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"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,

Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places,

Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:

And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,

Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

Eph 1:17-23

## PREFACE

God is mysterious. He is a God who hides Himself (Is 45:15). Therefore the reality of God cannot be explained, it can only be revealed. God reveals Himself to whomever He wills. And if, when we are open and seeking God, He reveals something of Himself to us, then we know it assuredly. Even though we may try to explain this same revelation to someone else, it is impossible unless they too are open to God and He chooses to reveal it to them.

Men cannot find God through their own wisdom, or by their own understanding. It is only by God's mercy that He chooses to allow men to see Him and know Him in any real way. The Bible teaches us that men in all their wisdom do not know God (I Cor 1:21). So God has chosen to reveal Himself to those who are simple, immature and unlearned. Very often, these are the ones who are truly open to Him.

The book which you are about to read is a human attempt to unveil a great mystery. This divine secret is something which only God Himself can reveal. It is something which we must have spiritual eyes to see. So if, after you have finished this book you do not understand what it is saying, perhaps a good suggestion would be to put it away awhile and get it out again later to give it a second reading. This may even be a good suggestion for every reader: to read the book through more than once, and while reading to open our heart and our spirit to the Lord that He could reveal something of Himself to us.

The second coming of Jesus Christ to the earth is imminent. All the events in the world are pointing to this one fact. How much all believers need to be watching, waiting and preparing for His coming. This book was written therefore to help those who are genuinely seeking deeper experiences of Jesus Christ Himself, and to aid Christians in finding greater fulfillment and satisfaction in their work for Him. I pray that God through His mercy would use this writing, however poor it may be, to unveil to many the great mystery: Christ and the Church, the Bride and the Bridegroom, who will be together for eternity.

D.W.D.

## 1.

### A SPIRITUAL VISION

*"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him." Eph 1:17*

The Bible is a wonderful book. Like any other book, it was written by men. Yet with this book there is a great difference. The men who wrote these holy words were directed and inspired by God. God Himself led these men to pen His thoughts and words so that other men could have the benefit of reading them. This great fact is what makes the Bible so precious.

Since the Bible was given by divine revelation, it must be understood in the same way. Due to its spiritual origin, man needs spiritual understanding to comprehend what it is saying. In fact, in its own pages the Bible claims that this is so. In I Corinthians 2:14 we read: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." When we read this book we need God to open our eyes to see what He is saying.

Not only does this apply to the general thoughts and concepts in the Bible, but to each individual word and phrase as well. Behind many words of scripture lie unfathomable revelation and meaning. If we could only see with spiritual eyes just a portion of what God is really saying, we would stand in awe and give Him glory.

An example of how much revelation and meaning can be contained in the words of the Bible is found in the name of Jesus Christ. At first glance these two words appear to be simply the name and title of a man no different from any other. Yet behind this name above all names is the creating power of the universe, the manifestation of God, the Savior of the world. There is actually no limit to what can be seen of Jesus Christ and His glory. The complete spiritual revelation of Jesus Christ is beyond human comprehension.

As it is with the name of Jesus Christ, so it is with the word "Church." Behind this one word also is much spiritual revelation. The Church in all her beauty, her power and her majesty is something which all Christians need to see. We all need to have God unveil our eyes to see the Church, the body of Christ. She is a spiritual reality. Her destiny is to be the final dwelling place of God. Her function is to defeat God's enemy. Her reward is to be the bride of Christ. This is not a small thing. The importance of the Church is beyond description.

One of the saddest things today is that so very few of God's children have seen the smallest part of this revelation. Without such understanding it is difficult for us to be a vital part of what God is doing. Our efforts for God may often be misdirected and

futile. If we do not understand what He is trying to accomplish, how can we work in a proper way to fulfill His purposes? Without God's light, our only alternative is to walk in darkness. How many of the foolish things which Christians do could be explained in this way!

For many Christians, the meaning of the word "church" is limited to "a building for Christian meetings," a "religious organization" or a "social institution." While these believers may quickly explain that the church is actually "the body of Christ," their daily experience of it is not that at all. They possess the right teaching, yet the revelation or the experience of that revelation is lacking. Unfortunately, for most the first three definitions are their only reality.

In our country every Christian has access to a Bible. How easy it is for us to simply scan the surface of its pages. Too often we pick up only the outward form of something and miss the inward substance of it. In the Bible, God has shown us a revelation of the church and what our part in it should be. What a tremendous need there is for us as Christians to both see and experience this reality!

It is the goal of this writing therefore to help unfold, unveil and explain the "great mystery" of Christ and the church for every believer to see (Eph 5:32). Let us pray together that God would use it in this way: "Dear Lord Jesus, open our eyes we pray, to see a vision of Your church in the way that You would have us to see it. Let the veils fall from our minds so that we could comprehend her reality. May our lives be touched in a way that would alter our course to satisfy Your desires instead of our own. Dear Jesus, we open to You and give ourselves to You completely that we may be a vital part of Your work on earth today. Amen."

## 2.

### THE CALL TO UNITY

*"So we, being many, are one body in Christ..." Rom 12:5a*

As a diamond which has many facets can show its brilliance in many ways, so the Church of God can be seen from many different perspectives. The Church is the body of Christ. The Church is also the bride of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the family of God; and someday she will be the city of the living God, the New Jerusalem. In every aspect of the Church there is much spiritual revelation to be seen. Everything which God reveals to us in His Word has some definite purpose and meaning. There is no revelation from God about His Church which we should consider unimportant to our lives.

However in this writing I will not attempt to deal with the vast spectrum of revelation and understanding which concerns the Church, but will concentrate mainly on one segment of it. This segment is that of the Church as Christ's body. This facet seems to be particularly appropriate because it has such a clear practical application to our daily experience of the church. In fact, one of the main definitions of the church which the Bible gives us pictures the church in this way: in Ephesians 1:23 we read of the church "which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all." This explanation shows us much about God's purpose and design for man, and how we can properly be His church today. May God show us this design as we proceed.

The church is the body of Christ. Although this phrase may seem somewhat mystical, it has very much real practical meaning. God is using this phrase as an analogy to show us many things about how He intends the church to be functioning. The comparison is actually taken quite far in the scriptures. Romans 12:5 states: "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." I Corinthians 12:12 echoes this same meaning when it says: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ."

There is a definite, clear life-relationship which the scriptures show existing between Christ and His church and the individual members of the church with one another. An understanding of this concept is absolutely essential if we are to perceive the body of Christ in a proper way. This life-relationship is the crucial factor for our experiencing the church day by day. If we as Christians do not understand this aspect of God's plan, much of what He is doing on earth will be lost to us.

Jesus Christ died that we might have life. He gave up His life so that we might have it. The "Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:2) has been poured out upon the earth.

All true Christians have received it. This means that we have come to participate in God's life. Every believer has had some experience with the same Lord Jesus and been made to drink of the same Holy Spirit (I Cor 12:13). Therefore, the life of Jesus Christ which every one of us is experiencing is exactly the same. Not only have we become attached to Jesus Christ who is the head of the body, but we have also become inseparably joined by His life to a whole group of people who make up His body. It does not matter what we think of these individuals or whether or not we would wish to be joined to them; the fact is, God has done it. We have been placed by God into an eternal life-relationship with every member of the body of Christ. Our part in this is to realize what this means, accept it as God's perfect will for us, and learn to live with this fact in such a way that He will be pleased.

The members of this body are joined together by God's life. Millions of individuals from thousands of backgrounds, dispositions, races and creeds have been called into this holy convocation. They have all been born anew. They have all been made partakers with us of the divine nature. They are all "called to be saints" (Rom 1:7, I Cor 1:2) and they will all, together with us, be with Him for eternity. This is the church of God.

Now we come to the part that is difficult. This God-ordained harmony, produced by the one life and given by the one Father, should translate into oneness and unity among Christians living today on the earth. Sadly, it does not. It is not that God does not intend it this way or that He does not feel it is important for the church to experience such unity. The problem is one of sin among the members of the body.

Not only do the scriptures plainly indicate that it is God's will for us to experience such unity, Jesus Himself prayed earnestly to the Father that we would have it. In the gospel of John, chapter 17, we read of Jesus praying for the members of the church: "That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee...And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one (Jn 17:21,22)." What our Lord is praying for here is not an impossible dream or merely something for eternity. This unity is something for us as believers to be experiencing today. His petition continues: "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me (Jn 17:23)." Jesus Christ Himself was praying for us as Christians to have such oneness and unity that it would be a testimony to the world of His reality. What glorious unity this would be! Oh, how we desperately need to experience this unity!

However, any casual observer will quickly realize that this prayed-for unity is not the daily experience of many members of the body of Christ. The portion of His church which is on the earth today is splintered and divided into many different segments. Denominations, "non-denominations," sects, groups and "bodies" abound. Arguing factions and separate parties dominate the scene.

Even though this is the case, God's Word has not been made null and void. Just because the outward situation among many Christians appears to be faulty, this does not mean that God has abandoned His purpose or plan. His will is just the same. We may not excuse ourselves from the demands of the Holy Word simply because we do not see everyone else doing what it teaches. As a matter of fact, there are literally hundreds of "logical" reasons (humanly speaking) which Christians employ to excuse themselves from practicing, teaching and experiencing this oneness today; yet God has not changed. The fervent prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ remains: "that they all may be one." Let us remember that "with God all things are possible (Mt 19:26)."

Oneness is God's will for the church on earth today. Let us all firmly agree with Him on this one thing; for unless we can agree, we will never experience it for ourselves. Once we do agree, then we may begin to seek Him for ways in which we can practice this unity daily. Since unity is God's idea and He has so clearly revealed it to us through His Word, He must also have some way for us to fulfill it. God never makes any demands upon us for which He does not have the supply. If we are to be obedient, our quest will now be how we can have unity with all other Christians.

### 3.

## THE ESSENCE OF UNITY

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

Unity is not primarily something outward. Merely gathering a large number of people together into one place does not constitute unity. The kind of unity that God desires goes much deeper than outward appearances. He desires unity that proceeds from the heart. Therefore in order to experience this unity, our hearts must be right—right before God and right with our brothers also. If we fail in these two areas there can be no true unity. As Christians we must learn to align our hearts with God's will so that we can experience this true unity.

The unity which God desires originates with Himself. It is something that we as human beings do not possess naturally. Oneness is a divine substance, a kind of heavenly glue which holds the church of God together. God our Father is using this oneness to build up the church and create a new man in Christ out of a vast array of individuals who previously had no unity.

The first element which our hearts need to have true unity with other believers is a deep love for God. Jesus said that the highest commandment is to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength (Mk 12:30)." Since God is the source of all true unity, it is impossible to have genuine oneness with other Christians without this kind of deep burning love for God.

Godly unity is not only a unity of desire or of common interests, such as a social club or philanthropic organization. Biblical unity is a unity of the Spirit which manifests itself in love—a deep spiritual love which comes from God. In order to have this kind of love one for another, each individual must cultivate a personal, intimate relationship with God. God is love. He is the source of genuine love, and it is from Him that we can receive the kind of love that we need for our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is the love that will build up the church of God today (Eph 4:16). We have only to read I Corinthians, chapter 13, to realize the importance of love in God's economy. We may have all knowledge, all wisdom and understanding, spiritual gifts or mighty spiritual powers; yet if we don't have love, they mean nothing.

When our hearts are filled with the love of God one for another, unity actually happens quite automatically and spontaneously. If we are full of love, it is easy to express and experience unity. On the other hand, if we don't have love, no amount of energy which we can exert or outward measures we can take will achieve the results that God desires. To have unity means to have love one for another. Significantly, the commandment that Jesus listed as second in importance is that we should love our

neighbors as ourselves (Mt 22:39). If we as Christians could only fulfill Christ's two simple commandments, love and unity in the church of God would be abounding.

Without love it is very difficult for us to maintain unity. There are many problems and disturbances in the church today. There is much with which we as Christians have to bear. To be one with new believers, mistaken believers and untransformed believers requires that we have an abundance of love. In order to maintain unity with all the many Christians in the body, the love of God must be shed abroad in our hearts. If we deal with them only in judgment and condemnation, division will be the ultimate result. On the other hand, love covers a multitude of sins (I Pet 4:8).\*

Sadly, love seems to be in short supply in the church of God today. There are many reasons for this shortage. Perhaps one of the most common reasons is that our love for God has grown cold. It seems so easy for our hearts to love other things. The world and the things of the world often appear inviting. Ambitions and goals that we are trying to achieve that are apart from the will of God are another great problem. Our love for these things creates a shortage in our love for God. This shortage quickly manifests itself as a lack of love for one another.

The scriptures state clearly that a man cannot serve two masters. For, it says, he will either hate the one and love the other; or he will cleave to the one and despise the other. He cannot serve God and mammon (Mt 6:24). When we love the world or any other thing too much, our love for God grows cold. If this is our situation, we have lost our first love. The solution for this is repentance. We need to repent to God for loving other things and turn away from them, put them away if necessary and renew our hearts with love toward God. In this way, we will again be filled with love one for another.

Another hindrance to the love of God flowing in our hearts is love of self. Naturally speaking, every man loves himself. The love of God, on the other hand, is contrary to this love of self. If we want to follow God and to have love flowing in us, the Bible teaches that we must deny ourselves. We must learn not to serve our own desires, our own ambitions or our own feel-

\*NOTE: The New Testament scriptures are full of exhortation and teaching on the subject of love. Although it does not seem appropriate at this time to analyze each of them, I am including a partial listing of references for readers who wish to look more deeply into the matter: Jn 15:12,13 Rom 12:9,10 Rom 13:10 Gal 5:22 Eph 4:2,16 Eph 5:2 Phil 1:9 Phil 2:2 Col 2:2 Heb 13:1 I Pet 1:22 I John (entire epistle).

ings. In the place of these things we must learn to serve God. Let us serve Him first and allow Him to meet our needs. In this way we will be full of love for God and have a supply of love for our brethren also.

