

Are You Part Of The Spiritual Unity?

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History repeatedly demonstrates that the people can possess enormous resources, intelligence, talent, and power, and still collapse from within when they lose the beliefs and principles that hold them together. Before an army is defeated on the battlefield, it can be defeated by division. Before a nation collapses politically, it can collapse morally. And before a church becomes divided outwardly, something has usually happened inwardly in the hearts and minds of its members. Because unity does not begin with organization. Unity begins with what we believe.

Ultimately, what we believe determines how we live. Our beliefs determine our values. Our values influence our choices. Our choices shape our conduct. Our conduct either strengthens unity or destroys it. That is why doctrine matters.

The U.S. is currently in spiritual and moral decline because it lacks a clear spiritual vision, purpose, and faithfulness to righteous standards. Americans neglect their unifying founding principles amid cultural perversions.

Proverbs 29:18 Where there is no revelation [or vision], the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law [and I will add "of God" there].

Whether in countries or communities, people's efforts to unify around foundational principles are ultimately doomed to fail because of the inherent pride, self-centeredness of human nature. Now, when we stay united, the external forces struggle to harm any of us. Often they cannot defeat us as long as we remain strong and connected. However, when we are divided, we become vulnerable to destructive forces. Our unified strength depends on our commitment to our core principles. Without commitment, without conviction, unity is temporary at best.

So it is with us in God's church. Together we are strong and a solid unit. Each member plays an important part in the church's work, but without unity, the workers cannot effectively function. This infinitely greater unity is described in Scripture.

The apostle Paul tells us that God has not merely gathered a collection of independent individuals into His church. He has created one spiritual body with Jesus Christ as its head, and every converted Christian is an essential member. Everyone is important and needed. Seven times in just three verses, Paul emphasizes one magnificent word: one. One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. And this is not an accident.

God is showing us something fundamental about His church. True unity is built upon truth. The Holy Spirit imparting God's truth is foundational to spiritual unity.

So today, I want us to consider why sound doctrine is far more than theological knowledge. It determines how we think, how we worship, how we treat one another, and whether we remain firmly joined together in the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace.

When we truly understand our place in God's Family, something remarkable happens. We possess something powerful, the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of one Spirit. Please turn with me to Ephesians 4, verse 13. And we stop seeing ourselves merely as individuals and begin to see ourselves as members of the Body of Christ.

The apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 4 that the whole church, that is, every part, is involved in the unity of the whole body. Our oneness in Christ does not destroy our individuality. Here in Ephesians 4, we are going to read verses 13 through 16.

Ephesians 4:13-16 Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of

deceitful plotting, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth in the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Everybody is involved. Everybody is needed. Nobody is unimportant. Christ is the truth. As followers of Christ, we are enabled by God's Spirit to understand the truth and to unify our thoughts and actions as one body.

We must be committed to the truth, and this means that both our words will be honest and our actions will reflect Christ's integrity. Speaking the truth in love is not always easy, convenient, or pleasant, but it is necessary if the church is going to do Christ's work. In the world, Jesus forms us into a body, a group of individuals united in purpose and in love for one another and for Christ. If an individual stumbles, the rest of the group is there to pick him up and help him walk with Christ. And if an individual sins, he can find restoration through the church.

Every one of us is important in doing the church's work, so we need to be like-minded and speak the same thing, relying on one another and working together to fulfill God's plan, purpose, and will. This is only possible and effective by the indwelling of God's Spirit. And we should, with all lowliness and meekness and longsuffering, forbearing one another in love, diligently work to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Like the other writers, the apostle Paul faced difficulties and problems among members of the church, but he always addressed them in light of the church's doctrine. When we read his epistles, we notice that his appeals to us are made directly.

It is defined by membership in the church. We are all interconnected parts of the church, so if we do not understand the doctrine of the church, its appeals, exhortations, and problem-solving will be meaningless. So most of our troubles arise because we begin with ourselves, and often we are too biased and partial, and this is a result of sin. *Sin places us at the center of the problem.* Pride causes us to sin, which in turn makes us feel all-important. It makes us so self-focused that nothing else matters except what happens to us

personally. So we spend most of our lives thinking about ourselves and our personal interests.

