

## 8.

# COMMITMENT

The most common glue which men use today to try to hold the body of Christ together is commitment. Virtually every church group wants the believers who meet with them to make some kind of commitment to that particular group. This may include a commitment to a doctrinal position, commitment to the leader or authority figure, commitment to some practice, commitment to a purpose or "vision" or to any number of other things.

The variety of items to which believers are urged to commit themselves is endless, yet the way it works varies little. Christians are exhorted often and forcefully to commit themselves to some "church," group, or segment of the body of Christ in a way that separates them from the rest.

This commitment of these individuals to the group is the adhesive used to hold members together. It is the insistence upon this commitment which the leaders use to capture and hold members to their group. Once someone is convinced of the correctness of their way, doctrine or practice and then commits themselves to it, they are considered to be "members" of that particular group.

In order to be free to leave the group, members are required to somehow unmake this commitment. In some institutions, this is quite easy. In others, the commitment demanded is very strong and some individuals find it extremely hard to extricate themselves when and if they wish to. Instead of each one being free to follow the lead-

ing of the one true Head, these believers have fallen into bondage to the dictates of a human organization.

Often, adherents to one group are discouraged, through various means, from any intimate relationships with other groups. They are exhorted to remain faithful to the "church" where they have a commitment. They are told not to be "church hoppers" going from one meeting to another. Such members are expected to participate in the activities of their group and to avoid others which might be seen to be in competition with them. Thus, the freedom for these believers to live in and experience the one true church is limited.

Since some kind of commitment is the basis for the unity of so many Christian groups, let us spend a little time and investigate this subject together.

## TWO KINDS OF COMMITMENT

The Bible teaches us two kinds of commitment. The first is that we should be totally committed to God. He asks from us and is worthy of our full allegiance. We read: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind" (Lk 10:27). Certainly, this speaks of a complete commitment of our being to our Creator. You cannot love someone with your entire being in this kind of way without at the same time committing yourself totally to them.

Further, we are urged to offer ourselves as "a living sacrifice" (Rm 12:1) on His altar. This too speaks of a kind of commitment which is complete, leaving nothing in reserve. Surely, every reader can agree that our God is calling us to, and is worthy to receive, the entire commitment of our heart.

We are speaking here about love and commitment in the same breath because they are intimately related. You cannot have one without the other. An example of this is the marriage union. Any two people can have sexual relations together without a marriage covenant. But real love involves a deep, lifelong commitment.

If we say that we love someone and yet are unwilling to make any kind of commitment to them, this makes a lie of our words. This shows that we really love ourselves more than the other person and are only using the other for our entertainment and/or gratification.

Without such a commitment, any time that the other ceases to please us, giving us the kind of feelings and service which we want, we are free to leave. Thus we have taken from them all that they had to give and then left them high and dry when they ceased to satisfy us. The idea of love without commitment is a farce.

This is also true in our present discussion. If we say that we love God but do not have a complete commitment to Him, then our love is defective. To the degree that we truly love Him, we will give ourselves to Him. If and when we are holding ourselves back from an unconditional yielding of our entire heart to Him, this reveals that our love for Him is also incomplete.

Our love for Jesus is what really binds us to Him in absolute surrender of all that we are, all that we have and all that we hope for. It is our love for Him which causes us to open up unreservedly to Him so that He can control all of our thoughts, our feelings and our decisions. It is this deep passion we have towards our Lord which draws us to live in complete transparency and openness with Him. This is a true love commitment. It is this commitment which is the basis of our union or unity with God.

## THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CHURCH

This then is the foundation for any genuine experience of the church. Without any external forces, such as authority figures or organizational structures putting demands upon us, our love for God alone is the only thing which causes us to walk in His ways. If we love Him, we will serve Him. If we love Him, we will follow Him and we will seek Him. Meditation in His word, times of prayer and seeking His face, looking for every opportunity to serve others in His name and even manifesting His life and

nature, are all the results of our love for God. Our lifestyle and daily living reveal our relationship with Him.

*The experience of the true church can only be known by those who love God supremely!* This is an extremely important truth. Anything less than a complete commitment to Him will not work. All that the church is, is flowing out from Him. He is the source of both the life and the leadership of the church. Therefore, if we are not constantly walking in intimacy with Him, this flow of life and direction will be interrupted. Unless we remain firmly attached to the Vine, the flow from this source will be sporadic or lacking. This will cause our experience of His body to also be partial and defective.

