



THERE IS ROOM FOR
YOU IN THE HOUSE
DIVIDED

CONFESSIONS
OF A
JEWISH,
CATHOLIC,
NON-DENOMINATIONAL,
CHARISMATIC,
BAPTIST

Preface

“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. ... Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them...” Romans 12:3-8

As I launch out in this writing, I am reminded of the Apostle Paul’s inspired words to the believers at Rome. I realize how important it is to be humble, especially in matters that deal with addressing other believers, and how imperative it is to use the gifts God has given us to our fullest. There is indeed a spectrum to be found here. On one end we find sober judgment from realizing that we don’t know everything there is to know, spiritually speaking. The other end of the spectrum concerns how willing we are to use the grace God has measured out to each one of us. In this regard, I hope to find myself somewhere in the middle of that spectrum. There is indeed a part of me that does not want to write at all, for various personal reasons: fear of criticism, fear of being wrong, fear of ridicule, fear of upsetting people, fear of not expressing myself, fear of rejection, and just plain old fear itself. There is indeed another part of me that says “FEAR NOT!” So I am choosing to follow the voice of faith and not the voice of fear—and in other words, please bear with me.

It is very difficult for most of us to express thoughts and feelings and actually put those into words that do not seem dull or mundane. A lot of thoughts and feelings I have arise in some part from a sense of frustration. The frustration I feel is from pondering the problems that plague the church of the Lord Jesus Christ in our generation. I may not be alone in some of these areas of frustration: lack of unity, internal bickering, lack of love for one another, failure to reach our generation, misperceptions of Christianity in our society, historical failures of Christianity, losing the moral direction in our nation, and failure to fulfill the great commission. I may be frustrated by all of these things on occasion, but this book is not about how “bad” things are and it is not a tongue-lashing on the negative aspects of the church. There is an inherent promise found in God’s word on *who* we are as the Body of Christ collectively and *who* we are individually as those born of the Spirit of God. The promise of *who* we may become individually and corporately IN Christ is what allows me to believe there is hope for renewal and revival within the Church that will overcome any of our problems. I believe that if the gates of Hades itself will not prevail against the Church then the carnality and problems inherent in the Church will not bring about its defeat either. No, the problems we find today are not new or unknown, even from what some would call the “early” days of the Church. In fact, most of the New Testament is dedicated to dealing with problems of the “early” church. Problems such as disunity, false doctrines, evil teachers,

carnality, people perverting the Gospel, people misrepresenting Christ, and believers living like the unsaved are nothing new to our day and age. I just wanted to ensure you that what may sound like a disheartened cry in some cases is not a lack of hope or faith in the power of the Spirit to accomplish the Great Commission and show the love of Jesus to this generation through us, His Body. The Word of God is given to us as a tool to stir us to unity and like-mindedness and it is in that vein that I pray the Holy Spirit will use this subject-matter to stir you to brotherly kindness and affection. There is a world that needs to know the love of Jesus. Let us therefore be a people that will with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Todd McDonald

In The Beginning

For who has despised the day of small things? Zech 4:10

New Year's Eve, December 31st, 1996. My wife and I attended a city-wide worship service in Las Vegas that night. We had never attended a city wide event before, let alone a church event, and let alone one on a New Year's Eve. This event had been advertised on a local Christian radio station a few weeks before and had perked my curiosity. Normally I notice things like who is sponsoring an event or what church is promoting something, but in this case, no organization or sponsor for the event was mentioned. The promo said it was open to all Christians from around our valley. All I had remembered was the theme of the evening: "Together Around Jesus". After convincing Angela this would be a "fun" thing to do on New Year's Eve, I also convinced some friends who were believers to go with us. One of them called the number given on the radio ad just to find out a little more about this event and to see "who" was actually sponsoring it. After all, you never can be too careful these days. There are so many people who use the word "Christian" but yet are totally foreign to the God of the Bible. We were really not used to doing things outside of a "church" either. It all seemed a little daring if you catch my drift. Anyway, a man with a "foreign" accent of sorts picked up the other end of the phone to answer questions about the "Together Around Jesus" event. He basically said there was no "official" organization behind the meeting. He just said that it was open to all believers in Jesus Christ from around the city: there would be singing, prayer, and some preaching. He said the focus of the evening would be to lift up Jesus Christ. That was it.

Wasn't there a church sponsoring this?? Nope.

But what denomination does it represent? None.

Needless to say, this did not make us any more comfortable going into this adventure. After all—this could be a cult of some kind, with the motive to give suggestive thoughts to make every one make weird noises during the service. And what if they were Calvinist? Or what if they were Armenian? What if they didn't even believe in a pre-trib rapture? Heaven forbid! I mean really, you can't just get together to exalt Christ alone: there has to be some "doctrine" here somewhere that sets the boundaries for us all. On top of all this, the theater where this event was held was in a "questionable" part of Las Vegas to say the least. We actually heard what we thought was a gun shot at one point during the service that night, but I think we were too afraid to ask someone for fear of the answer. It certainly motivated us to "walk quickly" back to the car for the trip home that night!

New Year's Eve finally came around. Uncomfortable and a little nervous, we decided not to chicken out at the last minute but to instead "go for it". I was surprised that for the size of a city like Las Vegas (with over one and a half million people), only 200 or so believers had showed up for this event. It could have been less (I didn't take a close head count), but I realized that Las Vegas certainly does have a lot of other attractions to offer, especially on a New Year's Eve. I know numbers do not matter, but we as humans tend to feel safer for some reason in a larger "crowd". This for some reason tells us, "It must be OK, there are lots of people here." Hey, I was looking for a glimmer of hope. This was my idea, and I really hoped we didn't wind up "making a big mistake" by coming to this. Some Yogi could have come out on stage to announce that he was Jesus re-incarnated for all we knew. Remember, it was just "Together Around Jesus". That's ALL we knew. We joked amongst ourselves that as soon as they brought out the snakes and the strychnine we were out of there!!

In the end, though, we found pretty much what was advertised that night: believers in Jesus Christ coming together around Him and lifting Him and His name on high. Imagine that. It was really "believers in Jesus".

The message presented that night was very convicting to me. It was convicting because of its subject matter: unity in the Body of Christ. This message was presented in a very unique way that night that was new but yet somehow familiar. I agreed with the speaker that the true condition of the Church in America was in reality a Church that has little love within itself, little reconciliation within itself, and little success in preventing the decay of our society. The church faces major problems in effectively bringing the message of the Gospel to people who need it. Think about it. People who are spiritually hungry need to know both God's love and His reconciliation. How can they know love and reconciliation when the Body that this message comes through doesn't demonstrate it with each other? "Together Around Jesus" represented no organization, no association, no ministry, and no particular man. Why would that be so important to most of us anyway? Yea, come to think of it, *why* would things like denominational affiliation, organizational titles, and ministry associations be of **primary** importance to those of us who name the name of Jesus? "Together Around Jesus" mainly represented believers who were meeting together to focus not on the things that divide us, but on the one Person who unites us: Jesus Christ. I felt right at home here. Ditto. Amen and amen. It was while worshipping and praising the Lord Jesus that night that I felt the Holy Spirit tell me, "Go ahead, start writing it. . ."

The thoughts that I want to share with you have been mulling around in my heart for several years. Being a person who keeps a spiritual journal I often write down things from time to time. In between my emotions and my own flesh, the Holy Spirit weaves into that tapestry some very insightful and rich nuggets on occasion. I will share other journal entries with you over the course of my discussion,

but for right now I wanted to share with you something I wrote down on January 1, 1997. It was the day after “Together Around Jesus” and the convicting message I had heard the night before. I wrote these particular sentences in first person because I write sometimes from the perspective of the Lord speaking to me personally. Here they are:

“If I give you something, how many people do you think I give that to? If you hold it in, I will always find someone else to give its message...Freely you have received, freely you should give. Give and it shall be given unto you.”

Read back over that a few more times. It is a truth that applies not just to me, but to all of us. God wants us to use the experiences in the journey of our own walk of discipleship to enrich and bless others in their walk. The great men of God that we read about are the ones who “did” something for God—they made a difference in “how” they fulfilled out and walked out the great Commission and the call to follow Jesus. We need that—we *all* need that. Remember, Paul continually urged His spiritual children to imitate and follow the pattern of Godly people who had gone before. Read a few books about great men of the faith in history and you yourself cannot help but be stirred by their devotion and energy which the Holy Spirit expressed through them. The same goes with us I believe. When we can identify with others in their walk, it somehow helps us frame a pathway in our own life. Especially when they have been where we are at.

The focus of this whole book will be to some degree on the insights and nuggets that God has given me on the idea of unity in the Body of Christ. In a broader sense, this book is about keeping a Biblical “balance” as we approach theology and orthodoxy. This principle in and of itself won’t promote unity, though. That only comes from the Spirit of God. However, if you are like me, you might have found yourself at times confused, perplexed, angry, or just downright hostile in the midst of all the things that are going on in the Body of Christ today. There are supernatural manifestations abounding, God’s power being revealed in some unique, yet not unfamiliar ways, and in general a supposed “chaos” that is going on as a result. Why do so many in the Body seem to be at odds over what is really going on? Why do doctrinal differences and differences in interpretation really separate and divide people so sharply? Why do some “investigations” place certain Christian groups into the “non-Biblical” arena? These are questions I both ask and look for answers to.

Although I grew up and was baptized in the Southern Baptist church at a young age, I would say that I was truly born again when I was at the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1989. That is when I allowed Jesus Christ to be the Lord of my life. My life truly changed when that happened. I repented of sin and began to change the entire course of my life. It was while I was there that I was discipled through a military wide ministry that has impacted my walk with the Lord ever since. It was

through that group that I grabbed the call to be a missionary for Jesus Christ while serving in the Air Force. There are many people in that group I have met over the years that I consider to be spiritual fathers and mothers. My foundation in the Lord, therefore, has not come from “a building that has the word church written on it somewhere”. I have been touched more by the ministry of the “Body” than by the ministry of any particular “church”. I have experienced far more of God in living rooms than I can say I have in a building with four walls called a “church”. Understand, we all need to be connected to a body of believers. The point I am making is that this “body” of believers in my life has come more from those I have known outside the context of a local church than those that I might sit next to in a pew from Sunday to Sunday.

My background has a lot to do with where this book comes from. Being in the military environment has allowed me to meet people of different denominational flavors, see cultural differences within the Church that is within the United States, and see many different viewpoints of doctrine and styles of worship. By traveling to different parts of the country and the world, I know that the United States is not the center of the universe for Christianity. There is a whole other part of the world that is still waiting to hear the gospel. Our nation, however, is by far one of the greatest forces for Christian outreach in the world. The Body of Christ in our nation, however, can appear to outsiders and even those within it some times to be disjointed and splintered. Do we need wonder why people become disillusioned and lost even “within” our church doors?

To clarify the scope of my talk, let me say that I write from the perspective of being a member of a Southern Baptist church. I have a “letter” of membership. Although I have never seen the “letter”, I know it supposedly follows you from church to church when you move. I have been involved in Presbyterian and Methodist churches as well. I have also been in non-denominational fellowships that were of both a charismatic and non-charismatic persuasion. I have been involved and exposed to the military wide chapel program (which is about as non-anything vanilla as you can get). I have been in Assembly of God, Church of God, Word of Faith, Pentecostal Holiness, and Four-Square churches at different times. I have been involved in parachurch ministries, to include both Promise Keepers and a military-wide ministry focused on discipling those in the armed forces. On top of all that, I have fellowshiped and met brothers and sisters from all other kinds of brands: Church of Christ, Catholic, Nazarene, Episcopal, Lutheran, Charismatic, Brethren, Pentecostal, and Vineyard.

So really, my scope is limited to what would be called the “evangelical” church in America. For the most part, evangelicals all have some very good common ground: a belief in the infallibility and divine inspiration of the Bible and a belief that values and morals are immutable based on that. Some branches of the evangelical

movement have become “liberal” over time, but those are not really my area of concern. I will address more on that later. I just wanted to first let you know that I have “been around the block”. I am not just someone who has been in the same church in the same city for the last 20 years. My insights have come from my travels and experience in my own walk of faith with Jesus Christ. My prayer is that in writing this book the Holy Spirit has moved me to write more from His heart than from my flesh. As James put it, a perfect man is one who never stumbles in anything he says. He was addressing that remark to teachers by the way:

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. James 3:1-2

I do pray that I have “heard” from God in regards to the things that I write and say. You will have to test it for yourself, though. You may or may not identify with some things I say. That’s all right: we can still be brothers or sisters if we have the foundation right, even if you do not bear witness to what I might say. A word of warning first, though. I am not “credentialed” in the modern evangelical intellectual sense of the word. This means I don’t have a seminary degree, am not in full-time ministry as a paid worker in a church, don’t have a title, and don’t even have a ministry name. The closest I can come to a title is “Sunday School Teacher”. Not very impressive as far as modern evangelical credentials go. Who knows. . . I may have one of those titles or degrees or offices one day. But for now, all I am is a disciple.

Disciple. Now there is a word we don’t hear as much of as we need to. Many of our churches, especially the evangelical ones, are filled with “members” instead of being filled with “disciples”. It is part of the problem the evangelical church in America faces. We know how to get people “saved” far better than we know what to do with them “after” they are saved. Discipleship tends to be an overlooked part of modern Christianity for the average church going person. If the 20-80 rule truly holds in most of our churches, 20% of the members accomplish 80% of all the work done in the church, this should tell us that the message of a disciple’s commitment has not been communicated as well as the message of “salvation” was. We would think it odd if a church actually had 100% tithing rate among its members. Why should it be odd? If the Bible reveals anything about the Christian life and the walk of a disciple, it is that life becomes EXTRA-ordinary after encountering Christ. It takes on a SUPER-natural quality that is not found ordinarily. This view of what “normal” Christianity is in America today makes those who sacrifice, expend great sums of energy for the Lord, and worship extravagantly to be placed in the “AB-normal” category. I think one of the root problems, which I hope in some way to address, is that people seek an intellectual knowledge of Jesus without pressing further to seek an intimate knowledge of Jesus. That very problem lead to one of the

greatest heresies within the Jewish community of Jesus' day and the days of the early church: pharasaism. We become pharasaical when our view of Christianity becomes exclusively intellectual without becoming experiential. When we read of the supernatural power of God, the love of God, and the power of salvation by faith, without experiencing them, we can wind up guilty of this heresy.

I believe there is a tendency in most people to be content with their own flavor or brand of Christianity. It is partly just our human nature. We become comfortable in an environment and we really do not seek anything else unless we become dissatisfied in some way with that environment. I myself have tried to be an avid spectator of things that have been going on in the overall community of believers that is located in the United States. Because I have been in many different environments of denominational and non-denominational church life and have met many friends who span a wide range of Christian faiths and beliefs, I have wound up being a spectator of many things that the Spirit of God is doing in the church today. I am also an avid reader of Christian authors from all sorts of different theological and denominational perspectives.

The church in America can sometimes appear to be a collection of splintered factions who agree on very little and believe they each hold the only correct interpretation of the Bible. Consider the military environment today. With budget cut backs and draw downs, one service cannot afford to do something without first coordinating with the other services. That means that the Air Force must work with the Army, the Army must work with the Marine Corps, and the Navy must work with the Air Force. It is also important to know that I would not want to task the Air Force with accomplishing a coastal assault, nor would I want to task the Navy with holding a piece of land 100 miles inland. Each service provides a crucial role to the overall campaign plan, and each is sometimes better fitted to accomplish certain tasks. All the services must work together and combine their efforts if they are to go to war and win. It does not always work out this way, but that is the goal. In modern times, a Joint Forces Commander is set up to command, control, and coordinate efforts of the Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marines. Without this Commander, the services would waste time fighting each other instead of fighting the enemy. Instead, they all obey the voice of that one commander. When our nation wages war, we do it now as a "combined" force, not four separate services that are all doing different things and wasting precious resources. Too many Christians are blinded to the battle we are all in and the "army" that we have all been called to. There is indeed a war going in our nation and in our cities for souls. The Church of Jesus Christ has a Joint Forces Commander: His name is Jesus. Unfortunately, many of our churches do not hear His orders. Many ignore the fact that their are "sister" services that are fighting in the same war and trying to achieve the same goals. As a result, just like in the military, we wind up wasting our resources, pointing our guns at each other, and failing to carry out the orders of our Commander. It is only by following His orders that will achieve victory in the battle

for our nation. Until we give up our rivalries, and begin listening to our Join Force Commander, the Church in America will continue to loss ground to the enemy.