The teaching of the New Testament shows us how we can be removed from that by giving us an extraordinary, insightful view of the church and of ourselves as units and members of this great spiritual Body of Christ. When we begin to understand our human nature, we begin to be delivered from the self-centeredness. And the way to come out from under the influence of our human nature is to see ourselves as the New Testament describes us.

I Corinthians 12:27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

Now that we are part of the Body of Christ, we know that we no longer own our bodies. We are now caretakers of our bodies.

I Corinthians 6:19-20 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Throughout his epistles, Paul's purpose is to bring together individual Jews and Gentiles who by His grace have been called and are being saved. Here, as in many other places in Scripture, Paul articulates God's purpose in terms of the church. Therefore, we must always regard ourselves as members of the church. As we do so, we will continue to be delivered from our troubles and trials. And since this is true of our problems, it is even more true of unity.

The only way we can envision ourselves as true members of God's church is to understand who we worship and what our role is in our relationship to Him. The only way to learn and know that is to adhere to the true doctrines of Christ. No other route leads to the truth or to God's way of life. It is a process, and as we learn more about the true doctrines of Christ, the more we understand who God is and what He has planned and what He requires of us. We gain a clearer, more complete picture of reality, of how things truly are.

If we are not doing Bible study and studying on a daily basis and reading scriptures, we are missing out on this whole understanding of the church. There are warning signs in the New Testament that there were already troubles concerning true understanding of the church's nature, for example, at the church in Corinth. Now Paul's reason for writing his first epistle to the Corinthians was the divisions, sects, and splits within the church. He tells them that their troubles stem from their failure to understand the nature of God's church, and the nature of God's church is defined by its doctrine. They were thinking of themselves in individualistic terms, and many had formed small groups.

And if they had truly seen the church as a whole, as a united body, they would not have experienced disunity. Notice how Paul articulates the doctrine of unity to the Ephesian congregation. He emphasizes essential characteristics such as humility, gentleness, and patience. Here in Ephesians 4, let us go back to verses 1 through 3. The caption in my Bible for this section is Walk in Unity.

Ephesians 4:1-3 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

So God's church is a spiritual body unified by God's Spirit. These righteous characteristics are necessary, but we must complement them by seeing ourselves as members of the church, one body and one Spirit. So God's Word places great emphasis on unity and oneness.

Ephesians 4:4-6 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were 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.

In these three verses, the word "one" appears seven times, underscoring the need for perfect oneness within God's church. Seven is the number of perfection and completion. Unity is oneness, a state of harmony and accord,

and the quality or state of being made one. Paul emphasizes and establishes through repetition the word one as the essential principle of unity.

We know we must be practical, but we cannot be practical unless we know how to be practical according to God's will, and why we should do so. And I notice the order in which oneness, that is, unity, is structured by Paul here. He starts with the church, then the Holy Spirit, then the Son, and ends with God the Father. Why did he list them in this order? Why does Paul seem to reverse the order of importance here? Because he is primarily concerned with practical application at this point.

He begins with the church, a fellowship of baptized members who share God's indwelling Holy Spirit. He begins with us to show that we have a responsibility to conform to God's way of life, one marked by consideration and concern for the common good. Then Paul takes us to a higher level, the church as a body with Christ as its head, and finally, the head of Christ is the Father. His process is practical, and not only does it make sense, but it also works.

Paul shows us that we are who we are and what we are because of the work of Jesus Christ in us through God's Spirit, by our receiving of the Holy Spirit. But our receiving of the Holy Spirit would not be possible if it were not for the Son and what He has done. And the Son would not have come were it not "for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." And this makes perfect sense, and is practical.

