

# One Body – Part 1

## Is God's Church functioning as One Body?

*Produced by [www.LightontheRock.com](http://www.LightontheRock.com)  
by Philip Shields*

Summary: Part 1: Is the Body of Christ living like the One Body that scripture describes? If not, why is that happening? Were we one at the Feast of Tabernacles? What happened to the unity we had in the 1960's? Was even that a true picture of the oneness we are to have? What can we do to beseech God to help us become more one with Him and with His body, the church? Is being perfectly One Body God's will? (I recommend you hear the audio as well as look at the transcript).

.....

Greetings, children of the one Living God, and you who are my brothers and sisters. I could almost say "to the divided children of the living God, when we should be one body if we really are His children". This message is not so much a sermon as it is an invitation for us children of God to talk more with one another, and listen to one another. It is a sharing of a yearning in my heart to yours. I'm hoping it will cause prayer and dialogue between Spirit led, spirit filled believers who are children of God—no matter where they are. As usual, this message is the fruit of weeks of soul-searching, studying the scriptures, beseeching Yahweh's direction in prayer, as well as discussion with other believers – and it's a sharing of what this has produced thus far. I welcome your input, your dialogue, after you have also prayed about this subject and have asked God to show you His will, please let me listen to God's word to you.

Most of you hearing this will be Sabbath-keeping, holyday-keeping believers who believe God has a family who should be living and working as one family to promote Father's kingdom. Most of you will have just recently worshiped our dear Abba and our King at His Feast of Tabernacles. So I am not addressing *any* organization, but the Body of Christ. I'm asking –

- what is God doing in His family – those with God's spirit? (We are baptized into one Body, God's church, which is "the body of Christ" – 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:22-23)
- For that matter, what is "the Body of Christ"? Is it to be found in one segment of believers only, or in one denomination? Has it ever been in only one denomination?
- Why do we not come together more? Was the Body ever truly one? When?
- Why do we not support one another more, especially outside of the organizations we each listen to or belong to?
- How is it that more and more seem content to have little to do with other believers?
- Why, in other words, are we not worshiping God –together, some way, some how? Why do we see so much pride in our own groups or organizations? What is happening in the body of Christ?
- Many of you believe true unity is impossible before the return of Christ. I wonder if that is correct scripturally. Just because we don't see how something can come about,

should we assume something is impossible? If it's God's will, nothing is impossible to Yahweh.

- Why are we so divided, so close to the time of greatest trouble this world has ever seen? You'd think, if we are aware of the times we live in, that we'd be coming together, forgiving one another, encouraging one another, especially as we see the Day approaching (Heb. 10:24-25).

This message is a soul-searching attempt to implore all of us to consider our state, our condition as the body of Christ, and come to a point of deep repentance for our part in what has happened to cause the division we see. It is easy to point fingers and blame others for our sick divided state, but we're all in this body, and when one part of the body is sick, the whole body gets sick, should feel sick, and should be concerned (1 Cor. 12:26). So I hope in fact that this message will lead many to a day of fasting and repentance before our holy God so He will be merciful to us in these last days.

I'm just sharing ideas. Let me say from the beginning that any oneness is going to be God's work, God's doing, God's timing, God's way -- and not some man -- any man -- attempting to force some kind of oneness outside of God's blessing. But it's good to talk about this.

Many of us have just returned from the Eternal's Feast of Tabernacles. In ancient times, it was a time of rejoicing over the physical harvest, and today we rehearse the rejoicing over the spiritual harvest of the people of the world during the Millennium. We know that. In another way, it was a time when the children of Israel—Yahweh's elect nation -- came together as one to worship their Creator. Nowadays we are the spiritual Israel of God (Gal. 6:16), the body of the Christ, preparing to become the Bride of the Messiah. Are you with me so far?

