great famine was about to come over the whole inhabited earth... So from the disciples, according to their ability to give, each one of them determined to send financial aid for support to the brothers who lived in Judea, which they also did, sending the aid to the elders... (Acts 11:28-30; LEB).

Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem (Romans 15:26; LEB).

A sincere concern for the poor is a mark of a genuine missionary ministry. Paul's and his missionary team were very eager all along to seek ways to assist the poor.

All they asked [the leading apostles] was that we [Paul and his companions] should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along (Galatians 2:10).

### iii. Longing for the arrival

We want Jesus to come back soon. We are longing for the arrival of the bridegroom. Just like a bride waiting for the groom to arrive at the wedding celebration, we

**...some churches of the times of the apostles... gave donations to poor churches...**

cry out “Come!” We want the party to get started, but how can that happen without the bridegroom present?

The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come!’ ... He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus (Revelation 22:17, 20).

If wives whose husbands have been away from home desire strongly to see their husbands, how much more so will a bride who hasn’t even begun to cohabit with her husband? She’ll long to be with him. Do you get the comparison? As Christ’s Church now, we haven’t yet started to share the Kingdom with him, but that makes our desire to see him even stronger.

#### iv. Body beautiful

**The Church... has beautiful proportions.**

**T**he Church is lovely. She has beautiful proportions. She is a body, a body beautiful. Just like Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Esther—she is attractive.

... the Egyptians saw that Sarai was a very beautiful woman (Genesis 12:14).

He [Isaac] thought, “The men of this place might kill me on account of Rebekah, because she is beautiful (Genesis 26:7).

Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful (Genesis 29:17).

... the young woman [Esther] had a beautiful figure and was very attractive (Esther 2:7; LEB).

Solomon praised his Shulamite bride for her beauty, describing the parts of her body one-by-one in poetic fashion. Does a book like Song of Solomon seem misplaced in the pages of the Bible? Is it a strange book? No, it’s not—not for someone who understands its meaning.

Even on a natural level, what bridegroom is not captivated by his bride’s body? Is there any sin in him thinking of her, and longing for her? In the following passage, Solomon praises eight aspects of his Shulamite lover’s body (her eyes, hair, teeth, lips, mouth, temples, neck, and... [yes,



even her] breasts). This is the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit:

How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from the hills of Gilead.

Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn, coming up from the washing. Each has its twin; not one of them is alone. Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon; your mouth is lovely. Your temples behind your veil are like the halves of a pomegranate.

Your neck is like the tower of David, built with courses of stone; on it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors. Your breasts are like two fawns, like twin fawns of a gazelle that browse among the lilies (Song of Solomon 4:1-5).

Let's think spiritually here: Did you notice how two of the metaphors Solomon uses to describe his bride's body are from the world of shepherding? Her hair is like a flock of goats and her teeth are like a flock of sheep. Those aren't Western metaphors for beauty, but they are Middle Eastern metaphors. Beyond that, they are God's metaphors for beauty because God is not interested in a woman's physical beauty. He appreciates flocks of goats and flocks of sheep. Having those flocks makes the Church beautiful. A strong pastoral ministry makes a church beautiful.

It's a good and healthy thing for a man to appreciate the beauty of his bride—but let's make a clear distinction here while we have opportunity: It's wrong for a man to gaze upon a young lady. Although a man is free to enjoy looking at his own wife, it is a sin to gaze upon the beauty of any woman who is not your wife. Job controlled his eyes and made sure to never look at the young ladies of his village, the virgins.

I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin? (Job 31:1; NASB)

[Jesus said:] I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you

**...it is a sin to gaze upon the beauty of any woman who is not your wife.**

to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into Hell (Matthew 5:28-29).

If you understand that a man should not look at a woman to lust after her, you will *also* understand why veils are important. Solomon mentions twice in this passage, a passage that describes his own wife's beauty, that she is wearing a veil. Both the Shulamites eyes and temples are "behind her veil." She chose to wear a veil for a very important reason: She was reserving her beauty for her husband, and for him alone. She did not allow herself to be seen or desired by any other man, just Solomon.

Now, since Solomon was the only one who praised her for her beauty, you can appreciate his writings even more. The Song of Solomon is not a sweeping praise of beautiful women, but a singular and precise praise, directed towards one woman for the beauty she only shared with the author.

### 1) Each member in harmony

**T**he beauty of the human body lies in its symmetry and harmony—each body member complements the other, and they work in unison. When each part of a body does what it's supposed to do, you're beholding a beautiful body. The Church is just like that: When every member acts harmoniously with other members, there is beauty—there is something attractive. Synchronicity and cooperation in God's Church makes it beautiful. When each person does his part, and we help one another, then we are acting like a body, the Body of Christ.

**The Church consists of members. Each one is distinct, but each one helps the other.**

Now let's examine a passage of Scripture verse-by-verse, one which concludes with the words "... you are the Body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27). This passage drives at what it means to be the Body of Christ, and it does that by laying out a very important principle: The Church consists of members. Each one is distinct, but each one helps the other. Twice in the passage we hear that "God has put the body together," by placing the parts in the Body of Christ "just as he wanted them to be"—and if you reap nothing else from this passage, reap

that: That we must recognize the wisdom of God in his design of the Church.

### a) Starting off

**Y**ou are not part of the Body if you don't have a gift, and the starting point for having a gift is the baptism of the Spirit—so ask yourself whether you've received the Holy Spirit yet or not. That was the question the apostle Paul posed to people who thought they were following God.

... [Paul] arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' They answered, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' So Paul asked, 'Then what baptism did you receive?'

... they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied (Acts 19:1-3, 5-6).

Ask yourself these questions:

- What was your first supernatural gift?
- Have you received any more since you got that first one?
- Are you using your gifts to serve others in the Church now?

The moment you are baptized in the Spirit, you have officially joined the Body of Christ. The moment you receive the baptism of the Spirit, you become part of the Church—and not a second beforehand! How many people think that they are part of the Church, but have never received the Holy Spirit? The great majority of people who call themselves *Christians*, no doubt.

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one Body... (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)

Notice here that, speaking of the believers at Corinth, Paul said, "We were *all* baptized by one Spirit." That clearly means that without exception, every member of God's Church has experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

**The moment you receive the baptism of the Spirit, you become part of the Church...**

You only have a place among God's people when God's supernatural power has rested upon you, and you'll know it when it happens to you. God will make it notorious.

Another very important truth is that if you have been baptized in the Spirit, you have received at least one spiritual gift. God wants you to have more than one, but he won't let you have any less.

Just as each one has received a gift, use it for serving one another (1 Peter 4:10; LEB).

## b) Belonging, peace, and love

**...you belong to other Church members.** Once you are baptized in the Spirit, you belong to the Church, but that doesn't mean that you're on some kind of list. You're not on a roster, no. Belonging to the Church means that you belong to other Church members. Just as a person's eye, hand, leg, and toe belong to each other by virtue of the fact that they are part of one body, so do we belong to each other.

... just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one Body, and each member belongs to all the others (Romans 12:4-5).

Being one body, we are under obligation to be at peace with one another—for what body is at war with itself? If a body does not have peace among its members, it is sick or disabled. That's why Christians shouldn't fight or argue. That's why we forgive one another—because a body has to have peace.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace (Colossians 3:15).

Furthermore, we strive to live in love because it produces unity. It is the perfect bond of unity.

My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love... (Colossians 2:2).

Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity (Colossians 3:14; NASB).

## c) Contentment

Once you are in the body, you shouldn't complain about your place in it. God has given you a role and your role will be different from other people's roles. You have to be content with what you are. Fulfill your role in the Body happily. For example, women should not complain, "Why can't we teach in the congregation?" and children shouldn't murmur, "Why do we have to study and learn?" Men shouldn't argue, "Why do we have to do the prayers in the congregation?"

... the body is not made up of one part, but of many. Now if the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.

If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? (1 Corinthians 12:14-17)

The key to finding contentment is interacting with other believers according to your gift. Your relationships with other believers, unbreakable bonds in which you serve them through your anointing, and they serve you through theirs, are what produce happiness in the Body of Christ. Here are some questions to gauge your level of contentment:

- How unique gift is your gift?
- Are you in a congregation that lets you use your gift in service to others?
  - How so? How often?
- Do you wish that you had someone else's gift?
- Are you happy to serve God the way he made you?

**...interacting with other believers according to your gift.**

## d) Wisdom from God

Recognize that God has put each person in the Body of Christ just the way he wanted. God doesn't make mistakes. He knows how to design a church, and he distrib-

utes the spiritual gifts according to his wisdom. Isn't he the same God who made Eve? She was no monster. She didn't have two heads. She didn't have horns, scales, yellow teeth, or green skin. Eve had two beautiful hands and a beautiful nose right in the middle of her face.

If God could make Eve beautiful, can't we trust him to make our congregations just as beautiful? We let God make them beautiful when we each use our gift, and we actively encourage each believer to use their gifts.

But in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one Body (1 Corinthians 12:18-20).

No one in the Church should look down on anyone else. No one should think that they don't need other members of the Body. In fact, the people who have the most insignificant roles in the Church (people like widows who often serve through prayer) should be treated with special honor. It's not just the leading apostle-teacher who should receive our respect.

Never should it be heard in a church "I don't need you." Never should we even think that way, because God has designed the Church precisely to form a network. He has us together so that we'll learn interdependence. We sink or swim depending on how much we depend on one another.

**...some  
believ-  
ers have  
a more  
private,  
while  
others  
have a  
more  
public  
minis-  
try...**

Now, some believers have a more *private*, while others have a more *public* ministry—that's perfectly normal. Everyone should be treated differently just like a young lady will treat the different members of her body differently: she hangs earrings from her ears, paints her finger nails, she grooms her hair, covers her breasts, and washes her hair with shampoo.

The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor.

And the parts that are unrepresentable are treated with special modesty, while our representable parts need no special treatment (1 Corinthians 12:21-24a).

Behold the great wisdom of God in designing the Body of Christ the way he has designed it. Wisely, he has put it together with unity in mind! He doesn't want there to be any division in the Church. He wants us to appreciate one another and to care for each other. He wants us to sympathize with one another—to feel the same feelings. You should feel the suffering of other Christians, and you are allowed to share in their honor when they get it. Weep and rejoice together, depending on the circumstances. You do this because you are bound together.

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:15-16).

... God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it (1 Corinthians 12:24b-26).

### e) The talent pitfall

The Body of Christ is a group of people who have been baptized in the Holy Spirit and who each have a spiritual gift. We have studied that already in this book, but be careful here: There is a great error that you need to avoid: The Church is not a stage. It's not a place where artistic talents are showcased. Make sure you understand this: A spiritual gift is not a human talent.

Catholics boast of the sculptures of Michelangelo, the paintings of Leonardo Da Vinci, and the architecture of Rome. They've done that for hundreds of years, wanting us to believe that their cathedrals have been built for the glory of God, but the truth is that their cathedrals (filled with relics, idols, images, and stained glass windows—most of which show scenes that contradict the stories of the Bible) are an abomination to God.

**A spiritual gift is not a human talent.**

Catholic priests glory in Maderno, the man whose flair for Baroque architecture adorned St. Peter's Basilica. They glory in Michelangelo, who painted the Sistine Chapel ceiling—but what of God's Word is actually communicated to us through the talents of Maderno and Michelangelo? That's all they had—human talents.

**...blatant  
contra-  
dictions  
of God's  
Word  
in...art-  
work!**

Observe closely and you'll even see blatant contradictions of God's Word in their artwork! For example, their chubby little baby-sized angels are nowhere to be found in the Bible. On the contrary, they are the opposite of the biblical descriptions of angels. They dare to call them *cherubs*, but they don't look like cherubim (protecting angels) at all. The word appears 91 times in the OT and describes them as being powerful and strong.

... he [Yahweh] placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:24).

The sound of the wings of the cherubim could be heard as far away as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks... the Lord commanded the man in linen, 'Take fire from among the wheels, from among the cherubim...' Then one of the cherubim reached out his hand to the fire that was among them. He took up some of it... (Under the wings of the cherubim could be seen what looked like human hands) (Ezekiel 10:5-9).

You don't have to go to the Vatican to witness the lies of Catholic art. In the buildings owned by local Catholic parishes around the world, you'll see the traditional Stations of the Cross. Have you ever asked yourself what the second and third falls Christ (stations 7 and 9) of and the wiping of Jesus' face by Veronica (station 8) are based upon? They're certainly not based on the Scriptures. Indeed, the Stations of the Cross inculcate at least one Satanic lie—the idea that Jesus' image was left imprinted on a cloth. Because of that lie, you can spy supposed “veils of Veronica” framed in glass in Catholic cathedrals in Austria, Spain, and Italy—along with other icons. What good have these veils served?



They have only led gullible Catholics into greater darkness and sin—and idolatry is no small sin! The second commandment says:

You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in Heaven above or on the Earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents... (Exodus 20:4-5).

Now, let's not just point the finger at Catholics, but look at ourselves. Aren't Evangelical churches taking the same path Catholics have followed for centuries? Aren't we allowing art to take precedence over anointing? Many pastors are promoting human talents rather than spiritual gifts. Many talented musicians in the Evangelical churches have become famous by doing concerts, selling CDs, and getting on the radio. The problem with that is that music is not a spiritual gift. It is a talent developed through practice.

**...music is not a spiritual gift. It is a talent...**

Now, a brother or sister in Christ who is anointed to compose spiritual songs and psalms can share his inspired lyrics with a congregation—but the lyrics of most worship songs today are far from inspired. We have to ask ourselves if these popular artists are inspired by God or not. It's our duty to ask ourselves whether they have authentic spiritual gifts or not. And why do they get 80% of the time in a worship service while there is practically no opportunity at all, not even 1% allowed for a brother to share a prophecy, teaching, word of wisdom, or healing?

#### f) Spiritual gifts

There are three Bible passages that outline the Church's spiritual gifts. Before we look at them, it might help you to know that there are two general categories of gifts: speaking and serving gifts. From the Bible passages we'll look at, you'll deduce that each category has seven corresponding gifts, making the total number of gifts 14.