So the apostle Paul is determined to show us that there is no room for argument about the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. That unity already exists. It is spiritual, certain, and firm. The words "there is" at the beginning of verse 4 make this truth clear. "There is one body."

The words "there is" are not in the original but were supplied by the translators, and these words were added to enhance the clarity of the thought, which is obvious here. In other words, the words "there is" remind us that Paul is not appealing to us to form unity. He is not appealing to us to *form* unity. Rather, he is telling us that this unity already exists spiritually and is asking us not to break it, but to endeavor to keep it and safeguard it.

He is not making a strong appeal for us to come together. He urges us to be careful not to break away from unity in any way or to be the cause of any kind of division. We must ask ourselves, Am I part of the spiritual unity that already exists?

In reminding us of who we are as members of the church, Paul uses the analogy of the one body. He often uses this analogy throughout his epistles to explain church doctrine. In the second chapter of his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul compares the church to a nation when he calls them fellow citizens with the saints. He also says Christians are members of the household. In other words, the church is a family.

He also says the church is like a building. *You have been built together on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.* Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone (Acts 4:11).

Chapter 5 of Ephesians compares the church to a bride, saying that the church is the bride of Christ, and that the relationship between Jesus Christ and the church is like that between a husband and wife. But he seems to use this illustration of the body more than any other, especially in connection with the matter of unity. He has already used this analogy twice in this epistle. He does so at the end of chapter 1. Back to the first chapter, and we will read verses 22 and 23.

Ephesians 1:22-23 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

He repeats it in chapter 2,

Ephesians 2:16 And that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

In these two examples, Paul mentions the body analogy almost in passing, but in Ephesians 4:4-6, he expands on it. The church is an unseen spiritual entity. They cannot refer to a visible external church because that church comprises many organizations and physical bodies, not a single body. So Paul asserts that there is only one true church. There cannot be many,

because the church is the Body of Christ. And a human cannot have many bodies, there is only one. There is only one unseen spiritual church of God. There is only one body. God's church consists of people of all types, kinds, and colors from different continents, yet this variety makes no difference to this invisible spiritual church. Similarly, time makes no difference to this fact.

The early Christians and Christian martyrs throughout the ages are reserved for resurrection in this body, and you and I are in this body if we are truly in Christ and He is in us. In a sense, the church is ageless, spanning millennia. Natural ability plays no role in this issue. What ultimately matters is that you and I belong to this body. *An individual can be a member of a visible physical church, yet not a member of this unseen spiritual church.*

Please turn with me to I Corinthians 12, verse 12. The apostle Paul believed that this body analogy conveys what we must understand about the unseen spiritual church. Notice what he says in I Corinthians 12, where he addresses it thoroughly, and we will read only the first part.

I Corinthians 12:12-14 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.

Here we begin to see the structure of unity within the church. Since the members of the church are a new creation, the church body is likewise a new creation. In bringing the church into being, God has done something as entirely new in the spiritual realm as the creation of the universe was in the physical realm.

II Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

He did not simply take an Israelite and a Gentile, somehow bring them together in a coalition, seat them at a table, and agree to be friendly. The church is an entirely new creation. This is evident in the body analogy. The

body consists of ten fingers, ten toes, two hands, two feet, two legs, two arms, and so on. Although these are individual members of the body, they are not merely a collection of parts, and they have not been created independently or separately and then assembled like a machine.

That is not how the body develops or comes into being. It all starts with one cell, which begins to develop and grow, sending out little buds, and one of these buds will eventually become the right forearm, arm, and hand. Another will form the same on the left. Then the bud that forms the trunk comes down, and the legs come off the trunk. It all comes out of the original primitive cell.

The parts have never had an independent existence. They are all offshoot outgrowths of this central primitive cell. That is why the body exhibits essential unity. By analogy, this illustration shows what is true of us as members of God's church.

A visible church organization is necessary so that the gospel of Christ, can be preached in an organized manner and reach out farther. But those still clinging to the false ideas may misunderstand it as a physical organization, that is, the true church of God. Yeah, in our past it has been looked at as a physical organization. Well, according to Scripture, it is not a physical organization, it is a spiritual organization with one Spirit.