We kept the Feast -- in dozens and dozens of sites -- but we didn't keep them as one body, did we? We sometimes had 5-10 or more similar venues within a couple miles of where we were meeting. Some groups met in the same hotel or conference center and were divided by just one wall. Why? What's going on? Why couldn't we come together to worship our God? Did we really fulfill Psalm 133 in the larger sense?

Psalm 133:1-2

Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* For brethren to dwell together in unity!

**2** *It is* like the precious oil upon the head, Running down on the beard,

The beard of Aaron, Running down on the edge of his garments.

Verse 2 speaks of two brothers coming together. It describes the ordination of Aaron by his brother Moses, as they surrounded themselves with the sweet perfume of the ointment (Ex. 30:25-30). They were as one, working together, in unity. The oil -- picturing our anointing of the Holy Spirit -- was plentiful, covering the whole body of Aaron pouring down over his garments. This was no small dab on one's fingertip like we do when we anoint for illness. No, this was a fragrant, special anointing oil that was poured in copious amounts. It was a joyous time.

Did we fulfill Psalm 133 for our Father? Some like to feel it was a pleasant Feast for Him seeing His children worship -- but not together, not coming together, but staying purposely apart? Where we attended in Panama City, several affiliated groups did meet together,

peacefully, but they were still groups that had been affiliated in the past few years. That was a good start. But meanwhile there were still several other groups meeting within a mile of where we were meeting, and we didn't invite them in, we didn't meet with them, though I did attend another venue as well. I don't think we should feel content because several previously affiliated congregations came together and functioned peacefully. Good start -- but I'm talking about something far more. But it was a good start.

If you were a great patriarch and had a family reunion of many thousands – but the children wouldn't play together, eat together, meet together – and yet ostensibly honoring the family name – how would you feel? Were we really coming together in unity, as Psalm 133 says, when dozens and dozens of groups met separately, apart from one another, sometimes divided only by a literal wall separating the 2 groups meeting in the same hotel? Is that what “one body” means? Some of you think the way it was, was just fine. I'd like to hear your reasons – based on scripture – why you would think this condition is pleasing to Father.

I remember the Feasts of 1966 in Squaw Valley, CA, 1970, 1971 in Minehead, England – it didn't matter where we were, we were one. 1972 in Praz sur Arly in the French Alps. We were as one. You may have been meeting in the Piney woods of Big Sandy, or at Jekyll Island or at the Poconos or in Australia or South Africa. It doesn't matter, our stories would be the same. There wasn't another break-away group across town, or in the next hall! Getting ready for the feast was exciting. The closer and closer we got, the more other brethren we'd see, for we all had those special green stickers – we'd wave to total strangers whom we knew were not total strangers but members of the same one body. I was 13, but I too got excited when the song leader strode on to the stage, then in a warm voice said, “Welcome, brethren, all of you, to the Eternal's Feast of Tabernacles!”.... and then a moment later he'd raise his arms, the pianist played the introduction, and then thousands of voices were raised as *one*, in unison, in praising songs to our Maker and our Redeemer.

What has happened to us, brethren?

Did you not feel some sadness, some loneliness, something missing this past feast? Many have said they did feel it. As we'd run into other brethren from the other venues, whether in the elevator or in the parking lot – didn't you feel a little sadness that we weren't meeting together? Did I seem right for children of God who professed His Spirit and love – not worship the King together? That's what made me feel something was terribly wrong, even as the individual organizations met on their own and seemed to be having a good time, something is not right in this picture! I know there are also many, many scattered and rejected sheep – who were also of this flock – but who did not feel welcomed to attend anywhere in particular. Did you know that? If you were aware, did your heart not bleed for them and wish to search for them and welcome them also to your joyous festivities? As you'll see in this and the next message, these scattered sheep are very much on the mind of their Shepherd King of Kings.