The following passage is great for starters since it outlines the two categories:

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

- If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God.
- If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 4:10-11).

Any list of the spiritual gifts will have to come from the following two passages:

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit... But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:4, 7-10; NKJV).

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serv-ing, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully (Romans 12:6-8).

The lists can be broken down this way:

- speaking gifts
  - prophecy
  - teaching<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Notice in the Bible how an evangelist (like Phillip the deacon) basically teaches the Word to unbelievers and encourages them to be baptized (Acts 8:12, 37). Because this is what an evangelist does, an evangelist would have a mix of the teaching and encouragement gifts. An evangelist to other cultures would need the

- encouragement (exhortation)<sup>29</sup>
- word of wisdom
- word of knowledge
- different kinds of tongues<sup>30</sup>
- interpretation of tongues

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gift of tongues too. Notice that you won't see evangelism listed as a spiritual gift. This is likely because sharing the Gospel is the duty of every Christian. God doesn't want any believer ever saying, "Since I don't have the gift of evangelism, so I don't have to evangelize."

<sup>29</sup> The gift of composing songs, an anointing of King David, would fit under this category. Worship and praise music is a very effective way for us to encourage one another. However, worship is not on the list because (like evangelism) it's something that all Christians should do. That's why another passage says:

When you come together, everyone has a hymn... (1 Corinthians 14:26)

<sup>30</sup> You have this gift if you can speak in the language of angels (1 Corinthians 13:1)—one that should be used not in public but in prayer (see 1 Corinthians 14:14-15, below)—or, if you can supernaturally speak in one of the thousands of "tongues of men" (1 Corinthians 13:1). Now, we recognize that the apostles spoke in legitimate foreign languages on the day of Pentecost. That's true, but it doesn't mean that other kinds of tongues (like tongues of angels) don't exist.

... if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding (1 Corinthians 14:14-15).

All of them [the apostles] were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven... a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken... 'How is it that each of us hears them in our native language?... we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!' (Acts 2:4-8, 11).

In the second kind of tongues—the one you use with understanding—the gift literally undoes the restriction God established at Babel! Since God uses this gift (tongues of men) to communicate the Gospel to unbelievers, it is particularly useful for cross-cultural evangelists.

- serving gifts
  - leading<sup>31</sup>
  - faith
  - working of miracles<sup>32</sup>
  - healings<sup>33</sup>
  - discerning of spirits<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Men with ministries such as apostle, prophet, evangelist, or pastor-teacher have this gift. To a degree, a man gifted to marry has a gift to lead because it's his duty in his relationship with his wife. A woman with children or with a ministry to other women will be blessed to have the gift of leadership too.

I wish that all of you were as I am [celibate]. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that (1 Corinthians 7:7).

<sup>32</sup> Paul said that the signs of an apostle include having this gift, miracles (2 Corinthians 12:12). An apostle is anointed to lead and to teach, but he must be anointed by God with the miracle-performing gift too. Why? Probably because many people will have to believe in what an apostle says, and miracles confirm that God is with him. It gives people more of a reason to believe in the Gospel.

<sup>33</sup> This word is in the plural for a reason. You may be able to heal people of cancer, headaches, stomachaches, the hiccups, diabetes, or glaucoma. You may be able to heal women of menstrual problems. There are certain demons that produce certain sicknesses. Those particular demons would be the ones you are able to cast out. The point is that there are different kinds of healings and every believer (who is anointed to heal) deals with distinct illnesses. Some believers, like the Twelve Apostles, were made able to heal *every* sickness and malady, at least for a time.

<sup>34</sup> This gift is a necessary anointing for someone who is going to have a ministry of deliverance. To cast out demons, you first need to discern what kind of demons you are dealing with. You have to understand what the underlying evil is in a person's life before you can free the person.

- giving<sup>35</sup>
- showing mercy<sup>36</sup>

### g) Haves and have-nots

**Y**ou either have gifts or you don't have gifts. You'll know it if you have one because it's supernatural. No amount of practice or human talent can develop a gift. You can't pay money to get one. If you don't have a spiritual gift, you simply haven't been baptized in the Spirit—which means that you either lack repentance, faith, or baptism. You certainly aren't part of the Church yet, because you're not part of the Body of Christ. You're not a member of any real congregation, no matter what list a pastor puts you on (a member list, a list of tithers, the list of ushers, or committee members).

Even if you're a teacher in the Church—you must be born again! Being a teacher doesn't guarantee that you will have experienced the new birth. You may not even understand it yet. Just being a teacher doesn't mean you even know the Fundamentals. Look at how Jesus confronted Nicodemus on this issue:

[Jesus said to Nicodemus] 'You must be born again. The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.'

**If you don't have a spiritual gift, you simply haven't been baptized in the Spirit...**

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<sup>35</sup> Every Christian should give, of course, but some have a special insight that shows them how much to give. Those who know what to give and to whom to give it have the gift of giving. Often, they give at the precise moment something is needed. Many believers in the original Jerusalem church had this grace. Barnabas was one who the Scriptures name for us in particular. He sold a field to give the proceeds of the sale to needy Christians (Acts 4:36-37).

<sup>36</sup> This gift is seen in a person who is good at visiting the lonely, helping the needy, assisting prisoners, the sick, the elderly, or orphans. All of those people need mercy. Tabitha had this gift (Acts 9:36-39), along with a strong anointing of the gift of giving.

‘How can this be?’ Nicodemus asked.

‘You are Israel’s teacher,’ said Jesus, ‘and do you not understand these things?’ (John 3:7-11)

As you can see from Jesus’ wind illustration, being a part of the Body of Christ does not depend on human choice, but on God’s choice. Of course you have to want it, and you’ll have to do what it takes to get the Spirit—repent, believe, and be baptized—but only God decides whether to send you his Spirit or not.

**...you’ll  
know it  
when he  
comes!**

Your job is to repent of your sins, believe with all your heart, and get baptized in water—and then you’ll have to wait just like the apostles did. You have to wait to get the gift of the Spirit, which means that you’ll know it when he comes! You’ll know because you won’t be the same. You will have supernatural power like never before.

... I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from On High (Luke 26:49).

... wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you (Acts 1:4-5, 8).

## 2) Body building

Everything we do in a church service, when we meet together as a Body, has to be done to build each other up. Erase the idea from your mind that building a church is about getting bricks, mortar, wood, and a team of construction workers together. It’s not. It has absolutely nothing to do with architecture, engineering, carpentry, or masonry. Building churches is about coordinating believers to serve each other through their spiritual gifts.

Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the Church... When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the Church may be built up (1 Corinthians 14:12, 26).

Did you get that last phrase? “So that the church may be built up.” To build our local church, we don’t need an engineer or an architect. We need apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. Got it? And what do we need them to do—the work of building the Church? No, we need them to equip believers for the ministry. The ministry (a.k.a., *the work of service* as it’s called in the next verse) belongs to all of us. We build one another up. Believers build up the Church together. It’s not something that’s done by some group of leaders.

And he [Christ] gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some shepherd-teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the Body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12; NASB, MacArthur).

Teachers will train us, but their training should be geared towards making each of us more able to strengthen the other. When each person in a congregation exercises their gifts, the result is body building. What do we mean by that? Well, the Body of Christ builds itself up.

**...the  
Body of  
Christ  
builds  
itself up.**

#### a) Husband head

Jesus is the head of the Church, the Bible repeats this truth over and over again—but that doesn’t mean that we understand it. For example, it certainly doesn’t mean that our Lord Jesus is the ear, eye, mouth, and nose of the Church. In fact, 1 Corinthians 12 says that other people hold those positions in the Body. By stating that Jesus is the *head*, we mean to say that Jesus is the Church’s leader.

... he is the head of the Body, the Church... he is the head of the Body, the Church... (Colossians 1:18, 24).

Jesus is to the Church what Adam was to Eve, her spiritual head. Adam never sat on top of Eve’s shoulders. Adam was not physically Eve’s head. He was *spiritually* Eve’s head. In the same way, there are members of our churches who are the eyes, the ears, and the mouth of a congregation—and they have a role to play in their local congregation just as much as the people who are the back, the hips, and the elbows of that congregation.

... speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature Body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole Body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Ephesians 4:15-16).

Notice how this passage states that we grow, mature, and get built up to become the “body of him who is the head.” That would be Jesus, of course. Think the verse through well. You have to interpret the word *head* in the sense that Jesus is the Church’s husband, right? In the context, there’s no other way to interpret his role as head.

## b) Connected

**O**ur connection with Jesus is vital. We cannot lose or loosen our bond with him. We, as his Body, will only grow to the degree that we are connected to him. Most everybody understands that a body cannot grow without being connected to its head; so it is with the Church in her relationship to Christ.

Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole Body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow (Colossians 2:18-19).

**...the body grows in relation to the head.**

The main idea of this passage is that the body grows in relation to the head. It says that Jesus is the head “from whom” the body grows. In this example, Jesus is to be understood as more than just the husband, he is the actual head. Just as a body will grow only if it is connected to the head, so do we grow only in connection to Jesus.

This is the only Bible passage we know of which calls Jesus a *head* in the body member sense, not the husband sense. Observe how in the following passage, the metaphor for a body’s head could not possibly refer to Jesus. Rather,



the head of the passage would have to be some elder of the Church—someone who has leadership anointing.

... the body is not made up of one part but of many... [and Paul speaks about the foot, the hand, the ear, the eye, and the nose] And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’... God has put the body together... so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other... Now you are the Body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it (1 Corinthians 12:14, 21, 24-25, 27).

### c) God grows the Church

A final principle for Church growth is that it’s God who makes the Church grow. The Pentecost Bible passage, which tells the story of 3000 conversions, ends with the words “and the Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved.”

**...it’s  
God who  
makes  
the  
Church  
grow.**

... they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

So continuing daily with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:42-47; NKJV).

Do read this passage very carefully. You should be able to identify ten factors that made the first Christian church a model for every subsequent generation of believers. We have already examined at length the four activities to which they dedicated themselves: doctrine, fellowship, Lord’s Supper, and prayers. Those are just the basics. There was more.

... the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow (Colossians 2:19).

Having more than the basics is what qualified the Jerusalem church for growth. Does your church qualify for the growth. God wants it to grow. Remember what it says at the end of the Acts 2 description of that first church: “the Lord added to the church daily.” If God is going to add to our number, then:

1. The fear of God has to come upon each of us.
2. Many signs and wonders must be performed by those who lead.
3. Everyone who has believed should be together.
4. We should have all things in common.
5. We ought to sell our property and possessions, distributing the funds according to the needs of believers in the Church.
6. We have to persevere united each day in meetings.
7. We should break bread in our homes.
8. We ought to eat together with joy and simplicity of heart.
9. We must praise God, worshipping him.
10. We should earn the favor of all the people in our community.

**...church growth is proportional to the degree to which a congregation follows the example of the first Christian church.**

So let's not be dreamers. We can't expect God to make our congregation grow unless we do our part. The hard facts reveal that church growth is proportional to the degree to which a congregation follows the example of the first Christian church. Study that church, a church which God blessed with growth. We can expect God to make our church grow too—but only if we fulfill the conditions.

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

You see, someone has to plant the seed and water it if God will make it grow. Those are the conditions. We have to do our part, then God will do his.

Jesus has promised us that he will build the Church—but he builds it upon men. If Jesus finds a man like Peter, someone who is bold enough to profess their faith in Christ in a hostile environment, and to be the first one to do it—then Jesus has a rock.

... I tell you that you are Peter [meaning *stone*], and on this rock I will build my Church (Matthew 16:18).

On a rock like Peter, Jesus can build many congregations or few. The number of congregations depends upon the time and place. Peter lived in the times of the green tree, we live in the dry. Some places in the world are experiencing revival, others are in unbelief. In the end, one truth remains firm: Jesus will build his Church upon someone. Are you that person today?

... these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the Gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from Heaven—things into which angels long to look (1 Peter 1:12; NASB).

**Jesus will build his Church upon someone.**

Who will be a rock in today's age? Who will be today's Peter? Has Jesus ever built a congregation upon thin air? No. He has always used men—not even angels are his choice for this honorable work. We are the envy of angels.

#### v. Covenant keeper

The final quality of a bride we will look at is that she is a covenant keeper. The fact that a young woman is committed is the most important reason why a bridegroom would ever choose her to be his bride. He must consider her a trustworthy and loyal woman.

Since any person who commits themselves through a covenant must actually understand what a covenant is about, let's ask ourselves, "What are covenants about?" The answer is: They are binding agreements between two parties. They define our responsibilities to one another, and they define the benefits available to those who fulfill those responsibilities.

God is a God of covenants. He established one with Noah, one with Abraham, then one with the nation of Israel

**God has established the greatest covenant of all time with the Church...**

(through Moses). He established others that we won't mention here [like his covenant with David in 2 Chronicles 21:7; with Solomon in 2 Chronicles 7:17-21, and Phinehas in Numbers 25:10-14]; nonetheless, God has established the greatest covenant of all time with the Church—that's the one we're going to focus on here, the New Covenant.

### 1) Covenant comparison

**L**et's compare different covenants on a chart. If we do, we'll be able to appreciate the superiority of the New Covenant over all others. A great way to understand what God's covenants are about is to compare them to some of the covenants that are common to us in everyday life: marriage, a job contract, and a will. If you carefully review the chart below, you should get a clear idea of what covenants are about. Every covenant has:

- promises
- parties
- a mediator
- ministers
- means (of implementation)
- conditions
- signs (to represent it)
- a beginning point
- confirmation

Please observe those elements as you study the charts at the end of the book. You'll find them as foldouts on the last pages.

We have glossed over what certain covenants are about, but be sure to invest some time comparing the two greatest covenants since that will be the most beneficial study for a believer. The two greatest covenants ever established by God are the Old and the New Covenants. Examine them as deeply as you can. It's something you'll be challenged to do if you read through the Bible anyways. For now, in this

book, we're just focusing on a simple comparison of the two, but a more advanced study will be very beneficial to you.