Each denomination and each brand of Christian faith has its own faults and quirks. But, thank God, each different brand and sect also offers so many unique strengths and benefits. It is when we cannot see the value or benefit of what other members of the Body bring to the whole that we get ourselves in trouble. The only churches (no matter what denomination or type) that really matter in your city or your area are the ones where the life of Jesus and the truth of God is found. They are the churches where “God is doing something”. You will find some in every city and every town, in every denomination, in every major sect, and in every major cultural and racial community. Ted Haggard, pastor of New Life Church in Colorado Springs, has written an excellent number of books on how God has helped bring the Body of Christ together in Colorado Springs and how his church played a role in that. “Loving Your City Into the Kingdom of God” and “Primary Purpose” are both books that deal with practical ways to bring about a “unified” effort to reach the lost in your city. There are other pastors and ministries and denominations that are beginning to do this. I hope there will be more...

The thoughts I want to share with you are indeed about the unity of the body, or rather what could be perceived to be the lack of unity because of doctrinal differences. I am not suggesting however that we all need come to agreement on every issue of doctrinal difference in order to achieve the unity of the Spirit. That would be a man-made effort at unity, and that will never bring unity anyway. That is unity on an “intellectual” level and not on a “heart” level. A good majority of doctrines outside the core beliefs that all Christians hold are what I would call “one-sided”. I have a deep dissatisfaction with “one-sided” doctrines myself. You know the ones I am talking about. . . they’re the ones that have two distinct sides, most of the time diametrically opposite to each other. It is these “one-sided” doctrines that I wrestle with and it is these that cause me the most “unrest” as a student of God’s word. It is these same ones that in my mind tend to produce the worst “divisions” among fellow believers. When I see in scripture two distinct sides to a doctrinal issue and two sets of people that seemingly are entrenched on one side or the other, I really struggle with that.

As a teacher and a student of God’s word, I am concerned over “who is right” and “who is wrong” in a lot of these cases. You may be too. You may really seek to know “which side” is right so that you can align yourself correctly. Am I right? Have you noticed that people can be so focused on finding the right side that they lose focus on the purpose we are here on this earth to begin with?? Did you know the military suffers from the same problem? People who are so proud of being Air Force or Army or Marine can become so focused on this pride that they cause us to lose the war. . . it happened to us when we went into Panama a couple of years back. There was so much inter-service rivalry that some of our troops died needlessly in

that instance. We fortunately discovered after that how important it was for “inter-service” rivalry to be put aside so that we could accomplish our objectives. The Church is no different. We are in essence a “house divided” when it comes to these issues and topics. For the most part the Church does have the same mind about certain key issues; issues that I call our core beliefs. These core beliefs are and should not be open to debate among us. I am obviously not trying to create some “new” Christian doctrine or offer fresh revelation from UFO’s or platinum plates or whatever other new “source” of ultimate truth is popping up these days. I’m going to stick with the Bible, so don’t get too worried. The Bible is final and authoritative in all matters concerning doctrine, godliness, and truth. It should be our only source text for discerning truth.

When I said that this book was about having a “balanced” approach to understanding the Bible and for defining our theology, that is exactly what I meant. I am not interested in discussing issues that are not open to interpretation, our core beliefs. I would like to share instead some insights concerning those issues that sit just outside our core beliefs. Those pesky “one-sided” doctrines I mentioned. Those “one-sided” doctrines are “one-sided” because they refuse to acknowledge the “other” side. The “other” side that is clearly seen in Scripture. I am not referring to “twisting” Scripture to make it fit some belief system either. I am talking about what the Word plainly and clearly says.

This book is for someone who steps back and looks at the big picture of matters open to interpretation and says: “Why does there have to be two sides here? It just shouldn’t be that way”. It is for someone who, like me, really questions some of the differences in theological opinion and the sources of these different opinions. I have known churches to split over these types of issues. Is “picking a side” and being able to defend it really what having the “right” doctrine is all about? These are all questions that concern me. Denominations and church people can disagree sharply about a myriad of different things. Each can have some very deeply held doctrinal positions. The first chapter deals briefly with my personal doctrinal statement and what I feel is a basic credo of church unity. Let me stop here and start you off with a few thoughts:

As a new believer I felt like I had to know every single doctrinal stand and be absolutely certain that I was on the right side of the right doctrine and be able to defend myself against every attack or onslaught that would attack it. Almost 10 years later, I am now completely confident that it doesn’t matter, *regarding non core-beliefs*, whether I am on the right side of the right doctrine or not!

There is indeed a spectrum to be found in God’s word, but what you do with that spectrum will determine by and large what “box” of doctrine you fit in. Is the spectrum there for us to choose a side and defend it, or

is it there to give us the “whole truth, and nothing but the truth”? I no longer believe there is a right *side* any longer concerning certain doctrines, but rather there is only a right *middle* that is found in the spectrum of God’s word.

If I have perked your curiosity, then come go with me a little further. There may be room for us together in the house divided.

A House Divided

But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. Matt 12:25

Abraham Lincoln once referred to this verse in one of his most famous addresses. Of course, he used the context of the United States, a nation, as the center of its theme. He borrowed the principle and applied it to a situation that he saw was looming imminent over the horizon of our nation's future. I think we all would agree that at times we feel the same sense of urgency to declare that same message to the church universal today. The nice thing about God's spiritual principles and laws are that they are immutable. They don't change because we are sorry, or because we are ignorant, or because we don't plan for them, or because we are negligent, or because we are just human and fallible, or because our flesh gets into the way. Much like His natural laws, God's spiritual laws are firmly established and will eventually come to fulfillment over time. Our Lord stated a valuable spiritual law here. No house will stand, no kingdom will stand, no nation will stand, no anything will stand for very long if it remains divided.

If the founding fathers of our nation were alive today, I believe they would die of coronary shock the moment they saw the state of our nation. If they saw the level of moral depravity and spiritual abandonment with which our nation has traveled, I truly believe they would not be able to bear it. If they saw how history has been rewritten about the purpose and founding of our nation, if they saw that murder was not only legalized but referred to in nice sterile terms, if they saw that perversion was promoted by the very government that they had worked with blood and tears to form, if they saw that every last vestige of Christianity has been removed from our schools and government, if they saw how God no longer was regarded as the Sovereign of our nation, if they saw that people no longer can decide by popular vote how they wish to live, if they saw that God's word was no longer the standard by which right and wrong is based. What would they say? Would they stare in shocked disbelief at where we have come. I truly wonder.

At the same time, I wonder as well at how the founding fathers of the Church of Jesus Christ would look today at the Body of Christ. I wonder if the Apostle Paul would stare in disbelief at how people were still divided among so many different sects and branches.

Would he chastise us the same we he did the church at Corinth:

“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” 1 Cor 1:10-13

Would Peter offer up the same explanation of who we are:

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy” 1 Peter 2:9-10.

Would James not accuse us of the same basic problem we have with our “religion”:

“If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. “ James 1:26-27

I hope you would agree that although we have our problems and we have our disagreements, the Church of Jesus Christ (not the Latter Day counterfeit by the way) is still God's chosen instrument to declare the gospel. There is “no other boat afloat” to put it another way. What amazes me about our Lord Jesus is that He left behind 11 men and a few other faithful disciples the task to go and make disciples of ALL nations: not just Jerusalem, not just Judea, not just Samaria, not just the Roman Empire, but ALL the earth! If they had failed, God had no other plan in mind. He did not have plans for ANOTHER church: if they failed in their mission, that was it! As we know, though, God knew they would not fail in their mission. He knew that “the gates of hell would not prevail against them”. He knew that the power and person of the Holy Spirit who would live within His followers was greater than any force known to man or not known to man. “Greater is He that is IN US than he that is in the world”. God knew that no power of satan, no power of our flesh, and

no power of the world would divert His plan to bring the message of reconciliation to the world.

Still, though, there is something within me that longs to see more of a unity within the church in certain areas. People may ask what church I go to, and I normally preface my answer with “I’m a follower of Jesus Christ above all else; the church I attend does not determine whether I am a Christian or not.” Non-believers even acknowledge that there are so many different ways to interpret the Bible that it is hard to know which way is right. In discussing one’s “religious affiliation”, some people draw “religious” lines around denominations like Presbyterian or Methodist or Lutheran. Catholics and Protestants are thought to be of different “religions” for the most part, though they are foundationally the same. Many find it hard to accept that cults who actually *use* the Bible and *use* Christian terms are actually not “Christian” at all. This, too, though should not surprise us. Jesus said clearly that there would be many false-Christ and many false religions claiming to represent Christ. It is not surprising that some people have become disillusioned with “Christianity”, or rather what I would call “Churchianity”. With so many to choose from, it is hard some time to know what the true hallmark of Christianity is all about.

I personally like to tell people that I am a **Jewish Catholic Non-Denominational Charismatic Baptist**.

Did you like that?

You see, I am Jewish because the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome:

“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.” Romans 2:28-29.

I am Catholic because *Catholic* means “universal”. I am a part of the “Universal” Church, the “Universal” Body of Christ. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth:

“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.” 1 Cor 12:12-13.

I am non-denominational because even though I may attend a denominational church or even be a “member” of a local church, I hold no allegiance to a “denomination”.

I am Charismatic because I believe that the power of God's grace, His *charis*, conveyed by the Holy Spirit living in me and working upon me is able to bring about God's purpose for my life and cause me to be an instrument fit for His use.

I am Baptist because in the great commission our Lord Jesus commanded us: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* Amen. Matt 28:19-20.

Pick almost any other denomination that you want, and I will probably pick something out that applies to me as well. The problem, is however, not everyone has that kind of an attitude. Growing up Southern Baptist and growing up in the deep South, I must admit that I was witness to what I would just call plain old "pride". People, bless their heart, were very proud to be "Baptist". They were very proud to be "Methodist". They were very proud to be "Pentecostal". Not that in and of itself that is harmful. Denominations are not wrong or bad. A denominational spirit is a tell-tale sign of carnality though. It was when people were proud they were "Baptist" and also proud that they were not "What You Are" at the same time that spiritual pride enters. Are you familiar with that kind of attitude?? "Well we just don't like getting emotional in our church like those weird folks do down the street". What about, "Praise God we don't bore paint chips off the ceiling like they do in their church." Or even better, "We have a certain image to uphold when people come to our church- we have to make people feel comfortable you know."

I admit people will indeed always have their own way of worshipping and their own style of meeting. People are always going to be more "comfortable" in one setting or another. Although this is a good topic of discussion for a completely different writing, I find that people for the most part pick their style and never even TRY any other style their whole life. I find some sadness that with all the diversity that the Holy Spirit offers us, most of the time we choose to pick one kind of fruit out of the orchard and never venture to try any other flavor. I think we have something to learn from every type of worship style that is available: evangelical, liturgical, charismatic, gospel, and whatever other style you can think of. I admit that I personally long for a church that would dare to actually combine some of the diversity in worship that is found in the Body of Christ, to include historical, traditional, and contemporary. I am sure there are some churches that actually do this, but they are by no means a majority.

Although worship styles are not the topic of this book, I have just given you a key theme that will run through the course of my discussion in this book. The fact that there can actually be unity in diversity. Think about that. **Unity in diversity.** Worship styles actually offer us a good template for this upcoming discussion. We know that there are many different ways people worship; most, if not all, are inspired

or directed in some way by a true Biblical mandate to corporately worship God acceptably as a body of people. Yet with all the diversity, there is not a major attempt to combine these styles into a single unifying form within a church or a denomination. That is what we should expect, though. People like their own flavor. We tend to keep getting the flavors we like and for the most part we are not willing to try other flavors because we are perfectly content with the ones we like. I myself find value in almost every type and form of worship. I may have a favorite form that I enjoy and express myself best in, but I have come to the understanding that I should never berate or criticize someone else's form. Thank God He made us all different. I just wish we would realize the differences are there so that we may collectively experience all that God wants for us.

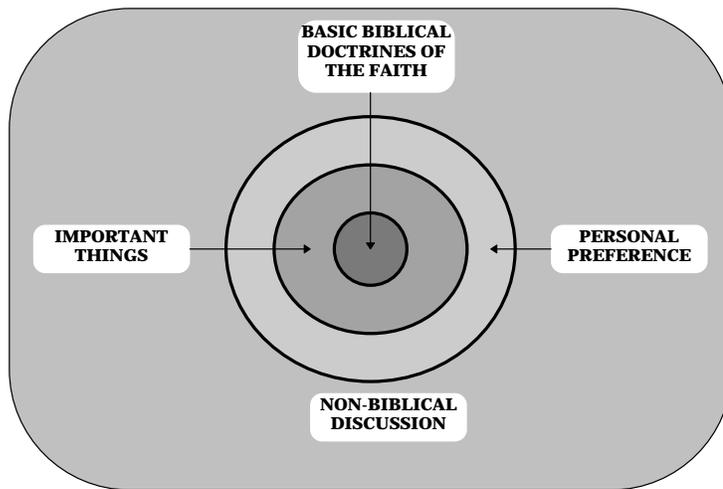
Do you think worship in heaven is going to be like worship in your church on Sunday mornings?? If you do, then I think you will have a rude awakening in store. No, I believe worship in heaven will be an expression of the diversity of worship expressed through the Holy Spirit just as it is within the Body of Christ that is on the earth. Our worship will ultimately culminate in heaven's court so I don't see any reason why we couldn't start getting used to something different even while we walk this old earth.

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans said:

“Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin” Rom 14:22-23.

Paul made an effort to address areas of concern where believers were bound to have disagreements and different opinions. He was not so idealistic that he did not allow for the fact that as fallen humans we are going to have differences of interpretation in matters regarding faith. In talking about whether a believer should eat meat offered to an idol, Paul in this particular letter made the statement that whatsoever does not proceed from faith is sin. We know that faith comes from hearing and hearing comes from hearing the Word of God of course. Our faith is the basis of our belief systems and the foundational principles of doctrine which we formulate concerning our relationship with God. It is based absolutely on the inerrant and infallible Word of God, the Bible.

I was taught at a very young spiritual age that there will be points of disagreement that we will always have with other believers. There are things that not all of us are going to agree on, especially when it comes to matters of faith and interpretation of God's Word. I am in no way intimating that we need to or even have the capacity to all agree on certain things. There is such a thing as being spiritually minded concerning our differences though. In fact, I was shown the following diagram which illustrates the 3 spheres of belief:



What do you consider to be the basic Biblical doctrines of the faith?? It is funny that we may not even be able to agree about that itself! I might consider something important, whereas you may consider it “essential” to having fellowship with me. I’ll attempt to propose a set of “core” beliefs of the Christian faith. I hope we can agree on these, because if we agree on them, we are not to yield on these. They are “immutable” truths that if you and I do not hold in common, then I cannot call you a brother or sister in the Lord. These are things such as the divinity of Christ, the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of Justification, the doctrine of Atonement, the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord, the attributes of God, and so on and so forth. Consider what John, the disciple of love, had to say about certain doctrines:

Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. II Jn 1:9-11

If you believe God was a man who became God, that man can become God or has the capability of divinity, that God is not immutable or eternal, that there is more than 1 God, that God is not Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that God is not personal, that God is not who He has revealed Himself in the Bible to be, then we have no grounds for discussion. This book does not concern those who would take issue with either the inspiration or infallibility of the Scriptures and the core doctrines that are derived from them. It is not “all right” for us to disagree on these core issues. This, by the way, is the basic error inherent in “Unitarianism” which would seek to abandon absolute statements of truth concerning God. Not all paths do lead to God. It is unfortunate, but true. If it were not true, then Jesus had no reason to die a brutal, torturous death on a Roman cross nearly 2000 years ago. Core beliefs

form the absolutes of the foundation that the life of Jesus Christ will flow from and through.

Whereas “Core Beliefs” define the “sandbox” for orthodox Christianity, the “Important Things” and the “Personal Preference” categories are beliefs and doctrines which we can or should yield on and still have fellowship with each other even if we disagree. “Important Things” are interpretations of Scripture of various issues such as the eternal security of the believer, predestination, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the structure of a local church, the ordinances of the church such as Baptism and Communion, and so on and so forth. Personal Preference items normally involve periphery issues such as which version of the Bible that you read, whether you should wear blue-jeans to church on Sunday, should a woman wear make-up, is drinking allowable in any circumstance, and so on and so forth. I don’t think Personal Preference items are really worth that much attention. Most of the time they are centered around Biblical issues which are only discussed a couple of times throughout the course of Scripture, issues which are possibly only mentioned once, or issues which are not even specifically addressed at all in the Bible. The kind of doctrines that border on legalism produce their own result: they will either produce life or death. Of course there is a vast difference between pious pride and spiritual life, right? Have you ever heard of churches splitting over things like the color of the carpet in the new building or how much the janitor should get paid? I have, and I think it is sad that people who bear the name of Jesus Christ can let periphery issues divide them. “It just should not be that way”. This book will not address Personal Preferences nor Core Beliefs, although I will try to establish what I believe a good set of Core Beliefs might include. Rather, I am going to talk in a fair amount of detail about those “Important Things” that we all hold dear but yet none of us in the Body can agree on corporately.