A third item which hinders our love for the brethren is sin. This sin manifests itself in many ways. At times we are jealous of one another or we envy one another. Some brethren have a tendency to strive about certain things—doctrines, teachings, beliefs, concepts or ideas. Actions such as these make it very difficult to have unity. Backbiting, gossip, bitterness, unforgiveness and hate are also great problems in the church today. All these things are contrary to God's love and bring forth division in the body of Christ. This kind of natural, fleshly activity is sin and it destroys unity. Such sin only frustrates God's plan for His church.

Once we are in Christ, unity should be easy. When we first meet the Lord, He

plants a love for the brethren within us. We have been given the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus; and He is accompanied by love and unity. In Ephesians we read that we should endeavor to maintain this "unity of the Spirit (Eph 4:3)." Since oneness has been brought into our lives by the Spirit, we can immediately begin to love the brethren. We can begin to live in unity as soon as we receive the Lord.

Naturally, as we grow and continue on in the Lord, difficulties may arise in our own hearts or in our circumstances. These are things which we need to overcome in order to retain what He has given us. To have this victory, we must seek the Lord and be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will supply us with love so that we can continue to enjoy unity with the entire body of Christ.

Let us learn today how to put away from ourselves everything which destroys and distorts unity. May we shun anything which keeps us from experiencing love and oneness with all other believers. We must agree with God that unity is His will and His purpose for His children. This agreement should cause us to put aside everything that hinders us and seek God diligently that we might have the genuine experience of unity; for without it, we cannot be experiencing the reality of the church.

#### 4.

### THE ONE TRUE CHURCH

"There is one body, and one Spirit even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." Eph 4:4-6

The Church of God is one. There is an inherent spiritual unity in the whole Church of God which includes every believer from the time Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins until now. Although this is so, the Church is actually divided in several ways.

Firstly, the Church is divided into two categories: those in the Church who have died and gone to be with the Lord, and those in the Church who still remain upon the earth. The physical reality of death divides the Church into these two categories.

A further division of the Church which remains upon the earth can also be seen. The Church is divided up practically among various towns and cities throughout the whole world. This division is a product of geography. Since it is the nature of men to gather themselves together in communities, so the Church is also divided physically in the same way. Thus, the one true Church is separated into the church in each community. This earthly division is evidenced in the Apostle Paul's writings when he addresses his letters to the church in a certain city. However, such geographical separation in no way implies that the Christians who live in these different cities should be divided spiritually. All this indicates is that there is an earthly, practical dividing up of the Church by communities.

The fact that this physical separation should not involve any spiritual separation is shown plainly by the Bible's teaching about hospitality. The scriptures teach us that we are to entertain strangers. We are to open our homes and our hearts to brethren who are passing through our city (Rom 12:13, I Tim 3:2, Tit 1:8, I Pet 4:9). These verses show us that we should have the same love, the same openness and the same spiritual unity with every Christian regardless of where they live. Thus it is plain to see that real unity extends beyond the physical division of the Church by localities. Although the Church is geographically divided, the unity of the Spirit still prevails.

Within any given city, there may be many thousands of Christians. Perhaps many of these Christians do not even know one another. Even the most hard-headed Bible interpreter must admit that in most communities it is impossible for all of these believers to meet together on a daily basis. For this reason, the Church of God is further divided practically. The members of the church in every city are separated among many church meetings. However, these Christians are still members of the one

church in their city which is only a smaller part of the one true Church. Again we must realize that this division of the church into many church meetings is only physical and must never lead to spiritual disunity.

In the Bible we can read about similar situations. The scriptures four times mention "the church in a house." We read about the church in Aquila and Priscilla's house (I Cor 16:19, Rom 16:3,5), the church in Nymphas' house (Col 4:15) and the church in the house of Archippus (Philemon 2). These verses show us plainly that the church in every city was further divided into smaller church meetings as a matter of practicality. Nevertheless, the context of these same passages (especially Romans 16) clearly indicates that those believers who were included in the greetings to "the church in a certain house" had much contact, fellowship and close association with all other Christians who lived in that particular city. They maintained a real, practical and spiritual unity with them. Any practical separation from other Christians, forced upon them by physical limitations, did not lead to spiritual division. How this example of a proper Christian attitude and perspective should speak to us today!

To have spiritual unity means that the bond of brotherly love is never broken. Please allow me to further clarify this with an illustration. Perhaps two believers live in the same city, yet do not know each other. One may be meeting with the Christians with whom he is acquainted, and the other with those whom he knows. Yet if they were ever to meet each other, there should be love, oneness and unity between them. They should accept and love one another just as much as those they already know. This is only possible if they do not have any heart attitude which is divisive or anything else which would disrupt the genuine unity of the body of Christ. This is genuine spiritual unity. It is something which is inherent in every Christian and possible for each one of us to experience. Although oneness is firstly spiritual, it has a very real, tangible, earthly expression—brotherly love.

In the book of First Corinthians we read about a group of people, the church in Corinth, who evidently did not have this experience of unity. The church in that city was divided up into several factions or camps. Paul wrote a portion of his epistle to the Corinthians for the purpose of rebuking them and exhorting them to be one in the Lord. How this passage reminds us of the situation among so many Christians today. We read in I Corinthians, chapter 1, starting with verse 10: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul (I Cor 1:10-13)?"

How easily these verses could have been written to the church in almost any city today! Such division is the common situation among Christians of our time. In fact, many Christians are taught that it is proper for them to be divided in this way. How pitifully short this falls of scriptural Christianity. Each group says, "we are of this persuasion," or "we are of that persuasion": "I am a Charismatic," "I am a Pentecostal," "I am for baptism by a certain method," or "I follow a certain leader." And so this is how we find much of the Church of God today—divided, arguing and disagreeing one with another. One group of Christians perhaps is suspicious of the other's motives, teachings or methods. The next group may be jealous of the other one because they have more members or a fancier building. All these things only divide the Church of God which

Jesus Christ prayed would be unified.

Arguing, bickering and dissension of this nature among the members in the body of Christ is carnal and fleshly. Let us read again in I Corinthians, this time in chapter 3, beginning with verse 1: "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat; for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal (I Cor 3:1-4)?"

The problem among Christians today, in every city, is not that there are many different meetings. This is a matter of necessity. The problem is that each one of these meetings takes on a separate identity. Each one of these groups begins to adhere to a certain doctrine or thing which differentiates it from other meetings of genuine Christians in that city. Each one builds some kind of wall or barrier to keep "their sheep" separate from all the rest. For every group the point of separation may be a different thing. However, the result is the same—the dividing up of the church in every city into smaller sects or factions which have little or nothing to do with each other. This situation is not of God! It is what the Apostle Paul labels as carnal and infantile. Such division destroys the proper functioning of the body of Christ and hinders God's work on the earth.

Allow me to be so bold as to ask a question. Is there any real difference in saying "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Christ," than there is in saying "I am of Luther," "I am a Baptist," "I am for a certain arrangement of the presbytery," or "I am of the Church of Christ"? How closely the situation today parallels that in the city of Corinth. Yet how strongly we as men justify what we are doing in spite of the plain teaching found in the scriptures. Granted, this is all done for good reasons, humanly speaking. Some are trying to protect what they consider to be "the faith." Others may be trying to save a certain truth that they have discovered from impurity. Still others might be attempting to protect their members from wrong teaching. Yet the result of all these well-intentioned reasons is to disobey the scriptures and nullify the Word of God. Unity, God's desire and the fervent prayer of His son Jesus Christ, is thereby damaged. (By the way, there is room for holding onto truth in the church. And yes, we should protect each other from heretical teaching. But it must be done in a proper way. We must never violate the principle of unity.)

As we have been seeing, the church in each city consists of every true born-again believer in that city. Furthermore, all Christian meetings are really just meetings of that one church. Therefore, we should strive to live in this reality. Our meetings with other Christians should not be something which are separate and distinct from the meetings of the rest of the Christians in the city in which we live. Our walls should be down and our doors open. Our hearts should be open likewise to each and every Christian with whom we may come into contact. Not only should we be open for them to come to fellowship and worship God with us, we should likewise be equally as open to meet, fellowship and worship God with them. This is genuine unity.

In God's eyes, there is actually only one church in every city. This fact is evidenced by the seven golden lampstands which we see standing before the throne in Revelation representing the seven churches—one for each city (Rev 1:20).<sup>\*</sup> Yet these churches are only smaller expressions of the one and only Church there is in the whole universe! Thank God that we are a part of it. May we seek Him that we might experience the evidence of this reality—true daily unity with each and every believer

with whom we come into contact.

NOTE: In the book of Revelation we are shown seven golden lampstands ("candlesticks" in the KJV is not correct) representing seven churches in seven cities. Nowhere in the scriptures is any smaller gathering of Christians so specially designated. This must be because of the fact that within every community both spiritual and practical unity are possible. (Between cities, however, such close communion is very limited.) The result of such intimate fellowship between all the believers in every city should be that the one true church would shine forth for all to see. No smaller group could ever be the totality of this expression because the God-ordained unity which in each city is both practical and possible is not seen.

## THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH

*"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Mt 16:18*

In this world in which we live, every group of people which gets together or associates with one another has some sort of common ground or foundation upon which to base the relationship of its members. The crowd at a baseball stadium has a common interest in baseball. Those who belong to a fraternal organization may foster a common desire to help their fellow man. Almost anything may be adopted, even if only temporarily, as a basis for people's relationships. Two people waiting for the same bus are a good example of this. To us as Christians, this concept has a very basic and important application. We need to understand clearly what the foundation of the Church is.

If we were going to build a large building, first we would have to lay a proper foundation. This is the most essential ingredient. If a structure is not properly founded—if the foundation is not solid or able to support the structure—it will collapse, or serious problems will result. The same is true of the church of God. If our fellowship one with another, our church meetings, and in general our entire church experience does not rest on the proper foundation, we will have serious problems. Many of the difficulties which the church experiences today can be explained in this way.

One of the most prominent difficulties caused by having an improper foundation is the problem of division. As we have seen, today the Church is divided and splintered into many groups and factions. Not surprisingly, most of these groups and factions have established another foundation for what they are building besides that which God has laid.

The Apostle Paul in his day was very concerned about the foundation of the church. In writing to the Corinthians, the church that had a prominent problem with division in her midst, he speaks about the importance of having a proper foundation. To correct this problem he writes: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ (I Cor 3:11)." This verse has deep spiritual meaning. It is essential that we adhere exclusively to Jesus Christ as our foundation, our basis and our only rallying point for the building up of the church. If we do not, we will only cause division. Understanding this concept is absolutely crucial if we are to be properly experiencing the church.

Jesus Christ is someone in whom all true Christians agree. We have all knelt before Him and called Him Lord. He, therefore, is our true bond of unity. We have a common basis in Him. As a matter of fact, He is the reason that we even associate one

with another, or that we are even a part of the church at all. He Himself is our true foundation. Therefore, we must be standing firmly upon Him and looking solely to Him as our only bond of unity with other believers.

What then does it mean to lay another foundation? It means that we establish some additional concept, doctrine, teaching, principle or creed as the basis or focal point for our meetings and fellowship one with another. Laying another foundation means that we establish a secondary reason for associating with one another or for meeting with one another than simply that we belong to Jesus Christ.

Establishing another kind of foundation is as common as it is easy. Human beings tend to want and even enjoy something which is outward and tangible. It is easy for us to place our trust in a teaching, concept, belief or even a particular leader. These things are earthly and tangible while Jesus Christ is heavenly and spiritual. Quite often, He is not easy for us to apprehend. Adhering to these outward things is often much simpler than having a right relationship with Him. To have such a relationship we must seek Him, love Him and follow Him every day. In this way, we can have Him as the proper basis for our church experience.

Most Christians desire to be right with God. They want to be pleasing to Him. However, God's enemy may sometimes capitalize on this desire and subtly deceive us. If we can be persuaded that simply believing the right way about some doctrine, teaching, method or "way" will make us right with God, we have been deceived. It may be concerning baptism, unity, evangelism or speaking in tongues. Almost any good scriptural idea can become a source of unscriptural security for us in our church experience. We must not allow the fact that we "believe the right way" about anything but Jesus Christ to become the basis or the assurance of our rightness before God. In the same way, we must not allow these external things to become the basis for our fellowship with other Christians. The fact that they may believe the same way we do about certain things should not become a rallying point or a focal point for our fellowship or meetings. This is laying another foundation. It is against the teaching of God. When we lay another foundation, we automatically exclude some of Christ's own. There will always be someone who cannot agree with the truth which we have seen.

Once we lay another foundation we begin to divide the Church of God. Again we have the situation of one saying, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Christ." These early Christians were laying another basis for their fellowship one with another. They too were establishing a secondary reason for their fellowship one with another. They were dividing into different camps and rallying around something other than Jesus Christ. Such behavior divided the church then and it divides it still today.

In order to have unity, we must have the proper foundation; and this foundation is our Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing else will do, no matter how good it may seem to be. I know of one group of Christians, for example, who have attempted to base their fellowship on what they called the "ground of unity." They believed that if Christians would only agree to be one in every city and meet together on this basis, unity would result. How subtly appealing this may sound to the human ear. But from God's point of view, this foundation cannot possibly support the church that He is building. Christians cannot even agree about unity.

Foundations of this type are weak and human. God's foundation, Jesus Christ, is secure and everlasting. We can depend on Him. We can rest assured that in Him we have a sure foundation. Though He is invisible and we cannot see Him, yet by faith we know that He is the Rock upon which we stand. If we cleave to Him and to Him alone, we will have the proper basis for our experience of the church.