## 2) In with the New

**T**he Church is a bride, and just as a bride enters into a covenant relationship with a groom, so does the Church enter into a covenant—but the Church's covenant is different. It's actually a covenant with the Father of the groom, not technically with the groom himself. We have the covenant *through* the groom, to be sure; however, our groom's intention is nobler than the intentions of the everyday human groom. Jesus wants to be part of the family of his Father. The Church has a covenant with *God* through Jesus! Remember that. Be cognizant of it.

**The Church has a covenant with God through Jesus!**

What is our covenant about? The best way to appreciate the New Covenant is to compare it with the Old, the one that God made with the Jews through Moses. In fact, that's exactly what God always intended for us to do—he has always wanted us to get a fuller understanding of the New Covenant through the Old.

When God established the Old Covenant, he knew that it wouldn't last. It was always temporary. God knew that the Jews (or any other ethnic group, for that matter) wouldn't be able to keep his Law. Like a father who assigns his son a task that's too difficult for the son in order to motivate the son to seek his help, God gave the Old Covenant to Israel. He wanted them to seek his help through faith.

God gave them (through the Old Covenant) the proof that only through a new and greater covenant, one based on faith, would they ever be saved. Anyone who has tried to live according to the Old Covenant will quickly find out, that our flesh won't allow us to live by it. It is too holy for our feeble frames to bear.

A very large portion of the Scriptures teaches the Old Covenant—but those Scriptures were not written to forever commit us to the Old Covenant. Rather, they were writ-

ten to prepare us for the greatness of the New Covenant! Are you able to see how God has ministered to humanity through the Old and New Covenants? If he enlightens you on this matter, you should be ready to conclude along with Augustine of Hippo:

The Law was given  
so grace would be sought.  
Grace was given  
so the Law might be fulfilled.

#### f. Sisters with children

**W**e need to see each Christian congregation as a bride. Now, since brides are part of a family, and they are in the process of becoming wives and mothers, it's appropriate to also see every Christian congregation as a *lady*—a lady who has sisters and children.

To the lady chosen by God and to her children...  
The children of your sister, who is chosen by God,  
send their greetings (2 John 1, 13).

**...see  
congregations  
in their  
relation  
to each  
other:  
they are  
sisters.**

The lady-sister metaphor is a beautiful expression to use when we refer to congregations because it allows us to see congregations in their relation to each other: they are *sisters*. Have you ever heard pastors speak of *sister churches*? Almost every congregation has another congregation with which they can relate easily. Many congregations do missions or other kinds of ministries together. They cooperate, which is very good, especially when one church needs financial help and the other can supply it.

The fact that churches are like *sisters* leads us to another lovely reality: Each person in particular is a *child* to our respective congregations. We are *children* to our church. This is how John puts it:

... I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth... Now I ask you, lady, not as though I were writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another (2 John 1:4, 5; NASB).

What does it mean to be the *children* of our churches? It means that we are born spiritually through the ministry of a particular church—and that makes us the children of that church. Congregations give birth to spiritual children. If that’s true, then what should a church try to accomplish through those children? The same thing that any mother tries with all her heart to accomplish in her children: to get them to love one another. That’s the great accomplishment of a mother, and of a church. Eve and Rebekah failed miserably at that task—may we learn from their examples, and not repeat them.

#### g. One Body with Israel

Understand that from the slavery in Egypt up to the time of the Twelve Apostles, God’s chosen nation was Israel. If you wanted salvation, and you lived anytime from when they were slaves in Egypt up until Pentecost, you had to actually join them—you had to proselytize and become a Jew. Every other nation on Earth (the Arabs, the Egyptians, the Chinese, the Greeks, Italians, Germans, and Celts, etc.) were outside of God’s covenant simply because they were not Jews.

Surely, there were a number of God-fearing Arabs, Egyptians, Chinese, and Europeans during those times, but God only had a covenant with Israel. That means, as the Bible puts it, that our Gentile ancestors were *far away* from God, that there was a *barrier* between us and God. Our forefathers were not part of covenant community. Worse off, there was *hostility* between our ancestors and the Jews.

**...our  
Gentile  
ances-  
tors  
were far  
away  
from  
God...**

... now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the Law with its commands and regulations.

His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two [Jews and Gentiles], thus making peace, and in One Body to reconcile both of them to God through the Cross, by which he put to death their hostility (Ephesians 2:13-16).

Now, thank God, things have changed. The hostility has ended. Through the Cross, Gentiles like us are now One Body with the Jews—but how did this unity actually materialize? How did it come about? It's a little complicated, but let's start with this truth: Although the Church today has relatively few Jews in it, the Church actually began as a completely Jewish community. There were no Gentiles at all.

**...Christians weren't even interested in preaching to the Gentiles.**

Furthermore, the first Christians weren't even interested in preaching to the Gentiles. After some surprising revelations from God, the first believers realized that God wanted to use them to reach the rest of the world. They realized that God was not only renewing Israel—he was forming a new humanity!

... remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called 'uncircumcised' by those who call themselves 'the circumcision...' remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:11-12).

In a revolutionary way, God showed the early Christian Church, which was 100% Jewish, that Gentiles like us are heirs of the coming world with them. He revealed to them that we are heirs of the Kingdom together with them—fellow heirs!

... you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints (Ephesians 2:19; NKJV).

... through the Gospel, the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one Body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 3:6).

So, we just examined one more sense in which the Church is one Body—the Church is one Body in the sense that the Gentiles are now official citizens of Israel, and sharers in God's covenant community.



## h. One bread, one body

This next passage is challenging, but we've got to deal with it if our one Body study will be complete because it explains very concisely *why* we are one Body. Before you read it, take into consideration that Paul introduces the subject, one Body, by saying "I am speaking as to sensible people; you judge what I am saying" (1 Corinthians 10:15). What does he mean by that? Paul means that his teaching is for rational-minded, cogent believers. He means that the one Body teaching is for people who are able to think things through. Paul wrote for people who have spiritual minds—people who can discern things.

After teaching that we must flee from idolatry (the kind into which the Jews fell while they wandered in the wilderness), Paul asks:

The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one Body, for we all share from the one bread. Consider Israel according to the flesh: are not the ones who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar? (1 Corinthians 10:16-18; LEB)

## i. Idol altars

To interpret this 1 Corinthians 10 passage rightly, we must recognize the fact that Paul is warning Christians not to participate in idolatry. Most of us won't easily understand the idea behind Paul's warning against idolatry because idolatry has changed a lot from what it was in Paul's day. We don't easily grasp the apostle's train of thought because he says not to participate in idolatry, and for him that means that we shouldn't eat any meat sacrificed to idols. We don't easily make the connection between idolatry and eating meat.

**...Paul is warning Christians not to participate in idolatry.**

It's hard for us to understand why we shouldn't eat certain kinds of meat mainly because we don't see meat sacrificed to idols nowadays in the West; however, meat from idolatrous sacrifices was the most common meat to be found in the markets in the times of Paul. With meat-market choices as his context, Paul instructs believers on the Lord's Supper.

Paul's intention in 1 Corinthians 10 is to contrast<sup>37</sup> the Lord's Supper with pagan sacrifices. In terms of Christian sacrifices, the Lord's Supper is our altar—that is, it's the space where Christians participate in Jesus' sacrifice to God. We benefit from the bread we eat, just as the priests benefitted from the animal sacrifices in OT Israel. How did they benefit from them? By eating those very sacrifices. Pagans who make sacrifices to their gods also eat of the meat being sacrificed. They have parties, eating generous portions of the meat of sacrificed animals.

Now, in our case the bread is the sacrifice. Christians believe that it is truly Jesus' body. We present that bread to God through the Lord's Supper, our altar.

Paul says that the Lord's Supper bread is the body of Christ. Just one verse earlier, Paul teaches that the wine of the Lord's Supper is the blood of Christ. Do you believe this? You must if you are going to go on to understand what Paul means when he says "there is one bread."

...what Paul means when he says "there is one bread."

#### ii. Not one loaf

Now, get this straight: Paul's expression "there is one bread" does not mean that there is one piece of bread. He's not talking about one loaf. It's not as if he's saying that every Christian eats of the same loaf of bread. How could we do that if we meet in different places at different times? Is Paul insisting here that for one big church meeting, that we have to bake an extra-large piece of bread? Is his goal to have us all share the same physical loaf? He's not even close to saying that, no. It's not the context.

So why is there widespread confusion on this issue? Unfortunately, the NIV translation uses the word *loaf* in some parts of the passage and *bread* in other parts, leaving NIV readers baffled. The fact is that the word is always *bread* (*artos* in Greek) in the passage, and there is no reason to

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<sup>37</sup> To *contrast* means to show the differences between things, while to *compare* means to highlight their similarities. There are very big differences between the Lord's Supper and pagan sacrifices. That's the point.

vary the translation of the same word from *loaf* to *bread*. As we've just proven, there's no reason to use *loaf*. It only confuses people.

### iii. Food for thought

So what does Paul mean when he says that there is *one bread*? The interpretation of what *one bread* means is the key to understanding the 1 Corinthians 10 passage; and understanding this passage will allow you to unlock much of what it means for the Church to be one Body. Why? Because if you can understand what the one bread is, you can discern *why* we are one Body. Now, concentrate on how Paul uses the word *for* in the following verse:

Because there is one bread, we who are many are One Body, for we all share from the one bread.

Paul means to tell us that there is one sacrifice—only one that God accepts for the forgiveness of sins, Christ's body. Paul teaches us that the bread of the Lord's Supper is the body of Christ, for he said "The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" Therefore, our sharing of that bread is a sharing in the one sacrifice that God accepts for sins—we share in Christ's body. That means that Jesus' body (as it is discerned by us in the Lord's Supper bread) is our one spiritual food, uniting us with Jesus.

This teaching lines up very nicely with another one Jesus gave in John 6:

'I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.'

Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'

Jesus said to them, 'Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my

**...if you can understand what the one bread is, you can discern why we are one Body.**

flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink (John 6:48-55).

#### iv. A hard teaching

**J**esus' body is the one sacrifice for sins, and we must eat his body. We can only eat it through our participation in the Lord's Supper bread. Does this doctrine sound hard? It is. Few are those who will accept it, but those who do accept it are united spiritually into one Body, the Church. It's perhaps the most powerful practical truth undergirding this book.<sup>38</sup> Eating this one spiritual bread, we become one with each another. Do you participate in the bread? With whom? You are joined together to those you eat with.

**Eating  
this one  
spiritual  
bread,  
we  
become  
one with  
each an-  
other.**

Notice how Jesus said (in the previous passage) that just as he lives because of the Father, people who eat Jesus' body and drink his blood live because of Jesus. What did he mean by that? Our Lord was talking about unity—the greatest unity possible. Indeed, the very same spiritual unity Jesus has with God, can be our unity with Jesus, but that will only happen if we eat his body properly. What is it to eat his body properly? You must eat it with faith and with a clear conscience. Do you do that?

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?' (John 6:60)

If you think that this teaching is hard, you're not the first one to think so. However, this is something you have to do. It's God's special way of committing the followers of Jesus to himself. If you do understand the commitment, and can discern Jesus' body in the Lord's Supper bread, then you will be able to participate in this Supper properly.

Participating properly is no small matter. It means that you have eternal life! It means that you remain in Christ. It means that you're part of the one Body—so good for you! The passage we just studied above ends with these powerful words:

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<sup>38</sup> You'll notice that the cover of the book has the bread of the Lord's Supper on it. The cup is on the back.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood re-  
mains in me, and I in them. Just as the Living Fa-  
ther sent me and I live because of the Father, so the  
one who feeds on me will live because of me' (John  
6:56-57).

### III. What the Church does

A. Distractions

B. Four key activities

If actions speak louder than words, then what are the ac-  
tions of the Church? What do those actions mean? What  
do they say to those who observe us? We are going to take  
a close look at what the Church should do, but before we  
look at what she should do, we have to identify the things  
she should *not* do. A congregation will never get around to  
doing what it must do, unless it first says 'no' to the distrac-  
tions. It is not enough to say 'amen' to the will of God, we  
have to say 'no' to the ways of the world.

... what  
are the  
actions  
of the  
Church?

#### A. Distractions

If a church is not busy with the things God has for it, then  
it will be busy with what the world has for it. It will slip  
into sin, the sin of worldliness. Many churches have already  
become just another business. To avoid that, here are some  
things the Church should not get involved with:

- buying property—we should be selling it instead
- constructing buildings (falsely called *churches*)—we do  
better renting space<sup>39</sup>
- promoting a vision for church growth, ignoring the NT  
vision of the Kingdom

<sup>39</sup> The Church should rent the buildings we use, if we can't get  
them for free through brothers and sisters who open their homes.  
Like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we should not make real estate  
investments, but investments in the Kingdom. When a congrega-  
tion buys a building, that purchase immediately blurs everyone's  
idea of what a church is. The word *church* is never used to refer to  
a building in the Bible, so why should we ever use it that way?

- selling worship music, CDs, and concerts for a fee—we should never charge for worship
- supporting ministries that are not supervised by God-ordained pastors.<sup>40</sup>
  - Some examples of how pastors must lead in these ministries is:
    - Protecting ministries from government control.
      - Governments often restrict or prohibit us from using the Word of God as we minister to sinners. Under liberal government influence, a church will not be able to preach repentance from sins such as homosexuality, adultery, or false religion.
    - Assuring that technology does not replace the fundamental ministry of God’s Anointing.
      - The Spirit is passed on through the laying on of hands, not through satellites, WiFi, or television.
    - Making sure that confession of sin and prayer are used in healing and recuperation.
      - Most ministries not under the supervision of pastors use just medicine and therapy. Only pastors will make sure that secular psychology stays out of our ministries.
    - Not only guiding addicts and alcoholics to repentance.
      - There’s so much more they need. A pastor knows how to test the fruits of their repentance, and commit them to Christ.
    - Making sure that missionaries have been tested before they are sent.