I would like to point out there are certain “Important Things” that in my mind border on being “Core Beliefs”. I will not fellowship with you and welcome you warmly as a brother or sister in the Lord even in this realm of “Important Things” when it comes to *certain* issues. There are and have been many man-made attempts at unity in the Body throughout church history. Invariably, however, they have always involved the abandonment of what I would call high moral principles. God would call it “holiness”. Any attempt by man to bring about unity is fruitless anyway- only the Spirit of God can bring unity and only His moving will produce this quality within His Church.

In Western Culture today we as a society no longer delineate between good and evil. “Sinful” is no longer related to behavior or the condition of the human heart; “sinful” now refers to how good something tastes and how many corresponding grams of fat it will deposit on your hips. Good and evil are based on your own interpretation and not an outside objective standard. This “culturally relative” virus has spread into the beliefs and values of the Western church to the

point where mainline denominations and large religious groups are debating over issues of morality that have traditionally been seen as black and white. In my mind, if you sacrifice holiness so that we can fellowship, you have sacrificed the wrong thing. The “Important Things” in my mind that border on being non-yielding “Core Beliefs” include issues like abortion, homosexuality, human sexuality to include extra-marital sexual relationships, assisted suicide, the lie of evolution, the inerrancy of God’s Word, just to name a few. Jesus warned us that at the eve of His return, things on earth would return to the way things were during the days of Noah. In case you have forgotten what it was like in those days here is quick reminder:

“Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.” But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.”
Gen 6:5-8

I wanted to make it clear that I would never promote the unity of the body while sacrificing holiness. If you do not hold to some of these “Important Things” it does not necessarily mean you will be kept out of heaven. However, “Important Things” that concern holiness are in my mind just as important as some of the “Core Beliefs”. The only thing that will keep you out of heaven is refusing to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. If you follow Jesus, though, you will follow the way of holiness. That is the nature of the Christian experience. God’s word is very clear on sin and on issues of life and death. “Let’s just all get along” implies that we must give up deeply held convictions of right and wrong in order to get along. “Woe to those who call evil good”. I am reminded of a now-famous prayer offered at the opening of the Kansas legislature a while back which described this exact condition within our society. I also see this condition growing in the religious church that falls under the Christian banner in our modern Western culture. The prayer offered the following observations:

We live in a society where we have ridiculed the absolute truth of God’s Word and called it moral pluralism. We have worshipped other gods and called it multi-culturalism. We have endorsed perversion and called it an alternative lifestyle. We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery. We have neglected the needy and called it self-preservation. We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare. We have killed our unborn and called it choice. We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable. We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building esteem. We have

abused power and called it political savvy. We have coveted our neighbor's possessions and called it ambition. We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression.

I wished I could have come up with that poignant observation of our culture, but I thank God someone had the boldness to proclaim this in public. The abandonment of holiness and truth is no solution for our disunity; leaving righteous standards we find in the Bible will never create more room in the house divided.

There are also some doctrines and beliefs floating around these days that are not based on the authority of the Bible. Though I may take issue with these, such doctrines and beliefs do not fall in the same realm of discussion. No matter how “good” the source, you will go into error the minute you leave the authority and the infallibility of the Bible. Any belief that derives from a source other than the Bible should be viewed with an extreme caution. Unless I know the truth of God’s word, I can be so easily influenced some times by humanistic philosophy, spiritualistic ideas of reaching God, and New Age ideas of divinity that are running rampant in our society. As Western culture embraces “Eastern” philosophies concerning good and evil and the “force” that drives the universe, we can be sure that these philosophies are seeping into the belief systems of the Church as well. Although there is nothing wrong in studying and learning about other religions and philosophies, I better be well grounded in the *standard* of ultimate truth first. This in essence means I should know the Bible inside and out before trying to grasp the subtle deceptions and lies inherent in other systems of belief. Remember what the world is supposed to be like in the “latter times”:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. 1 Tim 4:1-3

Some are going to and have already departed from the faith. Some are going to and have already given heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons. Yes, doctrines of demons. That means teachings and belief systems that find their origins in demonic sources. Teachings and beliefs that derive from an extra-Biblical source. Satan, the father of lies, stands against the truth. If God’s word is truth, then the primary job of our enemy is to attack that truth, distort it, and actually make a lie “look like the truth”. Nobody purposefully would eat arsenic. However, if you spike a piece of cake with arsenic, I will readily eat the cake without even stopping to think about “what is in this?”. We must be careful then when we read extra-Biblical sources. Paul warned Timothy that people will “give heed” to spirits, not doctrines.

This implies that there is a “spiritual” battle that goes on in regards to doctrine, and especially doctrine not based on the Bible. This means that Satan is doing everything within his power to make those “false religions” and “cultic doctrines” work. There is a spiritual battle for our mind concerning truth: we must recognize that it begins with what we open ourselves up to. If we open ourselves up to “other” truths, we will find ourselves so quickly deceived and so alienated from the life of God that we will not know what hit us. These extra-Biblical belief systems are not my primary concern though.

Believe it or not, I intend to set sail right into the middle of some of the key issues that really seem to divide people within the Church today. Things like salvation, the working of the Holy Spirit, faith and works, healing and prosperity, basic spiritual principles that run through the course of Scripture. These are dangerous topics. It is an area where people begin to bring up the shields and take out the clubs as soon as you mention one of them. I run the risk of being excommunicated. I run the risk of not being accepted denominationally. I even run the risk of even being called heretical. That’s all right, too: I’ve never met anyone who spoke something from their heart that didn’t get criticized for it. I do think it is ludicrous that we can ever reach a consensus on certain Biblical issues and certain things that fall into the realm of “Important” but yet do not border on surrendering holiness. That is not what this book is about. It is not about necessarily giving up your denominational beliefs. It is however about considering what I call a true Biblical belief concerning doctrine. It is about raising a voice and seeing who else would say, “Wow, that’s the way I’ve always felt but have never heard anyone express it in quite that way.”

Remember that concept I introduced a few paragraphs back: **Unity in diversity**. Could it really be possible that if we took an honest look at the Scriptures that we could truly find a unified message when it comes to the “Important Things”? Could it really be possible that if we take the blinders off the Holy Spirit would truly show us the “right” doctrine to believe? Could it really be possible that we could learn something from that “other” perspective if we looked close enough?

We choose to be divided on issues because we choose to be divided on issues. If you want to know what that means in the Greek, it means that we choose to be divided on issues because we choose to be divided on issues. I hope you are like me. I hope you look at all the divisions and all the bickering and infighting among us and go “Brothers and sisters, it just should not be this way.” I hope that you too are trying to find some semblance of what really is the right “doctrine” to believe. We already know that the Church does not display the kind of love within itself that the Lord wants us to display. I hope that I can provide some kind of scriptural foundation that would make that love easier. Take that example of diversity of worship that I discussed and move that into the realm of doctrine, doctrines that deal with “Important Things”. I hope I can give you a good

roadmap to do that. Adopting my “interpretation” of things is not going to bring about unity, though. Like I said, only the Holy Spirit can produce that along with love for our brothers and sisters who are different from us. My hope is to give you a building block that the Holy Spirit will use in building like-mindedness within His Church.

Just so we are reading off the same page to begin with, let me first tell you what my “Core Beliefs” are. If you do not have a personal belief statement, I think it would be wise if you thought about one. I would at least as a minimum know what your church or denomination believes in or professes to have as a core belief statement. Try making one for yourself. You’ll find it difficult to really distill from that big huge Bible on your shelf what the true “Basics” of your belief system are. Christianity is a thinking man’s religion. We are not only to give our lives to God, but our minds must be fully given to Him as well. If you can’t formulate a personal belief statement for yourself, maybe it’s time you tried. Here are what I hold to be basic Biblical doctrines of the faith. These are in essence my “Core Beliefs”:

Core Beliefs

1. God is a personal, eternal, unchanging, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, self-existent, self-sufficient, infinite, and immense Spirit.
2. There is only one God who is the creator of heaven and earth, things seen and unseen, and sovereign over the entire existence of creation. He is the author of life and reserves the ultimate authority over it. He is one God revealed in three divine Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
3. The Bible is His inspired and holy written Word. It has and always will be the one and only book in the world which reveals the whole truth about the will and purpose of God for mankind and for His creation.
4. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is fully man and He is fully God. Jesus Christ was God in the flesh of a man, in whom dwelt the fullness of Godhead bodily.
5. Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit and was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, being the only man who has ever lived a perfect life in obedience to God.
6. Jesus Christ was crucified, died a physical death on the cross for the sins of all mankind, was buried, was raised on the third day in his own body, ascended back into heaven where He sits at the right hand of His Father in power and authority.
7. There is only one universal church, the Body of Christ. It is made up of people from every tongue, tribe, and nation on the earth that have been born again by the working of the Holy Spirit.
8. A saint or believer is one who has recognized their sinfulness before a holy and righteous God, who has realized their need for forgiveness, has recognized the

reason that Jesus Christ came to this earth, has acknowledged that Jesus Christ was and is the only true God, and has decided to place their faith and trust in Him.

9. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. There is no forgiveness, reconciliation, or fellowship with God for anyone of any tongue, tribe, or nation apart from faith in Jesus Christ alone.
10. Man is separated from God by his sinful nature and by the real actions of his sinfulness. Man can come to God through the Person of Jesus Christ Only. There have never been, nor are there now, nor ever will there be other mediators in the heavenly realms.
11. The same Jesus Christ who lived and walked on this earth, who was crucified, buried, and resurrected, will return to receive those who have placed their faith and trust in Him and will judge those who have not confessed with their mouth and believed in their heart that He is Lord.
12. The Holy Spirit is fully God. He is the Person that indwells, seals, and regenerates the believer that has placed their trust in Jesus Christ.

I hope these core beliefs are shared by you as well. They comprise those set of “non-negotiables” that I would hold to. You may or may not hold to all of these. All I can say is that these beliefs have sprung from my personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. I would not expect someone without a relationship with Jesus to hold to these, but I do believe that the Holy Spirit will lead you into all truth if you will allow Him to. If the Holy Spirit authored Scripture, He too will give you the understanding of it as you follow Jesus Christ in a daily walk. Do not expect these truths to be evident if you are not willing to be a follower of Christ, though. God’s truth is not revealed to us for intellectual exercise: it is revealed to us so that we may live for Him and dwell in His presence every day of our life.

Given that I have established hopefully some common ground with you, let’s move on. I would like first to talk about some of the root problems that exist in the Church today that cause us to be disunited to begin with. I admit that God has changed my perspective drastically since I gave my life to Him on a number of different issues and on a number of different occasions. This is what is known as being “teachable” or “shapable”. Many of us have been cast into our “denominational” or “religious” mold and have remained cast iron ever since. We have allowed no room for shaping, no room for learning, no room for openness to the Holy Spirit, and therefore have remained closed to spiritual growth. I think there are certain basic ailments that affect the Body that really need to be dealt with before we can talk about fresh perspectives on our doctrine. I call these “Diseases of the Body”. Disease are all designed to destroy the proper functioning of the Body, which I call the “Work of the Ministry”. I am also glad that not only does God’s word point out these diseases, it also provides some very good “Cures and Preventative Treatments”. I have devoted the next three chapters to these topics. I

think it is important to not throw doctrinal issues around without first giving the Holy Spirit opportunity to deal at a heart level with the source of our problems.

What is the Church of the last days going to look like? I firmly believe the Church of the last days will not be defined any longer by what buildings people gather in. I also believe that the Church of the last days will be radically different than what we are used to in our Western culture, especially the American culture. The Church of the last days will carry a common banner we all will rally around. It will be a Church made up of different races, cultures, worship styles, and viewpoints. But the differences will not be proclaimed any more. . . the perfect bond of unity, which is love, will be its cement . . . the Person of its focus will be Jesus Christ. . . its message to the world will be the Gospel . . . the power of God to heal, deliver, and change lives will be its hallmark. The focus will not be Calvin, or Martin Luther, or Arminius, or even a religious figure head. It will be Jesus Christ who is the risen and living King. Perhaps, if we really consider it, there is much more unity in our diversity than we might think. The Church of the last days will be a persecuted group, I am sure. But its message, to all who are willing to see, will be: "There is room for you too in the house divided."

A Healthy Body and The Work of the Ministry

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. 2 Cor 5:18-20

The picture of the church of Jesus Christ as a body is one of the most amazing teaching lessons that we have ever been given by the Holy Spirit. Every person has one. . . a body that is. You are a spirit who lives in a body and you have a soul. You are a triune being that was made in the image of a triune God: there are not three of you, however, there is only ONE of you. Our body provides one of the best object lessons for how the church universal should function. The second greatest commandment is tied directly to how we treat our own self, or rather, our own body. “Love your neighbor, AS YOU LOVE YOURSELF.” We would never let our body go without food if we could help it; we would never expose it to harsh conditions if at all possible; we would never purposefully harm our body if we really thought *carefully* about it; and, we would never let our body go naked and cold if we had the ability to wear clothes. It is strange how our society and world has reversed some of these basic principles of survival: people degrade their bodies with unrestrained sexual appetite and sexual images that produce long term damage to both their body and their psyche; people intake harmful and even deadly substances looking for fulfilment and satisfaction that will make them “whole”; people lose the desire to live and thus believe it would be better to die than to continue in this world; people even go so far as to hate the shape of their own body and so they starve it or malnourish it or refuse it food. Paul even stated in his letter to the Corinthians that all sins we commit are outside the body, but sexual immorality is sin that we commit against our OWN body. How can a society try to love others when for the most part they do not even love themselves and their own bodies to begin with?

The body that God gave you is the only one you will ever have. After your spirit leaves your body when you die physically, you will stand before God and give an account for the life that you lived in that body. It is a marvelous gift that God gave us, but also an incredible responsibility as well. He gave you one of the world's most fascinating computers to control your body; even in our technological age, no one can come close even in the artificial intelligence arena with replacing the functionality or design of the brain. Although we can fantasize about "androids" and half-human/half-machine creations, the fact is that our brain was designed to work in the context of a being that has a body, soul, and spirit. These are things that man will never be able to re-create or reproduce. God also gave you the job of "programming" your computer over the course of your life. We spend a good majority of our life doing exactly that: adding to our database, programming new habits, de-programming old behavior, processing large amounts of information that comes in from our senses on a daily basis, and developing new processing capability through education. Aren't the best athletes the ones who can "program" their brain to ignore pain or who can program their brain to move their body in precise timing and movement?

Along with your body, God gave you a choice in what you do with your body. No creator or inventor would ever design something that is going to be used without establishing first the operating parameters and the design limitations of their creation. God, as the master creator and designer, gave us His written Word, the Bible. It is the "user's manual" of human life as opposed to similar claims made by L. Ron Hubbard with Dianetics. God's Word contains precise and specific instructions on the operating parameters which will result in the BEST use of our limited lifespans. We ignore God's operating parameters to our peril and our destruction. Just like someone who doesn't change the oil in their car when the owner's manual tells them to, that person will eventually sow what they reap. If we ignore the guidelines, the engine will run at less than optimum performance. If we continue to ignore the guidelines and never change or re-fill the oil, the engine is going to sooner or later "burn" out. The engine after that may never be able to run at the same performance level without some major creative handiwork being accomplished. At a minimum, it will certainly be of no value after it has "burned" out to its owner.

The Apostle Paul wrote extensively under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit on the picture of the church that is found in the human body. What can be known about the human body is plainly seen:

1. There are many "parts" or "members" of my body. There are too many parts of my body to even count or know the name of each part individually. Bones, nerves, ligaments, tissues, organs, systems, structures, and fluids are all found in the context of the body with designed arrangement and complex interdependencies that can only be explained in the context of a "purpose".