We must discuss here, in order to have a complete understanding of this subject, the problem of saying, "I am of Christ." This is also a problem that the church of Corinth was having. There is a great deal of difference between basing our fellowship on Jesus Christ and saying, "I am of Christ" in an exclusive way. What this group of Corinthian believers was doing was separating themselves from other brethren who did not understand that Jesus Christ was the only foundation of the church. They perhaps thought something like this: "These other brothers are saying they are of Paul, or they are of Apollos; but we are of Jesus Christ—we are doing things the right way. We are more enlightened! Therefore, we are not of these other people. We will not be with them and we will not fellowship with them because they are wrong." Excluding other brethren who are wrong about certain things is a tremendous problem today. This is a problem of saying, "I am of Christ."

Once we see that Jesus Christ is the only proper foundation for the church, we must live in this light. Yet we must be careful not to divide ourselves from, or exclude other brethren from our midst who do not have this spiritual understanding. This is to make the same mistake as the early Corinthians and to say "I am of Christ." All believers are of Jesus Christ. We have been born of Him, we are begotten by Him, and we must stand firmly upon Him as our foundation. Yet to exclude other brethren who have laid a different foundation is wrong and divisive and disrupts the unity in the church.

It is difficult to over-emphasize the importance of having the proper foundation for our experience of the church life. Without it we can only promote confusion and division. We must agree that God knows what He is doing. He has established Jesus Christ as the solid and sure foundation for our building. Let us cling to Him and establish ourselves firmly upon Him so that when things begin to be shaken, what we have been building will remain.

When we build upon another foundation, we begin to build something other than the church. Once we establish another basis for our meetings and our church experience, whatever we build upon it cannot be pleasing to God. Jesus Christ is the one with whom the Father is well pleased (Matt 17:5). Whatever we can do or whatever we can produce outside of Him, no matter how good it may seem to be, does not satisfy the Father. In the Bible we read that our righteousness is as filthy rags to Him (Is 64:6). In another place we read about many people appearing before the throne of God and claiming to have done many wonderful works in Jesus' name. Yet we find God Himself disavowing them and what they had done (Matt 7:22-23).

We should take earnest heed therefore to what we are doing and have a certain amount of fear within us that what we are producing for God would really be of God. Apart from Him we may be able to establish and build up some kind of "religious" organization. Perhaps we may achieve great membership and have many enjoyable activities. Yet, if we have been constructing all this on any kind of foundation other than Jesus Christ, it is worth nothing. And it is not really the church which we have been building.

The church is not a religious social club or some kind of spiritual toastmaster's organization. The church is the living body of Jesus Christ. She is a wonderful, spiritual building which God is constructing. How essential it is that when we are building with Him—and the Bible says that we are laborers together with God—that we are building according to His blueprint and His plan. It should be one of our greatest concerns that when we appear before Him, our work would be found to be approved.

If, through His mercy, God enlightens us and exposes us about any of the

activities with which we are involved, we should be careful to heed Him. We should be willing to stop anything and everything we might be doing which is not on a firm foundation of Jesus Christ alone. There may be a great need for us to disentangle ourselves from the web of spiritual unreality and renew our hearts toward God. May we not be tempted to justify anything which God has not ordained and is not according to His scriptures. Our part is rather to humble ourselves before God, confess our sin and our blindness, and begin to work according to His will.

Yet some may say, "What is so terrible about division? Of necessity, the people of God will always have to meet in many different places. What is all the fuss about other foundations?" Since questions such as these are very likely to be raised, let us study the answer carefully.

Jesus Christ is living in His body. By His life, He is causing all the members of His body to function and to build one another up. It is through the functions and ministries of all the members that the body is built up and perfected. According to Ephesians 4:16, the body is built up by "that which every joint supplieth." When Christ's body is splintered and divided up among many different groups, factions and denominations, this supply of life from each member to the others is interrupted. In this way, the daily ministering one to another which is necessary for our growth is hindered and the body damaged.

Another problem that division causes is that it stifles the expression of Jesus Christ on the earth. Since we, the believers in Christ, are to be expressing Him to the world, we need to be experiencing unity. Just as the human body, if it were to be divided up in many parts, would be unable to properly show forth the life which it contains, so it is with the body of Christ. When all the members of His body are fragmented and separated one from another, the full expression of His life is damaged. How can the unbelieving world be expected to see Christ, with all His love and glory, when His children are fighting and arguing with one another?

Perhaps some may think they are doing just fine in a divided state. This only shows that they have little understanding of the body of Christ. Although our experience may be good and God is doing some work in our midst, perhaps we should consider how much more He could be doing if only we would allow Him to work through us in the way of unity. What a glorious expression of His life there would be! How much more He could be seen and outpoured in our midst. And, how much more of a powerful effect the church could have on the unbelieving world today. The conversion of sinners and the saving of souls would be the abundant fruit of such glorious unity.

Let us not be deceived into thinking that what we have experienced is all there is. God is able to do much more than we ask or think. If only we will align ourselves with His will and commit our lives to obey Him in what He is doing, we will begin to experience unity with all Christians in His body.

## THE CONTENT OF THE CHURCH

*"And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Gen 2:23*

Long ago in the garden of Eden, God created man. And from this man, the scriptures tell us, He made (Heb. "builded") a woman. This woman was fashioned entirely from ingredients that came out of the man. While the man himself was formed from the dust of the ground, the woman, his wife to be, was made only from materials that came from him. When this woman was completed, she was given to the first man as his bride. Thus, in the beginning of the Bible, we have shown to us a type of something that will be happening at the end of time. This event is that of another man, Jesus Christ the Son of God, receiving His bride, the Church.

Although these two events are separated by much time, there are many similarities. The one similarity that we would like to emphasize here is that the Church, the bride of Christ, is also made entirely of what has come out of Jesus Christ. He is the origin of all that she is. There is nothing outside of Him that God is using to build the Church of God today. Only that which originates in Jesus Christ is good for God's building. This truth should carry for us a very important message and meaning. We must be careful when we are building the church today that we are using the right material. We want to be building with a kind of substance that will last for eternity.

Practically speaking, Jesus Christ is apprehended or known by us today through the Holy Spirit. Apart from the Holy Spirit, it is impossible to know Him. He Himself has ascended into the heavens and is seated on the right hand of God. Yet He has shed forth, or poured out, His Spirit upon us. It is through this same Spirit that we know Him, experience Him, and follow Him. So it is also through the leading of the Holy Spirit that we are building the church today. This means that, in order to be genuine, our church experience must come from the Holy Spirit.

To become members of the Church initially, we had to have an experience of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. To continue to experience the church, we must continue to know and follow this same Holy Spirit every day. This is the only way that we can see and know the reality of the church. Without the Holy Spirit, there can be no church. Any works that we do, no matter how good they may be, cannot qualify as being really "church." We may visit the sick, give all our money away, perhaps sing many hymns, attend many meetings, and hear many sermons. Yet if all our activity is not led of and prompted by the Holy Spirit, it is not really "church." All our efforts can amount to outside of the Holy Spirit are quasi-religious activity. How we need to learn to know the Holy Spirit! We need to walk in the Spirit; move in the Spirit; and let our

actions, deeds and words be prompted by Him. By so doing, we can begin to experience the church in a real way.

This principle of the Holy Spirit being the originator and the builder of the Church is of foremost importance. It is one of the main tenets of the New Testament. Ephesians 2:22 plainly states that we are being "built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." If we do not understand this principle, we will have great difficulty knowing and enjoying the body of Christ. Without Him we can only grope our way along blindly, occasionally stumbling across the will of God or any kind of real church experience.

On the other hand, once we grasp this spiritual reality, a whole new vista of the church will be open to us. We can become a vital part of what God is doing. Our efforts no longer need to be misdirected or futile. Simply by following the leading of the Holy Spirit and being obedient to Him we can be building up the church today. This is one of the singularly most important aspects of the church which we need to see. If we grasp nothing else—if you understand nothing else from this reading—this is the main point to receive. That is, the church is composed only of what comes out from Jesus Christ; and this is conveyed to us today through the Holy Spirit.

This truth may have a profound effect upon us as we continue on with the Lord. If our church experience to this date has been highly organized and structured, perhaps the essential element of the Holy Spirit has been left out. Perhaps much of what we have known as the "church" has only been the ideas, programs and organizations of men. It is possible that many of you have not found your church experience satisfying. This could well be the reason. The church is actually one of the most rewarding, satisfying things in which a believer can participate. After Jesus Christ, she should be our main priority. Building her up in various ways—by evangelism, pastoring, teaching, by all the different workings of the body of Christ—should be our goal. Helping her grow and mature in the Lord, seeing her being purified and made ready to someday marry Jesus Christ the Son of God, is our privilege. Someday we will be a part of that wedding. May we spend our time here on earth preparing.

The Church of Jesus Christ is a supernatural entity. Though the visible church is made up of men in human bodies, inwardly there is divine glory. She is a great spiritual reality which is waiting to be manifested when God is ready. The Bible teaches us that the whole creation groans in travail until now, just waiting for the manifestation, or the unveiling of the sons of God (Rom 8:19,22). This is our destiny. This is what we have to look forward to. May we turn our eyes to see what God is doing, and become a part of what He is doing. Let us work together with Him to produce the Church which He will inhabit for eternity.

## CHURCH MEETINGS

*"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."* Heb 10:25

The fact that the reality of the church can only be experienced through the Holy Spirit has several practical applications. One of the most obvious of these applications has to do with our church meetings. Meetings of the church must be in the Holy Spirit. To be in the Holy Spirit means that they must be full of the Holy Spirit and they must be led by the Holy Spirit. Only this kind of church meeting will be truly satisfying to us. Only this kind of meeting is pleasing to God. If our meetings do not meet these criteria, then they do not qualify as being genuine church meetings.

These statements may seem rather strong. Yet this is exactly what the Bible teaches. When Jesus was talking to the woman at the well, He made some statements which are very interesting. In response to this woman's inquiry about the proper way to worship God, He replied: "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:23,24)." These verses still speak to us today. Here God has plainly told us that our worship (both individual and in meetings) must have this spiritual quality. We the members of His body, must be in the Spirit\* to be genuinely worshipping God.

Another verse, Philippians 3:3, also strongly bears out this truth. Paul says that "we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit...and have no confidence in the flesh (that is, in the outward things)."

Being "in the Spirit" requires firstly that our hearts be open to God through Jesus Christ. When we enter a Christian meeting, we should also open our hearts to the heavenly Father and seek Him that He could fill us and minister to us. We should also from our spirit pour out our worship and our praise to Him. Without opening our heart, our spirit, and in fact our whole being to God, it is impossible to be genuinely worshipping. Merely going through the motions of certain rituals or ceremonies is of no value. To God, this empty worship is not pleasing. We must be experiencing the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst.

Some may say: "Is it not enough simply to be meeting in Jesus' name? Must we also be in the Spirit? Does not the Bible teach us that wherever two or three are gathered together in the name of Jesus, there He is in the midst (Mt 18:20)?" It is true that Jesus promises in His Word that when we meet in His name, His presence will be

there among us. However, in order to properly understand what this means, we must thoroughly investigate what it means to be meeting in Jesus' name.

\*NOTE: In the Bible it is often difficult to distinguish between the big "S" Spirit (the Holy Spirit) and the little "s" spirit (the human spirit). Due to the fact that the original Greek language has only capital letters, there was no way for the translators to differentiate between the two except from the context. Yet in many cases even the context does not make it clear which word is intended. The problem is further complicated because of the mysterious union of God's Spirit with man's which occurs at the new birth. John 3:6 states that "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." It is our human spirit which is born of the Holy Spirit when we receive the Lord. I Corinthians 6:17 further amplifies this point by saying: "But he that is joined unto the the Lord is one spirit." From this it should be evident that it is impossible to be in, or worship in, the spirit without being in the Spirit also.

The Person of Jesus is intimately associated with His name. Apart from the person and the reality of Jesus Christ, the name Jesus means nothing. Therefore, to be or to meet in Jesus' name means to meet in Jesus. Let us read one simple verse to illustrate this point. In John 1:12 we read: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." These people, who believed on the name of Jesus, believed on Jesus. They did not believe upon some name separate from the person of Jesus Christ. There is no way to separate the name of Jesus from Himself. From this discussion, we should be able to see that to meet in Jesus' name means to enter into the person and reality of Jesus. When we enter into Him, then we are genuinely meeting in His name.

As we have previously discussed, to enter into Jesus means to enter into the Holy Spirit, because Jesus Christ today is known and apprehended through the Holy Spirit. It is only by the Holy Spirit that we can experience Jesus in any real way. The Bible says in II Corinthians 3:17, "Now the Lord is that Spirit." Today, the reality of the Lord Jesus is in the Spirit. He "is that Spirit." And we must be in that Spirit to be in Him. This is what the Bible refers to as meeting in His "name." It is the only way we can be genuinely worshipping.

Not only should our church meetings be conducted in the Holy Spirit; but in any church meeting the members of Christ's body must be open to the Holy Spirit's leading. He is the one who should be leading and directing our church meetings. We do not need a "program" or a "schedule." Such things only hinder and confine Him. What we do need, however, is for each member to be open and sensitive to His leading. Every member of His body must be in living contact with Him during the meeting so that they can discern what He would have them to do. The result of this kind of openness and sensitivity among worshippers will be meetings which are more in tune with and full of the Holy Spirit. Since God is seeking this kind of worship, when He finds it, His blessing will be upon it. Let us therefore obey Him and submit ourselves to Him so that we may be partaking of this blessing.

Participation in New Testament church meetings was the responsibility of every member. I Corinthians 14:26 reads: "when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying." Here we see that each member of the body has a portion and a part in church meetings. Each one must have the opportunity to share. When this opportunity for every member to function is taken away, the leading, moving and operation of the Holy Spirit is limited. He is thereby confined to work only in predetermined ways. The effect of this will be to put a damper on our church meetings.

Thus, the Holy Spirit is quenched. When the functioning of the members of the body is limited, it becomes difficult to have truly spiritual meetings. We begin to fail to meet the requirements of the New Testament, which is to worship in Spirit and in truth. And when the Holy Spirit is lacking, so are our meetings.