You may have been in Branson, or Destin, or Squaw Valley or any number of other venues. In so many of these places, you and your group weren't the only ones there. In Panama City Beach, I was told there were at least 6-7 other groups there within a couple miles of each other – but not worshipping together. I've heard that was the story over much of the world. In 2007, we met in Newport, OR – and we had several Sabbath keeping and feast keeping groups there

once more. There was even a Messianic group meeting in their tents on the outskirts of town. I visited with them a couple times as well.

Did you notice something similar where you were? Did your heart not yearn within you for God's children to be truly one, to come together as one body, as one family of children of God truly coming together as brothers and sisters who enjoyed each other, and worshiped together? But can we? Is that what God wants? Is that what God is going to do? In the hotel we stayed in for the Feast, we'd bump into people from various of the church groups --- in the elevators, in the lobby. I'd ask if they were in town for the Feast, and they'd nod and mention their group, which wasn't our group. I'd smile and with a big, bleeding heart quietly and warmly say, "God be with you all. Have a wonderful Feast. I hope we meet again." But my heart was aching, yearning, wondering why it was like this, why we couldn't worship the King together. I would have jumped at it, and I think they were ready to jump at that.

As I talk about it, if you are a true child of the one True God, your heart is aching and yearning too, isn't it? In your heart of hearts, you know I'm touching on something important, don't you!? Even if you don't know me, you know this is true, don't you? I will discuss next time how and why this all happened, and what Father is going to accomplish through it all – but the question on oneness remains. Are we supposed to be content and self-satisfied with the little groups we meet in, but definitely separated from other groups who call themselves by God's name?

Again I ask, what has happened to us, brethren? Why have we split into hundreds of different groups? Where – and when – will the splits end? When will the splits finally stop continuing to split into yet smaller groups? Is this the successful work of a divisive Satan? Or is this God's doing – as some contend? Is this the ministers' fault, as many will say? Or did we bring this on by our own attitudes? Why did all this happen?

Back in the 1960's and 1970's, there was a spirit of oneness. However, this also was just one denomination back then. Was the Body of Christ really confined to that one group? Really? I ask, was even that picture I just gave you earlier of the way it used to be, of the unified feasts in the 1960's and 1970's – was even that really what the Lord's One Body was all about? Was God confining Himself to the work of one man, one group, and did God have no other children in any other denomination? We need to really figure this one out correctly.

Here are some examples that may broaden our thinking:

- I want you to re-read Rev. 2 and 3 again. If we could be a fly on the wall and watch church services of most of those groups, would we even recognize them as God's church? And yet scripture calls them God's church, with Christ standing in their midst. Take Pergamos and Thyatira for example. Doctrine of Nicolaitans, Balaam's teachings, the prophetess Jezebel seducing the followers with her teachings, and on and on. They are commanded to repent, but they were still God's church.
- Many who have ties to Herbert Armstrong feel the Body of Christ is limited only to offshoots from Herbert Armstrong's original group. But what about the group Herbert Armstrong came out of? Were there no converted believers in there? Mr. Armstrong himself said they were God's church, but asleep and dying, so he left that organization

and formed his own. But does that mean Radio Church of God in the 1930's and 1940's was the only group that had any believers in it? Herbert Armstrong himself would not have said so. I say all this because before it is said and done, I believe we are all going to have to accept God is working with lots of people all around the world who never even heard of HWA.

- Even ELIJAH had to be told he wasn't the only one left worshiping God, though Elijah thought that. But there were 7,000 who hadn't bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:14-18).

We're finding people keeping the Feast in India, in Thailand, in Kenya – with no prior connection to the groups and people many of us had connections with. These too include people with God's spirit. Get excited...God's not limited to working with remnants of the work of a man who has been dead now for 23 years. Far from it.

Our relationship is first and foremost with God the Father and His Son, not in any organization of this world! Don't confuse having an identity with a church, religion or organization as being the same thing as knowing HIM directly.