2. Although contrary to evolutionary thought, each part of my body has a different function and purpose. Evolution does not allow for a structure or a tissue or an organ to have a “purpose”: a structure or organ is only there because it happened by chance to mutate that way through some deviant DNA sequence over a long period of time. Rather than have blind faith in that belief, however, I know that each part of my body was designed by an intelligent creator in the context of every other part of my body. My eye was designed as an organ of sight. I know my heart was designed to pump blood. Each part of my body is made for a specific purpose and reason and each individually would not make sense without its place in the context of the larger body.
3. Each part is a member, individually, of every other part. My liver and kidneys, which filter impurities from my blood, would make no sense outside of the context of a circulatory system that carries nutrients and brings back waste from every cell in my body. That awesome engineering marvel called the heart would make no sense whatsoever without being designed to work with other independent structures and organs that all circulate blood throughout my body. My teeth would have no logical purpose outside of the context of a digestive system; this system is comprised of other independent organs that all work together to accomplish the same purpose: converting food into energy for my body. That same eye that is so wonderfully designed with several different types of tissues and muscles and structures would be useless without a brain that is capable of translating those images into “sight”.
4. The parts of my body belong to *my* body as opposed to belonging to your body. I have only one body, but I have many parts that make it up. You can't use my eyes, at least while I am living; they are not a part of your body, not to mention the fact that you would not want my 20/400 visual acuity. I can't use your brain: it is a part of your body, although I would never turn down an opportunity to harness additional brain power if I could.
5. All the parts of my body would wither and die outside of the context of my body: each would serve no useful purpose outside the entire system. No part of my body would survive if it is cut off or removed: it only receives nourishment, growth, and development in the context of the rest of my body as every part functions to take care of every other part.
6. My body takes orders from my “head”. My brain directs the entire spectrum of activity of my body and coordinates all the various parts through my nervous system. All the parts of my body are kept in contact with the “head” through nerves. The “head” is what allows other parts of my body to know what is going on in every other part. When I hit my finger with a hammer, those cells notify my brain that they are in trouble and the brain notifies the appropriate parts of my body to rush blood to the affected area. If my brain were not involved, I would easily burn my finger completely off on a hot stove because the muscles of my arm would never get the message to “move the hand out of the way, NOW!” What an amazing aspect of our bodies that this is.

7. No one part of the body can claim to be as important as any other part: you will continue living without certain parts of your body, but you will always be at less than full capacity of what you could be if that part were still present. Please understand, of course, I am taking nothing away from those people who are impaired in their body and yet overcome that obstacle to achieve and live full and satisfying lives. The point is that I am affected by losing “any” part of my body, no matter how insignificant it may appear to be or how unimportant its role may seem to be. I understand that losing a big toe is a major issue because you basically have to relearn how to walk.
8. My body is designed with an inherent growth capability. It can be “built” up through exercise and physical conditioning. It has within it the capacity to be nourished, to be fed, to require sleep, to repair itself, to automatically do certain functions, and to regulate itself. The body also adapts to changes in the environment automatically. Inherent with a growth capacity is also a capacity for destruction. As easily as I can build my body up, I can also just as easily destroy my body.
9. No part of my body could exist without the other parts of my body. Even though some parts of my body are more “presentable”, such as my eyes or teeth or skin, the other “less presentable” parts of my body are really the most important. Every one of my internal organs is essential for my basic survival, but they are not the parts of my body that every one looks at when they see me. My liver does not revolt and get jealous because I don’t show it off when people look at me. In Western culture, we show our teeth to each other when we are happy. A strange habit if you really think about it, but our teeth get to “show off” and “be in front” all the time. My heart and lungs do not quit working and performing their function because of jealousy over my teeth, right?
10. I care equally for the parts of my body, even though I give some parts greater attention. I can’t comb my liver; but then again, my liver would look funny on my head and probably would not give me the same attractiveness that the hair on top of my head does. I may comb my hair, but I can also make wise choices about what I eat and drink and in essence “care for my liver”.
11. If one part of my body suffers, all of my body knows about it! I can’t hit my finger with a hammer and expect my whole body not to respond to it. I am miserable if just one small part of my body is in pain. Have you ever noticed how much pain a small thing like a cuticle can cause?
12. The body also has a built in capacity to resist and fight off disease. Each part of the body is susceptible to various kinds of ailments, abnormalities, and sickness. **Disease will cause the parts of your body to not function properly.** Disease, if left untreated or unchecked, will cause the shutdown and degradation of your whole body over time. Even when treated, disease can cause serious destruction and a loss of function to the entire body.

In his letters to the Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, and Corinthians, the Apostle Paul describes all of these aspects of the body and how they relate to the church of

Jesus Christ. I think that in beginning a discussion of doctrinal issues it is important at the outset to understand what I call “diseases of the body”. As I said, diseases of the body attack the FUNCTIONALITY of the various parts and components that make up the body. Some diseases attack whole systems of organs, some attack particular organs, and some attack particular types of cells (sickle-cell anemia). Some viruses that cause disease even come through the back door and infect the very life source of the body found in the blood (AIDS).

For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.' Lev 17:11

To really understand the impact of disease on the body, you first have to know what a healthy, functioning body should look like. You have to recognize what “normal” is to begin with. Doctors recognize the onset of disease by symptoms and reactions in certain parts of the body. If you now move this into the context of the Church, I believe Scripture gives a clear definition of the diseases that we can expect to find in the Body of Christ. Just as a skilled doctor can recognize disease by symptoms, we can also recognize disease in the spiritual body of the Lord that lives on this earth. A diseased body will never perform up to its full capacity. A diseased body will be weak and will not be able to stand strongly against infection and other attacks. I believe the Holy Spirit is bringing about a healing in the Body of Christ these days, and I mean more than just a physical healing in our individual bodies, too. I believe the Holy Spirit is calling men and women from all sorts of different churches and all sorts of different races and all sorts of different social classes and all sorts of different denominations and all sorts of different heritages. He is calling them together with the same burning desire: to see a united, strong, fully functional, disease-free Body of Christ.

Before I discuss what I believe the Bible says about these diseases, I first want to discuss what the PURPOSE of the body is to begin with. If disease attacks the functionality of respective parts of our body, then it is important to understand what functionality is being lost to begin with. The truth is that the Church is not so much an organization but an organism. Organizations are artificial and require artificial life to sustain them; organisms are inherently governed by natural processes and require key elements of life to sustain them. In this case, the organism of the Church specifically requires *super*-natural life to sustain it and cause it to grow. In the same way that “**Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God**”, the Body of Christ has a spiritual aspect that transcends what we see of it physically. There is a spiritual aspect to our bodies, even as Paul indicates that our physical body is actually the temple of the Holy Spirit Himself. Just as the biological life of our physical body is in the blood, the *zoe* or spiritual life of The Body of Christ is in the Blood of the Lamb. I have discovered that every physical aspect of the crucifixion that Jesus

endured accomplished spiritual purpose for those in the Body of people that would believe and accept Him as their savior:

His body was broken physically,
 So that I could be made whole
 His blood was spilled,
 So that I could become a part of his blood line
 He wore a crown of thorns,
 So that I could be free from mental anxiety
 Nails were driven in his hand,
 So that I could be engraved on the palm of His Father
 He was scourged on His back,
 So that I could receive physical healing
 The Father turned His head away from His own Son,
 So that He could look at me in spite of the ugliness of all my sin
 His appearance and image was disfigured more than that of any man,
 So that I could be made into His likeness and image
 He remained silent before his judges though He was innocent,
 So that I could stand before my Judge and not hear condemnation
 He carried the yoke of my sin,
 So that I could carry the yoke of His freedom
 He was hung naked on a tree,
 So that I could wear the robes of royalty and righteousness
 He was humiliated and embarrassed,
 So that I could stand before God unashamed, my head held high
 He went to the edges of Hell,
 So that I would never even have to visit
 He faced spiritual death and separation from God,
 So that I could have life everlasting and eternal fellowship
 He was laid in a tomb,
 So that I could live a new life
 He was made to be sin,
 So that I could be made righteous
 He was covered with spit and blood,
 So that I could be anointed and filled with His Spirit
 He was mocked and reviled,
 So that I could hear words of encouragement and hope
 He was forsaken,
 So that I could be forgiven
 He was oppressed,
 So that I could be uplifted
 He died of a broken heart (literally),
 So that my heart of stone could be traded for a heart of flesh
 He sweated drops of blood,
 So that I could cast my anxiety at His feet
 He was downtrodden and walked over,
 So that my enemies could be made his footstool
 He became like me

So that I could become like Him

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. It makes you want to shout when you start thinking about it. Every physical act accomplished a blessing in the spiritual realm for me and you and all of our brother and sisters who call on His name!

The Body of Christ has this same physical/spiritual dynamic. Jesus had a physical and a spiritual aspect in His person, one in the role of a servant and as a descendent of David, the other as the divine Son of God, perfectly joined. Just as man ignores his spiritual nature to his own detriment, the Church ignores its spiritual nature to its own detriment. As a *spiritual* organism, we have a specific *spiritual* function in this world.

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; 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. Eph 3:8-11

Our spiritual purpose as a body is first and foremost to enforce and proclaim the freedom purchased by the Lamb of God on the cross of Calvary. God accomplished His eternal purpose of redeeming all humanity to Him, to all who would receive His Son, for all eternity. The curse of sin was broken. The penalty of sin was paid for in full. The power of the spiritual realms of wickedness was destroyed. John tells us that Jesus was manifested in order to destroy, not just cover or atone, the works of the devil (which are to kill, steal, and destroy anything of God in our life!). It is important to note that when Paul refers to the Unity of the Spirit, this also includes the REALM upon which we have unity. Our unity is certainly not in the flesh—we all look funny in some way or another, none of us are the same in terms of our physical appearances. I certainly do not look like Jesus did physically: I am lacking many features that a Jewish person would tend to genetically have. We certainly do not have unity on an intellectual level, a soul level. We are all emotionally different and we all have lesser to greater degrees of intellectual capability. Some of us can understand theology better than others, while some of us can teach children better than we can instruct adults. I prefer to teach people older than myself. That's just me.

Our unity, although not physically or emotionally or intellectually derived, is spiritually based. We are one IN THE SPIRIT. In other words, in the realm of the spirit, if we could peer into it and see, we should be able to see beings that look almost identical to what Jesus Christ looked like as the Son of Man. It is the express goal of the Spirit of God to conform us to the spiritual image of the Son of God—never forget that. The Spirit of God does not live in us to make us feel good about ourselves (although He does do that when we need it) and He does not live in us to pamper us (although He does hold us like a child when we need to be held). He lives in us for the express purpose of transforming us into the image of Jesus. That is a spiritual image. He does not cause me to grow a beard (assuming Jesus had one) or instruct me in how to be a carpenter (which Jesus was for most of His earthly life). He does cause me to manifest the character and power ministry of Jesus as I yield to the Spirit's indwelling control and pursue the Spirit's filling power.

Satan was scared to death on the day of Pentecost because he could see that in the realm of the spirit world, the image of Jesus the Messiah had been multiplied!! Instead of one Son of Man empowered by the Spirit of God, now there were 70 who looked just like Him in the realm of the spirit. Why do you think satan hates us so much? We remind him of the image of the one who publicly humiliated him (do a word study on the Greek word *apekduomai* from Col 2:15) and stripped the medals of humanity off of his proud chest. The anointing of the Holy Spirit I believe magnifies this image, and I believe that is why satan strives to keep most Christians from realizing this aspect of the Spirit's ministry.

The Body of Christ is one unit and one body: there is only one boat afloat so to speak. You are either in the boat or you are not. Just like Noah's ark. There was no other suitable vessel. So therefore, we all share the same spiritual image of Jesus Christ. That's why I can call you my brother or my sister. We have the same "genes", the same spiritual DNA that makes us of the same lineage and family. John referred to this genetic quality as the divine "sperm" or God's seed:

Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. I Jn 3:9

John was referring to the Holy Spirit of course. He is the divine seed of the Father. We are born anew. We are born into the image of Jesus. As we grow in spiritual maturity, our outward character begins to be conformed to inward picture that our spirit reflects. In a sense we already have unity in the realm of the Spirit: nothing can be done to make us more like the image of Jesus. The Blood of Jesus was sufficient to do that. However, in the realm of our souls,

there is great diversity and also (interesting enough) great disunity. We have unity in the realm of the Spirit ALREADY. We are told to keep this unity in the other realms- relationships at a soul level. Let's not forget that it is at the soul level that humans communicate with each other (they communicate with God on the spirit level). That is why our doctrines and our beliefs and our interpretations do not all agree. It is just the nature of this realm. When Paul says that the manifold wisdom of God would be made known to the spiritual realms, he ain't talking about the angels of God. He is talking about demon powers and spirits of wickedness, fallen angels, who still have authority on the earth until Jesus returns to set up His kingdom. Did they not hear about the news flash?? You LOST guys. Your leader was decapitated! Give up and go home. Unfortunately, they know this. The problem is that the human and world system which they exercise power over, DOES NOT KNOW THIS. Therein lies the mission and the purpose of the Church of Jesus Christ. We are to enforce the judgments of the Lord: all POW's must be returned; the effect of the curse must be overturned; blessing must replace poverty; healing must replace sickness; mercy must replace judgment; grace must replace law; Christ must replace self.

If being in the military has taught me anything, I know that strategy is one thing, but execution is completely different. God has already accomplished the grand strategy: the enemy is defeated! He has decimated his ranks! The Captain of the Host has plundered and laid waste to his kingdom! However, the execution or tactical level of the war is fought and waged at OUR level. That is where we encounter the resistance. That is where we are told to "occupy until I come." That is where the devil and his stupid, foolish subordinates (I am referring to demons of course) are still fighting a losing cause. They know that as long as God continues to extend grace, they can still keep a large part of humanity in the dark about who REALLY won the war. They know their time is running out and that all they have to do is keep humans occupied with their own lives and pursuits, leaving no time to think of eternity and accept the free offer of life purchased at the cross and waiting for them.

That is why God's MANIFOLD wisdom must be made known to these spirits of wickedness. It is the churches express duty to take back what has been stolen, until righteousness comes by the Prince of Peace. The Holy Spirit currently administers righteousness, joy, and peace in God's kingdom. The day is coming when the Son of God Himself will administer these things on earth as the Sun of Righteousness and the Prince of Peace. He will bring in everlasting joy by His very presence on earth. The word manifold comes from the Greek word *polupoikilos*, of which *poikilos* can be rendered as "motley" or "various in character." The whole word together with *polus* means "multi-colored" and "much varied". It strikes me that this is the picture of the Church of Jesus Christ. We are one body in the realm of the spirit, but in the realm of the soul we are for all intensive purposes a "motley" crew. We are the colors of Joseph's

coat. We are the colors of the rainbow. We are “much varied” in how we worship, interpret the Bible, and seek God’s kingdom. I do not think God wants us all to be the “same”. Just look at the world and you can tell how diverse and creative He is. Just look at Israel and you can see that God used 12 tribes mothered by 4 different women to establish the lineage of His people. In the same way, I believe the diversity we find in the Body of Christ is a *good* thing. It is with manifold or “much varied” wisdom that we will present the message of the Gospel to the world. One light that when it strikes the prism of a group of people known as His church, produces dazzling multi-colored light, all reflecting the glory of the original light to some degree or another. It is with this spectrum that I believe we get a sense of what God is really looking for in His people: unity in diversity.

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. 1 Cor 12:4-6

There are a couple of interesting words here in this description of God’s working. When we begin to talk about the “work of the ministry”, our first stop brings us to what I would call the “work of the Triune God”. We have ministry only in the context that God Himself has a ministry. We love because He first loved us. We serve because He was a servant to us first. We give because He gave. We have a ministry of reconciliation because God reconciled us. The Father sent His Son and now the Son has sent us. The purpose of God becoming man was multifaceted but can be summarized as two-fold: 1) to save sinners and 2) to send saints.

One of the first principles that we see at work in the Body of Christ is the Greek word *diairesis*. This is the word translated as diversities or varieties. It speaks of the fact that the Spirit of God Himself brings to the Body of Christ by His presence a division, or rather, a distribution of labor to the body. Just as the different parts of your body perform and function in different tasks, the Spirit brings a variety, a diversity, a distinction, a difference, a different distribution of purpose to different persons within the Body of Christ. Keep in mind our originating principle: **Unity in Diversity**.

What does He bring a diversity of? *Charisma*. This Greek word is where we get the word *gifts* from, and is also translated *grace*. The Holy Spirit brings favor and merit that we do not deserve. He brings to the Church divine gratuity, spiritual endowments, and the economic exchange of our human weakness for God’s supernatural grace. It is by the power of the Holy Spirit who operates in us and upon us and through us that ordinary people are transformed into

people who can accomplish God's will and establish His will on this earth and in His kingdom.