Yes, there must be some control and authority in church meetings. The authority of the Holy Spirit is an essential ingredient. In order to maintain this authority, there must be those present in every meeting who have much experience and knowledge of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. There must be members present who know the Lord's authority and are able to convey this authority to the church meeting (usually this authority rests upon the apostles, prophets and teachers). In this way, God's authority—His control over meetings—is manifested through those members of the body who can discern and transmit His authority.

A church meeting should not be chaotic. We know that the scripture exhorts us that everything be done decently and in order (I Cor 14:40). Decency and order, however, are not contrary to the leading of the Holy Spirit. We only must be sensitive to His leading and have some in our midst who know His authority and are able to channel the meeting in the direction of the Holy Spirit's leading. Church meetings which are conducted in this way give much opportunity for God to accomplish His purposes. He knows every need of each individual in a meeting. As He prompts the members of His body to teach and preach, testify, sing, or pray, ministry comes forth from Him. Through this ministry, He is able to meet each need and speak to each individual. He is able to minister to His body through the members of His body. This is an essential element of New Testament Christianity. Anything which deprives the Holy Spirit of this authority is not of God and is a hindrance to the proper functioning of Christ's body.

As you may have already realized, church meetings generally do not need to be of great size. It is not necessary to gather hundreds of Christians together into one place. Having great numbers of Christians gather together does not always enhance church meetings. In order for each member of the body to have the opportunity to function, it would seem that meetings should normally be of a smaller size. One brother I know recommended that church meetings be what he referred to as "lamb size" meetings. This concept is from the Old Testament in the book of Exodus, where the children of Israel were instructed to slay a lamb and to eat it together. They were supposed to invite enough people to their house so that everyone could partake, and also so that there wouldn't be anything left over. This brother thought that church meetings should be of such a size that everyone would be able to participate and get fed. Of course there is no scriptural regulation concerning the size of Christian meetings. Yet the principle of each member functioning is indispensable.

There is no doubt that the church often may have special kinds of meetings which are of a larger size. In the book of Acts, we have a record of one such incident. When the Apostle Paul came to the city of Troas, he preached to a whole roomful of people, evidently all night. This was a special kind of a meeting for the purpose of ministry. Here was an anointed apostle of God who had come to town on this special occasion. The believers wanted to spend as much time listening to his preaching as possible in order to receive as much from him as they could. So today in the church, there are many special kinds of ministry. On some occasions the church of God should gather in larger numbers to worship and to receive from ministries. However, on a more regular basis, we as believers need to be gathering together to worship, pray, and receive ministering from the Holy Spirit in smaller numbers.

So we see there are actually two general types of public Christian meetings. There are "church" meetings where the body of Christ is expressed and all the members have opportunity to minister one to another. There are also "ministry" meetings where special ministers perform their ministry. (Interestingly, most Christian meetings today would seem to be closer to the second type of meeting than the first. In many Christian gatherings there is little expression of the body of Christ. Yet this is what most consider "church." In reality such meetings are not much like the scriptural idea of church meetings, but are special meetings for the purpose of ministry.)

## THE DAILY LIFE OF THE CHURCH

*"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Mt 16:24*

Every Christian is a member of the same Church. This membership has been bought for them at a great price. The supreme sacrifice of God's only Son on the cross of Calvary and the shedding of His blood to redeem us has purchased our membership in this holy organization. There is no other way for anyone to join it. Nothing we can do apart from receiving cleansing by the blood of Jesus Christ can get us in. Beyond this, there is no further joining or obtaining of membership in any "church" organization which is either scriptural or necessary. There is no need for any Christian to "join a church." Every true believer is already a member of the only Church that there is or ever will be (Eph 4:4).

Firstly, every believer's membership is with the Church universally. Secondly, every believer is a member of that smaller part of this universal Church which is in his immediate geographical area. He is a member of the church in his city. Further down the line, every believer is a member of that group of Christians with whom he meets. Although this final state of membership is the one to which we usually pay the most attention, actually it is only the consequence of our being a member of the larger group called "the body of Christ." Our membership in the smaller group with whom we meet is only the result of being a member in the Church as a whole. This reality should govern our understanding of the subject of membership. First we are members of the body of Christ generally. After that, and solely because of that, are we members of any special group or church meeting. Therefore our responsibility is not only to those with whom we meet specifically, but to all Christians in the whole body generally.

In order to convey this proper understanding, perhaps it would be best not to say that we are a member of "a" church.\* All of us, as Christians, are members of "the" Church. And, since "the" Church is divided up both physically and geographically, we are also members of that part of "the" Church which meets in a certain place. In the Bible we read of "the" church in a city or "the" church in a house. However, we never read of "a" church anywhere in the scriptures. Although grammatically the phrase "a church" could be a proper usage, spiritually speaking it conveys a wrong impression.

Since the Bible does use the plural of the word "church," that is, "churches," it would be grammatically correct to use the phrase "a church." Yet, let us also notice that this word "churches" never refers to many churches in one city but only to many cities with one church. As mentioned in the note in chapter four, geographically the Church is divided into churches, but locally the church is only separated into church meetings.

To call something "a" church implies very strongly that it is complete within itself. The word "a" also suggests that it is somehow different than, and separate from, all others. Such a concept stands in direct opposition to the teaching of the New Testament scriptures. Therefore, since the phrase "a church" conveys an erroneous impression, it ought to be avoided. Truthfully though, the problems do not lie with our terminology but with our spiritual understanding. While the one Church is expressed in many places and in a variety of ways, it is still the same Church.

By saying all this, I certainly don't imagine that all Christians will rearrange their vocabulary and never refer to something as "a" church. My hope is only that some will see something beyond the sectarian situation which exists today, and perhaps begin to live in a more unified, loving way. With this view, we will begin to experience and practice more of the reality of the church. Eventually, such a change may even alter our vocabulary.

Experiencing the reality of the church, of course, is not at all subject to terminology. The only reason I bring up this distinction is that so often our understanding of words veils us and thereby hinders us from experiencing the truth. Let us therefore diligently seek God, so that we could be experiencing "the" church: in our city, in our homes, in our church meetings—in reality.

Not only are all Christians members of the Church generally, and members of some meeting specifically, we are also members one of another (Eph 4:25). We have been inseparably joined by God one to another. Every believer, whether or not we know him and have daily association with him, has been joined to us and we to him. This is a real, practical daily membership that we all need to be experiencing. There is a spiritual membership which we have with everyone in the entire body, and also a very practical daily membership which we have with those Christians with whom we fellowship.

This fact has a very important application, and that is that the church life needs to be experienced and practiced daily. Every day, we should be doing something for our Lord Jesus Christ in conjunction with other members of His body. Perhaps it is not possible every single day for each of us to associate with other Christians. Yet this does not negate the fact that our Christianity and our experience of the church should be daily rather than weekly or monthly. Every day, we should have some opportunity to fellowship, pray, sing or serve the Lord with other believers. We should experience the church every day.

This idea is not something new. The daily church life was the experience of the early Christians also. In the book of Acts we read: "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:46,47)." Here we see the early believers enjoying and experiencing Jesus Christ every day and this enjoyment having its expression in their daily church living. Jesus Christ, and what He was doing in their midst, had become the focus and the central point of their lives. His salvation and His working in their lives had so consumed their thoughts and their time that they were daily loving and serving Him together in a real, practical way. What a testimony this is for all believers today. How we too need such an experience.

Perhaps the main thing we lack is consecration. If we are to have this kind of wonderful, living, enjoyable church, we need to be consecrated to Jesus Christ and

submitted to Him completely. In this way we can be a vital part of what He is doing. In Romans 12, verse 1, we read: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Our part is to present our bodies. We must have our entire being yielded to God so that He is able to use us, live in us, and move us to be a part of what He is doing.

As long as we are living for ourselves and interested in God only secondarily, it is going to be difficult for us to be participating in the church every day. How we need to be seeking Him every day for what we can be doing in His church! Our attitude, according to the verse which we read in Romans, should be that we are a living sacrifice. A sacrifice is something which was placed upon the altar and totally consumed by fire. This shows us that we should cultivate the attitude within ourselves that we belong wholly to God. In order for Him to use us effectively, we need this kind of commitment. We should hold nothing back from Him so that He can have His way in our lives completely.

Such an attitude of consecration will enable us to begin experiencing the church. One result of this consecration may be that we will find it necessary to rearrange our priorities. Jesus Christ and our part in His body, needs to have first place in our lives. In all things, He should have the pre-eminence. Where we work, what we do during the day, with whom we associate, and many other things should all be subjected to Him. Instead of arranging our lives for ourselves the way we would like them to be, and then trying to fit Christ and a little bit of the church in also, let us first seek God's will for our lives, and how He would have us be functioning in His body. And then let us take a job, buy a house, raise a family, according to what would help us best accomplish this purpose.

If we live so that everything we do is for Christ and for His church, many of our decisions in life become simpler. Also, our ability to understand and to know God's will increases greatly. The reason for this is obvious. Without our being distracted with so many other things, it becomes easier for us to hear the voice of the Lord. Let us therefore put self, concern for self, and living for self aside, and begin to live for Jesus Christ only. Then, the scriptures teach us, these other things will be added unto us. The other things which are necessary for our daily living will follow in due course. If we would only set our minds to do God's will and to live daily in the church according to His leading, we will enjoy a great blessing. God will see to it that we have the other things which we need.

Another item which is necessary in order to experience the church life is the leading of the Holy Spirit. Just as our church meetings should be led by the Holy Spirit, so it should be with our daily living. Every day we should walk in the Spirit. We need to seek God through Jesus Christ to be full of the Holy Spirit; and as we are filled with the Holy Spirit, to walk according to His leading. As He leads, we will begin to experience and enjoy the reality of the church.

Jesus Christ has much work for us to do every day. In the scriptures we find several lists of functions which the believers might do. Giving, helping, ruling, administrating, showing mercy, healing, and so on, are just a part of the many spiritual activities which we as believers can be doing daily (see Rom 12:6-8, I Cor 12:28,29). There are many functions and ministries for each one of us in the body. All of them are something which we need to do every day. As we walk in the Spirit, He will lead us to be fulfilling these many duties and responsibilities. Perhaps He will simply lead us to call another believer on the phone for some fellowship. Perhaps He will lead us to pray

with someone, visit the sick, or go with another believer to share the gospel with the unsaved. There are an unlimited number of possibilities. Our part is to seek God and be obedient.

God is still working (Jn 5:17). As we follow Him every day, He will also lead us to have contact with the other members of His body and to be working with them and for them. We can be co-workers together with God to accomplish His purposes on the earth. In this way, we can help build up the Church and prepare His bride for that great wedding day.

In order to do this, we do not need to have someone telling us what to do. We also do not need a man in some position of authority to direct our movements. We need only to walk in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. There is also no need to be a member of some kind of human organization in order to have something to do. God has so much work for us to do today: there are still many unsaved, there are still so many needs in the world and in the church today for us to meet. Surely as we open to the Holy Spirit, He will lead us to accomplish some of these things for Him and He will also empower us to do them.

Another important facet of the church is that when each member is sensitive and obedient to the head, all the members of the whole body will be coordinated. Just as the human body, when it is functioning properly, is completely coordinated, synchronized and performs perfectly that which the head directs it to do, so it is with the body of Christ. There is no need to try to gather all Christians under one man's leadership or an organizational structure in order for their efforts to be effective. All we need is for each member to be sensitive and obedient to the leadership of Jesus Christ, and then the whole of His body will be expressing Him in a coordinated way.

May we consecrate ourselves to Jesus Christ today, seek Him that He could rearrange our priorities, and daily walk with Him in the Spirit to be fulfilling what He wants us to do. Let us realize that there is much work for each of us to do. If God would open our eyes so that we could see the tremendous need around us, our hearts would be overwhelmed. No doubt He would love to meet many of these needs through us individually and corporately, if we would only be open to His leading.

There are so many shortages in the church that need to be filled. Teaching, ministering and helping of every variety need to be done continually. Also in the world as a whole, there is a great need for the love of God to be shed abroad. As we open to Him, no doubt He will fill us with His Spirit and lead us to begin to experience the church in this way every day.

As you can probably see from what we have been discussing, the daily church life comprises the bulk of a proper church experience. Church meetings are actually a very small part of the church. Essential though they may be, they are only a smaller part of the total experience of the church. The daily church life, the daily walking in the Holy Spirit and living and ministering according to His leading, is actually the greater part of the church. Without a daily church life, our meetings will be shallow and empty. Unless we have a daily walk with Jesus Christ and contact with and experience of His body, we will have very little of Him in our church meetings.

An excellent example of this principle is found in an Old Testament feast: the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost (Ex 34:22, Lev 23:15-17). When the Hebrew people came to this feast, they brought with them the first fruits of their labors. They brought the tithes and offerings of their wheat, of their flocks, and of all that they had been working on and growing during the year. Thus when they came together to worship and make their offerings to the Lord, they did not come empty handed. They brought something

of the fruit of their labor during the year.

This feast is a marvelous type of what our Christian meetings should be. Each one of us needs to be laboring in Christ during the week, so that when we gather together we will have some fruit to offer both to the Lord and to the other brethren at the meeting. In this way, our meetings will be rich and full of the substance of Christ.

Believers must have a daily living church experience. The living out of Christ's life by His members is the genuine expression of the church today.

## ELDERS

*"They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not."*  
Hosea 8:4

Elders are an essential part of the church life. God has given them to the church for her benefit. Without their function and ministry, it would be very difficult for the church to operate properly. Unfortunately, misunderstanding and abuse of this God-ordained work may instead create problems in the church. Many of these problems stem from the fact that too often men do not understand God's plan for elders and begin to function in ways which are detrimental to the body. Let us therefore spend a little time to investigate exactly what an elder should be.