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<sup>40</sup> This may sound surprising, but even orphanages, nursing homes, clinics, hospitals, rehab/recovery centers, schools, colleges, seminaries, publishing houses, magazines, news sources, websites, radio stations, TV channels, movie ministries, legal services, missions, and other Christian endeavors will turn into businesses if they are not supervised by spiritual men—authentic elders and pastors. Just look at the Salvation Army, Alcoholics Anonymous, and Harvard University, to name a few well-known examples of Christian ministries turned businesses.

- Missionaries have to be examined to make sure that they are mature enough to handle missions. Only their pastors know the character of those missionaries.
- Assuring that educational ministries are biblical.
  - Pastors should oversee all schools and colleges, making sure that they remain an extension of the teaching ministry of the Church, and never separated from it.

## **B. Four key activities**

### **1. Teaching**

- a. The right place
- b. Full- and semi-inspiration
- c. Something to fight for
- d. First-hand witnesses
- e. New and old
- f. The doctrine defined

### **2. Fellowship**

- a. Thicker than blood
- b. Make or break
  - i. Warnings
- c. Cutting it off
  - i. In Satan's hands
- d. Sharing
  - i. Eating together
- e. Walking together
- f. Hospitality
- g. Stages

### **3. Breaking bread**

- a. A privilege
- b. Precious blood
  - i. The life is in the blood
  - ii. Remaining in Christ
  - iii. Jesus the life

#### 4. Praying

- a. Jesus' instructions on prayer
  - i. Anything
    - 1) Boldness and power
    - 2) Other believers
    - 3) The Anointing

The Church *perseveres* in four activities—these activities are essential to the life of the Church. Notice how the Greek word for *perseveres* [*proskartereō*] was well-translated by the LEB translators in Acts 2:42. They translated the word accurately as “they were devoting themselves to.” ... they were devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles, and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayers (Acts 2:42; LEB).

...no matter what happened, they stuck to four activities.

This wholehearted devotion of the first Church meant that no matter what happened, they stuck to four activities. Those activities were not optional. The Church today must be committed to those same activities, come what may.

The most complete definition of the Greek word the LEB translated as *devoting themselves* is “to be earnest towards, to persevere, be constantly diligent” (Strong). With that clarification, please understand that the first Christians were *very earnest* about these four activities. They were constantly diligent to teach, share fellowship, break bread, and pray. Now, the question is: Are we as diligent as they were? Let's look at the four activities now, one-by-one: teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and praying.

#### 8. Teaching

The primary activity of the Church is teaching. Why? Well, teaching establishes our thinking—and all human actions originate in thoughts. The first step we must take to be sure we're ready to act, is to make sure that our thoughts are right. If our thinking is off, so will our actions be off—and we can't afford to let our actions be off.

The Church is dedicated to teaching, but we don't teach the subjects kids get in school. We're not a group of intellectuals. We have no academic ambitions. Rather, we pursue



truth and we seek the wisdom necessary for living right. The Church doesn't teach liberal arts or social science. We don't teach accounting, business, culture, or languages. We don't even teach religion. Those are all wonderful topics to study—but our focus is the supreme subject of study: God's Word.

### a. The right place

If we're going to be faithful to the example of the first Church, we have to teach a very specific doctrine: the doctrine of the apostles. Remember what it says in Acts 2:42:

... they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42; NKJV).

Now, where will you find the doctrine of the apostles in the Bible? You will find it in the NT since the NT was written by the apostles. Look in the table of contents of your Bible and you'll see that the names of the 27 books of the NT, but don't feel overwhelmed. There are only nine human authors of these books. Their names are:

**...only  
nine hu-  
man au-  
thors...**

- Matthew
- Mark
- Luke
- John
- Paul
- the author of Hebrews
- James (Jesus' brother)
- Peter
- Jude

Five of these men (Paul, Luke, Mark, James, and Jude) were not part of the original Twelve Apostles. Only three of them (Peter, John, and Matthew) were members of the original Twelve. One of the NT authors is not certain.<sup>41</sup>

The fact that only three NT authors were from the original

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<sup>41</sup> We're speaking about the author of Hebrews. The style is certainly not Paul's, or that of any other NT author. There is a

Twelve might raise an issue: Could believing in the doctrine of the apostles mean that we should only trust in the writings that proceeded from the Twelve? That would mean that we could only trust in a handful of NT books—the ones written by Peter, John, and Matthew.

Certainly, the first Church heeded the teachings of Peter, John, and Matthew as we do, but they also listened closely to the teachings of Andrew, James (John's brother), Philip, Nathanael, Thaddeus, Thomas, Simon, James the Less, and Matthias. At that time, the Twelve were pastoring the Church. We don't have any writings from nine of them, but that doesn't mean that we're missing content from our Bibles—the doctrine of the apostles was not only taught by the Twelve. The doctrine of the apostles has been (and is being) taught by many others. In fact, it's taught by men today.

...the doctrine of the apostles was not only taught by the Twelve.

#### b. Full- and semi-inspiration

Apostles whose writings made it into the Bible were inspired by God, but other men were also inspired. For example, men such as Apollos, Barnabas, and Phillip are famous preachers of NT times—so where are their writings? Maybe they had none. Like Jesus, perhaps they only invested their time in verbal (not written) instruction. There is nothing wrong with that.

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possibility that the author is Barnabas, since he was a Levite (Acts 4:36) and knowledgeable about priestly things—the Epistle to the Hebrews dedicates much space to describing the priestly ministry.

However, the power of the writing indicates that this was Apollos, a man who was just as renowned for his preaching and just as esteemed in the churches as Paul or Peter (1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:4-6).

... a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures (Acts 18:24).

The way the author of Hebrews handles Scripture with depth and eloquence demonstrates that he was certainly a Jew who had a commanding knowledge of the Bible. Who else fits that description as well as Apollos?

Even the apostles whose writings are found in the Bible certainly had times when they wrote imperfectly. There were times when not all of their words were inspired. Just like any of us, they had times when some of their words were from God, and some were not. The writings in which some words were not from God did not make it into the Bible.

At a certain points in the history of the Church, church elders determined that certain apostolic writings didn't qualify as Scripture. We're not sure, but they probably even realized that certain writings of Paul, Peter, and John were not fully inspired. The Church has the God-given task of examining writings and retaining what is good.

Hate what is evil; cling to what is good (Romans 12:9).

... examine all things; hold fast to what is good. Abstain from every form of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22; LEB).

There were times when great men like Peter and Paul were not under God's full inspiration. They were certainly under full inspiration when they wrote the NT books—but those were written in certain moments of their lives. What happened during the rest of Peter and Paul's lives? Were they filled with the Holy Spirit every other moment? They likely weren't, but only God knows.

The important thing is that you and I must judge teachings. We have to discern which teaching is inspired by God and which is not. Just as Christians did when the apostles wrote their first letters, we have to judge what is from God and what is not. For example, what happened to the first letter Paul wrote to the Corinthians—not 1 Corinthians, but the one he wrote before that? He mentions it in 1 Corinthians, but nobody knows how to get a copy of it.

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people (1 Corinthians 5:9).

And what of the letter Paul wrote to the Laodiceans? It was not conserved by believers, and is now lost in history:

After this letter [Colossians] has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the La-

**The Church has the God-given task of examining writings and retaining what is good.**

odiceans, and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea (Colossians 4:16).

Surely, Paul's letter to the Laodiceans contained lots of words inspired by the Holy Spirit. However, at a particular point in history, the Church decided that it wasn't worthy of saving. Is that because it was not written under the full inspiration of God? We don't know, but the Church has done an excellent job of passing down Scriptures to us. It hasn't failed, by the grace of God.

... the Church has done an excellent job of passing down Scriptures to us.

Now, as God's Church today, we continue to identify and retain all things that are given to us under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. That's our job.

### c. Something to fight for

To believe in the doctrine of the apostles means believing in the original faith as handed down to us by the apostles. That original faith is something we have to fight for—why? It's because the general tendency of the Church is towards apostasy. The law of entropy, that all things go from a higher degree of order to a lower degree—the law that all things break down—applies to doctrine as well. That's why we have to fight for the original faith, the one that Jesus and the apostles handed down to us.

... contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints (Jude 3; NASB).

We have to resist falling apart at the seams. God warned us long ago that Bible teachers would go from bad to worse. Finally, it has become evident that his warnings were justified. How far they have teachers strayed from the truth? Very.

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days... evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:1, 13-15).

The only Christians who will be able to resist doctrinal

deception are the ones who are positive about what the doctrine of the apostles is. We have to be people who not only know sound doctrine, but people who, like Timothy, are convinced of what we have learned. It helps to have known the Scriptures from the time we are children because imposters are going “from bad to worse.”

**We have to be people who... are convinced of what we have learned.**

#### d. First-hand witnesses

**T**he Church can only believe in the original message, the Good News that started with Jesus himself. Since our Lord didn't actually write anything, we must look to the teachings of the men who heard Jesus personally. Since the apostles were first-hand witnesses, we hold to their doctrine.

This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord [Jesus], was confirmed to us by those who heard him (Hebrews 2:3).

To get the doctrine of the apostles, men such as the physician Luke had to carry out thorough research, investigating the truth very carefully. They did that to be faithful channels of God's message. Luke said in the introduction to his Gospel, that he had...

... investigated everything carefully from the beginning... so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught (Luke 1:3-4; NASB).

Luke said that he was not alone in his endeavor, but that many tried to write gospels. Eventually, four trustworthy gospels were handed down to us by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each of these men wrote with the objective of giving us accurate accounts of Jesus' life. Each of them wrote under the full inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Notice the way Luke uses the words *just as* in his introduction. Luke chose his words carefully, and it is through the words *just as* that he communicates to us how important accuracy was to him.

... many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the begin-

ning were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word...  
(Luke 1:1-2; NASB).

Luke calls the original apostles “those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses.” That means that they not only *saw* what Jesus did with their own eyes, but they saw it *from* the beginning of his ministry—they saw it from the time of John the Baptist. These men didn’t miss a thing.

You’ll also notice that Luke calls the original apostles “servants of the Word,” meaning that they served God through the Word—these men added Scriptures to Scriptures, transmitting fresh new revelations to God’s people. Through them, we have the NT. To be sure, the apostles fulfilled a solemn duty: They transmitted the truth of Jesus to the human race. They completed the Scriptures, and have given us a priceless treasure!

#### e. New and old

**... the uncorrupted original teaching of the Church...**

**N**ow you can see that the expression “the doctrine of the apostles” refers to the uncorrupted original teaching of the Church. It’s accessible to all, but only a handful of people are constantly devoting themselves to it.

When the original apostles were teaching, Christian doctrine was not yet tainted by any human theology or traditions of men. It was pure. Their doctrine stands in stark contrast to the tainted teachings of our times. You’ve probably already discovered how hard it is to find a preacher who’s willing to preach through the NT verse-by-verse. Why is that? It’s because there are few men who are able to even handle what the apostles wrote. Since they can’t handle it in its entirety, most pastors today just pick and choose what they like from the Bible. They take bits and pieces of the apostles’ writings much the way children pick the food they want from a dinner plate, leaving the vegetables.

The beginning of the Church’s ministry stands in stark contrast to today’s Apostasy. The primitive Church stands in stark contrast to the contemporary church. Let’s treat the Christian faith the way we should: It’s an ancient path laid

out for us by prophets and apostles. You can't beat God's original formula.

This is what the LORD says: 'Stand at the cross-roads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls (Jeremiah 6:16).

## f. The doctrine defined

We will look at the doctrine of the apostles more fully in our book *One Faith*, but there's space here for an overview since the doctrine is summed up for us in two short NT passages. The first passage contains a list, one that enumerates the basic message of Christ. We call it *the fundamentals* because it names the seven elements that make for a firm spiritual foundation.

...the seven elements that make for a firm spiritual foundation.

... leaving behind the elementary message about<sup>42</sup> Christ, let us move on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and faith in God, teaching about baptisms<sup>43</sup> and laying on of hands, and resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment (Hebrews 6:1-2; LEB).

<sup>42</sup> Better translated *of*, as does Young's Literal Translation, which puts the phrase like this: *the word of the beginning of the Christ*.

<sup>43</sup> Don't pay any attention to Bible versions that do not say *baptisms* but translate it to say *washings*. The Greek word here is *baptismos*, and is certainly best translated as *baptisms*. The question the author of this passage intended to provoke us to ask is "What are the different *kinds* of baptisms?" Some people don't want to be asked that question, so they avoid it. How do they avoid it? By denying that the word *baptisms* is there—but it still is, and it's not going anywhere.

What are Bible teachers trying to avoid? Many don't like giving importance to water baptism because, according to them, baptism doesn't save, only faith does. Others try to avoid the subject of the baptism of the Holy Spirit because it sounds too Charismatic for them. They don't want to have to make the effort to actually obtain spiritual gifts. They don't have enough faith to get gifts. These "Christians" are so spiritually dry, that even if they had a gift, they probably wouldn't even use it.

This passage is straightforward, with the only tricky part being how to break down what the author means by *baptisms*. However, if you gloss over the NT, you should be able to quickly conclude that there are two basic kinds of baptism: water and Spirit baptism. If you come to that conclusion, you should then be able to break down the fundamentals into seven.

1. repentance from sin
2. faith in God
3. baptism in water
4. the baptism of the Holy Spirit
5. the laying on of hands
6. the resurrection of the dead
7. eternal judgment

... the  
doctrine  
of the  
apostles...

We have another passage we call “the unity of the spirit,” a passage which sums up the doctrine of the apostles very concisely. Here it is:

... being diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit<sup>44</sup>... There is one Body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all—who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:3-6).

From this passage, we can sum up the Christian religion

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<sup>44</sup> It's impossible that this word *spirit* should refer to the *Holy Spirit*, therefore it should never be capitalized, although most translations do capitalize it, showing their poor interpretation. Why is it impossible for *spirit* here to mean the Holy Spirit? Because the Holy Spirit is already part of the list. You can't put the Holy Spirit on his own list, saying that the unity of the Holy Spirit is to have the one Holy Spirit. That would be confusing (to say the least), even contradictory.