One more thing: God's people are to be identified as being so incredibly loving in their unity and concern for one another, that the whole world would know these are the children of God. You know –John 13:34-35. v. 35 - “By this shall all men know you are my disciples, that you agape love one another (as I have loved you-v.34).”

Did the world see that kind of overwhelming agape love between God's scattered sheep in 2009? Did we evidence that kind of Christ-like love so much so that the world would say “those must be followers of the one true God.”?

I've given this a lot of prayer and thought. Frankly, some who attended the Feast may not have even noticed or thought about what I'm talking about. Some of you were very happy with the little group you met with – and not so aware of the other groups we weren't meeting with. Some may have been too giddy about the dance coming up, or the beach party or the get together for dinner to have thought about the state of the Body of Christ.

### **TRACK 2 – WHAT SHOULD WE BE DOING RIGHT NOW;**

I will address later exactly what makes one a part of the Body of Christ, and the oneness that is supposed to be evidenced in that Body, and where that Body is right now. We will clearly identify the Body of Christ. But I hope that most of you hearing this already know we are in a mess even as the end of the age comes barreling down before us. We'll soon be in the time period when brother will betray brother, a son will betray his father, a daughter betray her mother – but are we ready to face this greatest time of trouble in the condition we're in now?

See Micah 7:5-7. It's very clear. That was quoted also in Luke 21:16. Also see what Yeshua, our Messiah, says in Luke 12:49-53. I'd like you to write those down, and prayerfully read them on your knees as you ask Yahweh to speak to you. Notice each of these say during the time when there is division within families, that we are to look to Yahweh, we are to follow Him, that He is our Leader. We usually thought it meant some in a family would be called, and

others wouldn't – causing division. That may be true, but I also wonder if it doesn't apply to those of us "in the church" – being divided against one another for a time of testing. But there's a huge storm brewing out there heading our way, and many in the flock don't seem to be aware of it. Jesus said to understand the times, just like we can interpret the seasons. And with this huge storm coming, God's people continue to splinter.

So what should we be doing right now in the face of groups continuing to form yet more splinter groups, continuing to split over and over – and each daring to call itself "the church of God"? If this hasn't alarmed you, if this hasn't concerned you – put yourself in God's shoes. Is this what one family, God's family, is supposed to be like?

We will address all of this in the course of a couple messages. But I just want to say we need to learn from Daniel, who when faced with the scattering of Judah and its captivity. By this time many Jews had settled in to Babylon and most frankly had no desire to return. They liked things the way they were. But not Daniel. Which one are you? Do you like Babylon – or do you hear the call to "come out of her, my people" (Revelation 18:4)? For I believe all this splintering into yet more organizations of men, is – are you ready – God's people copying the ways of Babylon and departing from our true Leader – our Shepherd King.

Let's go back and read his prayer found in Daniel 9. He doesn't blame God, though he admits God used it as punishment. He doesn't blame the priests. He doesn't isolate the king as to be blamed. He doesn't blame his neighbors. He doesn't blame the Levites. He doesn't even blame Satan. He starts by using the word "we". His prayer is filled with "WE have done this, WE have failed here and there... be merciful on all of us." And yet Daniel is listed as one of the 3 most righteous men who ever lived, along with Job and Noah (Ezekiel 14:14,20). He includes himself as part of the problem. He certainly includes in the "we" - - a total picture of including himself, as well as to "our kings, our leaders, and our forefathers... for we have not listened..." (Daniel 9:8). I think when we look at the state of the church today, spiritual Judah, if you will, we can learn from Daniel and come humbly before God and seek Him diligently.

I believe if enough of us would pray the same kind of prayer today that Daniel did, we could be astounded as to what Yahweh may do in behalf of His people. What kind of work will He yet accomplish, if we repent and fast and seek His oneness in Him, together?