Matthew 13:24, if you will turn there with me, verses 24 to 30, and verses 36 to 43. Jesus spoke the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares to the multitude gathered before Him, showing an aspect that would affect God's church. The parable illustrates the workings of the mystery of sin against the church and the extent to which the evil one is allowed to go in his opposition to the church. In this parable, the church's existing mixed character culminates in the final separation of the religious hobbyists from saints. These are two distinct groups within the church, the one nonpliable and the other converted. In the Parable of the Wheat and Tares, there are two sowers, two kinds of seed, and two harvests, one good and one bad.

Jesus described two sowers of different character. Here, the sower refers only to Jesus, and He is the householder and the Son of Man. As the Creator, He made man in His own image. The other sower is called His enemy, an enemy, the wicked one, the Devil.

The word Jesus used for His enemy was *diabolos*, meaning the accuser, the misrepresenter, the liar, the betrayer, and the one who opposes all that is true and righteous. So Jesus' enemy sowed in a field that was not his while the servants slept. But this does not mean that they were unwatchful or to blame for the mixed field. This natural state of sleep implies that it was the normal time for sleep. It was nighttime.

We are given insight into the sly nature of Satan in choosing the darkness for his diabolical work. It is significant that Satan would not bother to sow the wicked among the wicked, but he sows the wicked among the good. Satan's malicious intention is to cause problems and confusion. The bad seed grows into poisonous weeds that allow only the healthiest wheat to survive.

Tares, like weeds, have never been marketable. Nobody wants them. They are not sellable, they are not useful, they are to be disposed of. Now tares are actually darnel, a seed nearly indistinguishable from wheat. In its upright state, the wheat and the darnel look alike, so trying to destroy one would destroy the other.

Separating them would be beyond his servants' ability. Only after the wheat has matured can the tares be detected. Then the tares are gathered in bundles in the field, and this binding process happens very quickly. After the gathering and the binding of the weeds follows their destruction by fire, the ultimate destroyer.

Many who are not in the process of conversion resemble those who are. They go to church, pray, read the Bible, just as true Christians do, yet they are merely religious hobbyists. Jesus calls them children of the wicked one, and being tares, they will be destroyed. In this interpretation of the parable, Jesus says that the tares are the children of the wicked one.

The tares are not originally from the wicked one, but they develop their character under his strong influence, and they are led by him, and so are his children. The parable exposes the problem of evil intermingling with good within congregations, and there is an intermingling of good and evil that confronts nations, communities, and homes as well. It is the *modus operandi* of Satan.

No matter how a society may try to legislate or separate lawbreakers from the rest of society, the seeds of crime seem to find a place to grow no matter how much human beings try to destroy it. The church is likewise affected by Satan's constant attacks. The genuine wheat and the counterfeit wheat, that is, the tares, are always together in the church.

In the parable, the servants' perplexity about the seeds shows that the presence of sin is often a mystery to people. God cannot be blamed for the tares because God does not sow evil, Satan does. But God uses them as a way to strengthen His one church, one Spirit. Jesus prophesied that God's church on earth in its physical form would be imperfect.

The spiritual church has members who are dedicated and loyal, filled with the Holy Spirit, yet they still have personal defects. But the physical church includes unconverted people who recognize the truth, yet are mainly there to enjoy social association with God's people, or some just to argue about biblical things. The intent of this parable is to enlighten and warn saints about this fact of life. It is not intended to strip religious hobbyists of their current charade. God will expose the bad seed once the good seed has matured.

The good seed, that is, the wheat, that is, the sons, the children of the Kingdom, refer to the same baptized members of God's church who have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit—the saints, the elect, the righteous. It is the product of that precious Word received, understood, and obeyed. The Son of Man, as the sower or householder, sows only good seed. It is the good seed, those who are righteous, who, because of walking worthy of God, of living God's way of life, become the children of the Kingdom.