Speaking of grace earlier, I mentioned that God assigns to each one of us a specific measure of grace:

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Rom 12:3-5

Just the fact that we each receive our own measure of faith for achieving God's purpose indicates that we are going to have different gifts. I think denominational groups can be considered like this some time. Some groups are far better suited for developing and presenting certain types of truth. I'll explore this idea later on in more detail (see Why We Need Each Other). Not every organ in our body can be the same: it is critical that we realize in Christ I am a part of a body, connected to some larger purpose and organism. I am also a different part of the body, determined and placed into by the Holy Spirit. God's giftings, or charisma, operate in me by 1) God's enabling, 2) our faith, and 3) my participation in a larger body of believers.

Here enters the concept of ministries. Paul states that just as the same Holy Spirit imparts divine grace in manifold and multitudinal ways upon God's people, the same Lord Jesus inspires and directs different ministries or diakonia. These are offices that are not so much recognized by titles that men ascribe to them, but are rather divine appointments which our Lord calls His disciples to. The truth is, we all have a divine service, we all have a divine ministry, and we all have a divine calling. This word is used for deacons, for specific titles given to elders, prophets, and evangelists, and for the office of apostle. *Diakonia* I think best represents the idea of a *servant* before anything else. Deacons of the early New Testament church were basically "waiters" who collected and distributed food to those who needed it within the Body of believers. I think we have lost the simplicity of this office in our modern church, but the fact remains that our Lord calls each of His disciples into ministry, or servanthood. We are to be servants of our Father, just as Jesus was servant to His Father. When we serve our Father, the outflow of that produces blessing and fruit in the lives of our fellow brothers and sisters.

If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor. John 12:26

Servanthood begins with walking in the footsteps of Jesus. Just like the old WWJD bracelets suggest. Servanthood was a primary focus in the parables of Jesus. It must be important to God. Israel lost its role as the servant of Jehovah, and Jesus illustrated this in a multitude of parables. They lost sight that the promise of God to Abraham was to make him a blessing to ALL nations. The Church has been grafted into that lineage of promise now. Today, both Jew and Gentile, any from both groups of people (that's all of humanity) who will receive Messiah Jesus' reign, can be a servant of the Lord. Jesus has promised that we will be where He is. If Jesus would be with the poor, the sick, the infirm, with prisoners, amidst sinners, eating with taxcollectors, amongst people of questionable reputation, then that is certainly where we should find ourselves. Are you not currently involved with one of these groups?? Maybe you should be. It's where Jesus would be yesterday, and it's where He would be today.

The last part of this Triune equation comes from the word *effects*. The Greek word *energema*, or workings/activities, describes an operation, a working, a thing performed, or something that produces an effectual result. It is the same Father God "who **works** all things in all". This *energeo*, or inspiration, means to be active and fervently effectual. It speaks of the mighty power of God to call things that were not as though they were, to bring order out of chaos, to divide light and darkness, to bring back to life that which was dead, or to restore that which was broken. God wants to show forth Himself and His nature within His Church. He wants the Church to be an effectual and fervent vessel to carry the message and ministry of reconciliation to the world. Father God who created all things with a purpose in mind has a purpose for you and I. There is a divine destiny in which God has called us all to follow. This destiny originates in the creative purposes of God, from the time when God knew you in your unformed substance in your mother's womb, when He foreknew and pre-planned the unique gifts and callings which when combined in you would uniquely make you His workmanship. We were created in Christ Jesus for good works, for God's plan to be unfolded in our lives, for their to be an attainment of the high calling with which Father God calls us heavenward.

There are many expressions of God's grace given by the Holy Spirit, manifested in and through the Body of Christ. All are designed to stir our hearts for service and ministry to the Lord Jesus. This is all in direct support of the Father working in many different ways in and through His people to accomplish His will. **Unity in Diversity**. There it is again. We see that Paul stresses it is the **one** and the **same** God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who effectually acts in many and sundry different gifts, ministries, and workings through the Body of Christ. It is this One God in Three Persons who inspires the full range of diversity within the Body of Christ to accomplish His purpose and work. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit bring gifts to the Church.

Consider the gifts (workings) of the Father:

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Rom 12:6-8

Consider the gifts (ministries) bestowed by Jesus:

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ Eph 4:11-12

Consider the gifts manifested by the Spirit:

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 1 Cor 12:7-10

This picture also reveals something about TRUE ministry.

- ◆ True ministry within the Body of Christ will have its origins in the divine power of God's grace working in and through us, not in the fleshly ability of man and his own devices. (Diversities of Gifts or *charisma*.)
- ◆ True ministry will seek to serve the Living Christ above serving man. Unlike most modern teaching on servanthood, we do not serve God by serving man! We serve our fellow man by being servants of the Father FIRST. If man is the object of our service and our ministry, then there will always be a natural tendency to please man above pleasing God. Jesus pleased and served His Father FIRST, and as a result His disciples were ministered to, people were healed, and the world was reconciled to God. We all have received the benefits and blessings that came from Jesus serving His Father. Jesus promised that the Father would honor those who serve Him. (Diversities of Ministries or *diakonia*.)

- ◆ True ministry will always be a result of us following God's leading. If we do not work where God is working we are going to waste our time. If we see God moving and working, that is where we are to join Him in His work. Just as John recorded:

"Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. "For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel." John 5:19-20

We must work where our Father shows us He is working. We must find out what His creative purpose in us is all about. We must find out what His workmanship in our life is all about. We must align ourselves with His divine purpose in this world and work in His vineyard. (Diversities of Workings or *energema*.)

Here is what I call this Triune Equation of Ministry:

The creative working of the **Father** in and through our life is manifest in the different service we render to the **Lord Jesus** as we are equipped by the diversity of the gifts the **Holy Spirit** brings to His Body.

Now that we have identified three marks of true ministry, let us consider what Paul said about the work of the ministry in his letter to the Ephesians. The word *work* in the Greek is *ergon*. It means to toil and labor at something. It conveys the meaning of a business, an employment, or what anyone is occupied with. It is an enterprise or an undertaking. Jesus taught His disciples to undertake the work of being a "servant". Paul calls this the *work* of the "ministry" or "service" or "*diakonia*", which we found in 1 Cor 12:4-6. In this particular case, Paul lists 5 specific offices of ministry which men and women are called to in the Body of Christ for the specific purpose of equipping the saints for this work (*ergon*).

One of the problems that I believe we have in the American church is that these offices have become "ends in themselves". Pastors do not see themselves as part of a bigger scope of organs that are part of one and the same body. Apostles who plant churches take no thought sometimes to what other church planters are doing and thus their efforts are never coordinated. Teachers see themselves as working for a "pastor" or a "church", but they do not see their role or place in the greater Body of Believers that is out there. Evangelists rarely step outside of their zone of comfort to reach across racial and cultural boundaries. Most

local churches and local bodies of believers themselves are mini versions of the larger body and most are complete with people who have appropriate giftings and callings. The point is that Paul said the work of the ministry was given to the entire Body of Christ, not just one church or denomination. Paul states that the offices are not the ends in themselves but rather *part* of the process:

5-Fold Ministry -> Equipping of the Saints -> Work of the Ministry -> Edifying of the Body

If those called to be pastors and prophets and apostles and teachers and evangelists do not do their job properly, the saints will not be equipped properly. If saints are not equipped properly, the work of the ministry, that undertaking of labor and servanthood that our Lord Jesus left to us, will not get done. A minister's duty is to develop, encourage, stir up, stimulate, and mature both the gifts and fruit of the Spirit in the lives of the saints. Their job description is not to be the "ones" who flow in the gifts per se, but rather to identify and bring forth the gifts that the Spirit distributes among the saints—they are to prepare US for the work of the ministry. When the body functions *normally* in accomplishing this task, the body will grow and build itself up in love. New growth will occur automatically. Old cells and dead parts will be replaced. Wounded parts will be healed and repaired so that they can function normally. The body will fend off disease and fight infection as one unit. A body that functions in a healthy manner will spread the fragrance of the knowledge of Jesus everywhere it touches the world.

The word *equip*, *katartizo* in the Greek, carries the idea of repairing, mending, and adjusting. It conveys also the thought of perfecting, or rather, perfectly joining together things that are part of the same frame and structure. Part of the job of equipping saints is mending them and adjusting their behavior. The role of the 5 fold ministry gifts should ultimately be to "fit" each part of the body into its proper place in the overall frame and structure, not just the corresponding organ or system or cell group. People can join churches and be committed to local bodies and there is nothing wrong with that at all. However, people forget the fact that they joined a much bigger "Church" through the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit.

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. 1 Cor 12:12-

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We are baptized into the Body of Christ by God the Holy Spirit before we were ever baptized in water or affiliated with a local church. Before we are members

of our churches, we are members of His Church first and foremost. Race or prior religious tradition (Jews or Greek), social status or rank (slaves or free), and gender (male or female) have no place in the Body of Christ as a basis for distinction. The only thing, as Paul put it, that matters is a “new creation”. If you look at a brother or sister and see a “label” or a “category”, then you are not seeing a “new creation”. If the ultimate goal of equipping or perfecting saints is to “fit” them into the right place in the overall structure of the body so that they can perform their God given function, then how much is the church missing this role if we only consider the church to be within the doors of the building we meet in on Sunday? If our service is ultimately part of a process and not an end in itself, then wouldn’t it behoove us to know what God had in mind for the process to begin with?

Ultimately, the goal is what Paul refers to as *oikodome*, or the building up of the body. This word conveys the idea of actually building on to part of an already existing structure. Just as our body has an inherent growth mechanism, the Body of Christ has been given a supernatural growth mechanism that derives its power from the corporate activity of the entire body working together properly. This leads me to a very important conclusion. It is the basis of what this book is all about. It is one of the key principles that we all need to grab a hold of collectively in the Church universal.

The Work of the Ministry begins with a normally functioning body.

If the parts of our body never coordinated their actions through the working of our “head”, the brain, and if the members of our human body each decided to work independently of one another and if each system of our body cared only about its own set of organs and functions without regarding other systems and sets of organs, our body would shut down. Our human body would literally stop working at that point. If disease comes into our body and causes organs and tissues and cells to not function properly, the net result is almost certainly a decrease in productivity across the entire spectrum of body functions. Our body is designed so that each part must function properly for the body to function properly as a whole. Although this is a very simple and basic truth, it still does not quite sink in some times. The enterprise and the business of servanthood and service that the Church of Jesus Christ has been assigned can only be carried out to its maximum intent by a body that is functioning properly to begin with. If disease is present in our bodies, our body can not function properly. It will not function, at least, to the ability that it could if the disease were not present. No, we need to first have a normally functioning body before we can expect it to perform and operate and produce work in the way it was intended.

What are the natural results of a normally functioning body? What happens when a body carries out the work of ministry where each part functions properly

and in the correct place in relation to the other parts? What happens when there is no disease or dysfunction within the body? Paul tells us exactly what we should expect to see happen and what the underlying principles are:

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 with 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 of the body for the edifying of itself in love. Eph 4:13-16

There should first of all be a UNITY of the FAITH. If you are like me, you probably sit and wonder some times what this unity of the faith thing really means. If there even is such a thing, where is it today and where can I find it in the Church of Jesus Christ? Sort of like the beggar in Charles Sheldon's book "In His Steps" who turned a church upside down by daring to ask the question, "What does it *really* mean to follow Jesus?" The beggar went on to make the statement in church, "I'm not complaining, am I? But what would Jesus *do*?" WWJD? I put that on my screen saver sometimes. What Would Jesus Do? That question should drive and motivate every step we take, every word we say, every deed we do, every breath we breathe, and every thought we dwell on. I am like that beggar, but instead I want to ask the question "What does it *really* mean to have a unity of the faith?" Paul said that the work of the ministry should continue on UNTIL we reach this point. If you are like me, I think you could agree that the Church as a whole, at least in the United States, is not there yet. I believe we are seeing a move of the Spirit in that direction, but there is still a ways to go. I like how the Living Bible renders this verse:

"until finally we all believe alike about our salvation and about our Savior, God's Son, and all become full-grown in the Lord" (TLB).

I believe there is a unity of the faith that is shared by most if not all denominations and flavors of Christianity. There are certain basics of the faith that we all hold to with little argument or bickering. Going back to the example of our "core" beliefs, these really do in a sense form that unity of the faith that any member of the Church universal would stand behind. They form the battle cry of the army of God and allow for a common ground for us all to stand on. Is there something more to the unity of the faith than just "core" beliefs, though? When Paul talked about this, did he mean that maybe there really

could be a consensus of understanding about what the Bible really says on those “important issues” that we all hold dear but that no one can really agree on?

I do not believe that getting everyone to agree on divisive issues is going to solve the problem of disunity within the church. Only love and repentance and giving up our selfish desires to be right will bring about healing and restoration and unity in the Body of Christ. “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up”. Evidently, Paul knew that a unity of the faith did not spring so much from *knowledge* as it did from *love*. That is one of the concepts that I want to explore later. Perhaps in our quest to find the right doctrinal position and the right side of the fence to be on that the possibility exists we have indeed pursued *knowledge* and not *love*. Can I make a statement similar to the beggar but instead ask, “I’m not complaining, am I? But what would Jesus **say**?” Indeed, what would Jesus say about our doctrinal *disputes*? It is not the fact so much that we differ about certain doctrines that bugs me. What irritates me is a plain out lack of love for those that are not on “my side.” Not only that, but the attitude that the other side offers nothing for me to learn because “I already know what the right side is.” That’s what happens when the liver thinks that it is the only organ in the body. It doesn’t realize that the other parts of the body are there to complete the structure and give the “whole” picture.

Would you join my sentiments in wanting to see the church reach the unity of the faith?? I would like to see it in areas where there have not been concessions from certain sides in the past. I would like to see more of a “whole picture” approach to the doctrines that split us and divide us. The beginning of that, however, starts with getting rid of the diseases in the body. If we are to relook at what the Bible might have to say to us about those sticky doctrines, then we first must have a “teachable” spirit to begin with. We must abandon the notion that we hold the absolute right interpretation about certain divisive issues. That is where the work of the ministry should begin. Denominations are not bad in and of themselves; a “denominational spirit” is a trait of a carnal believer, however, and a sign of spiritual immaturity. Although their purpose is to “denominate” people as one brand or another, denominations provide the panorama of experience and tradition that the Body of Christ needs to remain healthy. If God used the uniqueness and differences in customs and heritage of the 12 tribes of Israel to accomplish His will on earth, there is no reason He cannot use the unique and diverse strengths that each denomination or tradition of Christianity brings to the entire Body to accomplish His will on earth today. Lord open our eyes to see your Bride in all of her splendor; let us realize the potential and the destiny that you have called your Bride to on this earth!

Knowledge of the Son of God will be the second indication of normally functioning body. What is the knowledge of the Son of God? A person who knows **who** Jesus was and is will be a believer that 1) overcomes the

world, 2) overcomes sin, and 3) overcomes the devil. A church that brings people to the knowledge of the Son of God will be a church that God will use as an instrument of His glory. What is the crucial message of who Jesus is in this hour? After 2000 years, even Time magazine still asks the question, “Who was Jesus of Nazareth?”. With so many voices, many of which come from the pit of Hell, rising to answer that question today, the Church needs to have a clear and unified answer of who the Son of God is.

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Phil 2:5-11

Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. Rom 1:3-4

We must proclaim in this hour the absolute truth of two distinct natures that were consummate in the person we know of as Jesus of Nazareth. The first being that He had a human nature that was absolutely equivalent to that of the first human ever created, Adam. In other words, Jesus was 100% human. He did not just “appear” to have a body: He was a flesh and blood man. As John states, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us”. The world is longing and in desperate need to know that God understands the pain, the suffering, the agony, and the unfairness of this life. He did not just sit in heaven and take notes: He became one of us so that for all time and all eternity he could say to you or I: “I have been there; I have walked where you walk; I have lived where you live; I have been acquainted with all aspects of your existence personally.” The mystery of Godliness is indeed great: God was manifested IN THE FLESH. Jesus had a human nature in every aspect: he cried, he laughed, he talked, he cared, he was grieved, he suffered anguish, he faced temptation, he slept, he ate, he did everything that we all do with one major exception: He did not SIN. However, this did not establish nor become the catalyst for His other nature that was resident IN Him.

I refer to the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was also 100% deity. He had a divine nature. He was Immanuel, “God with us”. The spirit of anti-christ says that Jesus was not divine and that God did not come in the flesh. The spirit of error

says that Jesus was a creation and not the Creator. Jesus was the Son of David, but He was also the Son of God. Nothing changed when the Son of God came to earth in the person of Jesus of Nazareth in terms of His divine essence and being. His role, however, did change drastically. The Sovereign became a Servant. The all-knowing, all-present, and all-powerful One humbled Himself and took on the role of a servant and became obedient to death in order that we could live and not face spiritual separation from God. It is a paradox and a mystery. We will talk more about the truth of the Incarnation later. We must bring people to a knowledge of the Son of God. “Christ in you, the hope of glory. . .” If you have a low image or vision of who Christ was, then you will also have a low image or expectation of what His power will do within you to change you from a dead sinner into a living vessel fit for the master’s use.