Rather, the passage is saying that the Holy Spirit is a major player in producing spiritual unity, just as Father God and Jesus are. They're on the list too because they produce a unity in us. The point is that believers feel the unity produced by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in our spirit.



with this list of the seven essential realities:

1. the Church
2. the Holy Spirit
3. the Kingdom
4. the Lord Jesus
5. the baptism of the Holy Spirit
6. the doctrine of the apostles
7. the One God

In summary, any teaching worthy of being called *Christian orthodoxy* must embrace, affirm, and assert the ten essentials we list below. These are the original Christian doctrines the apostles gave us. God calls us to learn them and love them. Just like the first Church, today's Church must also "constantly devote themselves" to sound doctrine.

ten es-  
sentials

Typical statements of faith of Evangelical organizations today will almost always begin with the Trinity, affirm salvation is by faith alone, and ignore baptism altogether. How far they are from the doctrine of the apostles! Rather, here's a statement of faith that accurately reflects NT doctrine:

*We believe...*

- that there is One God, the Father;
- that God will judge each of us according to our actions;
- that all<sup>45</sup> people need to repent and to be saved from the power of sin;
- that God will forgive our sins if we are baptized in Christ, and continue<sup>46</sup> in the New Covenant;

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<sup>45</sup> This *all* does not include those who don't understand what sin is. Who are we talking about when we say those who don't understand? Children and people with mental retardation. A child becomes accountable to God for his own actions somewhere around 12 years of age, when adolescence begins.

<sup>46</sup> By *continue* we mean fulfilling our role in the covenant, which is examining our consciences and confessing our sins as we break bread together. If we do that, God will do his part and forgive us.

- that Jesus came in the flesh (a human nature inclined towards sin) just like we do;
- that God resurrected Jesus from the dead because Jesus overcame temptation, and made Jesus Lord;
- that we get power through the laying on of hands, beginning with the baptism of the Holy Spirit;
- that the Church is the brotherhood of believers in which each of us serves through our spiritual gifts;
- that we must persevere in the hope of the coming Kingdom of God;
- that God will resurrect all the dead (in eternal bodies) from Hades.

Do you understand these beliefs? Do you accept them?

Here are two more questions: Can you teach them? Are you willing to share them with others?

... are you willing to be rejected by other people due to your steadfast belief in these truths...?

Finally, are you willing to be rejected by other people due to your steadfast belief in these truths—even if those people call themselves *Christians*? You certainly will be rejected because churches are contradicting these truths right and left. In fact, you will likely be persecuted and possibly even killed if you dare to preach them. The opposition is strong.

## 9. Fellowship

The second thing the Church does is fellowship. Many congregations have a *fellowship hall* in the building they use, a place designated for chatting and sharing food together, as opposed to the *sanctuary*, the place set apart for worship and prayer. Regardless of what we call it, Christians best experience fellowship in an informal atmosphere, like someone's home.

Believers need a place where we can gather together and just be ourselves. Some congregations will designate free time for having a cup of coffee *fellowship time*. However, fellowship not just a time we set apart, but the very lifestyle of the Church.

In the first Church, believers centered their lives around each other. They were dedicated to being together, sharing, providing for needs, eating together, and being hospitable. You

should be able to see that in the following passage:

... they continued steadfastly in... fellowship... all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

So continuing daily with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food<sup>47</sup> with gladness and simplicity of heart... the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common... great grace was upon them all.

Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need (Acts 2:42, 44-46; 4:32-35; NKJV).

However your congregation lives out and expresses the virtue of fellowship, the most necessary element is spending time together. That's why the above passage starts by saying that the disciples "were together." Christians give their greatest resource—time—to each other. After simply being together, the other activities the first Christians participated in were:

- having all things in common (generous sharing)
- dividing their wealth according to needs
- continuing every day publically in one accord
- sharing the bread and wine from house to house
- taking meals together
- having simplicity of heart
- feeling gladness
- being of one heart and one soul
- never using the words *my own*

**... Christians give their greatest resource—time—to each other.**

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<sup>47</sup> The idea here is better expressed through the NASB translation where it says "taking their meals together."

- having great grace upon them
- selling their property to have money to give
- trusting in their pastors
- making sure that nobody among them lacked anything

Fellowship is brotherly love. Two other synonyms for fellowship are *fraternity* and *brotherhood*. Generations ago, they called fellowship *communion*. That's why you hear in the old confessions and creeds when they mention belief in "the communion of the saints." The early Church believed in fellowship—do you? Today, some churches talk about building a sense of community, but it's something more than that.

The bottom line is that we should act like good friends—but who is the *we* I'm referring to? Is it anyone who calls himself a Christian? Is it anyone who names the name of Christ? Is it anyone who says they believe in the Bible? No. Just like in Acts 2, the only people who will ever experience true fellowship are those who first dedicate themselves to the doctrine of the apostles! The only kind of person with whom we can enjoy true fellowship, is the someone who loves the truth.

...the only people who will ever experience true fellowship...

#### a. Thicker than blood

**B**lood is thicker than water, but fellowship is thicker than blood because it's a spiritual bond. Blood is just genetics. Christians share a precious unity with each other—one that is so precious, it is stronger than any genetic bond or family tie.

Our Lord put great importance on the fellowship he had with other believers, so much that Jesus declared publically that he was closer to believers than he was to his own family!

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, 'Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.'

'Who are my mother and my brothers?' he asked.

Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, 'Here are my mother and my broth-

ers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother' (Mark 3:31-35).

Jesus expresses here the real basis for fellowship: doing God's will. That means that you must choose your friends according to their actions. We should only be friends to people who do God's will. Can you feel comfortable with someone who does not do what God wants them to do? Is it possible for you to enjoy being with someone who does not please God? If you can, then you don't understand true fellowship. If you feel peace with someone who tempts you and draws you away from God, you are against fellowship. You are working to destroy it.

The true family, God's family, is not based on blood relations. It's based on spiritual relations. If two people have been born of God, then those two have the same Father—they are family. On the other hand, if someone is simply your physical relative (like a cousin), does that mean that you have fellowship with them? No, being in the same gene pool does not establish fellowship. Fellowship is much more precious than blood bonds, and much more difficult to come by.

#### b. Make or break

Every human being is shaped and defined by their friends. That's because humans are social creatures. We do what our friends do. We think the way our friends think. Humans can't live in a void; we can't survive in a vacuum. Our surrounding includes people, and those people influence us greatly—for good or bad. There is a saying in Spanish, *Muéstrame con quién andas, y te diré quién eres*, which is best translated: Show me with whom you walk, and I'll tell you who you are.

Your friends will either make you or break you—so you have to know how to choose them carefully. To choose friends, you could start by taking some advice from Solomon:

The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray (Proverbs 12:26; NKJV).

**Your friends will either make you or break you...**

A man who has friends must himself be friendly...  
(Proverbs 8:24; NKJV).

One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin,  
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother  
(Proverbs 8:24; NIV).

Fortunately for us, the Bible gives us an example of a model friendship: the one between David and Jonathan. They were committed to each other unto death. If you want a model of real friendship, spiritual friendship, then read about David and Jonathan. They had a covenant that even extended to their descendants.

**a model  
friendship**

... the soul of Jonathan became attached to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul... Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. Jonathan stripped off the robe that he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his fighting attire, and even his sword, his bow, and his belt (1 Samuel 18:1-4; LEB).

David... bowed down before Jonathan three times, with his face to the ground. Then they kissed each other and wept together—but David wept the most. Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of Yahweh, saying, ‘Yahweh is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever’” (1 Samuel 20:16-17, 41-42).

We get to know the depth of the love between David and Jonathan in another passage, the one that shows us David’s reaction to Jonathan’s surprising death in battle. David lamented the loss of his dear friend by declaring that the love Jonathan had for him was more wonderful than his love for women.

David took up this lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan... I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women (2 Samuel 1:17, 25-26).

## i. Warnings

God warns us in Psalm 1 to be careful of the influence of bad company. Read part of the psalm here, paying close attention to how David writes about the people in our lives. There are three kinds of company, three kinds of companions. David categorizes them as those who we walk with, those we stand with, and those we sit with.

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the advice of the wicked; nor does he stand in the way of sinners; nor does he sit in the assembly of mockers (Psalm 1:1).

Sitting with someone is an expression of the highest degree of confidence. That's why it's so dangerous to sit in the company of evil people! God wants us to beware, and to protect ourselves from bad fellowship.

Solomon also warns against fellowship with evil men. He warned us about how dangerous bad friendships are. Will we take his advice? Will we use wisdom?

My son, if sinful men entice you, do not give in to them. If they say, 'Come along with us...' my son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths (Proverbs 1:10-11, 15).

Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse, who have left the straight paths to walk in dark ways... whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways (Proverbs 2:12-13, 15)

Paul warns us about bad friendships too. He exhorted the Corinthians against them precisely because their relationships with outsiders were causing them to grow cold towards him. You may not have known this, but the Christian principle of not being "unequally yoked" is really about the importance of good fellowship. What fellowship did the Corinthians need? Did they need to love the men who brought them the light of God's Word, or did they need a commitment with unbelievers? Paul encouraged the Corinthians to love the people God sent to them.

**... their relationships with outsiders were causing them to grow cold towards him.**

We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also.

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:11-14)

Every human being will invest their affection in something, be it the Church or the world. You will be passionate about something in life—will it be something worthy of your heart? Will it be a sports team, music, cars, or a boyfriend? Certain relationships will kill faith, others will build it up. That’s why God advises us to guard our heart.

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it (Proverbs 4:23).

James warned us not to be friends with the world. His warning is more serious than most Christians think because friendship with the world is enmity against God! Do you want to be God’s enemy? Probably not, but are you willing to recognize the danger you are in if you cozy up to the world?

You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God (James 4:4).

### c. Cutting it off

...cutting someone off from fellowship is the strongest punishment the Church administers.

**D**o you want to understand how precious fellowship is? To do so, you must recognize that cutting someone off from fellowship is the strongest punishment the Church administers. There’s a famous rock song<sup>48</sup> that says “Don’t know what you got, ‘til it’s gone.” Those lyrics summarize very nicely the effect *disfellowship*<sup>49</sup> is supposed to have.

<sup>48</sup> The group that sang it is *Cinderella*, a metal band from the US. The song first came out in 1988.

<sup>49</sup> This can also be called *excommunication*, meaning *ex* (out of) *communication* (communion)—a term which is more commonly



Disfellowship is discipline, and it works like this: When a brother or sister is in sin, and they refuse the admonitions of other believers and the church community, all believers have to stop treating them like friends. That means that we're supposed to stop eating with them and conversing with them. No lunch dates, no phone calls.

We even have to change our prayers for them—not asking for blessings or healings or prosperity any more, but for repentance. When we do all this, we help the sinning Christian to come to their senses. When they feel the pain of lost fellowship, they should try to get it back. Removing them from fellowship should produce a feeling of emptiness in their hearts. It should make them feel the need to seek forgiveness and to come back to the fold.

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the Church; and if he refuses to listen even to the Church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector (Matthew 18:15-17).

These are the words of Jesus. We need to understand them and obey them. What did our Lord mean when he spoke of treating a brother like a Gentile or tax collector? He meant not having anything to do with them. That means not talking with them, not eating with them, not visiting their house, or welcoming them in your own house. Sound tough? It is. It's Holy Spirit-inspired tough love.

**...not  
having  
anything  
to do  
with  
them...**

To understand this form of discipline better, read about how Paul instructed the church at Corinth to use it. He wanted them to handle a case of sin in the church. He told them to use the appropriate firmness with disciplinary action:

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used among Catholics. Among Evangelicals, the term *disfellowship* (*dis* meaning *none*) is more commonly used. Both express the same thing, although they have slightly different connotations.

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife. And you are proud!<sup>50</sup> Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this? (1 Corinthians 5:1-2)

What did Paul tell the Corinthians to do with the brother who was in sin? He said "Put him out," that is, he ordered the church to remove the sinning brother from fellowship. The idea behind this command to exercise discipline is to arouse the conscience of the sinning brother so that he might repent. The reason why fellowship must be cut off from a sinning brother or sister is because it is our solemn duty to help them realize how empty their life is without Christian fellowship. In taking it away, we hope that they would be drawn back to it.

**...to  
arouse  
the con-  
science  
of the  
sinning  
brother  
so that  
he might  
repent.**

This method doesn't always work though—but why wouldn't it work? Precisely because some *supposed* Christians don't put a high value on true fellowship. It doesn't mean much to them, so when they lose it, it's no big deal. Could those people truly be Christians if they don't value the one Body? A lot of them will leave a church where discipline is practiced, and go to another where it's not. They think they're still in the Church, but are they really?

In the days of the apostles, believers put a high value on fellowship. The Corinthian brother caught in sin responded to his congregation's discipline by repenting.

... your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation... (2 Corinthians 7:9-10).

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<sup>50</sup> In what way were the Corinthians proud? They were proud in their tolerance. In fact, all liberals are essentially proud people because they consider themselves to be so wonderfully *tolerant*—accepting everybody, and extending a hand of fellowship towards all. Liberals are very proud of this fake virtue. A lot of them think that they're even more loving than God Himself (since they don't judge anybody, while he does)!

When the sinning brother demonstrated godly sorrow, immediately Paul encouraged the church to lay off, pleading with the Corinthians to receive the repentant brother back again. Paul’s words below prove that there is a level of sorrow churches can accept as an authentic demonstration of repentance. That’s why Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him (2 Corinthians 2:6-8).

You can see that Paul didn’t allow chastisement to become too hard or excessive. When it produces the fruit God desires, it must stop. No psychological abuse here. No peer pressure or group manipulation—things that we unfortunately see in lots of Evangelical churches these days. Rather, God’s discipline through the Church is healthy and positive. In fact, the entire purpose of taking fellowship away is to awaken a love for fellowship. The reason why we break fellowship is to draw people back to it again!