Now it is God's will that Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, sows His redeemed ones in this world of sin and misery, to train and to test them, so that we may be true witnesses for Him as we prepare for the Kingdom of God. Therefore He has placed us where He wants us. In Luke 22:31, Jesus told Simon Peter that he was wheat and that as such he was to be sifted by Satan. This warning should be heeded by all of us to watch and pray that the field of our hearts has not had tares sown in it by the enemy. And some of those tares in our hearts look like bitterness or complaining, or being lackadaisical about God's truth, basically being lazy in the extreme.

When we have been bought at a price and have received His Spirit, He has made us a new creation in Him, and an heir to His Family and to eternal life. He expects us to bear fruit in the corner of the field of this world where He sows us.

Now the true church is a new creation, and all who belong to her are spiritually born from above by the indwelling of God's Spirit. And once we recognize the truth of these terms, the certainty of unity is clear. Spiritual unity in the spiritual church of God exists only through God's Spirit indwelling the truly converted. Therefore, God's spiritual church is unified, even though the visible physical church is not. God's Spirit is never, ever disunified. It cannot be. It is God's Spirit. It is the mind of God.

Another principle Paul emphasizes is the variety within unity. I am not referring to the deceptive, politically correct "unity through diversity" double-speak of politics and academia. That is not what I am talking about. What we see in the church is true unity, not uniformity.

To express this principle, Paul states it in a seemingly negative way, using sarcasm and ridicule in I Corinthians 12. He had received letters from those in Chloe's household and from others reporting that one member said, I am of Paul. Another, I am of Apollos. And another, I am of Cephas. They were divided into factions, bickering and arguing.

The apostle Paul's way of dealing with that was to tell them that they had clearly forgotten that the church is the Body of Christ. He tells them that it is as if the eye says to the hand, I have no need of you, and the foot says the

same to the ear. So he ridicules all that and then teaches the principle that in the church, as in the human body, there is a variety within essential unity.

Looking at a finger and contrasting it with an eye, at first there seems to be nothing in common. The finger seems very ordinary, but then consider the eye. Think of its delicacy, subtlety, refinement, balance, and tenderness. What an instrument the eye is, as far as being impressive.

At first glance it appears as if there can be no relationship at all between an eye, a finger, a foot, or other parts of the body that are even less impressive or unattractive. And yet the truth is that though they are all so different, look so different, and serve different functions, they are all one in this essential sense, that they belong together and are essential parts of the body. The body is not complete without any one of them.

Then consider the analogy in terms of the interdependence of any one part on the others. None of them has any real sense, meaning, or existence on their own. As Paul puts it, "If the whole body were a hand, it would not need a body." If the whole body were a foot, it would not need a body either.

What makes the body a body is that all these various parts are one in this organic whole, and in this essential unity, they are all interdependent on one another. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you. If you have no hands, you will find yourself very crippled and helpless. The eye cannot work the whole body. There is no independence within the body. Each part derives its meaning from its relationship to the others. That is the truth about the body, and it is equally true of the church. Each organ needs the others, and each benefits from the other's function.

And consider Paul's illustration of the less attractive parts. He says that if we have the right conception of the body, we will not despise any part of it. No part is unimportant. Every part counts, and every member of the church is important. People sometimes say of themselves in the church, I am not a very important member, to which the reply is that there is no such thing as an unimportant member.

What they mean, of course, is that they do not have some obvious, outstanding, or exceptional gifts that others have. They may mean that they

cannot speak, preach, or pray eloquently in public, but they despise the gifts they do have.

I Corinthians 12:23 (KJV) On the less comely [honorable] members we bestow the more abundant honor.

In the life of the church, every member is essential to the harmonious function of the whole church. And we know that God has chosen each and every one that He calls and places in His church, so He knows what parts of the Body of Christ we are. In the church, people and actions all matter. Therefore, anything we do to interfere with this idea of interdependence is not only false doctrine but also introduces an artificial division and constitutes schism in some form.