According to The Flesh	According to The Spirit
LINEAGE	DECLARED
A Family, The Davidic Line Born of the Seed of David	A Statement, Pronouncement Born of the Seed of God Born of the Holy Spirit Son of God
Son of Man Human Nature Role: Servant	Divine Nature Role: King/Sovereign
Form of a Bondservant Emptied Himself Of His Privilege	Form of God Equal with God in Rank, Stature, Essence, Form
MADE Himself Likeness of Man	MAKER of all things Likeness of God

“Jesus Relinquished His Glory but Retained His Deity”

Can you be equal to God without being God??? Although man in his fallen state would like to believe that, unfortunately it is just not possible. Lucifer was the prime example of this. He was the first one to put this hypothesis to the test. He uttered his 5 great “I wills” and found he was holding a pink slip quicker than he could blink. Lucifer fell like lightning according to Jesus when he tried to make himself equal with God.

For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit. Isa 14:13-15

Since satan could not become equal with God himself, he decided the next best thing was to convince man that he could do this impossible task as well. Unfortunately, man will never be “like” God through his own efforts and wisdom. God wants us to be transformed to the image of His Son, who was the

likeness of God. However, we can never do that through disobedience or ignorance of God's word. That is what man has tried to do since the fall. The Son of God did the exact opposite of what TAFKAL (The Angel Formerly Known as Lucifer) attempted to do. Man today still strives to become "god". The Son was already God but He chose to become man. What a sad irony. The knowledge of the Son of God, however, is worth giving up everything else in this world.

Yet indeed I 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 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Phil 3:8-11

Paul told the Philippians that everything else was worthless dung in comparison to having a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and knowing the power of His resurrection life. Paul gladly gave up everything that he had attained through his own human effort and merit to embrace that which can only be attained through faith: a right standing with God. That is the knowledge of the Son of God. It will transform you and grab a hold of you. It is **this** knowledge that a healthy and normally functioning Body will communicate to a lost and dying world!

A third indication of a functioning body is a striving toward a "perfect" man. Jesus made a bold statement by saying that as our Heavenly Father is perfect, we must also be perfect. However, perfection does not refer so much to sinlessness as much as it refers to completeness or wholeness. We all know that none of us are "perfect"; we all make mistakes. However, Jesus revealed a truth that it is possible to live in the provision and grace of God to such a degree that our life is in perfect balance and completeness. A sign that a Body is functioning normally is indicated by the encouragement of its parts to attain the perfection that is found in a faith-based walk with God. It is in getting saints to move from living FOR Him to living IN Him that we will find the power to fulfill the command that Jesus gave us. Please remember that Jesus would never command us to do something that He could not give us the power to fulfill. If He tells us to be perfect like the Father, then God must have the resources within Himself to impart a divine life that will bring about victory over sin and a transformation of our character. The "perfect" man however can not be attained outside of a walk of discipleship and sacrifice within the context of the Body of Christ. We cannot attain it on our own. We need not only the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling us and transforming us from the inside out,

but we also need to be fitted together in the Body of Christ so that “together” we will become a perfect man. It would be a lot easier to avoid sin if we lived on an island by ourselves... it is a lot harder to avoid sin when interacting and working along side other sinful people who have been redeemed by grace just like us. That is why the mark of perfection is completeness and wholeness—how well we operate with *others* as well as how victorious we are in our own self.

It is indeed those who do not have a harmony or a peace within their own lives that bring the most destructive obstacle to the unity of the body. We must be at peace with ourselves before we can be at peace with others. We must be at peace with God before we can be at peace with ourselves. That is the goal. I become complete and whole individually. It is God’s ultimate desire and goal for my life. My goal is to remove any conflict between doing the will of God in my life and doing the will of my flesh. I am to utterly destroy and remove all things that will hinder my ability to do the will of God and obey His word. As I do this, God’s power is released in my life. I can then become part of His body without causing disruption or disorder. Until we each individually are brought to “wholeness”, the Body of Christ will not stand as a “perfect man”.

The fourth indication of a healthy body concerns reaching the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. In Christ dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Paul says that now we have been brought to fullness of life through him.

For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. Col 2:9-10

The fullness of Christ means that as He begins to live up to His true measure within us, outwardly we will begin to act, think, talk, live, and love in the very same manner that He did. We will be acquainted with His suffering; we will have His mind; we will feel His love for the lost and dying; we will be moved to action; we will speak His truth; we will speak boldly of what God has done for us and in us. There is no limit to what God can do through one person fully dedicated to Him. Imagine what God could do through one Body that was fully dedicated to Him. That is exactly what God desires and wants. We are being made to be a dwelling of the Spirit both individually and corporately. Again, we will not reach the fullness of His stature apart from other members of the Body. We need each other. That is how God designed the Body. A disease-free body will begin to reach the same measure of the Holy Spirit’s power that was found in the earthly ministry of our Lord.

If the Body is healthy, believers will no longer be children in spiritual thinking and will not be tossed to and fro on the wind of doctrine.

Doctrine was never meant to be intellectual head food. Jesus said that He who DOES the will of the Father would live. Doctrine was never meant to be sterile formulations of scriptural facts. Doctrine was meant to be lived out. I dedicate an entire chapter to this later, but I will wet your appetite for right now.

*But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that **form of doctrine** to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. Rom 6:17-18*

*But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to **sound doctrine**, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust. 1 Tim 1:8-11*

*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. 1 Tim 6:3-5*

Doctrine in the modern church has come to mean a very different thing than what I believe Paul intended it to mean here. I do not believe that Paul viewed doctrine as a codification of beliefs and statements of scriptural fact that supported a particular viewpoint of interpretation on a scriptural topic. “Sound doctrine” appeared rather to be something that promoted holy and godly living. It appeared to be a “form” or “pattern” by which one actually LIVES by. It did not appear to be a “pattern” which one knew or could recite from memory as being a collection of scriptural arguments regarding particular areas of concern. “Good” or “sound” doctrine was something that could be FOLLOWED:

*If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the **good doctrine** which you have carefully **followed**. 1 Tim 4:6*

That is the difference I am referring to. There is such a thing as doctrine that delineates a true faith from a false or counterfeit faith. Doctrines that expound on the nature of God and the person of God are at the core of what we believe and are the foundation to saving faith. Altering those types of doctrines will

lead you down the pathway to hell and not up the pathway of life. Satan our adversary is not stupid, either. He understands that people would not drink a glass of poison (i.e. false doctrine) knowing that it was going to lead to their death and destruction. However, people will drink a nice glass of lemonade that just so happens to have a drop of poison mixed in with it (truth mixed with error). This is how most cults operate. There is a semblance of the truth of God's Word to be found, but that is just the wrapper around the deadly poisonous lie that will lead one away from true faith in the true God.

The Word of God is living and active and is designed to have a transformational power as we study, read, and apply it to our life. God wants His word to incarnate in us so that in this physical world people can once again witness the grace and truth of the Lord Jesus Christ. A healthy, growing body will take a balanced view of the Scriptures in areas that are sources of conflict to members within the body. Intellectual pursuits of knowledge are not worth wasting our energy over. Paul referred to those who are "mature" on several occasions. Maturity comes with a continual openness to being changed, shaped, taught, molded, and corrected. If we close our minds and stubbornly believe we are right on every single debatable issue, we are not as mature as we think we are.

Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Phil 3:15

Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature. 1 Cor 14:20

Lastly, a healthy Body will speak the word of truth in love so that people will grow and not remain infants. Peter said that we are to yearn for and partake of the milk of the Word. That is how we grow into maturity spiritually speaking. Far too many members of the Body should be "teachers" by now but they still need someone to teach them the elementary tenets of the Scriptures:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Heb 5:12-14

We must strive to move from spiritual immaturity into adulthood. We should expect new believers in Christ to need milk and to act carnal. That should be no surprise to us: they are babies, and precious in the Lord's site. However, when a 20-year old saint is still wearing spiritual diapers it is no longer cute or normal. Disunity, prejudice, judgementalism, and divisions are the tell-tale sign of carnality. Carnality is associated with believers who should have matured but who never did. May the Lord lead us all unto maturity and usefulness in His Kingdom!

Father God, give us a vision to look outside the four walls of our church building. Let us see with spiritual eyes and give us the mind of maturity toward one another, especially those we do not see eye to eye with. Let us see our oneness, not our division. Let us see our commonality, not our difference. Let us see your loveliness, not our roughness. Let us see your power, not our own ability. Let us have eyes that see the work of the kingdom accomplished together, by those on the "other side of the aisle". Let it be Lord. Amen.



We have looked at three marks of true ministry and five signs of a healthy, functioning body. It is a body that is accomplishing the work of the ministry. It is a body where the life of Jesus is communicated. This means that people are saved, sinners are set free, bondages are destroyed, yokes are lifted, and basically people become what God made them to be. This is what it means to have a healthy body. It is the ideal that we all should strive for and not settle for anything less of. Now let's consider what it means for disease to attack the body and the havoc that it can cause.

Diseases of the Body

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. Eph 5:29-30

If our human bodies are susceptible to disease and malfunction, does it not make sense that the spiritual body of people that make up the Church would also be susceptible to the same danger? If we know that we need to go to the doctor or take medicine when our physical body is sick, does it not make sense that we need to be aware and respond to illness and disease when we see it in the Body of Christ? Just like Paul states in Ephesians, no one despises or hates or neglects his own flesh. If our body is sick, we take measures to alleviate and treat the cause of it. No one starves and disregards what their own body is telling them: we would call them foolish for doing such, right? What is more important for us to understand, I believe, is that we are literally connected to each other by our faith in Jesus Christ and by the new birth of the Holy Spirit. When we attack another “part” or “member” of our body, we are not just attacking another part of our body, we are attacking the Lord Himself! That is the picture Paul is trying to communicate here! He extends this picture even further when he talks about why sexual sins for a believer carry a far greater weight than any other sin:

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For "the two," He says, "shall become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. 1 Cor 6:15-17

The neat thing about using a body as an object lesson is that we can apply this pattern all the way from our individual church that we attend, to a city wide group of believers, to a state or nation wide group of believers, all the way to the entire body of believers that is on the earth today. The point is that we need to allow the Holy Spirit to speak to us at the level where we need to be adjusted in our attitude. Some of us need to first examine how we deal with other believers within our own local body of fellowship, our home church. Until we deal with believers correctly at

that level, it is going to be hard to deal with ones that do not even go to our church, hold our interpretations, fit in our culture or race, or fit in our box of who we fellowship with.

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God Eph 2:19

Remember that as a member of a larger body, the diseases that attack the other parts of my body affect me. “If one member suffers, all suffer”. Spiritual disease affects us all within the Body of Christ. We pay sometimes for the bad attitudes and poor representation that other believers have left behind them as they have either brought reproach or shame to the cause of Christ by their actions. We all bear the burden of those who have “fallen”, whether they are TV evangelists, local pastors, ordinary believers, or learned teachers. The fact is that we all suffer when any “member” of our body falls into dysfunction because of disease or attack. Who do we ultimately belong to though? We belong ultimately to God Himself and to each other secondly, “members one of another”. Once I was alienated from God. Once I was a stranger and foreigner to the ways of God and the blessings of God. Now, however, I am a member of His household, a saint, a fellow citizen, His own flesh and blood. I don’t become a member of this body by joining a church.. I become a member by a supernatural act of the Holy Spirit. That *is* our membership.

*Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, in **whom** the whole building, being **joined together, grows** into a holy temple in the Lord Eph 2:20-21*

In Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone, we are all being fitted together for His purpose to accomplish the work of the ministry. God must fit us together or we will never grow like He intends us to. We should never leave a body of fellowship because of hurt feelings, bitterness, unforgiveness, or other external measures of fellowship. Being fit together is a painful process in some instances, but the fitting together is good for us in the long run. Remember, we cannot grow or be nourished outside of the context of a body. We need to learn to adjust to others in how they sing, how they worship, how they pray, and how they teach. We do not go to church to feel good about ourselves but rather we go to be joined together so that we can grow properly. God is indeed fitting us together so that we can grow up! We must let God do this or we will never walk in the callings and purpose He has for our lives. Let people rub us and refine us! That is why we have each other, so that we can learn to live in the context of a body.

In whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Eph 2:22

The ultimate goal is that God will have a place, a dwelling, a structure for His very presence to abide and dwell with us. Notice that Paul indicates we are not only individually the temple of the Spirit, but that collectively we are being built and made into a dwelling by a Spirit. That means that when I work and worship in the context of other believers, a dynamic of the Holy Spirit is at work that would not be otherwise present if I just “worshipped God at home on Sunday morning”. To use a cliché, “there is no such thing as Lone Ranger Christian.” Now that we understand this, let us see how diseases can wreak havoc among our members.

Consider first of all the classic definition of disease:

Disease, in medicine, any state in which the health of the human organism is impaired. All diseases involve a breakdown of the body's natural defense systems or those regulating the internal environment. Even when a cause is not known, a disease can almost always be understood in terms of the physiological or mental processes that are disrupted.

In medical science, diseases can be classified by their site (bone, heart, liver); by their natural history (acute or chronic); by their course (progressive or intermittent); or by other schemes. Two of the most useful ways to classify disease are 1) by cause and 2) by which biological process is disturbed. There are numerous types of infectious diseases such as **pneumonia**, **cholera**, and **gonorrhoea**, caused by bacteria; and **smallpox**, **measles**, and **hepatitis**, caused by viruses.[]

I want to cover a few diseases first by what PROCESS is disturbed, then I will give an extensive list of diseases by CAUSE. Processes concern systems of organs that work together to accomplish some task within our physical body. God so arranged organs to work together in systems, some working independently, some interrelated, and some dependent on other systems.

Let's consider first diseases that attack our muscular system, like MD. Here is the classical medical definition of the term:

muscular dystrophy *noun* *Abbr. MD*

1. Any of a group of progressive muscle disorders caused by a defect in one or more genes that control muscle function and characterized by gradual irreversible wasting of skeletal muscle.

Muscles are the element of our body that provides us with mobility. They attach to our skeletal system. Without muscles, I would have a similar structure, but I would not be able to move, be able to talk, and do any other number of crucial tasks that sustain life. One principle of muscles is this: snooze you loose. That's a colorful way of saying that muscles break down and atrophy naturally without use and exercise. They lose capability when they are not contracted and relaxed on a regular basis.

Muscles can be correlated in a lot of way to works. God has called the Church, just as He did the nation of Israel, to be His servant in this world. He has called us to be priests and kings, representing our intercessory role and the ministry of reconciliation we are given. WE are to bring the reign of the Kingdom of God into every situation where we find ourselves. We are to bring His way, His name, and His power. Muscles follow this same paradigm. When the Body of Christ is attacked in this area, it becomes inward focused instead of being outward focused. It is found when we are do more resting on our faith than acting on our faith,

With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. II Th 1:11 (NIV)

Our faith should be prompting us to do for God. Notice that I did not say, nor did Paul, that our doing produces our faith. The Holy Spirit within you is calling you right now to leave a life of selfish pursuit and be baptized into the ministry of Jesus Himself. He is calling you to leave all and pursue the Kingdom of God. When we do not respond to that voice of faith, we do not exercise spiritual muscle. Instead, we become reliant on what we know in our head rather than what we have experienced in our hearts. When groups of believers do this, the Body has fallen prey to an attack on its muscular system. There is no movement forward in God. There is no advance of God's kingdom. There is no building of faith that will see and expect God to work in our midst. Notice the Christian life is called a "walk" and not a "sit on the pew." This is an example of how disease can attack the process of a bodily system. I address the cure for MD within the Body of Christ in the next chapter.

Some diseases can attack the nervous system of the human body as well. What is the purpose of the nervous system? Very simple. It is to communicate messages from our brain (the command center of the nervous system) to every cell and organ in our body. Correspondingly, it communicates from every cell and organ to the brain.

Nervous System, those elements within the animal organism that are concerned with the reception of stimuli, the transmission of nerve impulses, or the activation of muscle mechanisms. []

Humans are for all intensive purposes a walking electrical plant! Do any reading on the human nervous system and it will amaze you how the electrical processes that happen at the cellular level of a single nerve is based on voltage differentials and ionic interactions of a microscopic nature. Not only that, but electrical signals “jump” across gaps called synapses from one nerve to the next all the way till a signal is propagated and received by the brain. Diseases like Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s are linked to the production or abnormality of things called neurotransmitters. These are chemicals which are vital in the propagation of signals from the brain. Fatigue, mental confusion, forgetfulness, and even violent behavior can result from these types of disorders.

