



"Believers are never told to become one; we already are one and are expected to act like it."

—Joni Eareckson Tada

17-Dec-21

Loving the Body of Christ (Part One)

We all realize the level of sickness and death that has recently occurred in the greater church of [God](#). Dozens of members have contracted COVID this year in Church of the Great God alone, and the disease affected many other churches as well. This scourge has touched all of us.

As we reflect on the reasons for it, we must remember that God often provides solutions for several issues simultaneously. Consider, for example, the many uses of water: It is not just for drinking but is also effective in cooking, cleaning, heating, cooling, etc. Similarly, God may allow us to face a trial to help us learn a handful of different lessons.

Our afflictions likely have many reasons. A recent sermon posited that the coronavirus calamity may have been a blessing in disguise, providing God's people with the natural, superior immunity from [COVID-19](#) and its variants. Another sermon suggested that our suffering from this disease provides the key to unity across the churches of God. These trials are helping us to become one with [Jesus Christ](#) and with each other through suffering.

An email forwarded to my wife seems to affirm this:

Among us in the CGG and in the other Churches of God near and far, GOD seems to be forging a common bond—be it of bereavement, of physical sufferings due to illnesses of various kinds, even privations, danger, hazards of daily life . . . amidst the innumerable evils in this dying world.

God is preparing us for our roles as kings and priests in His Kingdom. As He is preparing us to reign with Him, He is also teaching us compassion through these trials.

A good friend assured me, "Unless there is evidence to the contrary, BECAUSE we believe God loves us and that He finishes what He starts, then those who died were ready, they won their race." Referring to [John 17:23](#), he continued: "God is [love](#), and He loves us, each individually, as much as He loves our Savior. He does not want to see any of us fail, and He is going to bring our salvation to pass." He also mentioned [Isaiah 57:1-2](#) (*New International Version*): "The righteous perish, and no one takes it to heart; the devout are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into [peace](#); they find rest as they lie in death."

For the brethren who died, it is a blessing. They are at peace, waiting for the resurrection, but it seems like a curse for us who no longer have them in our lives. Even though it is painful for those left behind, their suffering was for a purpose that helped to complete them for service when they awake in their next moment in the [Kingdom of God](#).

No one in the church dies apart from the knowledge of our Father, and no one will die before he has been made ready for his part in His Kingdom. If God knows when a sparrow dies ([Matthew 10:29](#)), He is surely keenly aware of the death of one of His saints (see [Psalm 116:15](#)).

However, we need to consider another possibility. Notice [I Corinthians 11:27-30](#) (*Revised Standard Version*):

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood

of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. *That* is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. (Emphasis ours.)

The epistle of I Corinthians addresses several problems. Chapter 11 deals with fellowship issues, particularly at the [Passover](#) service. We can look at this problem in two ways. The first is that "the body" (or "Body," as some translations may present it) refers to the physical body of our Savior, and the second sees it as Christ's spiritual Body, the church. The latter perspective indicates that the Corinthians did not esteem other members of His Body as our Savior does.

[I Peter 2:24-25](#) seems to support the latter view:

[Jesus Christ] who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

The word "healed" is the Greek *iaomai*. In addition to physical healing, it also "denotes the restoration of divine fellowship through the forgiveness of sins, and all the saving benefits which accompany it" (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*).

We will examine this spiritual deliverance. Before we get to a solution, it will help to review some issues that Paul confronted in this first-century church. Their problems were the struggles of God's people living amid the pagan society from which God had called them. The apostle had to address several lifestyle problems he saw in the Corinthians, including cliques, brethren suing each other, sexual sins, misusing the Passover service, and misunderstanding spiritual gifts.

A significant issue in the book is the lack of unity within the congregation. Commentator Matthew Henry summarizes the apostle's exhortation: "In the great things of religion be of one mind; and where there is not unity of

sentiment, still let there be union of affection. Agreement in the greater things should extinguish divisions about the lesser."

Paul also highlights the problem of preferences and partiality ([I Corinthians 1:11](#)), which still plagues today's church. We should be able to see ourselves in what Paul writes about in this epistle. Frankly, it is easier to serve some brethren than others. If we find ourselves unwilling to humbly stoop to help someone who needs a lift, we must consider the depth of Christ's sacrifice. The most powerful, valuable, sensitive, loving Being in the universe, save His heavenly Father, gave everything He could to serve us. Why do we feel so superior?

Or, we may think highly of our intellect, forgetting that God has not called many of this world's intellectuals to be members of His church ([I Corinthians 1:26-29](#)). Our intellectual skills are likely nothing to write home about! Yet, we sometimes think we have all the answers, throwing our opinions around like birdseed, believing we are feeding others with our [wisdom](#). How easily we ignore or dismiss what may be a real problem for others to confront!

Part Two will continue to examine other ways we can contribute to the unity of God's elect even during times of trial and suffering.

- John Reiss

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Faith and Healing \(Part One\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

A group of Ukrainian Jews applied foresight and sacrifice to escape from the impending onslaught of the Nazis, saving themselves from certain destruction. If we as Christians fail to dress and keep, cultivating, embellishing, and improving what has been entrusted to us (including our bodies and health), we are equivalent to a destroyer. Fighting the forces of decay - a continuous struggle of overcoming planned for us by almighty God - requires constant, life-long work and vigilance. We should never delude

ourselves that we are "innocent victims" of our own sins or destructive habits. We have a sobering responsibility to analyze our health needs, continually adjusting and changing as we learn, faithfully maintaining the temple of God's Spirit.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Unity and Personal Responsibility](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The most prestigious international organization dedicated to peace on earth is the United Nations, but such a name can be true only in the most vaguely hopeful way. Nations and the people who comprise them are tragically disunited. John Ritenbaugh shows what we must do, personally and individually, when calamitous events—in the world and in the church—are taking place.

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