Another principle that is evident is that all the parts of the body work together toward the same magnificent end and have the same objective. Each part of the body has its own function, but it plays its part in the whole. We think with our brain and act with our will, but we must have some instrument through which to carry out our purpose. If we want to shut a book, we do so with our hands. We think it, we will it, and we put it into practice with our hands. And if we are without hands and arms, we cannot shut the book. Although I have seen videos where a person did not have arms and they shut the book or were able to do everything with their toes. So, you know, analogies break down after a while, but I am glad those people are able to accomplish such extraordinary feats.

Please turn with me to Ephesians 3, verse 10. All the parts serve one great function and work toward the same great end and objective. The church is the Body of Christ, and we are its members. And Paul had already told the Ephesians that God would reveal certain things through His church.

Ephesians 3:10-11 To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This I find very interesting and never realized before, but the principalities and powers are looking down from heaven, and it is through the church—

through you and me, every one of us, all of us together—that they are beginning to understand the manifold wisdom of God. We are called to make God's wisdom known. What this means is that the angels in heaven looking down on us do not have a full understanding of human workings and human nature. And so by watching us in the process of human life throughout history, they are learning things that they did not know either, which I find interesting.

So God is also teaching them, in a similar way, not exactly the same way as He is teaching us. We are actually on the front line. Well, so are some of our angels right around us protecting us.

Please turn to John 4:23. The pagan religion of Rome was more a rite than a doctrine. In effect, the emperor declared, You *must* do this, but you may think as you please. The Roman worshippers believed they needed only to perform the proper religious ceremonies, whether they understood them or not. As far as they were concerned, a hypocritical skeptic could be just as religious as a true believer if he offered a sacrifice in the temple of their gods.

So it is vital that true Christians believe and act in accordance with God's written Word. Jesus unconditionally stated that we must worship the Father in spirit and in truth, not in hypocrisy.

John 4:23-24 "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth."

And now flip over to Hebrews 10:19. All who truly and sincerely worship God do so from the heart, not merely in form. Acceptable worship of God is always sincere, expressed through gratitude, praise, and prayer, and marked by a desire to glorify Him without seeking to be a spectacle. Spiritual worship involves offering the heart and mind to God for His use as He sees fit. Hebrews 10, we are going to read verses 19 to 23. The caption in my Bible says, Hold Fast Your Confession.

Hebrews 10:19-23 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which

He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

So the church's gathering for worship is essential to our faith and signifies God's presence. There is no reason if you are not sick or too far away that you should not be here at church. And there should be a representative from the family here as well. If there is sickness in the family and the husband is not sick, or if there is something like that, the husband should be here to represent the family.

I know that with the Internet and all of that, it seems like we are able to get the truth out to everybody through that. And it is good for those who cannot or do not have a congregation close enough to go to, and that is fine, and God understands that. But if you have a congregation close enough to go to, you should be there representing your family. And I realize there are vacations and things like that in the summer, but generally speaking, there should be a representative of the family, if at all possible, provided they are not contagious or anything like that for the church.

But this was an understanding that was very basic in the Worldwide Church of God, back under Herbert Armstrong, that this meant something, to come before God, because we are coming before God's throne as a congregation, and God is here. And so if we are at home, we think, Oh, I don't really feel like going. Well, even if you are on the Internet, God will judge. I cringe. So I just wanted to express that to you.

We have lost some truths, or a lot of things that were just basically understood back in the Worldwide days, and well, things are just more lax. In some ways it is a good thing, in other ways not. So we have to be very careful and understand that we are part of a body, and we are expected to support it. What we believe in our minds and feel in our hearts, we will do in our actions.

I John 3:18-19 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

It is a way of life in Jesus Christ that yields genuine obedience to His doctrines. Obedience to what God has already revealed is the key to understanding even more.

Psalms 111:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever.