A nerve cell by definition is one that is capable of receiving and sending stimuli. A neuron has axons and dendrites that together do the role of receiving stimuli and then propagating that stimuli to other cells and to the brain. Diseases of the nervous system include genetic malformations, poisonings, metabolic defects, vascular disorders, inflammations, degeneration, and tumors, and they involve either nerve cells or their supporting elements. Vascular disorders, such as cerebral hemorrhage or other forms of **stroke**, are among the most common causes of paralysis and other neurologic complications.

Multiple Sclerosis is a progressive **disease** in which the body attacks its own central **nervous system**. It is an example of a disease that causes certain members to war against one another. MS gradually destroys myelin, the white, fatty substance that surrounds nerve fibers, and damages sites in the **brain** and **spinal cord**. This disease has a peculiar geographic oddity as well. It is a common in temperate zones but more rare in the Tropics. Symptoms vary and the most common are blurring of vision; double vision or loss of vision; weakness of the extremities; sensory changes such as numbness, tingling, or pain.

Let’s consider this type of disease in terms of the Body of Christ. What is the equivalent to our spiritual nervous system in the Church? Consider that the primary purpose of the human nervous system is to relay and transmit stimuli from the brain to the other parts of the Body. We indeed have a head within the Body of Christ: the Lord Jesus:

And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. Col 1:18

Our Head, who is equivalent to our own human brain, wants to communicate to His Body, the Church. Here is the problem. Where is the Head at?

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Col 3:1

Where is His Body at? Pretty obvious answer, but for those of you who need help with this, His Body is not in heaven where He is... it is on the earth. The Head and the Body will be reunited one day at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb... the Bride will be wed to Her Husband, the Bridegroom. Now you might ask yourself, what then is the equivalent of our nervous system in the Body of Christ. How do we receive and take instruction, as members and cells and organs and tissue units (humanly speaking) from the brain? Consider the following:

*Then **the Spirit said to Philip**, "Go near and overtake this chariot." Acts 8:29*

*While Peter thought about the vision, **the Spirit said to him**, "Behold, three men are seeking you. "Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them." Acts 10:19-20*

*As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, **the Holy Spirit said**, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Acts 13:2*

I will not go into the context of each of these passages, but I bring them up to illustrate this point. The nervous system of the Church on this earth is the voice of the Holy Spirit. Here are three instances where the actual words say that the Holy Spirit spoke and gave specific instruction. I will ask you this question: Do you believe these passages refer to an audible voice being heard? I don't. Mainly because God does not typically use an audible voice in most of recorded Scripture to communicate. In fact, an audible voice is used when people have the least amount of faith and it becomes a last resort. I believe prophetic utterances came by normal believers and that these utterances were attributed to the Holy Spirit. It is written that even Jesus gave His disciples last instructions through the ministry of the Holy Spirit:

*Until the day in which He was taken up, after He **through the Holy Spirit had given***

commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen.
Acts 1:2

Consider these (I suggest reading the entire context of each one for yourself):

*Then one of them [a prophet], named Agabus, stood up and **showed by the Spirit** that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Acts 11:28*

*So, being **sent out by the Holy Spirit**, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. Acts 13:4*

*Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were **forbidden by the Holy Spirit** to preach the word in Asia. Acts 16:6*

*And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that **the Holy Spirit testifies** in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. Acts 20:22-23*

*And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They **told Paul through the Spirit** not to go up to Jerusalem. Acts 21:4*

*When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, "**Thus says the Holy Spirit**, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.' Acts 21:11*

*So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "**The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah** the prophet to our fathers, saying, 'Go to this people and say: "Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive. Acts 28:25-26*

If the book of Acts reveals anything to us, it reveals that when Jesus ascended to the throne, the Holy Spirit became Lord of the Church here on this earth. He communicated the will and purposes of both the Father and the Lord Jesus directly to the apostles AND directly to believers of the New Testament churches. The book of Acts shows that the Holy Spirit took on the central role of leadership within the church: directing, speaking, testifying, communicating, forbidding, and sending. It can be shown from Scripture here that these actions were not limited to just the 12 Apostles. Paul made the "13th" apostle. Phillip was not an apostle. Neither was Agabus. Neither were other believers mentioned throughout the books of Acts with whom the Holy Spirit had direct communication with. Can you see that He acts as the central nervous system of the church? The Holy Spirit

communicates the wishes and orders of commander and chief, the Head, who is in heaven, to the members of His Body on earth (that's you and me).

Now ask yourself, if a disease were to attack the Body of Christ in this area, how would it manifest itself?? Do you think symptoms like blurring of spiritual vision, double mindedness (double vision), even a complete loss of vision would occur?

Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint.... Prov 29:18 (NKJ)

I like the way the original King James puts it:

Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he. Prov 29:18 (KJV)

What is revelation or vision? It is hearing the voice of God and sensing His manifest presence. The Holy Spirit says in His Word that people die when they no longer hear the voice of God.. they lose their way. They become blind. They become numb; they sin and experience consequences, painful as they may be. Their extremities get weak. These are exactly the symptoms of Multiple Sclerosis. It is what happens in the Body of Christ when our own members start attacking the nervous system of our Body. How does this happen?

***Do not quench the Spirit.
Do not despise prophecies.
Test all things; hold fast what is good.*** 1Thes 5:19-21

***Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy,
and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all
things be done decently and in order.*** 1 Cor 14:39-40

The Holy Spirit put those in the written word for a reason. What do tongues and prophecy have to do with the voice of the Holy Spirit? Everything. In fact, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are rooted and based in speaking and singing and praying from the Spirit, not our own fleshly thoughts. The Apostle Paul framed an entire discuss on spiritual gifts by first focusing on words that are spoken:

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. 1 Cor 12:1-3

What in the world is Paul talking about here? What to dumb idols and saying Jesus is cursed or saying Jesus is Lord have to do with spiritual gifts, or “spirituals”, *pneumatikos*, in the Greek? Hey come to think of it, what do they have to do with them? Much like I said about tongues and prophecy, they have everything to do with them..

Consider that the Corinthian Christians, and most Gentile converts of the Roman empire in that day for that matter, were pagans. What was a pagan? Well simply put, a pagan worshipped one or more of various different idols or gods that were floating around in that day. In the Roman Empire, Rome had captured so many foreign peoples that they incorporated and assimilated the gods of all sorts of different pagan religions into their own system of beliefs. Remember Paul’s reaction while visiting Athens? “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.” (Acts 17:16) There were many pagan temples of worship in that day. Their temples were dedicated to a particular god, which most of the time had a physical idol that represented that deity.

Paul understood that the behind an idol was an actual demon power or principality. Paul said that idols themselves were “dumb”. How can you be lead by a dumb idol? Well their system of worship, believe it or not, had a lot of similarities to Jewish and Christian worship. A pagan would go to his temple of choice, depending on which deity he wanted to please or beseech, and bring some kind of offering with him. A priest in the temple would receive the offering, whether it was an animal or food or money, as the representative of the god. Many times, as part of the worship in the temple, the person would participate in sexual intercourse with a temple prostitute. This was considered part of the worship and not outside any social norm either! The main point, before I lose you, is that the priest would also speak over the person. Now how could the priest speak for a god when the idol or statue is just a piece of rock? Easy. It works the same way in our modern day with psychics, fortune tellers, diviners, witches, sorcerers, and priests in cults. The demon that was behind that idol would speak to the priest concerning the person and the priest would relay that message to the person. In this way, Gentiles were “led astray”, following the demonic wisdom offered and being under the power and authority of the very kingdom of darkness itself. It is sad that those in the New Age movement, those involved in psychic powers, and those involved with other forms of spiritism have a better understanding of spiritual gifts than the average Christian in America! They understand that communication comes from the realm of the spirit. They may not be aware of the source, but they certainly understand the principle.

Paul used this knowledge in his hearers to relate something we need to understand about spiritual gifts. He said in essence, “Now I know you are familiar with how the kingdom of darkness has lead you in your former days before you knew Christ. However, I tell you now that the same principles apply, but the source now comes from the Spirit of God and the power you are under is the Kingdom of Light.” That is why Paul said that no one SPEAKING by the Spirit of God would ever curse Jesus. Nor can anyone call Jesus their Lord except by the working and operation of the Holy Spirit in their life. It might shock you to realize how many people in Christian churches have never made a confession, to themselves or God or anyone else, that Jesus is the Lord of their life.

If you can see the point now, speaking is at the root of spiritual gifts. But it is not just normal speaking. It is speaking BY the Spirit of God. It is singing BY the Spirit of God. It is praying BY the Spirit of God. That is what separates normal speech from a supernatural gift. All gifts, in one way or another, are related in one way or another to the operation of our mouth. The gift of healing is communicated when we say “Be healed in Jesus name.” The gift of discerning of spirits is seen when we *tell* what spirit is in operation. The gift of faith and miraculous power, as Jesus suggested, is communicated when we SPEAK to the mountain and say “Be removed and cast into the sea.” Even in the miracle of Jesus feeding the 5000 and the 4000, Jesus BLESSED the bread first. The gift of administration is operated when I speak from my mouth and give directions to other people what to do. The gift of encouragement is manifest when I speak graciously of someone. The gift of serving is communicated best when I do not complain about what I am doing! The gift of contributing to the needs of others is accomplished via communication with the person in need. I do not believe that some gifts are the “power” gifts and some gifts are the “lesser obvious.” They are all supernatural! Otherwise they are just human ability! Think about it. How much of what is human ability do we call a spiritual gift? If you can do it by yourself, the you don’t need God to help you! No, I think all gifts have the same source and most, if not all, have as a key ingredient the operation of the mouth in some way or another.

The definition of tongues, according to Paul, is *speaking* by our spirit to God. We speak mysteries to God with our spirits when we speak in an unknown tongue.

For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. 1 Cor 14:2

There is a devotional quality to tongues that escapes the attention of many Christians. The same can be said of prayer. There is an appropriateness and

need for corporate and public prayer. However, prayer has a very devotional and personal quality to it. Although I don't want to get into a doctrinal discussion of tongues, I mention it up because Paul thought it was very important to mention. Although the public use of tongues should always have some type of orderly application, as really all of the corporate public gifts of the spirit do, Paul wanted to make sure that the devotional quality of tongues which God intended it to be was not missed.

But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification. 1 Cor 14:3-5

The devotional quality of tongues can be seen in that while I can do this in private, just like I can pray or sing in private, the public exercise of tongues with other believers profits them nothing unless someone can interpret the message.

*For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified. I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; **yet in the church** I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. 1 Cor 14:14-19*

Paul knew the value of tongues: he saw them as something that EDIFIED the believer who used them. Edifying myself is OK. Bible study, prayer, fasting, worship, and fellowship all edify me and are essential to sustained spiritual growth. The purpose of gifts, if you will recall, is that the Spirit manifests for the common good. The public gift of tongues, when in operation, should always edify someone in the Body of Christ. Three key words that need to be understood and noticed are "IN THE CHURCH." Paul used this to delineate public use of tongues from private, devotional use of tongues. Paul thanked God that he spoke in tongues devotionally more than any other believer. However, he knew that in the church, speaking in words that another person understands is far more important. That is why he wished

all believers “spoke in tongues”, but that he would rather have them move from just speaking in tongues (edifying their own selves) to prophesying (edifying others from the same source that the tongues come from: the spirit of man illuminated by the Spirit of God.) The same principle applies to prayer. I am sure the Lord wants us all to move from just being able to pray privately and devotionally, and possibly without speaking, to where we can pray for OTHER people.

The connection between “speaking by the Spirit” and tongues and prophesy really requires a much more in-depth study (hey, sounds like another book to me), but I wanted to briefly talk about it in relation to the nervous system of the Body of Christ. The gifts of the Spirit operate when we receive direction from the Spirit of God and speak those things forth. Tongues, I believe, are a devotional tool that God gave the entire Body of Christ to develop the ability to “speak from their human spirit.” However, tongues are not a goal that once achieved becomes an end in and of themselves. Tongues were just meant to be the “bicycle with training wheels” to help us get used to the practice of speaking with our “spirits” and not just speaking with our minds. Prophecy is speaking from our spirit, just like tongues is. The difference is that YOU can understand prophecy.

When the time comes the Head of the Body wants to use me to communicate with another “member” of the Body (that would be another believer), I could already be accustomed to speaking by the spirit on a regular basis if tongues were a part of my daily devotional life. We see God use denominations in certain gifts because they are better prepared to use them when God wants to employ them. If I my spirit is properly trained to respond to the Spirit of God, then God can use me to as part of the nervous system of His body, communicating from the brain to the members of the Body the desires of the Head, our Lord Jesus.

The gifts of the Spirit were given to Bride of Christ primarily so that her Bridegroom, the Head, could communicate with her. Jesus wants His voice to be heard in the midst of His people today!

For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying: "I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You." Heb 2:11-12

Jesus wants to sing and rejoice over us, in the midst of our modern church age and in the midst of our intellectual/technologically revolutionized society. He wants to speak words of comfort, exhortation and edification to His church.

He want to quiet us with His love in the midst of the hustle and bustle of our busy lives:

The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will quiet you with His love, he will rejoice over you with singing.
Zeph 3:17

He is the LORD God in our MIDST. That means in the middle of. Right in the center. Smack dab, as they say in the south. The Ark of the Covenant was situated in the MIDDLE of the tribes of Israel. God wanted His presence to be the centerpiece of their daily lives. He wanted His manifest glory to be right in the middle of their lives. The gifts of the Spirit communicate the love of the Father and the Son to those on this earth that are His children.

Multiple sclerosis and other nervous system disorders are serious problems in the church today. We neglect and downplay and pooh-poo the gifts of the Holy Spirit to our own detriment. Can we get by with just the Bible? Jesus said that His sheep hear His VOICE. The Bible is obviously the greatest tool in which we can hear the voice of God. However, the Bible is full of examples of people who heard God outside and apart from the Scripture. Just read the book of Acts. Somehow we believe because we are so technologically advanced in our day that we no longer need to hear His voice. Hearing the voice of God from the Bible is indeed how most Christians live. If that was all that God thought we needed though, He would have never given the gifts of the Spirit to the Church. He would not have put specific warnings against stopping or forbidding people to prophecy or speak in tongues.

I have visited churches where the very members of the same body that I am a member of (another part of the Body of Christ) were destroying and attacking our central nervous system by their theology and their teaching. They were excluding themselves from communication with our Head because they rejected and attacked the nervous system by which that communication takes place. Other groups don't outright forbid or deny the operation of the communicative gifts of the Holy Spirit, but they certainly do not welcome or encourage them. Look at the context with which Paul spoke in concerning the role of the gifts:

No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism

in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. 1 Cor 12:22-27

Why did Paul set the tone of his discussion on spiritual gifts (the Greek word is actually rendered “spirituals” or “spiritual things” in 1 Cor 1:1)? Because gifts of the Spirit have to do with Head communicating with the Body. The manifestation of the Spirit is given for the individual good, right? Oooops, I meant to say the COMMON good.

Let me give you an example. Suppose Brother BillyBob has had a rough week. In fact, he has fallen prey once again to his secret nagging sin that no one knows about except him and the Lord. Inside he feels rejected, condemned, and that God is so angry with him for failing that he shouldn't expect God to answer his prayers anymore. So he just quit praying altogether this week. The Head, in heaven, knows that Brother BillyBob feels this way. However, Brother JimBob, a fellow heir of salvation and brother in the Lord to BillyBob, doesn't have a clue what his brother has gone through this week. In fact from all outward appearances, Brother BillyBob looked fine to him at church this morning.

So the Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus, would like to minister comfort to Brother BillyBob and let him know that his sins are cleansed by the blood and that he is fully accepted as a child of the Lord; he wants BillyBob to approach the throne of grace in boldness. However, BillyBob is so depressed, he couldn't hear the Lord say that to him right now even if the Holy Spirit used a megaphone. In fact, satan, the adversary has one of his henchmen screaming so loud in BillyBob's ear, that BillyBob soon thinks they are just his normal thoughts. The Head of the Church, via the nervous system of His Body, which is the Person of the Holy Spirit, moves Brother JimBob to go talk to Brother BillyBob. In the course of the conversation, Brother JimBob feels lead by the Holy Spirit to say, “Brother BillyBob, for some strange reason I feel like the Lord is saying to you this morning that you are precious in his sight, that He loves you. And oh, by the way, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.”