If our heart is captured by other things, we will seek them instead of, or parallel to, our relationship with Jesus. With the passing of time, these other things which we love will draw us away from Him. To continue on with a spiritual walk, we must continually repent for and forsake anything which competes with our love for Jesus. It is only by walking in love and complete commitment to Christ that we can experience the fullness of the reality of His body.

Demas was a man with a divided heart. He was one of Paul's coworkers (Col 4:14, Phm 24). Demas had labored for some years with Paul to advance the kingdom of God. But deep within him, there was a secret desire. Hidden inside his heart was a love for the world. And so, when this longing came into bloom one day, he forsook the work of the Lord and went to try to satisfy his longing for goods, wealth and perhaps even fame. We read: "For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world" (II Tim 4:10).

If our heart is not "single" (Lk 11:34 KJV), we will not be impelled to seek our Lord every day. We will not be looking for how to satisfy Him by serving His body. We will not be spending our time, money and energy for the construction of His eternal dwelling place. Instead, we will end up serving only ourselves.

Consequently, the one true church which is led by and filled with Jesus, will not be our experience. Many other

motivations and desires will command our time, energy, money and attention. When we are freed from the bondage of other taskmasters who make demands upon us, what do we do? Where is our heart? If our commitment to Jesus is lacking, then this will impact our ability to experience the spiritual reality of the true church.

## A LACK OF COMMITMENT

The absence of a complete commitment to the Lord is a common ailment in the church today. When each one of the members of Christ's body is not seeking and following His leading every day, the living church does not and, in fact, cannot function. When the intimate connection to the Head is broken, the flow of life and direction is interrupted as well.

Just as a human body cannot work properly when the members are not connected to the head, so it is with the body of Christ. Unless each one maintains an intimate, constant relationship with Jesus, He cannot guide them and express Himself through them. Thus the manifestation of His body – which is the only true church – is not seen or is seen in a very limited way.

This lack of commitment becomes manifest when nothing of spiritual significance occurs. Where this lack is evident, very little evangelism is done. The ministry of God's life one to another is absent. The use of the gifts, helping, giving and all the other evidences of the Holy Spirit's work are in short supply. When the members are resisting or out of touch with their true Head, then the life of the body does not flow through them. Thus the expression of the true church is limited.

The result of this deficiency is that men often try to employ human organization and structures to compensate for this lack. Some sense a need for more action. They realize that the church is in a stagnant state. But lacking a heavenly vision, they begin to use earthly means and methods to try to correct the problem. They begin to try to rally believers together around some doctrine, direction or

leader. They begin to organize activities and meetings to try and stimulate Christians to do what they think they should do.

An infinite variety of natural means are used to try to make the body appear to do what it should be doing naturally and automatically. Leaders and organizations begin to manipulate the activities of the members to try to achieve what is lacking. The results of such efforts are a mechanical imitation of the living church.

Instead of curing the problem, such human means often only serve to hide the core issue. Innumerable believers today are being carried along by religious organizations while they have very little, if any, commitment to Jesus. The structure of the group provides for them meetings and activities which give them an appearance of serving Jesus. Their consciences – which should trouble them due of their resistance to God’s true leadership – are assuaged by the group, which considers them “good members.”

Their participation in the group becomes a substitute for a real walk with the invisible God. This becomes a kind of crutch for their Christianity. The adherents are provided with a vehicle which carries them along day by day, but does not really resolve the deepest problem of the heart. Such a religious structure does nothing to expose any hidden resistance to the complete government of God in people’s lives.

Frequently, such organizations become a kind of god for the members to love and follow. They become a substitute for the real headship of Jesus. Some begin to love “their church” so much that it makes it impossible for them to hear God’s truth concerning *His* church. It is not uncommon for such religious participants to resist, fight against and even hate anyone who might suggest that God has something better for them.

Their religious organization has provided for them another way to assure them that they are right with God instead of their actually being right with God. Consequently, they cling to it with all their might. They are expe-

riencing what can be called “justification by church.” Instead of being justified by a right relationship with Jesus, they feel they must be right with God because they are in good standing with their group or church.

### THE REAL CURE

The cure for those who do not have a complete consecration to Jesus is not to supply a substitute. It is not to fill their lives with religious activities. It is not to apply natural, human pressure to try to make them conform or participate. It is to help them come to Him, repent of whatever is getting in the way and then give themselves utterly to Him.

