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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.