**The reason why we break fellowship is to draw people back to it again!**

Remember this: The discipline of disfellowship will only work with people who have experienced the joy and comfort of fellowship in the first place—we can’t use it on new believers. Only if a person has already learned to enjoy good company will they seek it when it’s not around.

In conclusion, if you really want your own salvation to be secure, make sure that your love for fellowship has matured. Only then will it be possible for your spiritual family to use discipline with you when it’s necessary. To a greater or lesser degree, you *will* need discipline someday. Count on it: When the day comes that you need to be saved from a powerful temptation, God will use his Church to draw you back into the fold. Fellowship is one insurance policy you can’t do without.

#### i. In Satan’s hands

**I**t is our job to judge sin within the Church. The famous words of Jesus “Judge not lest ye shall be judged” (Matthew 7:1) are misinterpreted more often than any other Bi-

ble passage. The truth is that they have nothing to do with judging sin within the Church. Rather, Jesus was addressing religious hypocrites, like the Pharisees, who condemn others for the very sins they commit.

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? (Matthew 7:1-3; NKJV)

The context of this passage is not Church discipline. If it were, then what would we do with the numerous other passages of Scripture which clearly command us to judge sins in the Church? For example, the following passage commands us to expel people from the Church who refuse to repent. It's so clear, it even asks the rhetorical question: Are we not to judge people within the Church?

**Are we  
not to  
judge  
people  
with-  
in the  
Church?**

... I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the Church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. 'Expel the wicked person from among you' (1 Corinthians 5:11-13).

Case in point: When the sexual sin of a Corinthian disciple became public knowledge, Paul immediately passed judgment on him. In other words, Paul declared that what the brother was doing was wrong, sinful, and worthy of punishment. Paul was not timid about judging anybody inside the Church—are we?

... I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this (1 Corinthians 5:3).

The verse that follows this one may be difficult for some of us to understand because in it, Paul commands the Corinthians to “hand this man over to Satan.” What is that supposed to mean? Handing someone over to Satan was a

disciplinary measure commonly used by the early Church. It's not likely something you're going to hear preached in today's churches.

So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the Day of the Lord (1 Corinthians 5:4-5).

Sound odd? It most likely will, but it shouldn't because God has always commanded his people to purge sin from among them. Do you remember the many OT commands to stone Sabbath-breakers, murderers, idolaters, and adulterers? In addition, this wasn't the only time Paul handed someone over to Satan. He did it to Hymenaeus and Alexander too.

... holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme (1 Timothy 1:19-20).

**God has always commanded his people to purge sin from among them.**

Pay close attention here. Paul gives definite reasons for why he hands people over to Satan, and those reasons are the key to understanding why this is an important practice for the Church. In the first case, it was "so that" the spirit of the sinning brother in Corinth would be saved on the Day of the Lord. Therefore, the Corinthian church handed the sinning brother over to Satan with the goal of saving his soul. It was a benevolent act, not a curse (even though it might sound so).

In the second case, Paul handed two men over to Satan so that they would be "taught not to blaspheme." In other words, Paul's goal was to instruct Hymenaeus and Alexander. He handed them over to Satan to give them a lesson in holiness. He did not do it to destroy them. He was not condemning them to Hell.

All this may sound difficult, but it's not as hard to understand as you think. If believers are handed over to Satan, they are in his hands. Being in the hands of the Prince of

this World means that Christians under church discipline have left the protective fellowship of the Church. Having been removed from fellowship, they are exposed to the many afflictions and troubles this world has to offer. Fellowship is an oasis in the desert, so the brother or sister who is not in fellowship will suffer. They will eventually feel a great need for the consolation of Christian friends, and hopefully that feeling will draw them back to us.

#### d. Sharing

Sharing is the most natural activity for folks in fellowship...

Friends share everything with friends. What would a true friend not give to another friend? What would they hold back? Sharing is the most natural activity for folks in fellowship, but the believers in the first Church went to the extreme: They shared absolutely everything they had. They had *all things* in common!

... all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need (Acts 2:44-45; NASB).

Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need (Acts 4:32-35; NKJV).

Have you ever known a group of people like the one you see here? That first church was a remarkable group. What was it that inspired them to have all things in common? What was it that caused every last one of them who owned lands or houses to sell those properties? It was because they were filled with so much love for their needy brothers and sisters in Christ that they were willing to do anything they could to satisfy their needs.

That first Church was certainly a remarkable group. The “good and pleasant” experience David highlights in Psalm 133 was theirs for the keeping.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! ... there Yahweh commanded the blessing—life forever (Psalm 133:1; NASB).

The first Christian churches shared something that other people only dream about. They lived the dream of utopians and socialists. Socialists long for the day when they will accomplish through government what the first Church accomplished through faith: solidarity, brotherly love, equity, distribution of wealth, freedom from poverty. Socialists believe that through political ingenuity we can accomplish what the Church accomplished through the work of the Holy Spirit. They can't.

**Socialists long for the day when they will accomplish through government what the first Church accomplished through faith...**

Socialists will never experience the reform they long for unless they repent, integrate into the Church, and do things God's way. Faith in the God who is Love has to be their starting point if they will ever get a taste of real equality, justice, and happiness. They'll have to obey Jesus, who commanded us to love one another.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another... My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you (John 13:34; 15:12).

Did you notice that Jesus did not make brotherly love optional? It is an order from the King of Kings. It is essential. It's supposed to be essence of our reputation: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another..." (John 13:35). As the apostle John told us, we should lay down our lives for Christian sisters and brothers.

He [Jesus] laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 John 3:16; NASB).

James was particularly strong on the issue of loving our brothers and sisters. James chastised the wealthy people in the church because they were not sharing with poor believers. Being very blunt with them, he told the selfish rich believers that their faith was dead.

Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (James 2:15-17).

**...Christians who do not share with poor believers do not have a saving faith.**

James' point was that Christians who do not share with poor believers do not have a saving faith. That is, as they are, they cannot be saved. They could only be saved if their faith inspired them to act in love towards their poor brothers and sisters! You see that for James, salvation is the real issue. When he speaks of loving others, he's addressing the issue of salvation. We can't be saved if our faith doesn't inspire us to share.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? (James 2:14)

The answer to James' rhetorical question is "no." Paul said something very similar, rebuking the Corinthians who did not follow the law of brotherly love. Since some of them were not sharing food with the Christians who had no food, he chastised them, saying that they were *humiliating* the poor believers.

... when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the Church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? (1 Corinthians 11:21-22)

How would not sharing with someone humiliate them? Quite simply, if they hear that they are your brother or sister, and you don't treat them as such, you are humiliating them. They have been told that they are part of Christ's Church, but you treat them as if they are not, you are humiliating them.

Paul also noted that for someone to take the Lord's Supper with a selfish attitude made that person guilty of sinning against the body and blood of Jesus. Can you imagine the greatness of that sin? Doesn't sound like a minor one, does it?



...whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:27).

### i. Eating together

The simplest way to share with someone is to eat with them. The first believers, in their commitment to share the Lord's Supper by "breaking bread from house to house," were also "...eating their food with joy and simplicity of heart" (Acts 2:46; LEB).

Eating with other believers is a great custom, but it's more than a custom for us. It is an ancient Church tradition. As such, it must be part of the lift of any church. What else foments brotherly love as well as eating together? Brotherly love is the primary effect of eating together, but it's also a great way to establish better eating habits. Eating with others builds self-control, and blesses our health.

Unfortunately, in many US congregations, so-called *fellowship time* is focused on drinking coffee and eating doughnuts, making their brand of fellowship far from what God intended it to be. In fact, their kind of fellowship quickly becomes sinful. The sweet and fatty foods they serve have become a stumbling block for many of the people who are weak in the face of the temptation of gluttony.

There is also a counter-movement to these excesses with some stricter congregations practicing frequent fasting. Fellowship is good, and fasting is wonderful—but which of the two should Christians develop first? Fellowship through eating together is the priority, which is why we have the saying:

You must learn to eat,  
before you learn to fast.

Both eating and fasting with believers are good customs; but you have to develop one before the other. You have to eat right before you can to fast right. Learn to eat before you learn to fast. Fellowship is a fundamental Christian principle, fasting is not. The spiritual discipline of fasting is great, but its place in the Christian life is enhancing and intensifying our prayers.

**Fellowship through eating together is the priority...**

How many Christians have had a time in their life when they tried fasting, but then they got discouraged and went back to bad eating habits? If this happens, they often end up with worse eating habits than they had before they ever tried fasting.

Along those lines, we know that being overweight is not a sin, but we also know that the obesity of many Christians demonstrates that they have sinful eating habits. The way for them to overcome food-related temptations isn't for them to get into fasting, as some might imagine. The solution for those believers to develop healthy eating habits—and habits are formed gradually. The solution is going back to phase one of the Christian life, fellowship. They need to share their meals with other believers. They need to reinvest in the basics.

**...going  
back to  
phase  
one of the  
Christian  
life, fellow-  
ship.**

#### e. Walking together

**H**ow exactly do you develop fellowship with someone? There are a lot of activities popular in churches across the country: playing a softball game, watching television together, going to a restaurant, or playing a video game with someone—but Jesus didn't do any of those things. He never took his disciples to the theater or to a sports arena—and those places existed in his time! Jesus never placed any importance on entertainment or sports, so why would we?

What did Jesus do to develop fellowship among his disciples? Well, they worked together because he ministered with them, preached with them, and did missions with them. Once he went fishing with them—but that was to get them *out* of the fishing business, not to get them hooked on the fishing hobby. No recreational fishing for the apostles. Jesus didn't engage the apostles in worldly activities, but disengaged them, even having them give up their business endeavors.

What else built fellowship among the disciples? Well, Jesus made sure that his apostles celebrated the Jewish religious holidays together. They observed the holidays carefully. They were a very Jewish group of men with a keen sense of their ethnic background.

Jesus also sang with them. That built some fellowship among them. Although the Bible only details one time when Jesus sang with the apostles, he must have sung with them on other occasions, since they worshipped God at least every Saturday in the synagogues of Israel, and in the Temple.

Jesus also prayed with the apostles. Granted that he didn't pray with them very much, but that was only because the apostles were not particularly good at prayer. Jesus was obligated to pray alone. They weren't quite up to the challenge of joining him in prayer.

For fellowship, our Lord camped out with his apostles quite a bit too. They were itinerant and didn't have the money to stay in hotels. This itinerant lifestyle brings us to Jesus' most common fellowship-building activity of all: taking long walks. Jesus walked everywhere with his apostles. Our Lord's ministry required a lot of movement—and God did not see it fit to give that group horses, camels, or donkeys. Instead, God blessed each one with a good pair of sandals.

**...Jesus' most common fellowship-building activity of all: taking long walks.**

Jesus asked them, 'When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?' 'Nothing,' they answered (Luke 22:33).

Why was walking with his disciples such a powerful fellowship-builder? Mainly because it's so informal. The wisdom in walking together is that it opens people up to asking questions. It frees us from the limitations and formality of a classroom-style education. It makes learning simple. It exposes us to any kind of experience—we're walking in reality.

Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over...' (Matthew 20:17).

... on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him (Luke 17:11-12).

## f. Hospitality

The NT strongly urges hospitality upon us, especially hospitality to our brothers and sisters in the faith. God expects us to open our hearts and homes to fellow Christians. Hospitality is an important act of fellowship, one that we should not neglect.

Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality (Romans 12:13).

... [a widow can only get financial aid from the church if she has] a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers... (1 Timothy 5:10; NASB)

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it (Hebrews 13:2; NASB).

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling (1 Peter 4:9).

**...being hospitable to Christian missionaries...**

Now, God urges us to be hospitable to Christians, but being hospitable to Christian missionaries is a higher degree of hospitality. Doing so makes us participants in missions and collaborators in God's outreach. Do you want to work for the advance of the Gospel in the world? If you do, then you should be hospitable to the men who preach the Gospel.

You will do well to send them on their way [i.e., give them accommodations] in a manner worthy of God. For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles [they didn't ask unbelievers for financial assistance]. Therefore we ought to support such men (3 John 1:6-8; NASB).

Why does God urge us to help missionaries in particular? The sad reality is that true missionaries are not welcome in many homes. Few people are able to accept the truth God's missionaries preach—even among professing Christians. The people who reject the Gospel message also reject the missionaries who preach it.

Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me (Luke 17:16).

Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the One who sent me (John 13:20).

If they reject us, that means that they reject Jesus and the Father. Ultimately, it's God who they are rejecting because God sent Jesus. Jesus sent us. On the other hand, those who do welcome us, welcome God Himself. They will be duly rewarded for their faith—a faith they express through hospitality.

...faith they express through hospitality.

Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the One who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward (Matthew 10:40-42).

#### g. Stages

**I**n conclusion, the stage of spiritual development in which a believer becomes grounded in fellowship is the most basic stage of Christian development. It's the first stage, occurring right after we are born again. We all have to pass through it. Sometimes we refer to it as *Family of God*. Have you been firmly established in the family of God?

The real test of being grounded in fellowship is what you do when you can't find it. Do you remain firm in doctrine? Do you seek fellowship when it's nowhere to be seen? The maximum degree of testing on your commitment to fellowship is this: Can you love professing Christians and bless them even if they cast you out of their fellowship unjustly? Will you still love the Church even if the Church does not love you? Don't just *say* you will always love the Church—prove it.

**Will you still love the Church even if the Church does not love you?**

You will need good foundations in fellowship if you're ever going to evangelize, if you will ever develop a ministry, or if you will ever be sent on missions. Those are three further steps down the road of Christian maturity. A solid foundation in fellowship is necessary before you take further steps on your journey with Christ. Nobody who evangelizes, who serves in a ministry, or who is sent on missions does those things without first discovering, experiencing, and devoting themselves to fellowship.