It is absolutely necessary for every Christian to arrive at and maintain a complete surrender of the control of their lives to Jesus Christ. Unless and until believers come to this point of commitment to their Lord, they cannot really experience the true church in her fullness.

Since the real church experience is something which flows out of the side of Jesus, only those who are constantly drinking of Him will be able to enjoy all the benefits. Unless we are connected to this divine fountain of life we cannot know the supernatural results. When our hearts and minds are distracted or captivated by other things, then the flow of His Life is restricted. Consequently, our experience of the one true church will be limited also.

The true church is a spiritual entity. To participate in her therefore, we too must constantly be in the Spirit. We must continually be full of and led by the Spirit of God. This requires a complete commitment of our heart, life and soul to Him. If we are only walking in the flesh – that is being led by our thoughts and feelings – then we will find it difficult to enjoy true spiritual experiences.

Being tied to the earth by our heart’s desires, we will be impeded from knowing and enjoying the spiritual realities. Only by offering our whole being up to God continually can we walk in His fullness and therefore enjoy all that He is doing in His body. The undiluted experience of the

church is only known by those who are completely in love with Jesus.

Consequently, it is of the utmost importance that we work to bring all believers to this commitment. It is essential that our ministry to others include this all-important ingredient. If we desire to work together with God to build up His eternal house, we must seek Him for how we can draw others into a complete surrender of all that they are to Jesus.

## SPIRITUAL GROWTH

This same complete commitment of our heart and soul to Jesus is required to experience real spiritual growth. Unless and until we are really ready for Him to work in all of us, our progress will be limited. This is because when the Holy Spirit begins His transforming work in us, He wishes to do a complete work. He wants to change our entire being. Whenever He encounters any resistance, His work within us stops. God will never go even one centimeter beyond our willingness. When we have areas of our hearts which we are not ready to open up to Him, He cannot move.

God never forces Himself upon anyone. He will never do something to us or in us which we are not one hundred percent willing for Him to do. Therefore, our spiritual growth is stopped by our lack of consecration. When and if He encounters any resistance on our part, then He simply waits for our hearts to change. While He certainly will work to draw us into the kind of total commitment which is necessary for His work to continue, He will not violate our will in any way.

I once knew a person (not myself) whose life was a testimony of such an experience. This individual received God's new life and was born again. Yet they were full of different resistances to the work of God. Stubbornness, fears, pride and many other such problems were lurking within this spiritual child. The thought of a total, unhindered yielding of their heart to God brought panic to this

believer's mind. This then brought this Christian many emotional conflicts and stresses but almost no spiritual growth. The Spirit of God was always trying to draw this one into complete submission yet this person fought against this kind of transparency with Him tooth and nail. This condition lasted about 20 years.

Yet, through His mercy, one day God's love began to conquer this individual. This believer's heart was being slowly melted by His grace. So one day this person decided to take an important step – the opening up of their heart completely to God. At that moment supernatural salvation began to take more effect.

The transformation process, which had been so truncated, began to really move forward. After a total consecration was made, real, tangible changes began to be manifested in this life. All the benefits of true submission to Jesus began to become real to this person. Their genuine walk with Jesus and experience of His complete salvation only began with a complete commitment to the Lord.

The experience of this believer is not unique. Through the years I have seen a number of similar cases. Real, spiritual progress only can be realized by those who have yielded their lives completely to Him. This commitment then is the basis for a genuine walk with the Lord and also the foundation for the true church experience. Without it we are only fooling ourselves, often being carried along in our Christian life by many artificial, religious props and devices which do nothing to really change our lives in an eternal way.

## THE SECOND COMMITMENT

### BROTHERLY LOVE

The second type of commitment which the Bible teaches us is commitment to one another. We are taught to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Lk 10:27). This love too speaks of commitment. We must have the same kind of obligation to care for our neighbor as we do to care

for ourselves. This responsibility is especially true in the church among believers.

We are required by God to have “the same care for one another” (I Cor 12:25). We are exhorted to “love one another fervently with a pure heart” (I Pet 1:22). Everywhere in the New Testament we are urged to exercise brotherly love. This, as we have been seeing, is a kind of deep commitment to others. The New Testament is so full of exhortations regarding this kind of love commitment to the other members of the body of Christ that it is almost impossible to list and study them all.

But how is it possible to love all the different people whom Jesus has chosen to put in His body? Sometimes it seems that He has chosen people who are some of the most difficult to love. Yet, He requires that we love them just as much as He has loved us. We read: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (Jn 13:34). This seems to be an impossible task, yet it is an essential element in the experience of the one true church.