Chiefly, an elder's job is to shepherd the flock of God. In order for us to better understand this, let us break down the concept of shepherding into three sub-functions or smaller categories. A proper shepherd must be able to do three things. First of all, he must oversee or watch over the flock. This means that he is to watch diligently and carefully to make sure nothing evil or destructive happens to any of the members of the flock which are under his care.

The word "overseer," which is found in Acts 20:28, is exactly the same word in the Greek language as that which is translated "bishop" in other places. This word in the original Greek is "EPISKOPOS" and means literally "to watch over." Such overseeing is not the same as that which we would associate with an overseer of slaves or a taskmaster who may exercise dictatorial powers. It is perhaps more akin to the job of a security guard who watches out for and protects certain property. Thus, the first responsibility of an elder is to watch over and protect the church of God.

The second duty of an elder is to lead. "To lead" means "to go before" the flock in all things. An elder must walk with the Lord in such a way that the flock can see his example and follow. To lead a flock does not mean to get behind the sheep and drive them in the direction that we think they should be going. Nor does it mean to regulate or control the lives of any individuals. This leading occurs when an elder has taken it upon himself to walk purely and rightly towards the goal to which God has directed him. By seeing his example, the flock will be able to follow (I Pet 5:3).

In the King James version of the Bible, we have the word "rule" applied to the position of an elder. We read in I Timothy, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour (I Tim 5:17)." This word "rule" has perhaps misguided or misled some in their understanding of eldership. This word in the Greek is "PROISTEMI." According to Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, this word literally means "to stand before; hence, to lead." Such leading is not what we as Americans

would generally associate with the idea of ruling. Our concept is probably the kind of ruling that a king might do. This could basically be described as "controlling," "lording it over," or "reigning" over the flock.,

Biblically, the word merely means to "stand out in front of" and "to lead" the flock of God in the way they should be going. No thought of commanding or controlling is conveyed. Understanding the work of an elder in this way should help eliminate many problems with men abusing and misusing the authority as an elder which God has given them.

The third function and responsibility of an elder is to feed the flock of God (I Pet 5:2). In order to fulfill this responsibility, an elder must have an intimate relationship with God and a thorough understanding of His holy Word. Feeding is accomplished through teaching, and teaching must be the result of an elder's personal experience with the Father. Without such experience, it is impossible for any teacher to convey nourishment. No one can impart to another anything more than they themselves possess. Therefore, a true elder will have a close association with God so that he may feed the flock of God properly.

In the New Testament, elders are not associated per se with church meetings. They are associated with the church as a whole—with the entire body of Christ in each city (Tit 1:5). Nowhere do we find elders appointed for each church meeting. In fact, as far as we can see from the New Testament, elders have no specific function at all in the church meetings. Their ministry is largely outside the meetings. Theirs is a general ministry to the body of Christ as a whole. Although some elders do function quite frequently in church meetings, they are those who have other gifts as well. Perhaps they are also prophets or teachers, or have other gifts of ministry. Such elders may be prominent individuals in church meetings; however, their eldership is not something for meetings but for the daily shepherding of the sheep.

Since some believers will no doubt raise the question of an elder's jurisdiction, it seems appropriate to discuss this idea briefly. An elder's authority does extend beyond those members of Christ's body with whom he meets. He is responsible to God for all of the body of Christ with whom he has any intimate contact. His jurisdiction extends to all believers whom he knows and with whom he associates frequently. Some have pointed out that an elder's authority should not extend beyond the boundaries of a city. Such a situation is found in the Roman Catholic Church where we have bishops ruling over larger areas. To say such a thing should really not be necessary. There is no need for an elder to try to shepherd sheep with whom he has no contact or knowledge. A shepherd can only shepherd sheep whom he knows and who know him. These are the only ones that he can properly lead in the Lord. Therefore, simple practicality limits an elder's authority and jurisdiction. Let us remember, however, that this in no way indicates that such responsibility is limited to those with whom he meets.

It should be mentioned here that elders who are functioning properly will have some contact and association with other true elders in their vicinity. These men must cooperate and be in fellowship with one another to lead the church in a proper way. Such loving cooperation will greatly benefit Christ's body. There is no need for elders to compete amongst themselves for followers. If their hearts are right with God and their concern only for Him, this will never be a problem. May those in positions of leadership be careful not to lead the sheep astray through petty strife or jealousy.

For obvious practical reasons, it is essential for all of the flock of God to know who the elders are. This must be why the Holy Spirit, working through the Apostle Paul, appointed elders or had them appointed in every church (Acts 14:23). It is of the

utmost necessity that Christians know the elders so that they may benefit from them. For this reason Paul, through the Holy Spirit, pointed out who these men were.\* The sheep need this knowledge. They need to realize who it is that they can look to for leadership and guidance, and who they can go to for wise, mature fellowship and counsel.

Elders are men who are appointed by God. This fact is of foremost importance if we are to properly under

\*NOTE: The word "ordain" in Titus 1:5 is the Greek word "KATHISTEMI," which can also be translated "appoint." "Not a formal, ecclesiastical ordination is in view, but the appointment for the recognition of the churches of those who have already been raised up and qualified by the Holy Spirit, and have given evidence of this in their life and service." VINE

stand eldership. The appointment of elders comes from the Holy Spirit and not from men. Since God is placing the members in the body as it pleases Him, He is the one to do the choosing. He is the one building the church. So it is that we should be led through the Holy Spirit to appoint elders. In fact, these men were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, as were we all. Part of His plan was to make certain men with the life, the maturity, the understanding, and all of the other qualifications necessary for eldership.\*

After these men are born again, have gained some experience of His life, and have a history of faithfulness, God sees to it that they are appointed to be elders. Elders who have been appointed only by man and not according to the will of God, mean nothing and can do nothing. Their appointment only confuses the situation in the church and makes it more difficult for people to understand and follow Christ. In order to properly experience the church today, we need to understand eldership correctly. We must understand their calling, their appointment and their ministry. Let us also be careful not to appoint elders only for our specific meeting or group, so that we do not create additional division and confusion in the body of Christ.

Some have insisted that the elders must be appointed by apostles. This does seem to be the experience of the New Testament believers. It is logical that God would use those most sensitive to His authority to make this appointment. However in these days, when the apostles are not generally recognized, absolute insistence upon this method does not seem to be practicable. God will not be bound by any outward forms. The crucial thing is that the elder's appointment originates with God and not the instruments through whom the appointment is made.

\*NOTE: The words "bishop" and "overseer" are translations of exactly the same word in the Greek language, which is "EPISKOPOS." This word means literally "to look or watch over." The term "elder" comes from the Greek word "PRESBUTEROS," which is an adjective used when referring to an old man. The word "elder," therefore, denotes maturity and spiritual experience while the words "bishop" and "overseer" indicate the nature of the work being done.

**CHURCH GOVERNMENT, ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION**

*"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."* Jn 3:8

No book about the church would really be complete without the author addressing such subjects as church government, church organization and church administration. Therefore we are going to take some time to discuss these subjects from a scriptural point of view.

In the Old Testament, everything which pertained to the service and worship of God was clearly defined and laid out in order by God for the Jews. When they should worship, how they should worship, where they should worship, and many other related things were all carefully explained to them. The office of the priests, all their functions, their garments, their duties, how they should live—everything was delineated step by step, point by point for them. The same was true of the Jews' worship. The offerings they were to bring and the way in which they were to offer these sacrifices were carefully ordered. Even the tabernacle itself, with all the different items and objects it contained was organized in detail by God. In short, everything pertaining to the worship and service of God was structured and organized in the minutest detail. There need not be any question among the Jews as to how, when or where they should worship God.

In striking contrast to this we find in the New Testament that things simply are not that way. There is no detailed, step-by-step set of instructions laid out for us which show us how we should proceed with the practice of the church life and with the various administrations and operations of the church. Although by reading the New Testament and learning what the early apostles did we can pick out a few details of how they practiced the church life, yet no clear step-by-step, point-by-point organizational structure such as we have in the Old Testament is ever prescribed in the New. Perhaps the closest thing we have to something of this nature in the New Testament is the Apostle Paul's instruction to Timothy concerning the qualifications of elders and ministers.

Since there is no such formal exposition of the structure and organization of the church in the New Testament, men when they read the scriptures often have perceived things quite differently. This fact is well illustrated by the situation among Christians today, many of whom are divided one from another on the basis of their disagreement about such things as church government, organization and administration. The Presbyterian Church, for example, is founded in part upon a particular view of the scriptural function and work of the presbyters or elders.

No doubt God has a very good reason for not prescribing to us an exact formula for the administration and organization of the church. Undoubtedly His purpose was not to be ambiguous or confusing. Perhaps there is some spiritual understanding we can obtain from this apparent lack of clearly defined organization and structure in the New Testament.

In order to have a scriptural understanding of these things and why God has not chosen to provide us with a detailed format for the church it will first be necessary to have a good understanding of two basic scriptural principles. These two principles are, number one: the life of God, which is living in His body; and number two: the headship of Jesus Christ by which He is leading His body. If God will grant to us a spiritual revelation of these two basic principles, we will then have a proper understanding of how the church should be organized, administered and governed today. How we need Him to open our inward eyes to see what He is doing.

Please allow me to spend a little time here elaborating on point number one. There are three Greek words in the New Testament which we in English translate "life." These words are "BIOS," "PSUCHE," AND "ZOE." Although these words have different meanings in the Greek language, in English they are translated by the same word, "life." The word, "BIOS," refers mainly to our means of maintaining our physical life or our "living." "PSUCHE" refers to our soul life, or our self life, and is also translated in some places, "self." The third word, "ZOE," as it is used in the New Testament, means "God's life." W.E. Vine, in his "Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words," defines "ZOE" as "life as God has it."

God really has life! In the scriptures we read: "In Him was life (ZOE) (Jn 1:4)." This "ZOE" life which God possesses, is an eternal, immutable, immeasurable, all-powerful, never-ceasing, life. His life is without beginning and it is without end. Did you realize that God never began, and also He will never have an end? He was never born and He cannot die! By definition, God's life is eternal. It is a kind of life which can withstand anything, create anything or do anything. This is the life which God possesses. And this is the kind of life to which the Bible is referring when it says "eternal life" (IONIAN ZOE; Gk).

All this is simply to say that God has a life, which before Jesus Christ came to the earth and died for our sins, no man, or any other creature in the universe possessed. Only He had it. But today, through His son Jesus Christ, God is sharing His own uncreated life with human beings! This fact is so grand and glorious that it is extremely difficult for the mind to even comprehend it. Yet, Jesus said: "I am come that they might have life (ZOE) (Jn 10:10)." Through Jesus Christ, this new life which had never before been given to men has been made available to us. The scripture reads: "For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life (IONIAN ZOE) (Jn 3:16)." ASV

So we see that every true believer has become a partaker of this divine life. Each one now has access to supernatural motivation and experience. God wants nothing more than for His people to be open to Him and to be full of His life. As each one is filled with new life and allows this life to live in them, they express Jesus Christ. This is the life of God living in His body.

Now let us go on to point number two, which is Christ as the Head, leading His body. The head is the part of a body which controls all the functions, movements and activities of the different members. It is the part that tells the mouth to speak, the feet to run or the hands to move. It is also the part that interprets what the eye sees and what the ear hears. The head is the organ that coordinates and leads every function of the

entire body.

As it is with the human body, so it is with Jesus Christ and His church today. He is our supreme authority. It is by His command that we work, live and minister in His body. He is the one who is to be leading and guiding every movement of every member.

Interestingly, no other member of the body of Christ is ever said to be the head. No other part of the body ever replaces this primary, important function of Jesus Christ. Even the greatest apostle in the church (aside from Jesus Christ) can never become the head of the body. No matter how gifted, how eloquent, or how endued with spiritual gifts and powers anyone may be, he can never be the head. All he can be is simply another member of the body.

While God may use the more spiritual members of His body to transmit His will and His leading to the other members, they never receive the authority or the power to initiate any movement or action themselves. No one but Jesus is the head of the body. The members' responsibility is simply to obey the leading which they receive from the head.

Now some may say, "What does all this have to do with church government, church administration and church organization?" Actually, these great truths are of the utmost importance to us if we are to properly understand how the church is to be operating. Every facet of the church's structure and operation must be through Christ's life and by His leading. The "church which is His body" is a living thing, not a machine or organization. Although it may appear to be highly structured, this is only the result of inward life. When we read the Bible, it is all too possible that we may only discern the outward form of the church and miss the inner content.

Please allow me to use an illustration to further clarify this all important point. When we look at a living human body we may notice many things about it which appear to be highly organized. When a hand moves to pick something up, the head turns to look in the same direction and the eyes focus on the object. When one foot moves ahead, the other foot follows it and the person walks. When the ears hear a sudden noise, the head immediately turns to look and see if there is danger. By examining a human body in this way we might perceive many types and levels of organization.

Yet, in our every day experience we rarely think of the body as being organized. Everyone realizes that the body acts as it does because it is full of life. The outward movements which it displays are simply the spontaneous result of the inward life. So it should be with the body of Christ. There is no need for men to govern, administrate or organize the church. In fact, one of the greatest needs of the church today is for men to stop their own organizing, governing and administrating and open up to God.

Unfortunately, many Christians do not realize these principles today. As they read the Bible, they think that they perceive some form of church organization or church government; and from this perception they begin to construct something which they believe to be the church. In spite of this prevailing methodology, God does not intend for things to be this way.