## 10. Breaking bread

The members of the first Church devoted themselves to the breaking of bread. This activity, commonly referred to today as *the Lord's supper*, *communion*, or the *eucharist*, was something that the first Christians eagerly participated in. Did you know that they broke bread on a daily basis? They simply called it the *breaking of bread*. They didn't use any mystical, religious, or theological terminology for it. It had no aura of mystery or ceremony, as it does today in many congregations.

Breaking bread was essential to their lives. Believers shared the Lord's Supper in the simplest of settings: at home. In fact, they shared it in multiple homes. They made the covenant a personal matter to such a degree that their covenant became as intimate as it was the night of the first Passover in Egypt. The first Christians shared the covenant signs (of the bread and wine) from house to house.<sup>51</sup> They literally brought their faith home with them!

**They  
literally  
brought  
their  
faith  
home  
with  
them!**

They [the members of the first Church] devoted themselves to... the breaking of bread... Every day they continued to meet together... They broke bread in their homes and ate together ... (Acts 2:42, 46).

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<sup>51</sup> Although the NIV says "in their homes," the best translations (NASB, LEB, Mounce, and NKJV) translate *kata oikos* "from house to house." The NASB adds (in a footnote) that another appropriate translation would be "in the various private homes." The point is that the covenant was not static, but mobile. It moved through the homes of believers.

Remember also that the first Christians didn't think that the Lord's Supper had to be administered by any particular kind of person. It wasn't a pastor's job—it was the job of all Christians to make sure that they broke the bread along with their meals. The Lord's Supper became the most common of activities, and it was everybody's responsibility.

Their commitment to breaking bread doesn't sound much like anything you'll see in Evangelical churches today, does it? Where will you find a group of Christians who devote themselves to going from house to house to share meals together? If you do find that, then look even more closely: Is it a congregation in which believers have incorporated the Lord's Supper into their meals? If you find that, you've found a group that's living according to the example of the original Church. Congratulations.

The early Christians clearly had a different concept of the Lord's Supper than people do today. Let's look at what motivated them to treat the Lord's Supper the way they did. What was the Lord's Supper for them? First of all, it was a privilege. Secondly, it was an opportunity—a golden opportunity.

#### a. A privilege

You'd be hard-pressed today to find a Christian who could even define what the New Covenant is, but the first Christians were well aware of it. They had just finished about 1500 years under the Old Covenant and were very conscious of the fact that they were participating in the New Covenant every time they ate of the bread and drank of the wine. Furthermore, they felt privileged to be in the New Covenant. They knew that their access to God was a great honor.

For the entire time the Jews were under the Old Covenant, only the priests and Levites were in charge of administering sacrifices and leading in worship. All of a sudden, believers had become their own priesthood! The previous priesthood was complex. It had hundreds of very detailed rules related to worship, sacrifice, holidays, and the atonement of sins. There was a complete Temple ministry governed by hun-

... a group of Christians who devote themselves to going from house to house to share meals together...

dreds of regulations. That ministry had suddenly become summarized in a single ministry: the breaking of bread.

...two  
simple  
but  
profound  
activi-  
ties...

God took the Old Covenant and simplified its entire system into one rite. The breaking of bread became God's new precision tool. He would use it to truly and effectively cleanse his people. The complete priestly system of sacrifice got summed up in two simple but profound activities: eating bread and drinking wine. Finally, the covenant was in the hands of the people.

What a privilege they had as a *royal priesthood* (1 Peter 2:9)—and they understood that! Do we understand the privilege we have in being the guardians and administrators of the New Covenant? You must pause and reflect upon this fact: Believers who share in the bread and the cup are a *holy priesthood* (1 Peter 2:5). God says we are.

#### b. Precious blood

Christians were very conscious that the cup they drank from was the cup of the blood of Christ. It wasn't just wine for them. The first Christians were all Jews—as such, they were keenly aware that God's forgiveness is only obtained through blood, and that the New Covenant was established through the blood of Jesus.

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? ...You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too (1 Corinthians 10:16, 21)

They believed that they were drinking his blood, according to the very words of Jesus.

My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink (John 6:55).

Jesus said to them, 'Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life...' (John 6:53-55)



Of the four restrictions the apostles emitted in writing to the Gentile churches, two of them were related to not consuming blood! That's half of the restrictions they imposed on the churches.

It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood... It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality (Acts 15:19-20; 28-29).

If a full 50% of the apostles' restrictions were related to not consuming blood, we have to ask ourselves "why?" Well, you first have to understand that practically everybody consumed meat from strangled animals in the times of the apostles, and lots of it. Why did they consume it so much? Mostly because the meat of a strangled animal is more savory than the meat from an animal that has been slaughtered properly. When an animal was not properly drained of its blood (that is, it was not bled and butchered, but asphyxiated), the blood retained inside the meat made it taste more juicy.

**...a full 50% of the apostles' restrictions were related to not consuming blood...**

Not consuming blood is a restriction God has imposed on his people from the times of Noah. Now, since God has prohibited blood since before the Law and through the Law, can you see why the apostles were so adamant about not consuming blood too? Is their concern irrelevant for Christians today? Was it an issue that only affected first-century Christians? We don't think so, no. Even though the whole subject of consuming blood seems archaic, it's as relevant as ever. We'll show you why.

#### i. The life is in the blood

**C**onsuming blood is just as wrong for a Christian today as it was for Noah, and just as wrong as it was for Moses. Consuming blood for you or me would be a heinous

sin, just as grievous as fornication or idolatry. Would you worship an idol? Would you sleep with a prostitute? Would you eat chicken with blood in it? Each of these sins is just as abominable as the other—did you know that?

**The life is in the blood.** The ancient principle is simple. Do you know it? The life is in the blood. What does that mean? It means something both scientific and spiritual. It means that blood is the carrier of life. Here are three OT passages that teach this vital principle:

Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant. Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood (Genesis 9:3-4; NASB).

However, you may slaughter and eat meat within all your gates, whatever your heart desires, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which he has given you; the unclean and the clean may eat of it, of the gazelle and the deer alike. Only you shall not eat the blood; you shall pour it on the earth like water (Deuteronomy 12:15-16; NKJV).

And if there is anyone from the house of Israel or from the alien who is dwelling in their midst who eats any blood, then I will set my face against the person who eats the blood, and I will cut him off from among his people.

Indeed the flesh's life is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your lives, because it is the blood with the life that makes atonement. Therefore I said to the Israelites, 'None of you may eat blood, nor may the alien who is dwelling in your midst eat blood' (Leviticus 17:10-12; LEB).

Did you take some time to meditate on the verses we just shared above? You'll need to, especially since they are not taught very often in Evangelical churches. You won't be getting many opportunities to learn them.

In the last passage we listed, you read "it is the blood with the life that makes atonement." That means that the reason why we should not drink the blood of animals is because

it can't atone for sin—but what blood can atone for sin? It says it right there: “the blood with the life.” Animal blood is not the blood with the life. So we have to examine the different kinds of blood around us, and ask ourselves “Where is the blood with the life?” That's the great question that God wants us to ask ourselves. He wants us to earnestly seek the answer to that question.

**...the reason why we should not drink the blood of animals is because it can't atone for sin...**

Now, let's move on. We challenge you to carefully observe how the word *because* is used in the following passage. You'll see that it's used twice. What does the word *because* lead us to understand?

Any Israelite or any foreigner residing among you who hunts any animal or bird that may be eaten must drain out the blood and cover it with earth, because the life of every creature is its blood. That is why I have said to the Israelites, ‘You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood; anyone who eats it must be cut off’ (Leviticus 17:10-14).

This passage is critical. Read it again and again if you must. It is the key for interpreting not only why we *shouldn't* drink animal blood, but it is the key for understanding why we *should* drink the blood of Jesus. So that you understand how firm the verse is, you should know that it is translated in the exact same way in the English language's most trusted translations, and with the same essential meaning: the blood is the life of every creature. Here it is again:

... the life<sup>52</sup> of all flesh is its blood (Leviticus 17:14; LEB, NKJV, YLT, NASB).

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<sup>52</sup> The NASB points out that this word is literally *soul*, and they are right. It is the Hebrew word נֶפֶשׁ, pronounced *nephesh*, meaning: a soul, a living being, life, or the self (according to Strong's Concordance entry #5315). It doesn't make for a very smooth translation into English, which is why no translation uses *soul*.

All semantics aside, for those of us who know that the word here is *soul*, what do we get out of it? We benefit greatly because now we have clarity on a very important issue: where the soul of a being actually is. Where is a creature's soul? In its blood.

Do you get it? The reason why no animal blood should be consumed is because it is the life of the creature, and we certainly don't want the life of a chicken, a cow, or a sheep in us. There is only one kind of life that a Christians should long to have; and that's the life of Christ—agreed?

... Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the Covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Matthew 26:27-28).

Jesus gave his life to us on Calvary, and anyone who can appreciate the value of Jesus' life will procure it for themselves. He invites us to procure it, to make sure that it's ours too. He welcomes all of us to drink his blood. Have you accepted his invitation?

## ii. Remaining in Christ

**N**ow, let's answer this question: On a spiritual level, what exactly do we *do* when we eat the Lord's Supper? Jesus defined eating the Lord's Supper as *remaining in him*. You can see that in the following verse:

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them (John 6:56).

This expression "remain in Christ" means to abide in him. It is the opposite of being *separated* from Christ—and separation is condemnation, so we don't want separation, for sure. This all means that we have two options in life: remaining in Christ or separating from Christ.

**...we have two options in life: remaining in Christ or separating from Christ.**

There is only one other passage in the Bible in which Jesus uses this expression "remain in me," so let's look at it now. To get the complete idea of what it means to eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood, we need to properly interpret the following passage in the light of the one we just read:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned (John 15:1-6).

Remaining in Christ means being firmly committed to him. As Jesus explained above, the only other option is separation. What is separation from Christ? He describes it as a process: not remaining, being thrown away, withering up, being picked up, being thrown into the fire, and being burned. Our Lord made it clear that people who don't remain in him will eventually be condemned and burn in Hell.

Now you know why the members of the early Church were absolutely committed to participating in the Lord's Supper. Now you know why they shared it daily. They wanted life, not death. They wanted salvation, not condemnation. What do *you* want? If today's Church wants life, they know where to find it.

### iii. Jesus the Life

**T**he Early Christians knew that if they remained in Christ, that they would have his life in them. We just reviewed the divinely-inspired principle that the life is in the blood, correct? Now, let's take that principle and ask ourselves: How we can get Jesus' life? He is the Life, after all, isn't he? Yes, twice in the NT he stated that he was.

I am... the Life (John 11:25 and 14:6).

Early Christians took Jesus seriously when he called himself *the Life*. For them it meant that Jesus was the source of true life. Is that what he is to you? If so, then how do you get access to his life? At this point in our study, you should be able to answer that question, but here's the answer anyways:

**How we can get Jesus' life?**

If Jesus is *the Life*,  
and if “the life is in the blood,”  
then we should drink Jesus’ blood.

**We should drink Jesus’ blood often.** We’ll say even more than that: We should drink Jesus’ blood *often*. Since this truth is clearly the framework for the thinking of the first Church, and the very reason why NT believers participated in the Lord’s Supper daily, may it be our framework as well. Let’s try to think like they did.

Of course, drinking Jesus’ blood sounds challenging. It is a hard teaching, no doubt, but it’s only hard for people who don’t feel completely committed to our Lord. This teaching has always caused large groups of people to turn away from Jesus, and it still does. Since it’s hard for people to have an absolute commitment to Christ, many turn back when they hear about drinking his blood. They stop following him.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the Living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me... On hearing it, many of his disciples said, ‘This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?’ ... From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him (John 6:56-57, 60, 66).

What kind of disciple are you? Is Jesus your life? Is his blood your most cherished drink? Be warned that many who call themselves believers today, do not treat the cup of the Lord’s Supper as a holy thing. What will become of them? Their future looks bleak.

How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them... ? (Hebrews 10:29)

Not us, but the Bible says that so-called Christians will be punished severely if they treat the blood of the covenant as if it were something common. And these are people who were sanctified in the blood—people who really did get cleansed from sin at one point in their lives. But they went back to sinning due to a wrong attitude towards the blood of Christ.

Be warned! We have to treat Jesus' blood as holy, precious, and valuable. We have to make Jesus' blood our source of life. As fanatical as that may sound, faith in his blood is the key to remaining in him, bearing much fruit, and having eternal life! Don't be afraid to be a radical follower of Christ. Be his biggest fan, and don't worry about what others think of you.

#### 4. Praying

The first Christians were devoted to prayer; so devoted that they prayed together daily. That was a great accomplishment—but the greater accomplishment was that God actually heard them. One thing is to pray a lot (the quantity of prayer), quite another is to be heard in Heaven (the quality of prayer).

There are many factors that figure into how to be heard in Heaven, but the one we'll address here is *what* we pray for. What does the Church need to ask for? The best answer to that question is praying the prayers Jesus taught us. Surely, if we pray according to the wisdom of Christ, we will have quality prayers, and God will respond to them.

...praying the prayers Jesus taught us.

##### a. Jesus' instructions on prayer

So what were Jesus' instructions on prayer? Surprisingly, there aren't many. There are only ten specific requests Jesus urged us to lift up to God in prayer. The *Our Father* touches on seven of them, so it is a great summary of what we should pray. In his teachings on prayer, Jesus didn't go much beyond his masterful *Our Father*. There are only three other requests Jesus taught us to include in our prayers.

The ten requests he taught us to make are:

- For God's name to be glorified.

This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name...' (Matthew 6:9).

- For the Kingdom to come.

... your Kingdom come (Matthew 6:10).

- For God’s will to be done, as difficult as that may be.  
... your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven (Matthew 6:10).
- For our daily bread (that means asking for today’s needs, not for future needs or for anything not related to basic needs—those would include food, clothing, shoes, shelter, safety, health, education, and salvation).  
... Give us today our daily bread (Matthew 6:11).
- For forgiveness (this is something we shouldn’t ask for until we’ve already forgiven those who have offended us).  
... forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors (Matthew 6:12).  
Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us (Luke 11:4).
- Not to fall into temptation.  
... lead us not into temptation (Matthew 6:13).
  - Jesus is particularly interested that we ask God to help us to resist the temptation of falling away when there is persecution. The night he was betrayed, he warned his apostles:  
Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation (Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38; Luke 22:40).
  - Our Lord often ordered us to pray to be ready for the Last Times. Do you do that? You might want to start including it in your prayers.