The source of such supernatural love is God Himself. God has a deep, passionate love for His people, His church. Before the world began, God must have looked into the future and beheld His bride. While gazing upon her, a deep, passionate love must have been born within Him. The intense love which He has for her has been His motivation for all the work which He has been doing for and in mankind throughout the ages. This is the “...love of God which is in Christ Jesus” (Rm 8:39) when He came to earth to die for her.

Therefore, when we are walking every day in intimate communion with Him, we will sense His love for every one of His children. Our fellowship with Him will result in our absorbing and then expressing His tender sentiments. As we know Him more every day, this unfathomable love which He has for His people will begin to fill our hearts. With the passage of time, this divine love will begin to become the source of our motivation in our work together with Jesus.

So we find that there is a second commitment which we need to make. It is both biblical and essential. It is a firm, complete commitment to love all the other members of the body of Christ. It is necessary for each one of us to make a conscious, clear commitment before God to love all of His children. When we make this commitment, this puts us in a position to receive the love of God for others. As we agree with God concerning His attitude towards His body, this opens the way for His love to flow through us.

Without such a commitment, it is very possible that our human reactions to others will prevail. It is probable that our natural man will begin to express itself. In order for us to live in and experience the true church, this deep commitment needs to be made. If we do not, sooner or later, something will happen – someone will do or say something to hurt or offend us – which will cause us to stop loving them, become closed to them and pull away. We will then turn our backs on them and a division in Christ's body will occur.

If we are to have divine love flowing through us in each and every circumstance, we need to make a commitment before God. This is a commitment to love all His children. Then, when our resources run out, as they no doubt will – when we can love no longer, when we cannot bear the burden – we will sense His supply of supernatural love. When we are committed to others, He will always supply us with His love. Since His love never fails, it is always available for us to experience.

When our commitment to God and to His people is lacking, if we have not come into a deep understanding of what living the gospel of Jesus entails, we will not be able to enter into the fullness of all that He has for us. Many of the spiritual benefits and pleasures of His house will not be our experience. Our failure in this area will rob us of many spiritual enjoyments and maturity.

Those who miss these precious things are in a real kind of danger. They are very likely to seek a substitute. If they fail to make the two commitments which we have been discussing, they will also fall short in their spiritual

lives. Their experience of the living house of God will be faulty. Lacking this experience it is possible that they will seek to fill the void with some kind of religious organization, leadership or structure. If the spiritual reality is not our experience, the natural tendency is to seek out something easier.

So we understand that in order to experience the reality of the one true church, there is a second commitment involved. This is a commitment to our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is not a commitment to an institution, group, method, leader or way, but a commitment to other individuals. We must commit ourselves to love them fully, utterly and completely. This includes individuals of all kinds, both those who are more agreeable and those who prove to be very difficult to love.

### WHOM MUST WE LOVE?

The church of Jesus today is very large. There are many millions of believers who are part of her. We have been seeing that God requires us to love all of them. Yet, loving millions of people at the same time is only theoretical and not practical. Although our heart attitude may be right before God, being willing to love all, there is simply no way to express this love in a real way.

In the city where we live there may be thousands or even millions of other Christians. There is no possible way we can meet with all of them, minister to all of them, serve all of them or care for all of them. Obviously, our capacity as finite human beings is limited. So how then are we to exercise this love?

Jesus taught us to love our neighbor (Mt 22:39), but who is this neighbor? It is those other Christians whom God brings into our lives. As we walk with the Lord, He brings us into contact with other believers. If and when we are sensitive to Him, we will know when it is He who is orchestrating these contacts. We will be able to sense that it is God who is bringing these people into our lives. We read that He "...has set the members, each one of them, in the

body just as He pleased" (I Cor 12:18). As we have seen in previous chapters, Jesus is the one who is building His body. He is the one who puts one stone alongside another stone in His building. He is the one who knows how to do this construction. Our part is to be sensitive to Him and respond to what He is doing.

These are not always people whom we might choose. These are not necessarily people we like, that please us or even that we think are easy to befriend. What is important is that God is bringing someone into our lives. It may be for their benefit and growth. Possibly, they need some kind of ministry which we can give them. Or perhaps, we will learn from them, either from their portion of Christ or growing in patience and long-suffering from their lack of Christ. Certainly, we will grow through the experience whether it is a blessing or difficult.