Do I hear anyone saying or thinking we don't need to fast and repent? Doesn't that sound Laodicean to you? "We're fine, in need of nothing, we're rich, we're OK" (Rev. 3:17). Or others might say "Hey, God's obviously doing this, or at least allowing all this – so chill out, relax. He'll do what He'll do". Daniel didn't think that way. God had prophesied 70 years of captivity – but Daniel didn't take it for granted. I'd rather err on the side of humble repentance and beseeching Father as His children, than assume I'm in no need of fasting and repentance.

In fact, in Nehemiah's day, after they had returned to Jerusalem from Babylon, what did they do three days after their Feast of Tabernacles? I gave a sermon a few years back on this: they fasted and sought their God. You may wish to re-read Nehemiah 9:1-2. So there's precedent. They re-covenanted with God to do His will – Nehemiah 10. So there's precedent for this. Can we not follow Daniel and Nehemiah's example?

True spiritual oneness will come only when we first of all become one with Yahweh and His Son, our King. That's the example Daniel set for us as he watched a splintered, scattered Judah in his day – just like the spiritual church, spiritual Judah, is today. Let's read it in Daniel 9.

Daniel 9:3-22

Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. **4** And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said, "O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, **5** we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments. **6** Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land. **7** O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us shame of face, as *it is* this day — to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those near and those far off in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of the unfaithfulness which they have committed against You.

**8** "O Lord, to us belong shame of face, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against You. **9** To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him. **10** We have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in His laws, which He set before us by His servants the prophets. **11** Yes, all Israel has transgressed Your law, and has departed so as not to obey Your voice; therefore the curse and the oath written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against Him. **12** And He has confirmed His words, which He spoke against us and against our judges who judged us, by bringing upon us a great disaster; for under the whole heaven such has never been done as what has been done to Jerusalem.

**13** "As *it is* written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us; yet we have not made our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth. **14** Therefore the LORD has kept the disaster in mind, and brought it upon us; for the LORD our God *is* righteous in all the works which He does, though we have not obeyed His voice. **15** And now, O Lord our God, who brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and made Yourself a name, as *it is* this day — we have sinned, we have done wickedly!

**16** "O Lord, according to all Your righteousness, I pray, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people *are* a reproach to all *those* around us. **17** Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate. (*The sanctuary, the NAOS (Greek)—is what WE are supposed to be today, the temple, the naos of God!*) **18** O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies. **19** O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your

own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name." ("Church of GOD" – that's right)

**20** Now while I *was* speaking, praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God, **21** yes, while I *was* speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering."

The Eternal God was moved by Daniel's prayer. Yahweh recorded this for our admonition, for us today. We, the people of God, have also been smashed, scattered, have an ineffective work going on – but we can repent deeply and come together as one, somehow, some way. Father will give our King the master plan, and we will come together in His time, in His way. We are not going to form yet another organization of man though. Of that, I'm confident.

Disunity starts when we lose being one with God first. That is our part in this break up: we have not remained as one with God as we should be. That is what I'm repenting of, and recommending you all do.

#### FASTING – Dec 18-Dec 19 as one

I am going to encourage as many of you as will join in this seeking after God and fasting, to join with all of like mind, **sunset Friday Dec 18- sabbath ending sunset Dec 19** in a day of deep repentance, soul searching, confession of our sins, reconciliation with those we've offended or been offended by, and beseeching our God to bring one body of like minded believers to Him. Spread the word. There will be no church service. There will be no celebrating. There will be zero focus on any man. The entire day is to follow Daniel's example of beseeching God in heaven and focusing 100% on HIM, His reconciliation, His joy, His forgiveness. That's Dec 18 at sundown Friday night, to Dec 19 Sabbath at sundown.

Please pass the word on to as many who will hear you. It's not an attempt to follow anyone – except Yahweh Himself and His Son, our Husband. I don't even want to necessarily know who all is going to do this. Just fast in private, in secret, as we're told, without telling others (Matthew 6:16-17). But I do think that if a group of us do it at the same time, privately though, there may be more effect. There's plenty of precedent of the whole nation, or a group of people fasting together (Esther's court; Jehoshaphat's people, etc). So let's plan on it if we are on the same wavelength here.