When Jesus Christ was on the earth with twelve (or should I say eleven) of His intimate associates whom we know as the twelve apostles, He no doubt had ample opportunity to explain to them all about the proper form of church government and organization. He had plenty of time to tell them how things should be arranged. He easily could have explained to them about the appointment of elders, the work of the apostles, the ministry of the deacons and all the different operations of the various parts

of the body. Yet, significantly, all He said was: "I am going away, but when I go, I won't leave you alone, but I will send the Holy Spirit, the Comforter to you; and when He is come, He will lead you into all truth (Jn 16:5-7,13)." This is the basis for all church government and organization today—the leading of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Interestingly enough, this is exactly the experience of the New Testament Fathers. When Jesus Christ died and rose again from the dead, He kept His promise and poured out the Holy Spirit upon them with power. After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit this same Spirit began to lead them into all truth. He began to reveal to them that there were elders. He began to reveal to those in the church of Jerusalem that they should appoint certain ministers to take care of the feeding of the widows. He began to reveal through the Apostle Paul the qualifications of men who should be elders. In short, He led them, step by step, day by day; and as He led them, the structure, the organization and the government of the church came forth. It was produced by the leading and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

Now, this is exactly the way church government, organization and administration should be happening today. Although we have an accurate Biblical record of what men of God were led by the Holy Spirit to do in the New Testament, it is not our job to try to reproduce this. It is our duty only to follow the Holy Spirit. The core, the basic message of the New Testament, is not what these men did, but how they did it. Who motivated them to do it? What was the source of their doing it? The key to understanding the entire New Testament is that God is living in the members of His body.

It may be altogether possible for us to manufacture something that would be similar to the things that we see in the New Testament. Yet, all we can produce is limited by our understanding of the truth. The other option is to simply do what the early apostles and church leaders did, and that is to follow faithfully the Holy Spirit in all of His leading. As we follow the Holy Spirit in His leading, the organization, the government and the administration of the church will come forth. It will be produced by the life of God, brought to us by the Holy Spirit being lived out through us. How we desperately need this experience today!

Some of you may think at this point that I am advocating throwing away the Bible. This is absolutely not true. The Bible, and especially the New Testament, is essential to us if we are to be rightly practicing the church life. However, we should not get the cart before the horse. We must not put the outward structures and formats which we think we perceive in the Bible ahead of the source of these things, which is God's life in the Holy Spirit. First, we must be full of God's life. Then, we must be led of the Holy Spirit. As He leads us to begin working, ministering and perhaps even organizing certain things in the church, we can check with the scriptures to see if what we are doing is in accordance with God's will. God's word is essential as our guide; for without it, we as men have no clear way of knowing whether or not what we are doing is of the Holy Spirit. No man is above being deceived. Therefore we need the scriptures as a guide, as a check and as a balance for us.

Another great value which we gain from the scriptures is to read what God did in the lives and church experience of the New Testament believers and to beseech God that He would lead us into the experience of these same things. Again, we do not need to strive to achieve them or to organize and manipulate other people to make things appear as we think they should be. We need only to seek God and ask Him that His Spirit would go before us and would lead us into the fulfillment of what we see. In this

way, our experience of the church life will be real and living and holy.

I realize that these subjects of church government, church administration, church organization, are very touchy ones. Great rifts and divisions in the church as Christ's body have been made because men perceive these things differently. Yet, the solution to these problems that have arisen is very simple. The name of the solution is Jesus Christ. To simply follow Him and to obey when He speaks or leads is to accurately and adequately express the church.

Although man has added to the church many things in all of these areas, and by doing so has kept Christians all over the world from experiencing the reality of Jesus Christ, still it is possible for believers today to walk in truth. We can walk in the Spirit, and the Bible promises us that He will lead us into the truth. May we so walk that God, when He comes, will find us doing what is right and pleasing to Him. May our motivation be the Holy Spirit and our source be Jesus Christ, so that our work and our church will be of that eternal substance which is going to endure for eternity.

## THE ADDED THINGS

*"...and (Hezekiah) brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan" II Kings 18:4*

In the eyes of many, the church bears little resemblance to that of early Christianity. Perhaps this is because man has added so many of his own ideas, inventions and theology to what God initiated in the beginning. All this, no doubt, has been done with the best of intentions. Man has simply been trying to help God. The unfortunate result of so much help is that the church has become full of many outward things. Many things have been added by man which have very little to do with God's plan or His purpose. Sadly, some of these things have actually become a hindrance to what God is doing and what He wants to do with His people. They have become a stumbling block to many and a detriment to those who want to have a living church experience.

There are many things which man has added to the church, but among them one of the deadliest is that of human organization. Please don't misunderstand me. I am not against organization. Almost everyone must realize that God can lead His people to organize certain works for Him in order to accomplish His purposes. Yet an organization can be dangerous because it seems to take on a life of its own. An organization may be initiated by the Holy Spirit working through men, but continue and perpetrate itself long after the presence of God has departed.

The natural man seems to reverence and give much weight to the way things have been done in the past. The "old" way of doing things seems very safe and secure. However, as we have been seeing, this attitude directly contradicts the principle of the body. This principle is that the Holy Spirit will lead each of His members daily into the works which He would have them to do. Organizations to accomplish the work of God are fine as long as the Holy Spirit has complete authority in them. The men who are involved in these organizations and who bear some responsibility in them, must be open to the Holy Spirit. He must be able to change the way they are operating or even disband them entirely. Jesus Christ has to be the Lord and the head of all that they are doing. Unfortunately, it is far too easy for men to shift their gaze from God to an earthly arrangement of how things should be accomplished.

Many worship services today fit very well into this category. Most of them are pre-planned, perhaps weeks in advance. Often there is very little room, if any, for the Holy Spirit to lead the different activities in these meetings. He is relegated to fitting Himself in wherever He can, rather than having the opportunity to be the author of everything.

The work of the church in many places is also highly structured and organized. Usually it has been that way for many years, and very often does not seem likely to change in the near future. Here again we see men permitting God to work only in the way which they have perceived Him for a long time, and having very little opening for the Holy Spirit to do new, living things in their midst. The end result of this situation is a religion which has a form of godliness—but very little content of reality. Although this is an unfortunate circumstance, it is exactly what the Bible says will be happening in the latter days (II Tim 3:5).

Nevertheless, I believe God desires something more from His people than a mere shell of religion. His desire is that the members of His body would be moved and prompted by His leading, and in this way would express Him to the people with whom they would come into contact. The church is Christ's living body. It is His expression on the earth today. Just as Jesus Christ expressed God fully when He was on the earth, so today the church is to express Jesus Christ so that people will know of God's reality.

Time and space would fail us if we were to enumerate all the religious externalities which have been added to the church of God. However, it seems expedient to mention a few of the more prominent ones in order to make the point more clear. Let us consider for a moment. Where do we find choirs in the New Testament? Where do we find the clergy-laity system? Where are the vestments or robes which some "ministers" wear? And where do we find stained glass windows, "altars" or ornate cathedrals? All these things have been added by man to New Testament Christianity because they are things which are meaningful to human beings. They give some men a natural feeling of awe or perhaps make them "feel" closer to God. Many Christians might be surprised to discover that all this is of absolutely no value in genuine spiritual worship to God. There are no special times, places or props necessary for true worship. God is as real and available in a jail cell as in a pew.

The problem with religious externalities is not that they exist, but that by their existence they become something which they should not be. Men begin to attach certain meanings to these things which in turn become a substitute for spiritual reality. These things fill a place in men's hearts which needs to be filled by God alone. Religious externalities may capture our attention and affection, which belong to the Lord alone. Substitution of this nature is accomplished in a very subtle way. When man begins to seek after God, he also seeks understanding for many Biblical expressions and ideas—among which may be the concept of "church," the cross, ministry or worship. If, while he is seeking, his mind is supplied with answers which have no spiritual reality, he may become thereby satisfied. Thus, his search does not continue until he finds the truth. Herein lies the great danger of outward "religious" things. They provide a definition for man of spiritual things, yet without any content. The seeker is then left not knowing that there is anything deeper for them to understand.

So it is with the word "church." When Christians come to know the church only as a building which houses a specific religious organization, perhaps with several pastors and a secretary, their minds may be satisfied. Many of them may never seek to know the spiritual reality of the church. Being blinded in this way, they may find their church experience unsatisfying. When this happens many Christians begin to seek fulfillment outside of Jesus Christ. Their jobs, their families and many other things begin to take their time and attention. The end result of their misdirection is of great loss to them personally and to the body of Christ corporately. I believe that, at least to some degree, this is part of Satan's strategy. If he can promote definitions for scriptural concepts which have little or no real meaning, then he has succeeded in keeping many

from a deeper walk with Christ.

It seems appropriate here to spend some time to examine one of these many extra-Biblical things which have become so harmful to the body. This is the problem of the clergy-laity system which is so prominent among us today. As far as I know, in the New Testament, there is only one thing which Jesus Christ says that He hates. This thing is mentioned in Revelation in the letters to the seven churches. It is the deeds and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, mentioned in Revelation 2:6,15. Since church history does not record any group of people called "the Nicolaitans" specifically, there has been much speculation about them. I believe the answer to their identity lies in the meaning of the word "Nicolaitan." Please bear with me as we investigate this possibility.

It is my understanding that the word "NIKAO" in the original Greek language means to conquer, to subdue or to rise above: while the word "LAOS" (from which we derive the word "laity") means the "people at large" or the "people assembled"\* Therefore, the word "Nicolaitan," which is composed of these two words, would mean those who rise above and subdue the laity or the common people. How this parallels the clergy-laity system which we have today.

From our previous discussions, it is easy to understand why Jesus Christ would detest this kind of a thing. Such an arrangement stifles and hinders the functioning of His body, which is His expression on the earth. The immediate effect of it is that most members of the church are kept largely inactive and a select group of men is elevated to a position of having to do most everything. So we have a few men trying to live the church life for the many. Obviously this is not possible; and it greatly hinders God's work.

In the New Testament, there is no special man or group of men who has any greater access to God than the rest of the members. In the Old Testament, the Levites performed this function. But in the New Testament, there is no special priesthood. We are all to be a kingdom of priests to God (Rev 1:6). This means that each member of Christ's body has equal access to the throne of God. We can all enter into the Holiest of Holies and each one of us can appear before God, being washed in the blood of the Lamb. No one is to be left out. This means that we do not need an elite group of men to perform most of the functions of the church for

\*Vine's "Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words."

us or to be the sole source of teaching which we receive.

Admittedly, there are specially gifted and appointed men in the New Testament. These ministers—the apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists—are gifts given by God to His body. Yet these men are not to supersede or take over the functioning of the body of Christ. All the work of the ministers must be kept within this perspective. Their job is not to "run the church." They are not to become so prominent that all the members of the body cannot freely perform their part in expressing Jesus Christ. This not only includes the daily church life but also the meetings as well.

It is worth noting that there are three nouns in the Greek language which are translated "minister" in the New Testament. 1. "DIAKONOS" means a servant, attendant, or minister. This is the same word which is translated "deacon" in other places. 2. "LEITOURGOS" "Denoted among the Greeks, firstly, one who discharged a public office at his own expense, then, in general, a public servant, minister." 3. "HUPERETES" "Properly an under rower, as distinguished from a seaman, hence came to denote any subordinate acting under another's direction." VINE Nothing in this word "minister" denotes a hierarchy of special Christians which directs the activities of the church. The emphasis in the meaning is on being a servant. The word "office" (I Tim

3:10,13 KJV), referring to deacons, represents no word in the original, but was added by the translators. "Minister" is a translation of the word "DIAKONOS" while "deacon" is a transliteration of the same word. Both words have the same meaning, and perhaps should have been translated consistently as the same word to avoid confusion.

So we have seen that today the church situation is quite a bit different from that which God originally intended. Much of what has originated solely from man has corrupted our church experience. What we as Christians need to do therefore is to repent of these things and turn back from them to what God initially desired. Let us only be His living body, His true expression on the earth. Let us flee from religious externalities that keep us from the reality of the living presence of God in our daily lives and in our worship. Let us not cling to empty forms without substance, but seek God while He may be found. How we desperately need His reality in our Christianity!

## THE PROBLEM OF DIVISIONS

*"Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God."* Rm 15:7

Christians today have many of the same problems experienced by the early church. As we have seen, one of these problems is the problem of division. Today we see the church divided in many ways. There are factions, sects, and divisions in abundance. Yet we find the scriptures and the Spirit of God requiring us to live in unity. In order to have unity with so many divided organizations, what should our attitude be? How should we view those groups of Christians which are functioning improperly and divisively? The answer to these questions is of great importance for us if we are to experience the church in a full way.

First of all, we must realize that the church will never be entirely free from sin until the day that Jesus Christ returns. Although we as Christians abhor sin and must flee from sin, still we are involved with members of the church who do sin. In order for the church on earth to be without sin it must also be without human beings. How much we need the blood of Jesus Christ and His cleansing. All of us sin and come short of the glory of God even when we have been trying to follow the Lord. The Bible tells us that if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves (I Jn 1:8). Therefore, the fact that there is sin in the church and that members of the church practice sin, does not disqualify it from being the church. It only reveals that the church is not yet perfected.

This fact is well illustrated in the book of Revelation in John's letters to the seven churches. There were some, in several of these churches, who were practicing grievous sins. We even read in one instance about Jezebel engaging in fornication with members of the church. Yet Jesus Christ addresses them as "the church" in their respective cities. Sin, in and of itself, does not disqualify members of Christ's body from being the church.

How then does this apply to our situation today? We see from the scriptures that division is sin and that sin is wrong. It is sin for us as Christians to practice division. Yet our world today is full of Christians who are both divided and practicing division every day. Even though this is so, the meetings of such believers must be considered by us to be genuine church meetings, as long as the presence of God is there. The fact that they are divided from the rest of Christ's body in and of itself does not disqualify them from being a part of the church of God. This only means that they are a part of the church of God which is divided and practicing division. Though the body of Christ is hacked up and divided into many separate parts, it has not ceased to be the body of Christ.