So God will not lead you any further or give you any more inspiration and understanding until you act on what you already have learned. God builds upon, He teaches us in increments, and we learn by building upon knowledge that He has already given us. So back to Hebrews 8:10, and this is a quote from Jeremiah 31:33.

Hebrews 8:10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

So if our hearts are not changed, following God's rules is unpleasant and difficult. Human nature rebels against being told how to live. However, the Holy Spirit gives us new desires and helps us want to obey God, and with new hearts we find that serving God is our greatest joy.

Psalms 86:10-12 For You are great, and do wondrous things; You alone are God. Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name. I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify Your name forevermore.

To fear Your name means to revere God, and heartfelt reverence means appreciating and honoring Him in every area of life. And we must show our loyalty to Him in every part of our bodies, not only when we go to church. If we revere God with our whole heart, our work, our relationships, finances, and desires will align with His will. Under God's new agreement, God's law is within us, it is no longer an external set of rules and principles.

Please turn with me to Philippians 3, verse 8. The Holy Spirit reminds us of Christ's words, strengthens our consciences, shapes our motives and desires, and moves us to obedience. Now we desire to do God's will with all our heart and mind. Keeping God's law is the way to every good, right, and desirable result we can imagine.

Philippians 3:8 Yet indeed I [that is, Paul] also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.

He had suffered and lost everything, five shipwrecks, and you can go on and on at his personal loss, but yet he counted them as just trash compared to what he was going to gain from Christ, and what he had already in spiritual knowledge and wisdom. So we have access to spiritual knowledge and power, but we may have to make sacrifices to enjoy them fully. And when we are united with Christ by trusting Him, we experience the power that raised Him from the dead. And that same mighty power helps us live morally renewed and regenerated lives.

Understanding true doctrine is necessary to guide a Christian's life. False and misleading doctrine inevitably deceives and devastates. Our attitudes and actions inevitably flow from our foundational doctrines, whether good or bad. For this reason, we must contend earnestly for the faith which was once and for all delivered to the saints, as Jude 3 admonishes. In II Timothy 4, verses 3 and 4, Paul warns that some in the congregation will have itching ears and resist sound doctrine.

II Timothy 4:3-4 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they

have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables.

Elsewhere Paul admonished us to,

II Timothy 1:13 Hold fast the pattern of sound words you have heard from me, in faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

and

Titus 1:9 Hold fast the faithful word as [we] have been taught, that [we] may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

Please turn over to I Timothy 6, verse 3. The law, the prophets, and the teachings of Jesus Christ are the church's doctrines, and this doctrine of truth harmonizes with godliness.

I Timothy 6:3-5 If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

You know, you look at the Internet, and you look at advertisements on TV, and it seems like some religious person is trying to sell you something, and their interpretations or whatever it may be, or something or other. They have made godliness a means of gain. God allows Satan to lead people away from sound doctrine because some people think too little of the church and its doctrines, and they follow their own desires.

The apostle Paul's repeated emphasis on sound doctrine implies that the church's body of teaching is more than a gospel *about* Christ. It is the gospel

of Christ and what He taught and lived in His own life. The sound doctrine of Christ is the pattern of sound words and a body of truth once for all delivered to the saints. And given the constant bombardment of false doctrines, the New Testament writers were inspired to warn us that God's church must be founded on the sound doctrine of Christ, to defend and contend for the faith.

Every major religion in the world has claimed that its founder possessed unique insight into life's eternal truths. But true Christian doctrine claims far more, for Jesus Himself told us in John 14:6 that He is the truth, not merely its Teacher.

God has given His church an enormous responsibility to preach, teach, nurture, give, serve, and do many other tasks. We cannot fulfill this command individually, but God calls us to be members of His body. Some of us can do one task while others can do another. Together we can obey Him more fully than any of us could alone, meaning carrying out the responsibility that God has given us and given the church.

It is a human tendency to overestimate what we can do by ourselves and underestimate what we can accomplish as a group. The truth is just the opposite. As the Body of Christ, we can accomplish more when we function together than we would ever dream possible when working alone.