Again, this is not about you and certainly not about me. Neither is it about any leader, not man or woman. This is about you and I repenting before God quietly and privately. I'm not leading it, I won't be speaking on that day. I'm the least qualified on earth to ever lead such a thing as this, and I am not leading it. I don't even know if more than a handful will even hear this or hear about it. So why am I saying all this? I've felt motivated for weeks to say something. God sometimes uses even a jackass to speak His mind, as He did with Balaam's donkey (Num 22:21-33). If we remain quiet, He may even raise up stones to speak, so I speak as a fool, and bear with me (Luke 19:39-40).

So I feel led to say we need to desperately do the same thing today that Daniel did: fast in deep repentance for our own part in this division. Then we need to immediately stop the pointing of the finger at one another, at the ministers, at anyone but ourselves, as we fast.



In Isa 58 our God tells us that if we fast with humility, and not be in strife and debate, and not be pointing the finger at others, quit blaming others in other words – that He will hear us, He will heal us, He will bless us. Let's read it right now. Listen to Yahweh's words as I Isaiah 58.

He begins by questioning the way we fast, and how He is not in our usual kind of fasting. He then reveals what is the kind of fasting He is looking for. Pick up verse 7.

**Isa 58:7-14 -- I'll break into mid thought about how we should fast:**

*Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, (Kenya brethren?)*

*And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out;*

*When you see the naked, that you cover him, (some are feeling spiritually naked)*

*And not hide yourself from your own flesh?*

**8** *Then your light shall break forth like the morning,*

*Your healing shall spring forth speedily,*

*And your righteousness shall go before you;*

*The glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.*

**9** *Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;*

*You shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' (Have you not felt your prayers have not been answered as strongly as before? Perhaps it's because we have something against our brother and we haven't resolved that yet! – Matthew 5:23-24).*

*"If you take away the yoke from your midst,*

***The pointing of the finger,** and speaking wickedness,*

**10** *If you extend your soul to the hungry And satisfy the afflicted soul,*

*Then your light shall dawn in the darkness,*

*And your darkness shall *be* as the noonday.*

**11** *The LORD will guide you continually, And satisfy your soul in drought,*

*And strengthen your bones; You shall be like a watered garden,*

*And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.*

**12** *Those from among you Shall build the old waste places;*

*You shall raise up the foundations of many generations;*

***And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach,***

***The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.***

**13** *"If you turn away your foot from the **Sabbath**, (have we not become lax on keeping Sabbath properly, as a real day of rest and worship?)*

*From doing your pleasure on My holy day,*

*And call the Sabbath a delight, The holy *day* of the LORD honorable,*

*And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways,*

*Nor finding your own pleasure, Nor speaking *your own* words,*

**14** *Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD ;*

*And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth,*

*And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father.*

*The mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

As I've also already said, let's make it a focus between now and then, on our own, privately, to pray a prayer of blessing for all those who have hurt us; to pray God's forgiveness on all we have hurt (I will be praying a long time, I can see), to bless those who curse us, to forgive all,

to love everyone with this profound agape love – “that you may be children of your father in heaven” (Matthew 5:43-48). Let’s read it.

Matthew 5:43-48

**43** "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' **44** But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, **45** that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. **46** For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? **47** And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? **48** Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Remember agape love like the kind Christ has for us, was to be our hallmark. We cannot claim to love God – but not love our brother. We cannot claim to love our brother while we refuse fellowship, or sue them in court, or mark them in church because they believe slightly differently than we want, or because they refuse to worship a man - -living or dead.

1 John 4:20-21

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? **21** And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God *must* love his brother also.