When God brings someone to us, then we are required to love this person. It is our obligation to commit ourselves to serve them. We are not free to pick and choose whom we will love and serve. As servants of God, we must obey Him in our commitment to those whom He puts before us. Our role is to express the love of God to whomever He brings into our lives.

We can have confidence that God knows what He is doing. He is the architect and the builder of His house. He knows which relationships are strategic for His purposes. He understands which parts are important to each other. He knows how such spiritual relationships will work together to edify the rest.

God will bring us co-workers. He will bring us people with many problems and needs. He will bring us some who need our portion of Christ, some who will disappoint us, some who will challenge us, some who will bless us and some who will help us. Our responsibility is simply to commit ourselves to love them with the love of God.

Our responsibility to love others does not stop with only those who agree with us. It is not limited to those with whom we meet regularly, those who like us, those whose company we enjoy or those whom we imagine we can con-

vince of our position, doctrine or practice. Anyone whom God brings into our lives, we are required to love and serve in a humble way, and leave the results to God. As we do this, Jesus will build His church in an invisible, hidden way which one day will be revealed in all her glorious splendor.

This commitment of love is not something which is temporary. These relationships must not depend upon our emotions or whims. Since it has its source in the eternal God our commitment to others should also be an eternal thing. These individuals whom God brings into our lives are not disposable. They are not to be discarded like used tissue when they cease to please us or when they do something which hurts or offends us.

Just as God does not discard His children every time they sin or disobey, so we too must make a thorough commitment to others to love and serve them. They may choose to turn their backs on us, but we are not free before God to turn away from them. Our commitment to other brothers and sisters must be like that of Jesus Christ.

In today's world, men and women have become very accustomed to and even addicted to instant self-gratification. So many of us have become used to having what we want the way we want it, when we want it. But if we are to experience the one true church, this self-love must be denied. Our natural feelings and reactions to so many things which others do and say must be replaced with Jesus' divine reaction of love.

The commitment which we make to others must be deep and abiding. It must be made as a conscious, sober decision in which we become willing to lay down our own lives for others. It is a commitment which puts others before ourselves. It is a decision which mirrors the heart of our Savior when He came to give His life for us.

### **THE REAL CHURCH GLUE**

Brotherly love then is the glue which will hold the one true church together. It is this love for one another which

will cause us to maintain our fellowship. It is this eternal love which will impel us to serve Christ's body. It is this unfailing love which will induce us to lay down our lives so that others can grow up into all that Jesus is. It is the love for God and for one another which will cause us to maintain relationships, desire to meet for worship, edification and prayer and to use our gifts and ministries to build up the body.

Here there is no need for positional or institutional authority. There is no room for some kind of substitute framework or "commitment" to try to hold people together. This is not something artificial. It is nothing which man can produce or even imitate. This is not anything which has been made with human hands. It is the place where God dwells and will dwell for eternity.

The evidence of the reality of the one true church is brotherly love. This ageless love of God being poured out through and onto His body is the proof that God Himself is at work. It is the sure sign that He is the One who is in control and He is the One who has done this work. Man cannot imitate it.

Such love produces the most enjoyable kind of "church." The scripture reads: "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard...It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing - Life forevermore" (Ps 133).

The intimacy of living together and relating to others in the love of God is one of the highest human experiences. It is one of the most truly enjoyable things which we can know. The intimacy with one another which this produces, the transparency of lives and relationships which comes forth, is simply wonderful. There is nothing which can compare with living with others in God's love.

This is the goal. This is the experience of the one true church. It is the kind of living into which Jesus is calling us. It is meant to be part of our reward for our faithful obedi-

ence to Jesus. Every Christian is meant to be able to participate in and fully enjoy this spiritual communion with one another.

If we fail to enter into the kind of relationship with Jesus which produces this love, then we will also fail to experience the one true church. If we do not walk in intimate communion with the Father, then we will never succeed in knowing the reality of His body. The love of God is the only adhesive which will work when we are constructing the genuine house of God.

Any other method to try and hold the people of God together is false. It is an imitation. It is a human effort to try to produce something which should be the automatic fruit of a spiritual life. If we really know God intimately, we will love the brethren. This love is the only substance which can be used to hold the people of God together in a real, eternal way. Therefore, it is a large part of our work to stir up one another to love as Christ loves (Heb 10:24).

It is our privilege to demonstrate through our lives this godly love so that others will have an example to follow. It is part of our function in the body of Christ to exhort and encourage each brother and sister to know this love and to express it. This is the highest and holiest calling.