**Take  
heed,  
watch  
and  
pray...**

Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is (Mark 13:33; NKJV).

Pray that your flight [the Jews who will escape from Jerusalem when the Antichrist comes] will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath (Matthew 24:20).

Pray that this [the Great Tribulation] will not take place in winter, because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again (Mark 13:18-19).

Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen,



and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man (Luke 21:36).

- For freedom from the Devil.

...deliver us from the Evil One (Matthew 6:13).

- Jesus modeled this prayer for us when he asked God to protect his disciples from the Devil.

Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail (Luke 22:32).

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the Evil One (John 17:15).

- Our Lord also encouraged us to pray so that people would be delivered from demons.

... this kind [of demon] does not go out except by prayer and fasting (Matthew 17:16-21; NASB).

This kind can come out only by prayer (Mark 9:29).

- For our enemies

I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:28).

- For God to send out missionaries

The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the Harvest [God], therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field (Matthew 9:37-38; Luke 10:2).

- For the Holy Spirit

I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (Luke 11:9-13)

**Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.**

## i. Anything

He said that we could ask for anything...

We don't have enough space to cover all the other things the apostles told us to pray for, such as our food (1 Timothy 4:4-5), for government officials to allow us to live in peace (1 Timothy 2:1-2), and for wisdom (James 1:5-6); so let's just wrap up the subject of what believers should pray for by highlighting Jesus' *carte blanche*. He said that we could ask for anything:

... truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in Heaven (Matthew 18:19).

Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer (Matthew 21:21-22).

Notice the conditions of the *carte blanche* prayers:

- if two of us agree
- if we have faith and do no doubt
- if we believe

When those three conditions are met, we will get whatever we ask for. That means that although Jesus taught ten specific prayer requests (we already looked at them), we are free to pray for whatever we feel is important. We are free to express our needs at any time. We are not limited by Jesus' teachings on prayer, just guided by them.

We should try to pray in the Spirit, and not only be guided by our minds. If we are sensitive to the leading of the Spirit, we will pray with our spirit, and not only with our understanding.

... pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests (Ephesians 6:8).

... if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding (1 Corinthians 14:14-15).

What did the first Christians do with their freedom in prayer? What did they ask for, since Jesus gave them a *carte blanche* to ask for whatever they desired? Here are three things:

### 1) Boldness and power

The first Christians asked God to perform healings, signs, and wonders through them. In other words, they asked for the anointing to do miracles. Along with that anointing, they also asked for the boldness to proclaim the Word of God. Does the Church today ask for those two powers? Do we ask for the power to act and the power to speak?

**...they asked for the anointing to do miracles.**

‘... enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.’

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly (Acts 4:29-31).

The effect of this awesome NT prayer was that God did indeed fill the Jerusalem Christians with the Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit filling, they were equipped to perform wonders and to preach. They were fully equipped to evangelize. The effect of their prayer was that God made Christianity a force to be reckoned with in the world. As a result, the Church grew!

### 2) Other believers

The early Church prayed for believers, starting with their pastors. When the leading apostle, Peter, was put in jail due to religious persecution, what did believers do but pray for God to release him? They didn't expect God to answer their prayer as quickly and effectively as he did, but God really did. He answered their prayer for Peter powerfully.

Peter was kept in prison, but the Church was earnestly praying to God for him ... he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Peter knocked at the out-

er entrance... when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. Peter... described how the Lord had brought him out of prison (Acts 12:5, 12-13, 17).

Our Lord Jesus gave us an example of how to pray for believers also. Let's not forget to pray for other believers, especially that they may be one Body.

I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours... My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one... (John 17:9, 20-21).

### 3) The Anointing

**T**he first believers asked God for everything they needed. As we read earlier, they could have asked for anything and God would have given it to them, but one request was their most important: They asked God for his Spirit.

Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the Gift my Father promised... in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit... Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem... they all joined together constantly in prayer, along with... a group numbering about a hundred and twenty... When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly... all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them (Acts 1:4-5, 12, 14, 15; 2:1-2, 4).

Isn't the most important prayer request of the apostles (before Pentecost arrived) their request for the Holy Spirit? Yes, it was. Right up until Pentecost, they were very busy asking God for the Promise of the Holy Spirit; and why were they so focused on this one request? Jesus told them to.

**the top  
prayer of  
the Early  
Church** Do we follow Jesus' teachings on prayer? If we do, we'll certainly ask God for his Spirit. It was the top prayer of the Early Church, and it should be our top prayer as well. God is willing to give his Spirit to anyone who will humbly ask. You'll find a full study of *the laying on of hands*, the most powerful prayer the Church can administer, in our book *One Spirit*. Through that prayer, believers can receive the Holy Spirit.

Instructions on the *laying on of hands* prayer is for another book, but for the purposes of this book, we need to make just one thing clear: Only the Church has what it takes to lay hands on people so that they might receive the Holy Spirit. How important the Church is in this world! Without us, there would be no hope for humanity, no salvation, and no grace of God.

#### IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, let's look at how many people it takes to make a church and how many churches there are in the world. These are two questions which burn in the hearts of many, so we would like to address them before we close.

##### A. How many people in a church

There is a biblical principle which states that God will have mercy on a city if it has at least ten righteous people in it. Consider the story of Noah. The Flood came when there were only eight righteous people left on Earth. Eight is less than ten, so that's when God decided to destroy the Earth. Then you've got Lot and his family—four people. God destroyed Sodom with fire, but took them out first. If Lot had a bigger family, God would not have destroyed the city. You can see that in the following conversation Abraham had with Yahweh:

**at least  
ten  
righteous  
people**

... he [Abraham] said, 'Let not the LORD be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten [righteous people] should be found there [in a city]?' And he [Yahweh, Jesus] said, 'I will not destroy it for the sake of ten.' So the LORD went his way [to Sodom to destroy it] as soon as he had finished speaking with Abraham (Genesis 18:32-33; NKJV).

Good thing that Abraham bartered for Sodom before it was destroyed, because in his pleading, we discover a great truth: God will have mercy on a city which has at least ten righteous people living in it.

Do we, like Abraham, seek the salvation of the cities we live in? Do we pray for those places? Certainly, God has strategically placed us in specific places so that we might be a blessing to each place.

Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare (Jeremiah 29:7).

In your city, the church you belong to might have many people. It could have three or five thousand:

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day (Acts 2:41).

... many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand (Acts 4:4).

... many people believed in the Lord (Acts 9:42).

... many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men (Acts 17:12).

The church you belong to might have very few people as well. In fact, it could have as little as two or three.

... if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in Heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them (Matthew 18:19-20).

**a hypo-  
critical  
church**

Your church may even be a hypocritical church. What we mean to say is that it might be filled with sinners, with only a small minority that has remained faithful to God. If that is the case, it is still a church in God's eyes.

To the angel of the church in Thyatira... I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her [a woman pastor's] teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets, 'I will not impose any other burden on you, except to hold on to what you have until I come' (Revelation 2:18, 24-25).

Hypocritical churches are common these days. It's very uncomfortable for sincere believers to be among the few sincere people in a hypocritical congregation, but God will be faithful to them to make sure that they enter the Kingdom, as long as they don't allow themselves to get contaminated by the sin around them.

... you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy (Revelation 3:4).

So, how big can a church be? We just read passages that described churches with thousands of sincere believers, many false disciples, and others with just a handful of true brothers and sisters. As long as there are still believers among a group of professing Christians, it's still a church in God's eyes. Your role is this: If the majority of people in your congregation are sinning, go with the minority. It will take strength and character, but you will have proven to God that you are worthy of his Kingdom.

## B. How many churches in the world

The apostle Paul referred to "all the churches" in his letters as if there were many churches in his times. There may be less now than there were during the times of the apostles. There may be more.

All the churches of Christ send greetings (Romans 16:16).

I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches (2 Corinthians 11:28).

Since very little sound doctrine is being preached nowadays, and sin is rampant in churches, certainly not every group of people that calls themselves a *church* really is one. Only God knows how many churches are really his. Only he knows how many of those groups are even worthy of being called *churches*.

**Only God knows how many churches are really his.**

... in Christ we, though many, form one Body, and each member belongs to all the others (Romans 12:5).

How many churches are there in the world? Really, just one. Be part of that one Church.



### Covenant Comparison, Part A

Covenant	Promises	Parties	Mediator	Ministers
<b>1. marriage</b>	to love each other until death separates them	bride and groom	a town justice or religious leader officiating the ceremony	family members and friends who are witnesses to the vows
<b>2. job contract</b>	the employee commits to work, the employer commits to pay and provide the benefits specified in the contract	the employee and the employer	a corporate lawyer	the supervisor of the employee as well as other bosses and co-workers
<b>3. a will (for a deceased person)</b>	the deceased person promised to pass on ownership of their financial and material possessions	the deceased person and the heir(s)	a family lawyer	advisors, family members, bankers, and real estate agents
<b>4. the Flood Covenant (Gen. 6:17-18)</b>	unilateral: God will no longer punish humankind through a world-wide flood	God with Noah, his children, their descendants, and "every living thing" (Gen. 9:9-10, 15)	Noah's burnt offering (Gen. 8:20) demonstrated his faith in someone to mediate between him and God	the angels that control weather and nature itself
<b>5. the Covenant with Abraham</b>	to make Abraham a great nation, to bless him, to make his name great, to make him a blessing, etc. (Gen. 12:2-3)	God and Abraham	Melchisedek, priest of God (Gen. 14:18-19) interceded with bread and wine	the Angel of Yahweh, angels
<b>6. the Law, the Old Covenant</b>	the Jews would be God's chosen people, inherit the promised land, or be disgraced	the One God with the nation of Israel	Moses and Aaron	the priests with the Levites
<b>7. the New Covenant (Heb. 2:3; 8:6; 9:11-14; 10:19-31; 12:15-29)</b>	that we will <b>receive the Holy Spirit</b> (Jer. 31:31, 33-34; Ez. 36:25-28; 37:14) who is the guarantee of <b>our inheritance</b> (Eph. 1:13-14), which is the <b>Kingdom</b> , one in which we will <b>reign with Christ</b> (Lk. 22:29)	<b>the One God with the Church</b>	<b>Jesus Christ</b> , who is our High Priest established by God according to the order of Melchisedek (Heb. 7:25; 9:15; 12:24)	First, <b>the 12 apostles</b> , then the <b>other apostles</b> like Paul, then today's <b>church leaders</b> , those who are called and competent (2 Cor. 3:6)



### Covenant Comparison, Part B

Covenant	Means	Conditions	Signs	Initiation	Confirmation
<b>1. marriage</b>	the vows spoken before witnesses with signatures on wedding contract	faithfulness, cohabitation, the man providing for the woman and children	in most cultures, wedding rings or items of gold	the wedding ceremony	when the two become one flesh, the marriage is consummated, children are a further confirmation
<b>2. job contract</b>	signatures on the job contract	fulfillment of performance expectations as outlined in the contract, such as punctuality, professionalism, and productivity	varies with the job: an id card, a uniform, a badge, a gun, tools, or company vehicle	filing the contract and placing the new employee on file in human resources department	the first and subsequent paychecks as well as the signing of a new contract when the previous one has expired
<b>3. a will (for a deceased person)</b>	signatures on legal documents, especially the last will and testament	these depend on what the deceased person states in their will; for example, they may require that an heir be 21 years old to qualify for the inheritance	the corpse of the person who wrote the will	the will takes effect not only when the person who signed it passes away, but when it is read in the hearing of the heirs	the death certificate, funeral, and burial confirm that the will is in effect
<b>4. the Flood Covenant</b> (Genesis 6:17-18)	passing through water (1 Pet. 3:20-21) in the wooden ark	none, but that doesn't mean that God won't destroy the world again, just that he won't use water to do it	rainbows (Gen. 9:12-17)	when God set the first rainbow in the sky	every time that a rainbow appears in the sky
<b>5. the Covenant with Abraham</b>	the Word of God and the animals that were sacrificed	Abraham had to believe God, not return to the land of his fathers, live like a pilgrim, and do all that God commanded him	circumcision (Gen. 17; Rom. 2:25-29; 4:9-12)	after Abraham left Ur, his father's land (Acts 7:3-4)	When Isaac was born, since Isaac was the son of the promise
<b>6. the Law, the Old Covenant</b>	the blood of bulls, sheep, lambs, and other animals and the Word of God (Heb. 9:13)	obeying the laws and commandment of God	circumcision, the Ark of the Covenant (which had the 10 Commandments, Aaron's rod, and manna inside)	the day that Moses sprinkled blood on the Ark, the tabernacle, the Scriptures, and the people (Ex. 24:6-8; Heb. 9:18-21)	God would be with them to help them to win wars as they conquered the promised land, God would continue to bless them
<b>7. the New Covenant</b> (Heb. 2:3; 8:6; 9:11-14; 10:19-31; 12:15-29)	<b>the blood of Jesus</b> (Mat. 26:28; Heb. 13:20; 9:11-14, 18, 22), <b>the Word of God</b> , and <b>water</b> (1 Jn. 5:6; Acts 16:31-33; Eph. 5:26), with <b>the laying on of hands</b> (Acts 8:14-17)	1. <b>Keeping a clear conscience</b> (not sinning, but maintaining a lifestyle of confession), and  2. <b>persevering in fellowship</b> , loving all Christians, and never rejecting one, but rather providing for the needs of the Christians we know	the <b>Lord's Supper</b>	<b>baptism</b> in water	the <b>baptism of the Holy Spirit</b> (Acts 1:4-5; 2:33, 38-39) and at least one <b>spiritual gift</b> which is to be used in service to the Church