When attempting to correct this situation and overcome this problem we must

be careful not to further promote division. We must accept every meeting of real Christians as being genuinely the church. Of course this fact is qualified practically by another principle which we have discussed earlier in the book, and that is the necessity of having the living presence of the Holy Spirit in church meetings. Yet positionally, when born again Christians are gathered together in the name of the Lord, this is the church.

We must not say in our hearts, "Because this group over here is 'a division' I will not fellowship with them and encourage their division." As we have already discussed, this is to make the same mistake that the Corinthians made of saying, "I am of Christ." Such individuals are in fact saying, "Since I am more enlightened about what God wants than they, I will not associate or meet with them. They have laid another foundation and I haven't. Therefore they are not part of the church, yet I am." Scripturally, this teaching does not hold water.

In the very same chapter of I Corinthians where we read about the four arguing, disagreeing factions, we find Paul specifically addressing all of them as "the church in Corinth." He recognized all these divisions or denominations as part of the church. Although they may have considered themselves to be separate and distinct from each other, still God, speaking through the Apostle Paul, saw them only as members of His church. Childish, fleshly and divided though they were, nevertheless they were still members of His body.

We should be careful to note here that participating in church meetings which have another foundation and are divided from the rest of the church of God is different from associating with a divisive person. A divisive person is someone who is causing division and stirring up strife and contention among the brethren. Such an individual no doubt has some impure motives and goals of his own apart from Christ which he is trying to fulfill. The heart of such a problem lies in these goals and motives. From this kind of person we are to disassociate ourselves completely.

On the other hand, there are many groups of Christians which are standing apart in some way from the rest of the body of Christ, yet are doing so ignorantly—imagining that they are doing the right thing—and thinking that they are serving God properly. Unfortunately, we cannot divorce ourselves from all such Christians who are misled, mistaken and misallied. If we would, then we must leave the church altogether. It should not be Christians' stands or opinions which cause us to avoid them but the attitude of their hearts.

We must receive Christians on the same basis that Christ has received them; because they believed in Him and have taken Him to be their Saviour. They have fled to Him for refuge, as to one of the cities of refuge; and have called upon His name in their day of trouble. This means that they are His and are part of His body. We must always remember the principle of the one body—the body of Christ on the earth today is one!

To live in the church in unity today requires that we as Christians have a great deal of love, a great deal of forbearance, and a great deal of longsuffering with respect to brethren who are not mature in the Lord (Eph 4:2, Col 3:13). Though they may not be wise in the Lord, may be very young and may not know the way, still they are His. We must not cut them off simply because they are misguided or mistaken about something. In order to maintain unity, we must accept and receive all kinds of brethren who are involved in many things which are not of God. (This again is different from an individual Christian, whose heart is turned away from God and is given to practicing some sin.) Our obligation is through patience, endurance and love to lead these ones on

into the presence of Christ, and maturity. We must help them to have a more pure walk with Him. If we merely cut them off, we have lost this opportunity.

From the foregoing discussion it should be evident that it is not wrong to fellowship, associate or meet with those who are involved in denominations or divisions. Most of these people don't know any better or are merely seeking somewhere to worship God and have fellowship according to the exhortation of the scriptures. Many of them may be deceived or blinded in some areas, and are walking before God in the best way they know. We must not condemn them for doing this, but love them, care for them and do our best to teach them His way more properly.

Yes, in order to have unity in the church of God today, we need to receive and have unity with all kinds of Christians. There are Christians who sin, Christians who are fleshly, Christians who are babes in Christ, Christians of every stripe and denomination. We need to receive them all, not upon our basis of being so wonderfully right as we might think we are, but on Christ's basis—the fact that He has received them.

It is interesting to note that in the meetings of many sects which some would consider to be terrible divisions, the presence of the Holy Spirit is strongly manifested. How can this be? Does God honor division? No, God certainly does not honor division! He is honoring the fact that their hearts are open to Him, that they love Him, and that they are meeting around Him. In each one of us, God has to overlook some sin. His blood has to cover many shortcomings and offences in order for Him to come and fellowship with us at all. We all need the blood of Jesus Christ. Since the church of God is washed in the blood of Jesus Christ, He is able to come to meet and fellowship with all of its members. Their basis may be wrong and their stand divisive, yet He Himself will come and meet with them and minister to their needs.

What then does this say to us as members of His body? How can we keep ourselves apart from something to which He has joined Himself. If He attends a meeting and His presence is there, how can we stay away? This is the same childish behavior that many groups accuse the others of having. This is the same infantile mind which won't see beyond outward appearances and look into the heart. May God grant us mercy that we could drop these foolish ways and see the church of God as He sees it today.

All Christian meetings are meetings of the church if they have Jesus Christ. Let us enlarge our view to see the church in this way. Let us realize that all Christians are members of the body and are part of the church. Sin does not disqualify them, another foundation does not exclude them, and error does not keep them from being part of the real church of God today.

## UNITY AND DISUNITY

"...for without me ye can do nothing." Jn 15:5

Believers today must live in unity. However, such unity is not a unity of conformity, where all believers look and act the same. Neither is it a unity of proximity, where believers spend much time with one another. Although true unity may have its expression in some of these ways, it does not consist primarily of them. Godly unity is a unity of life. Every true Christian has been made to partake of the life of the one Spirit. Just as the Jews are all related because they descended from the same father, so we too are all now part of God's family. We are one because God has given us His life, through His Son Jesus. Simply put, we are one in the One, Jesus Christ.

How glorious it is that God has ordained us to share with Him in this tremendous reality! How precious it is and how thankful we should be for it. Since God has generously given us so much, we should give diligent heed to maintain what He has given. In other words, since God has entrusted this unity to us, we should be careful not to lose it. Not only has God given us such a wonderful start in the matter of oneness, He also desires that we grow into deeper unity one with another. It is part of our obligation as believers to mature in this experience. As we grow in Christ, we should also be gaining in this area.

Since, as we seek after God, we are all approaching the same source, when we draw closer to Him we also draw closer to one another. Although we may be starting from many different points, as we draw nearer to Him, we are also drawing closer together. A good analogy of this could be the spokes of a bicycle wheel. On the perimeter of the wheel, they may be quite far apart, but as they approach the center, they draw closer to one another. This is Godly unity.

Let us read again from John 17, verse 21. Jesus is praying, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." Our unity is in Jesus Christ. In God alone do we have the kind of unity that He prayed for. As we enter into Him and as we come to know Him intimately, we will begin to experience a real spiritual unity with other believers. This unity will manifest itself in brotherly love. God is love; and to know God is to love one another.

As you can see, unless each individual believer commits himself to seek God and to press on into Him, unity—real unity—can never happen. Unless we put aside ourselves and the things which keep us from God, there is no possibility for any kind of deep experience of unity with other members of the body of Christ. If we remain babes in Christ, no doubt we will begin to experience division. For when we are babes and

children, there are many ways in which the Devil can deceive us, divide us and keep us from experiencing unity.

God's desire is that we would all be one. We are builded together into one holy temple for God's eternal habitation. In eternity, we will all be together. We will all be a part of the "one new man" (Eph 2:15) and all be united as the bride of Christ. If we cannot get along here on the earth, I wonder how it will be possible for us to love one another later. (Along these same lines, perhaps we should consider: if we don't love God very much today, how will we enjoy spending eternity in His presence?) Nevertheless, this is the goal: to have unity—a deep Godly unity—with all other believers.

Let me make it very plain that the unity about which we have been speaking is not ecumenicalism. This writer is not advocating gathering together all Christians under one leadership or one organization. Outward unity is of no value unless there is the inward content of reality. There is no need for us to try to put on a big show of "oneness." If our hearts are right before God, the unity that we do possess in Christ will be manifested properly and at the right time. Our desire should be a unity which comes from within and not one that is forced upon us in some way from without. It is good that we agree with our brethren and that we love Jesus Christ, but there is no need for us to join together in some kind of worldwide organization and begin building another Tower of Babel. If we are only faithful to love one another and to take care of our part in the work of God, someday the whole building will be put together when He is ready. Let us faithfully follow Jesus every day and not attempt to build something for our own glory.

Since we are discussing unity, perhaps we should also speak briefly about disunity. We as believers need to be one with all Christians. In fact, God commands it! Yet, He also provides certain exceptions. Unfortunately, these exceptions have been used by many Christians to justify dividing themselves from the rest of Christ's body. The very scriptures which God has given to us to maintain unity have been used by immature believers to fragment and separate the body of Christ.

In general, there are two kinds of persons with whom, even if they profess to be believers, we can have no unity. Although there are many different scriptures in the New Testament which talk about our disassociating ourselves from believers for one reason or another, for the most part they can all be put into two general categories.

First of all, there is the believer (or the perhaps false believer) who deviates from "the faith." Now what exactly is "the faith"? The faith includes all the essential items regarding Jesus' own person and work. Among these things are: His birth through a virgin (the incarnation), His deity (the fact that He is God), His death on the cross and the shedding of His blood for the forgiveness of sins (the atonement), His bodily resurrection, His giving of new life to men (regeneration), and His promise of coming again to receive us unto Himself. These items about the person and work of Jesus Christ are what is known as "the faith." A true Christian can believe many things about a variety of subjects and unity can still be maintained. But if a believer deviates from faith in these items, he is a heretic and a reprobate from the faith and we should have nothing more to do with him. With such a one, there is no way we can have true unity. If he does not believe in these things, then he does not believe in the real Lord. He is not following the genuine Jesus. Since it is only in Jesus that we can have unity, when someone is in error about these things, there can be no true unity. So the first category of the people from whom we should disassociate is that of the heretic—the individual who is in error about the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The second category of persons from whom we should disassociate is that of

persistent, unrepentant sinners. Every believer sins. Praise the Lord we have the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse us from sin! Yet there are some believers who persistently engage in immorality and sin of one kind or another. Drunkenness, fornication, division, arguing (strife), debate, backbiting, idolatry and many other things are sins in which some believers refuse to stop their participation. They know that their actions are sin, yet even when exhorted to do so, will not abandon them. When a believer is a persistent and unrepentant sinner, we should also have nothing more to do with him.

Jesus Christ is separate from sin. As we walk in Him and have fellowship one with another, His blood cleanses us from every sin (I Jn 1:7). Yet when a brother persistently engages in sin, there is no way for us to have unity with him. To do so is to compromise our faith in a holy God and in the purity of Jesus Christ. Since our unity is established through the Holy Spirit and in the life of God, when another believer's relationship with God is interrupted by unrepentant sin, there can no longer be any true unity. We as believers can have no unity with sin.

However, let us be very careful in this area. God is also full of mercy and His children should be this way too. It is only after much seeking of God and fellowshiping one with another, that we should disassociate ourselves from anyone. (Actually this too, as with everything else in the church should be according to God's clear leading.) Let us not be too hasty to cast another brother out. But if it is necessary, this is what we must do.

Thank God that He has given to Christians such a wonderful enjoyable experience as unity with other believers today. Aside from knowing and loving Jesus Christ, this is the greatest experience that we can have. Anyone who has tasted of deep brotherly love in both spiritual and practical unity with other believers, will understand what I mean. This is the church in reality. The experience of unity in the Spirit with other believers every day is the experience of the church. To know the church is to know unity, and to have the real church is to have a genuine unity with all believers with whom we come in contact.

Surely brotherly love is unsurpassed. It is an experience which every believer needs to have every day. Without it, our walk with God can only be lonely and individual. As an individual, we can never experience or express the body of Christ in any kind of full way. When this unity is lacking, so is our church experience. But our God has promised us better things. He has called us into a love and unity with one another which even the world will be able to see. Let us open our hearts to Him today. May we seek Him that He would lead us into this kind of deep Godly experience of unity. In this way we will begin to experience the reality of His body and be the church for which He prayed. Oh how much God desires this! How He longs to lead each of His children into such a rich experience of unity. Open up to Him, seek Him, call upon Him, that He might make each of us a vital part of what He is doing.

**THE PATH ONWARD**

*"These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."* Rev 14:4

Since we find ourselves in the midst of present-day Christianity, with all its attributes and problems, what should our course of action be? How can we as believers live in love, unity and harmony with all the members of Christ's body—many of whom are divided into factions, camps and divisions? While most Christians are building vigorously on other foundations which have been laid by men and participating in many foreign things which have been added to the church, how shall we then live? How can we as believers live rightly before God and have a proper relationship with all other Christians also? These questions are of utmost importance. Unfortunately, the answers to them are easy to miss because of their childlike simplicity. Too often we seek a formula or a method rather than the person of Jesus Christ.

Though there is no step-by-step process which will guarantee us a living church experience, there are several principles by which we can be guided. Perhaps the most important one is that our hearts be right with God and our fellow man. If we have not determined in our hearts to love Him and to love and receive all the brethren also, our goal is unachievable. Furthermore, unless we also recognize all meetings of the church as being genuine, we are going to have difficulty and will never succeed in living in true unity.

Let us remember that by accepting Christian meetings as being genuine, we are not accepting what man has added to the church or that which Christians are doing which is not genuine. We are only accepting that portion, however small or large it may be, of Christians' meetings which is real. We must not throw out the baby with the bath water, so to speak. To insist that just because Christians are doing some things wrong or differently from the way we think they should be, they are not of God, is shortsighted. We cannot exclude them from the body of Christ for these reasons. Once our hearts are right with God on this matter, we can then begin to pursue unity.

A second indispensable principle which we have previously discussed is that everything in the church of Christ must be led by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's leading is absolutely indispensable. All the functions and activities of the church—such as the appointment of elders, the time and location of meetings, any works of the church, and even the daily life of the believers—need this leading. This important principle cannot be overlooked. As we follow Him in all these things day by day, we will begin to experience the church's reality. No doubt, as we walk with Him, God will bring us into contact with other believers who are also seeking this kind of experience. Together

we can pray, fellowship, meet, and serve the Lord.