The responsibility of the church is to help prepare her members to attain a stature measured by the fullness of Christ. The goal of the church is nothing less than to produce men and women who reflect Jesus Christ Himself, and this means we must reach the unity of the faith.

Ephesians 4:13 Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

This means until we all arrive at a state of complete unity and perfection, until we all hold the same truths, the same doctrine, and have the same confidence and the same faith and trust in the Son of God, we must edify the Body of Christ.

Now please turn to I Corinthians 12, verse 27. The apostle Paul mentions another principle in I Corinthians 12. Because of this essential unity, if one member suffers, all the members suffer with that member. We cannot say only my little toe is sick. We have probably said that in various ways, but we cannot say it truly. Only my little toe is sick? If the little toe is sick, we are sick, and if there is pain there, we feel it all over. We cannot divorce ourselves from our little toe.

I Corinthians 12:27-31 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

That more excellent way is the way of love, the way of giving, the way of outgoing concern for others, as the next chapter, chapter 13, explains. Nevertheless, godly love cannot be learned and applied without the knowledge and understanding of the true doctrine of the prophets, Jesus Christ, and the apostles. Because of the unity of the body, the same blood flows through all its parts. This vital power animates the whole.

Therefore, if one member suffers, all members suffer with him. If one member is honored, all members rejoice. If we truly understand this doctrine of the church, any idea of competition, rivalry, self-seeking, or self-importance would be impossible, even ludicrous. And when we are guilty of such things, we are simply proclaiming that we have never understood the church's doctrine.

The church's doctrine, in a word, is love.

What a privilege we have and enjoy. You and I are members of the Body of Christ. That is our relationship to Christ. He is the Head, and we are the various members. No greater privilege exists.

Psalm 84:10 I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

Even that position in the king's palace is a wonderful one. And although physically and humanly reasoned, we think, Oh, I don't necessarily want to be a doorkeeper. However, it is going to be so fantastic, but it is not going to seem like the doorkeeper we have today, the kind in front of a hotel, that has this uniform on and such. But this New Testament blessing goes infinitely beyond that.

We are *in* Christ. We belong to Him as Christians. We are part of His invisible spiritual body, and are now members of the Body of Christ. If we realize this, we will inevitably endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The unity of the Spirit is the spiritual union among the Father, the Christ, and Their saints, and we have unity among ourselves, by which, being joined to the same head and having the same Spirit dwelling in us, we share the graces of faith, hope, and love.

We are rooted and grounded in the same doctrine of Christ and share a mutual affection for each other. When we look around the church, here and afar, we see a variety of personalities and abilities and backgrounds and strengths and weaknesses, but God sees one body.

I Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.

And that is the source of our unity. Our unity does not come merely from belonging to the same organization, or from personal agreement. True spiritual unity comes from God's Spirit dwelling in us, uniting us with the Father, with Jesus Christ, and one another. That is why Paul does not tell us to create unity, he tells us to maintain it, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. God has already provided the spiritual bond; we must safeguard it. We protect it through humility and patience and forgiveness, service, sound doctrine, and godly love.

Every member matters! If one suffers, we suffer together; if one is honored, we rejoice together; if one becomes discouraged, we strengthen and encourage him. Why? *Because we belong together as members of Christ's Body.*

The world struggles to manufacture unity but God gives His church something powerful that the world cannot produce: spiritual unity found in His truth. One body, one Spirit, one hope; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; and one God and Father of all. What an extraordinary privilege! It gives me shivers.

At the center of the unity stands Jesus Christ, the Head of the body. We have the extraordinary blessing of being members of that spiritual body. God has called us, Christ leads us, God's Spirit unifies us, His truth grounds us, His love binds us together. And His Kingdom is our common destination.

So let us treasure this unity. Let us protect and strengthen it. By the power of God's Holy Spirit let us remain joined and knit together in love. Many members; one body, one Spirit, one purpose. And a glorious future in the Kingdom of God!