### **GIFTS ALONE WILL NOT SUCCEED**

Many people today are trying to build up the church and hold it together with their spiritual gifts. They are doing their best to edify other believers with their ministry. But some also make the mistake of thinking that this will be sufficient. They try to build the church by attracting others through the use of their gifts and then try to get these others to commit themselves to them and their ministry as a means of holding these believers together.

Dear brethren, it is not enough simply to have some kind of spiritual gift. It is not sufficient to have an "anointed" ministry. Simply being able to preach or teach, cure the sick, predict the future or cast out demons is not adequate to build up the true church. All these things can be done by

those who do not know how to live in God's love. Incredibly, they can be accomplished by some who are not really living in intimacy with Jesus. Here the scripture is quite clear. If our "ministry" is merely an exercise of our gift but not a result of the flow of eternal love in us and through us, it is an empty, vain thing. In fact, it is "nothing" (I Cor 13:2).

It is not uncommon in the church today to find men and women who are using the gifts which God has given them to promote themselves. They are exercising the spiritual abilities which they have received to impress others and therefore exalt themselves. They want to be seen and heard. They want others to think that they are really spiritual.

Yet, all this is simply evidence of their immaturity. They are lacking in God's love. Real love does not behave in this way. It "does not parade itself." It is "not puffed up" (I Cor 13:4). Those who are motivated by the love of God are not self-seeking. Their motives are only to minister the life and nature of God to other believers and a perishing world.

The exercise of spiritual gifts without love is an empty religious exercise. It like the sound of a bell or trumpet which quickly vanishes away (I Cor 13:1). The kind of ministry which will produce lasting, eternal results is the ministry done in love. It is the love of God flowing in us and through us which will build up the eternal habitation of the Most High.

## GROUP COMMITMENT

As we have mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, there is a third kind of commitment upon which so many are insisting today. It is the commitment of a believer to a certain "church," group or ministry. What about this idea of the dedication of our lives to a specific group? Do the scriptures teach us that we should commit ourselves to a certain church, ministry or way? Absolutely not! On the contrary such commitment is forbidden.

The alignment of ourselves with any subgroup other than the body of Christ as a whole is strictly prohibited. It is what the Bible calls "division." It is the cause of "factions" within the body. It is a kind of activity which is destructive to the cause of Christ. Paul rebukes the believers in Corinth for doing this very thing. There they were aligning themselves with certain leaders. They were saying, "I am of Paul," "I am of Apollos," "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ" (I Cor 1:12).

Paul teaches us that such commitment to a subgroup of believers is carnal and childish. It demonstrated that these Christians were still infantile and fleshly. They did not yet have the maturity to see things according to God's point of view. They did not have a heavenly vision of His one true church. Nowhere in the word of God are we urged to give our allegiance to any group, church or ministry beyond the simple exhortation to love one another.

The alignment with or commitment of ourselves to a specific church or group is against the clear teachings of the New Testament. When we do this we automatically set up a kind of barrier between ourselves and other Christians. Our allegiance to anything other than Jesus Christ and His entire body, creates a sort of delineation or "denomination."

Literally, a denomination is a distinction and separation of something by the use of a name. For example, we give people a name or even nickname to differentiate them from others. When we form separate groups within the church and give them names to distinguish them from the rest, we create "denominations."

To a greater or lesser degree, such a practice cuts us off from the ministry which the rest of the body has to offer us. Conversely, we also limit our availability to the others to contribute our portion. Such divisions in the body of Christ limit the flow of His love. They inhibit the ministry of Life which the members give to one another. When believers band together in groups which are separate from the rest of the body, they greatly limit the work of God. For this reason, such commitments are contrary to His will.

We have no need to rely on such commitments to try to keep a group together. We must not look to such earthly means and methods to try and secure members or keep believers in our group. The love of God will do this. Remember that it is He that places the members in the body as it pleases Him (I Cor 12:18). We can trust in His ability to do this in a way which will benefit everyone. If we live in love, Jesus Himself will cause His body to grow and prosper.

The commitment of believers to a group or organization frequently substitutes for the two essential commitments which we have been discussing. By committing themselves to a group, Christians often neglect their commitment to Christ and to one another. As we have seen in previous chapters, such carnal commitments are often easier to make and maintain than the two spiritual ones which we have been discussing here.

A fleshly group commitment can be made and maintained without any commitment to love God totally and love our brothers and sisters as we love ourselves. Anything which is or which becomes a substitute for God's best way should be avoided.