The third principle is that we must live the church life according to the revelation which we have seen. Once God reveals something to us, we must begin to walk in this light. When God gave Moses instructions about the building of the tabernacle, He said: "See...that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount (Heb 8:5)." This principle still applies to us today. After God shows what He wants, we should be careful to do it. Divine revelation should lead to human obedience. We must not shrug it off as unimportant and continue on in the same old way. Nothing which God reveals to us is inconsequential. The writer, James, exhorts us to be "doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves," for "whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed in his deed (Jas 1:22,25)."

Although there is no need to start a new denomination, there is much room in this world for more Christian meetings. In fact, the scriptures exhort us to meet more and more as the day of the Lord approaches (Heb 10:25). It is possible that our Lord may lead us to attend some Christian meeting which is already established. Perhaps there are some in our area which are open to the Holy Spirit's leading. All around the country many Christians are enjoying this type of meeting. The scriptural concept of spiritual worshipping is not a new idea. Since the first century many believers have been meeting in this way.

Unfortunately, in some places it can be very difficult to find such meetings. Whether or not this is the case, Jesus Christ may lead us to start new meetings which are living and open to His leading. Christians should be open to God for this. We should not be afraid to follow the Lamb "whithersoever He goeth (Rev 14:4)." Beginning new meetings may in fact be necessary if we are to experience the church in a living way, since it can often be extremely difficult to put new wine into the old wineskins. The practices and traditions of the Christians meeting in our area may be extremely difficult to change. If they are not open to the Holy Spirit, it is very possible that God may want us to begin new meetings which are open to Him. Such meetings are of vital importance both to us and to Him. Therefore this possibility should not be overlooked. Many Christians in every place are more than willing to practice this type of meeting. Surely, other Christians are hungry for a deeper church experience also. By living out what we have seen and sharing it with others, together we can begin to live and meet in a way which is spiritually satisfying.

For this purpose, a home living room would be just fine. If on occasion more room is needed, there are many buildings available to rent which would not involve great financial strain on those attending. The idea behind this is not to meet separately from other believers who do not see things the same way that we do. It is only to have meetings in which the Holy Spirit can be in authority and the church can be manifested in a more full way.

Many Christians wonder with which others they should be meeting. A most practical answer would be to meet with those they know. Our Christian friends, the believers with whom we have some association, are probably those with whom we should be meeting. As we have daily association one with another, a godly relationship in His love will begin to grow. The automatic result of this spiritual relationship should be a desire to worship and pray with one another. And the natural outgrowth of a proper daily church life is the church meetings. So it is that the Christians nearest us are probably those with whom we should meet.

Christians should not feel that they must be a part of some long established

religious organization to be approved by God or to be genuine. This concept is not found in the Bible. The approval of God is much more important than the favor of men. May we seek to please Him and realize that it is He who has founded the church and He that is building it (Mt 16:18). We should never be afraid to follow Him in this work.

If we do begin to have Christian meetings in our home, for example, let us remember that we should never separate ourselves or set ourselves apart from the other Christian meetings in our city. We should not attempt to keep those Christians with whom we meet from fellowshiping with other Christians or attending other meetings. Also, we should receive all the members of the body of Christ in the same way that Christ has received them.

As we study the Word of God and as we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, He will lead us daily into a deeper, richer experience of His church. Our goal should not be to tear down or destroy what other Christians are doing, even if we perceive that it is not godly. Our goal is to build up the Church. However, this may include speaking the truth in love about some of these things to our brethren. We must not shrink back from declaring the whole counsel of God merely because others may not agree with us. Yet it is essential to make sure that our hearts are right with God when we do these things lest we use truth which we see as a club to batter other Christians. Revelation should never give rise to feelings of superiority or become another tool for hacking in pieces the body of Christ.

Another essential principle which we must follow is that our experience of Christ in the church must be in accordance with the Bible. Everyone should realize that while we are following the leading of the Holy Spirit, He will always lead us in complete accordance with the Word of God. If we think we are being led in some way by Him which is not in harmony with the Bible, then we must realize that it is not the Holy Spirit who is leading us.

Before we interpret God's Word, however, we should be in the Spirit. We cannot approach the Bible simply with our human minds, try to figure out how the church was practiced in the days of the early apostles, and attempt to implement the same things today. This method does not work. It will only cause confusion and trouble.

In order to further clarify this, let me use the illustration of a package of seeds. When you buy a package of flower seeds, on the front you usually see a beautiful picture of how the flower is going to look. Yet when you open the package, all you find are some small brown seeds. They don't look at all like the picture on the package. But, if you simply plant the seeds in the ground, water them, and wait patiently, something will begin to grow. Very often this sprout doesn't look like the finished product either. Yet it is the same thing. And if properly cared for, it will produce the flowers. To aid in this care, sometimes on the back of the package there are smaller pictures to show us what the sprouts will look like so we can distinguish them from the weeds.

So it should be with the church today. We cannot read the Bible, decide how we think the church should look, and begin to manufacture it. Christ's body simply does not work this way. Some having read the Bible think that they see certain truths about elders, apostles, church meetings and so on. They then attempt to fabricate what they see in a natural way.

This would be the same as someone trying to make a flower. Perhaps first they would buy some pink paper and cut out objects that look like petals. Then they would glue them together. In the end, they might achieve something which looks remotely like a flower. Yet it would be lacking any reality.

God's way is a different way. His church is produced by His life growing up in

and flowing out of the members of His body. It can never be produced artificially. No matter how many elders we appoint, how many meetings we have, or how one with Christians we say we are going to be; unless we have the living reality of Jesus Christ in our daily lives, it is to no avail. It cannot be pleasing to God. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it (Ps 127:1)." We must learn to cultivate the life of Christ which is in us. This goal can be aided by feeding on His word, praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and allowing Him to lead us day by day. As He leads us individually and together with the other members of His body, we will begin to see the church unfold in all her beauty.

The one and only way to experience the church is Jesus Christ. He is the answer to all of our needs. We must cleave to Him and not to any other method or way. We must meet with other Christians according to His direction. We must walk daily in the Spirit and have contact with other Christians by His bidding. This seems very simple. Thank God, it is! The Bible tells us that we should let no man beguile us from the simplicity that is in Christ (II Cor 11:3). Perhaps we have become too complex in our understanding and teaching. Christ is so simple that even the most ignorant brother can follow Him and properly live in the church today. The solution to our multitudinous problems is so uncomplicated that it is easy for us to miss. To follow Christ today is to express Him. And to express Him is to be the church which He desires. All the members of His body, as they follow Him every day, produce the church, His bride. This is what the world needs to see and this is what God desires.

What a great need there is today for such an expression of Jesus Christ. We are living in a time which appears to be the close of the age. The power of the Devil is being unleashed to corrupt mankind and destroy him with many devices. What a tremendous need there is for the church to be a shining testimony of Jesus Christ. How the lampstands need to shine and to lead men to the Saviour. May God have mercy upon us that we could give our lives for His testimony.

**CERTAIN OPPOSITION**

*"The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" Jer 5:31*

No doubt as we begin to practice a daily church life and meet according to the Spirit's leading we will encounter much opposition. However, we should not be surprised by this, since the Devil has been opposing the church from its beginning. He is doing his utmost to keep the church from functioning as it should. His goal is to keep the members of Christ's body inactive. For when believers live according to the leading of the Holy Spirit, they express the person of Jesus Christ on the earth. By thus expressing Jesus Christ, they are defeating God's enemy, the Devil. They are tearing down his kingdom, capturing people out of his kingdom and transferring them by the Spirit's work into the Kingdom of God. This is something which the Devil cannot tolerate. He would like to see all the members of the body of Christ be passive, docile and doing nothing to bring the Kingdom of God to the earth.

Satan greatly opposes anyone being born anew. But once this happens, the next best thing he can do is to keep them from doing anything for God. If he can keep them deceived, weak and timid, he can keep them from furthering God's work. For these reasons, the Devil will strongly oppose any kind of teaching or practice which stimulates Christians to experience the church in a living daily way. He has worked very hard through the centuries to get the Church as a whole to the passive state she is in today. He is not about to give up easily. Therefore, when anyone begins to teach or practice a daily church life, he should expect opposition.

Satan's opposition will come from many places and in many different ways. He will use anyone he can to work for him. Those whose hearts are not right with God are prime candidates. The Devil will use them to repel and attack what God is doing. He is an expert at finding people to do his bidding and ways to get his work done. Satan does not want to see living church meetings led by and filled with the Holy Spirit. He also does not want to see the church becoming a living daily experience for Christians. His objective is to oppose and counter this kind of thing as much as he can. Surprisingly, some of his best instruments are religious people. Even Christians who really are born again but do not know God in an intimate, real way can be used mightily by the Devil to frustrate what God is doing.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks for many Christians concerning a free, enjoyable, Spirit-led worship service is tradition. Over the years, man has introduced much tradition into the church. Since the days of the early Fathers, an abundance of things have been added to the church. Many of these things have eventually become

traditions for Christians in their church experience. Understandably, believers who are following the leading of the Holy Spirit may not desire to participate in or be a part of such traditions. The reaction of those who hold these traditions and consider them to be sacred may be to bitterly oppose and attack those who do not cleave to them.

This same reaction was a problem in Jesus' day. Some of the religious people of that time, the Pharisees, had instituted many apparently good and appropriate traditions into the Jewish faith. One of the main reasons that the Pharisees opposed Jesus was that He did not keep their traditions. They were greatly offended by Him because He transgressed the commandments and rituals that they themselves or their forefathers had instituted. They also thought that if anyone did not keep these observances that they were against God and could not be from God.

This attitude and way of thinking is well expressed by Jesus in the Gospel of Mark chapter 7, verse 9, where we read: "And He said unto them, 'Full well ye reject the commandment of God that ye may keep your own tradition.'" and verse 13: "Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye." Unfortunately, this same attitude is still prevalent today.

Here we find that religious traditions may easily become the enemy of the living daily walk with God. In many cases they stand in direct opposition to what Jesus Christ wants to be doing through the Holy Spirit in our midst. These traditions limit God; and they do so by causing Christians, even real believers, to condemn and oppose what the Holy Spirit might be doing in a living way.

There are verses in the New Testament, it must be admitted, which teach us that we should hold fast to the traditions which were delivered to us by the first apostles. These verses do not apply to the many hundreds of traditions which have been added by men to the Church since that time. The Apostle Paul taught us many things about the Lord's supper, marriage, and various other things which are Spirit-instituted traditions. These we must follow (also by the Spirit) today. However, it is wrong to universally apply these verses to mean that we must keep every human tradition which has been instituted since that time. This interpretation simply cannot be supported. So we see that the traditions of men hinder the Holy Spirit's moving and also provide a basis for other Christians and religious people to resist, oppose and condemn things which are different from their experience.

Another great problem which causes people to oppose the reality of the church is that of ulterior motives. Unfortunately, since we are not yet completely purified, many Christians may have wrong motives for the things which they are doing. Such motives may lead men to do things which are not in God's purpose or will. The Apostle Paul said in Philippians 2:21: "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." This verse shows us that many of the Christians which Paul knew had some other motive or reason for doing what they were doing besides the pure and simple fact that they loved Jesus Christ. In the same way, we also should be careful that everything we do would be to please Him. Our first and foremost goal should be to be obedient to Him. Interests and desires of our own—in fact all other motivations—should take second place.

Let us now take a brief look at how some of these other motives work to destroy the Church of God. Unfortunately, the effects are all too easy to see. Some men have gotten themselves into a position in which it would be very difficult for them to practice the church life according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Too many of the members in their congregation would be opposed to this sort of thing. Spirit-led

meetings would require a great adjustment which many are not willing to make. This puts many pastors, for example, in a very awkward position. They are faced with a dilemma. Either they must face losing their congregation, their incomes, their homes, and possibly everything for which they have been working, or continue doing things in the old way. Such a situation quickly leads to the question of motives. What are our motives? Are they to take care of ourselves and our families first and to serve Jesus Christ later; or shall we put Him first above everything and be willing to face the consequences of being faithful to what we have seen?

Money is one of the singularly most powerful influences in our world today. Our whole society revolves around money. Everyone must have a job to make money so they can support themselves. Our status and our influence in the community is constantly assessed and defined by the amount of money we make. From the time we are young, many of us are taught that money is a means of security. Unfortunately, few Christians have learned to trust God totally and to lean on Him as their only security.

If any church leaders find themselves in this kind of situation, it may be very difficult for them to alter the course on which they are going. Sadly, a common alternative to changing course is to oppose anything new or different. Anyone may have a vested interest in something and therefore feel it necessary to attack or condemn anything which might threaten his security. Meetings which are not subject to the traditions, concepts and rules of man may be such a threat. An open-to-the-Spirit, free-flowing church life may be a great challenge to many whose jobs and positions depend upon something else. In all likelihood this kind of teaching and practice may offend some of these people and cause them to react against it.

Another motive, which is an all-too-common pitfall, is that of trying to build up a following. Many leaders and church organizations today have as a primary goal increasing their membership and building up a following. This goal is not godly. Mere numbers do not impress Him. When Jesus walked the earth, His attention was never on how many people were following Him. Our goal should be to build up the church as a whole regardless of whether or not more people attend the meetings with which we are involved. Our goal should be Jesus Christ alone. Our motivations ought to be what is best for Him, for His kingdom and for His glory. Whether or not more people attend the meetings which we may attend should be of little consequence to us and what we are doing.

The concept of a Spirit-led daily church life, and Holy-Spirit directed meetings, may be a threat to those who are trying to build up something for themselves. Smaller home meetings and an unstructured daily church life may challenge the control which some exercise over the believers. Such an arrangement removes much authority from men and places it again with the Head, Jesus Christ, where it belongs.

If our work and our ministry is not based entirely upon Jesus Christ and conformed to His will, we may find ourselves opposing something which He is doing. May God have mercy on us that we should not be rejecting what He is doing. Let us seek Him diligently that He would purify our hearts and our motives so that we could serve Him properly.