It is not the love of God, brethren, when we spiritually grave dig one’s past sins then catalog them all in a notebook or magazine and spread it around the nation or world. That’s been done to way too many children of God who have sinned and repented. Scripture is so clear on that. If we don’t learn this, division and splintering and scattering is bound to continue. Let’s read what the love of God in our lives would act like:

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 Apologetics Study Bible

“Love is patient; love is kind. Love does not envy; is not boastful; is not conceited;

**5** does not act improperly; is not selfish; is not provoked; does not keep a record of wrongs;

**6** finds no joy in unrighteousness, but rejoices in the truth;

**7** bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

**8** Love never ends.

But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for languages, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.”

Remember 1 Cor. 13:5 – keeps no record of wrongs. Love covers a multitude of sins, especially when repented of (1 Peter 4:8). “He who covers a transgression seeks love...” (Prov. 17:9).

But look at what the ungodly do; they fall right in line with their leader, who is the Accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10):

Proverbs 16:27-28

An ungodly man digs up evil, And *it is* on his lips like a burning fire.

**28** A perverse man sows strife, And a whisperer separates the best of friends.

So don't be an accomplice to this evil of speaking evil of any children of God – or anyone. When people start to talk dirt about someone, anyone, even people you don't particularly like, leave the scene. Or tell them, "you who are without sin, cast the first stone" – then leave. Don't be part of that kind of grave digging in the Lamb's blood. It's evil. Let's all help each other on this one, for I think many, many of us do it without even realizing it.

### **TRACK 3 – what is GOD'S WILL ABOUT ONE BODY? HAS THERE EVER BEEN ONE BODY?**

I want to move now to talking about this "One body" concept. What IS GOD'S will about this? What we think doesn't matter. What does Scripture say? Some of you apparently think the current state of affairs is as it should be. In fact let's start with that. What IS the current state of affairs and then compare it to what our Master says we should be like:

The State of affairs of the Church of God groups – at least in some quarters:

- over 400 splits (and growing) from the one denomination we once were a part of.
- Even one group that calls itself by a name implying unity – has had at least 44 splits
- Pastors marking other pastors, disfellowshipping them.
- Not coming together for the Feasts. Some brethren cross the lines and attend here and there, especially social events, but for the most part we greet those we know and love.
- More and more say that sermons are tame and church seems more like a social club

But how unified and how one does scripture say we should be?

Ephesians 4:1-6

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, **2** with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, **3** endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. **4** There is **one body** and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism; **6** one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.

Now what standard did the Christ give us for how unified the spirit-led children of God were to be? Turn please to John 17, and see how many times Jesus prays for oneness. I think He wants us to get the point. He wants oneness.

John 17:20-23

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; **21** that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. **22** And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one:

<sup>23</sup> I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

Are we one? Are we anything close to the oneness Christ and Father have? God help us!

That oneness will come only if indeed we abide in the Father and the Son (see 1 John 4:13-16; 1 John 3:24; John 15:1-5; 1 John 5:20). We become a part of them, in them, and we become a part of one another of the brethren as well (Rom. 12:5).

The closer we are to the mind of Christ in all aspects of our lives, the more unity we will have with others who have that same mind of Christ. It is He who makes us united and unified.

But neither does unity mean we are all the same identical yellow pencils – hence Paul uses the parts of the body to explain Christian unity in 1 Cor. 12. The body parts – or members, as he calls them -- are connected together but they are not the same, nor have the same function, but they work together for the unity and health of the body. The body parts don't separate from one another. They don't war against one another – or the body is being ravaged by cancer and disease. This takes intense humility and lowliness or meekness. In fact, now we are members not only of the Body of Christ, but members of one another (Romans 12:5 says that). Nobody in his right mind has ever hated his own body. So if I'm supposed to be part of the body, and if you are – how can we function as a body if we don't come together in our hearts and spirits?

If the liver is over there, and the kidneys over here, and the elbow still somewhere else – and refusing to work together -- how is there to be a body?

But neither should we think unity of Christ's body means we have to all be under one man-made organization. Can we really box Father in heaven and Christ into one man-made organization? We may be defining "God's sheep" or the Body of Christ too narrowly.

John 10:15-16

As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd."

Yeshua was probably referring to the Diaspora (the scattered Jews), as well as the scattered 10 tribes of Israel in Parthia and other areas, as well of course of the Gentiles He was going to call. So in John 10, he was referring to those who would be called from groups not generally considered part of the elect Jews. Is it possible that WE should learn from this principle that Yahweh has far more sheep here and there than we recognize, many more people in groups outside of our narrow vision of "church of God" groups? Is that possible? I think so. We'll address that more in future messages.

In the meantime, what do we see? Many of God's Sheep have been wandering. We've roamed from this sabbath-keeping group to that sabbath-keeping group over the years. We try this pastor, and then try that pastor, via internet or live. While there, that pastor talks about how his flock is growing – when in fact it is just the sheep roaming the hilltops looking for pasture (Ezekiel 34:6). Soon they leave that pastor and try another. That pastor disappoints eventually, so they leave him – or are shoved out by the pastor or the sleek fat sheep in the flock and off they go again. Some of you recognize that I've been speaking scripture (Ezekiel 34; Zech 11).

When we stick with our Shepherd, we “will come in and out through Him and find pasture” (John 10:9). “All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned – every one – to his own way” (Isa. 53:6). If you’ve felt like “sheep going astray”, then we need to “return now to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls” (1 Pet. 2:25). I will speak more on Ezekiel 34, John 10, and Zech 11 next time.

We have to come to understand that regardless of what man says about you, if you’ve been called as a child of God, you are the “apple of His eye” (Zech 2:8). He loves you, knows you by name (John 10:3), chose you, wants you and knows everything about you (Psalm 139). So we must quit putting our hopes and expectations in man, any man or woman – or their man-made organizations. All our expectations, all our hopes, all our dreams, all our confidence – all of that, is placed now in our dear Abba (our loving Father) and His Son alone. Period. End of story.

Psalm after psalm warns us to put all our trust and confidence in Him. But we keep trying to put it into yet another organization we’re going to try. You’re going to be disappointed, again. No man should ever be placed on a pedestal. But we have, and we do. That is idolatry. You should not rely on an organization. That is also idolatry. Put nothing between you and God – for that is also idolatry. I think this is a big part of the lesson our King needs for us to learn – and one reason why we’re going through so many splits and breakups: HE is the head, He is the leader, He is the only one we put on a pedestal.

If this topic has moved you – talk to your friends yourself about this. Perhaps they too will want to be praying for this oneness in Him. That first love is a oneness in Him, not as much as it is about religion. God’s religion is to be helping the helpless (widow and orphan) and to keep from being contaminated by the world (James 1:25-26). If we are one in Him, we will do the things He will do. Our number 1 priority is seeking Him and His righteousness – and that’s what Matthew 6:33 says. We are to put Him and His kingdom first. We do not put a church or a religion first. HE is first. There is a difference between the two.

We’ll discuss in detail all about sheep and shepherds in the next message. If you want to do some prep work, study on your knees Jeremiah 23, Ezekiel 34, Zech 11, John 10 and 1 Pet. 5.

We’ll also discuss next time which leader we should follow, what makes us be a part of the Body of Christ, who brings unity and some speculation of how it will happen – and when; steps we can be taking to be promoting oneness in the body, and more. I’d love to hear from some of you as we develop this theme.

Don’t forget to follow the examples of Daniel 9 and Nehemiah 9-10 – of fasting and beseeching God to help each of us be first of all one with Him and in Him, and then one with His children. You certainly can fast any time you wish. I’m hoping many of us will do it as one, together for a change, from sunset Dec 18-Friday night through sundown Sabbath Dec 19.

Until next time, be one in Him and with each other – God bless you all.