What has just happened is that Brother JimBob has just been given a manifestation of the Spirit. We might put the label “word of knowledge” on it, or we might even call that a “prophecy”. It was given to him for the common good of a fellow member of the Body who was suffering. You see, even though JimBob did not realize it, he was suffering too. If one member suffers, we all suffer with them. If one member is hurt, we are all wounded with them. If one

member is damaged, we are all damaged. When I burn my hand, all the other parts of my body begin working to heal my wound and place special attention on that burn. If the other parts of my body did not receive the impulse from my brain to do that, my hand may get infected and even get worse instead of better. You see, the Holy Spirit used Brother JimBob to put salve on the wound of Brother BillyBob. However, if they were taught to not expect God to speak in that way, or they were never trained in the practical exercise of the gifts of the Spirit, then Brother BillyBob would continue to struggle and Brother JimBob would have never been able to

How many wounded members are there in the Body of Christ because our central nervous system is suffering from disease? How many people are perishing because they have no vision or revelation of what God wants to accomplish in them today, right now, right this minute? How many denominations and sects and churches are effectively acting as an agent of Multiple Sclerosis by attacking the very nervous system of the Body they belong to?

Lord forgive us all for ignoring your voice and lead us all to see this disease as an ailment and not just a difference in doctrinal viewpoint.

Let's just take a look now at classifying diseases in the Body of Christ by cause from the New Testament perspective. I will look at different passages that point to these "diseases" and their cause, but I want to first say that the worst disease by far that attacks the body is SIN. Sin is at the root of all of these things we will look at. Sin does not please God and it is what Jesus hung on the cross and was brutally tortured to death for. Sin is the only thing that can keep us from God, rob His power in our life, and steal His blessings toward us. Let us look with an open heart at how this three-letter word manifests itself in the Body of Christ.

First of all, consider the greatest *cause* of conflict.

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? James 4:1-5

The Holy Spirit reveals to us that we have conflict within ourselves and that this is the primary reason that we find “dis” ease in the rest of our spiritual members, amongst our brothers and sisters. We all want and pursue things sometimes that are selfish. We want and desire things that will make us feel better, boost our ego, promote our agenda, bear our standard, exalt our name, focus on our righteousness, and establish our superiority. This is the essence of lust. It creates conflict and friction between our soul, which is being progressively transformed by the Word of God, and our spirit, which has been born again in the spiritual image of Jesus the Anointed One. We can wind up being enemies of God in our minds when we allow our lusts to rule us and when we attempt to do things in God’s kingdom in worldly ways. All other conflicts can be said to derive from the basic conflict we have within ourselves. Until we are ruled by the Prince of Peace in our souls and minds and emotions and will, we will have a hard time being ruled by the Prince of Peace within His body.

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. Rom 16:17-19

One of the basic tendencies of human nature is that we are easily influenced. Unfortunately, the tendency for us to be influenced toward evil is not completely removed from us by the new birth. Rather, we may now overcome that nature through the blood of Jesus and faith in His full and complete redemption. This involves a process to work out what God has worked in us through the salvation experience though. That process involves learning to discern what is good, or moving beyond the point of naiveté as Paul put it here. Everyone had heard of the obedience of the Roman Christians in following the commandments of the Lord and the teachings of the apostles. Paul understood that their readiness to be led was a great strength and also a great weakness that could be exploited. People who are serving their own carnal desire for power, fame, and control can easily sway those who are already naturally obedient much easier than those who are naturally disobedient. Paul was telling these believers to keep their willingness to be obedient, but to mark and watch those that are leading them, especially if they are producing division or placing obstacles to walking in Godliness. In fact, Paul pleaded and urged his spiritual children to avoid and disassociate themselves with those who either cause divisions or create offenses within the fellowship of believers.

I do want to point out here a key principle in regards to division. Some of you may recall something our Lord Jesus said on one particular occasion about division.

It was recorded for us only once in the gospel of Luke:

"Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."
Luke 12:51-53

Some divisions are not only good, but that they are to be expected. Jesus did not want there to be division, but unfortunately because of the nature of God's truth and His judgments and the nature of man in contrast, there are going to be divisions that come from following God and not following man. Christianity is not a weak namby-pamby religious exercise. It requires moral courage and an internal fortitude in some instances to not only stand up for the truth but to expose works of darkness. These things are going to cause division, some times even among those that we love the most. When we go God's way and our family goes the other, there will be division according to Jesus. Unfortunately there are only two ways to choose from in life, even though we foolishly believe everyone has their own unique "way". There is God's way and there is that which is not God's way. It is pretty simple. Jesus said that on account of Him and by our following after Him, even our very family could turn against us. He used the Greek word *diamerismos*, a division, to describe this. Interestingly enough it is the only use of this word in the New Testament. The word *merismos*, of which *diamerismos* is a variation, is also found in only one other verse in the New Testament. It gives us an interesting picture of what a "necessary" division is all about:

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. Heb 4:12-13

You see Jesus Christ, the Living Word, the Word of God Incarnate, came to divide those who would follow God from those who would not follow God with all their heart, soul, and mind. The Written Word, the Bible, is given to us as the Sword of the Spirit, living and active, so that in our own inner kingdoms,

there will once again be a division between that which pleases God and that which does not please God. Hebrews states that even our own soul and spirit will be divided over following and obeying God. Our soul, that part of us which is not born again, is and will not be fully redeemed until we see Jesus one day face to face and are transformed into His likeness. Our spirit, otherwise known as our new man, that part of us that was dead to God but has now been made alive, is on the other hand being renewed day by day into the likeness of the One, Jesus, who created it:

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 2 Cor 4:16

Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him Col 3:9-10

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 1 Cor 15:53

Paul basically told the churches in Galatia that there would always be a continual struggle, or division, within us until we are completely redeemed one day in the presence of our Lord in eternity. You see our soul is still for the most part “self-centered” while our spirit is for the most part “God-centered”. Our mind must be renewed, our emotions have to be brought under control, and our will must be used for God. Jesus indeed came to bring division, even division at the very core of our being. Why? Because not going God’s way will bring death and destruction, depravity and decay. Going God’s way, in contrast, will bring life and blessing, richness and health! Jesus loves us too much to watch us be given over to death, like cattle going to a slaughter.

God’s word, according to the Scriptures, is that living and active sword. It is the sword which the Holy Spirit uses to always keep us aware that nothing good comes from our “flesh” but that victory comes through “Christ in us, the hope of glory.” When “division” occurs, it occurs so that we will be motivated to remove the thing that is not pleasing to God; division does not come in our inner world so we can acknowledge we have a problem and continue living in defeat. The Word is there to cast a clear light on who Jesus is and who we are in comparison to Him. It is that “mirror” in which we can see our fallen and defeated nature. The law in that sense is the strength of sin, as Paul puts it. It shows clearly how unrighteous we are and how reliant we must be on God to make us righteous and provide righteousness for us on our behalf.

However, we can also see in the Word the promise of who God wants us to become! We are being transformed into His likeness by the working of the Holy Spirit. We must take that “conflict” within us as a sign not of our failure and defeat, but as a sign that the Holy Spirit will not allow that dividing wall to stay there in peace! Every sin, every act of the flesh, every minor character flaw, every thought not obedient to Christ, every action done from a selfish motive, every ounce of unforgiveness, every vestige of fear, every loose word, every evidence of pride: they all must be cut out of us by the sword of the Spirit. It was meant to be a sword! Our prayer should be, “Father, let your Word accomplish its work in me; Holy Spirit swing hard and deep until all that’s left is the image and character of Jesus!” That my friends is how God looks at “the good kind” of division. It is meant to bring us to Christ-likeness. Any type of division that does not produce that is what Paul talked about when he referred to “dissension” and “divisions”. Division is for a purpose, and when division for the wrong purpose happens within the Body of Christ, we are told that this is the sign of disease attacking the body. Paul says in essence “Be on guard!” - “Watch out!”. Disease will destroy a body if not identified and treated as such.

Jesus brought the “good” type of division among His own people, the Jews. He caused them to take sides, either for Him (and therefore for God) or against Him (and therefore for the devil and this present evil world). It made people think and consider. They then were faced with a choice. Things are still the same today! Jesus calls us to choose Him absolutely without reservation. The Greek word *schisma* is used to describe three times when division arose because of Jesus:

*Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, "Truly this is the Prophet." Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Will the Christ come out of Galilee? "Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" So there was a **division** among the people because of Him. John 7:40-43*

*Therefore some of the Pharisees said, "This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a **division** among them. John 9:16*

*Therefore there was a **division** again among the Jews because of these sayings. John 10:19*

Just like the Living Word, the Written Word will cause the same type of divisions among people.

Those who question its origin: Did Jesus come from Galilee or Bethlehem? Did the Bible originate from divine inspiration or from human intellect?

Those who question its divine power: How can Jesus perform such miraculous feats if He is a sinner? How can the Bible be used to transform peoples lives if it is just an ordinary book?

Those who question its sayings: Division arose because of what Jesus spoke in that day ... Division arises because of the what the Bible speaks to us today.

We digressed there from Paul's mention of division in Romans 16 only to establish that divisions are not necessarily a "work of the flesh". It depends on the source. The only other place the Greek word *dichostsis* is used other than Romans 16:17 is in Galatians when Paul was making a distinction between the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit and the works of death produced by our fleshly nature.

*Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, . . . **dissensions, heresies** . . . Gal 5:19-20*

Dissensions in the body are indeed the sign of disease because these are divisions that come from the carnal nature of man and not the desire of the Holy Spirit to produce Christ-likeness. See the difference? Dissensions arise:

because people are trying to gain worldly or secular support;

they arise because people want notoriety and fame in the lime light;

they arise because people work without divine power and authority and instead rely solely on man made titles and conferred degrees;

they arise because it is easy to say good words but it is much harder to preach the truth;

they arise because people will feed their own pride and dignity while running roughshod over those that are truly searching for God;

they arise because it is far easier to tear down another than to build them up;

they arise because it is far easier to live for ourselves than to lay our choices and desires aside so another will grow up spiritually.

That is why they are called “dissensions”. It is why they are a work of the flesh and not a fruit of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit will lead us to be correctable, teachable, and shapable.

The worst dissensions I have ever seen in a church have come when someone thought they had “arrived” in the area of a particular “doctrine”. They had reached a point of understanding that completely closed the possibility of any other interpretation over something that was not of vital eternal importance! Most doctrinal disputes I have encountered were spiritually equivalent to rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic. Why does it matter? Teachability refers to also being able to listen with an open heart any time something is expounded, whether we have heard it a million times or taught it ourselves. There is always something we can learn and apply in our lives. None of us I believe will ever “arrive” at a point where we are beyond temptation, correct? Then why are we foolish enough to believe we can “arrive” at a point where we are beyond learning anything new or even having our entire doctrinal perspective changed?? As a young believer, my prayer was to touch God’s heart in regards to doctrine! I wanted truth that would bring me life, not truth that would close doors to the possibility of God’s grace and power working in me! If I may use a worn out cliché, I refused to say “been there, done that, bought the tee-shirt” when it came to understanding scripture and the doctrines of the faith. Remaining open and shapable could keep so many of us from being the source of dissensions, but it requires an attitude of heart and a change of mind. It requires a refusal to admit the possibility that I could be wrong.

And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. Acts 15:2

Here we have recorded one of the most well know dissensions in the early days of the church. We know what happened after the council of Jerusalem met to deal with this question over what to do with new Gentile converts. Thank God that when Gentile believers were entering the church that the Jewish disciples were open to receive what the Holy Spirit was saying about “doctrine”. The Judaizers, on the other hand, became enemies of the Gospel because of the divisions they caused. They continued to follow Paul around and plant seeds of dissension after him, converting new believers into “their way” of thinking. It was because they thought they had “arrived” in knowing what the Scriptures had to say. They became a disease that attacked the body, even though I am sure some of them may have had the best intentions in the world. The point is that God was doing something new by bringing Gentiles into His family; He was

fulfilling the promise given through Abraham that through his lineage all nations of the world would be blessed. When the fulfillment came, though, some people were too rigid in their understanding of the Scripture and their hardened hearts disallowed any working of the Holy Spirit to change their minds to see what God was actually doing.

In some ways we see God moving in ways He has never moved before today. Had Gentiles ever been brought into the “household” and “commonwealth” of Israel before the New Covenant was established? They had, but the Jewish mind could not accept this possibility. God had foretold and promised it though, didn’t He? Of course He did. Just like He foretold and promised the Messiah and His coming, but those on whom the fulfillment came completely missed it! How many people in the church today are completely missing what God is doing in this day and age? How many in the church are causing divisions and dissensions because they cannot discern the very power of God in their midst? How many modern day Judaizers are there, converting disciples into “their way” and not the way of the Lord? How many are a disease instead of a blessing to the Body of Christ because of their religious attitudes, their stubborn pride, and their refusal to let the Holy Spirit change their minds? It breaks my heart to see how God is so powerfully moving among His people these days in so many supernatural ways and yet the worst critics of this are coming not from the world and Satan’s people but from people who name the name of Jesus Christ. Oh how grieved the Lord must be over that. . . when the fulfillment of the ages is happening right before our very eyes:

And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.
Joel 2:28-29

Is it any surprise that if those who knew the written Word backward and forward could miss the very Incarnation of that Word that we today in the church could be also be blinded to miss the very pouring out of God’s Spirit in our midst? Let us rid the body of this disease before it spreads any further. Let us all come to a knowledge of not just what Scriptures say but also of what the God of those Scriptures is doing in our day in the very fulfillment of those Scriptures. Dissension is a disease that must be dealt with at the heart level of an individual. It comes from carnality and not from the Spirit of God. Paul spent a lot of time addressing the issue of carnality with the Corinthian church. They were full of it. It pervaded the entire atmosphere of the church. It was a disease that Paul dealt with sternly but yet gently:

I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." 1 Cor 1:10-12

Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly--mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men? 1 Cor 3:1-4

But instead, one brother goes to law against another--and this in front of unbelievers! The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers. 1 Cor 6:6-8

Carnality is one of the worst diseases in the Body of Christ. It will stunt growth quicker than anything I know of. Remember the warning you got growing up about smoking cigarettes? "It will stunt your growth." Carnality, in much the same way, is a disease that will prevent the Body of Christ from growing to its full potential. It stunts our growth. We are supposed to be the spiritual bride of our Lord Jesus. Paul demonstrated that we deny that identity by quarreling, being jealous, and having envy. We deny that identity by having a condescending or prideful attitude when we say "I am a Catholic", "I am Orthodox", "I am a Baptist", "I am a Methodist", "I am a Congregationalist", "I am a Church of God person", "I am a Nazarene", "I am a Presbyterian". And those are just the "major" divisions. There are so many different levels of sects within each one of those that it is amazing how any one keeps track of them! Even though denominations by definition divide people, I do not believe they are wrong in and of themselves. A denominational spirit, as I have said already, is wrong and is a tell-tale sign of carnality. If God could use 12 tribes to accomplish His purpose through His one people Israel, I believe He can accomplish His purpose through the believers born of the Spirit of God that belong to hundreds of different sects all across the world.

When members of those sects war against one another they deny their identity with one another (and with Christ as a consequence), defeating the cause of Christ and bringing reproach to the name of Jesus. Paul used the words “in front of unbelievers” when writing to the Corinthians about their childish behavior. Friends we must understand that what we do is on display for the entire world to see. God has put us here to be a light in the darkness. We cannot help to broadcast a message to the world about who Jesus is by WHAT we do! When a person does not identify with being a “member” of the flesh and body of Jesus Christ on this earth, they can easily get distracted from the primary purpose of His Body here on earth and instead spend their energies on attacking other members of their very own body. Some of the worst diseases of the body are the ones that cause our own body parts to war against each other, as opposed to those diseases that just debilitate and shut down a particular organ or system. That is why I believe Paul placed such a high premium on unity among brethren. He understood that the power of God flows freely through a normally functioning body: one free from disease. How blessed it is for brethren to dwell in unity. It is the source of God’s anointing power to change lives when His body is free from disease.

I am not saying we need to all leave our denominational churches and meet in houses. We would have worse problems than we do already! We need to get rid of our allegiance to our denomination, though, if it leads us into any form of prideful superiority or sectarian bigotry. God is not pleased by our adherence to a doctrinal creed or our definition of what is correct if we are destroying other members of our own body and His body while we are doing it!

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. Gal 5:13-15

Again, Paul describes a “biting” and “devouring” of one another. This is a classic symptom of disease. Cancer is an uncontrolled growth that destroys normal tissue as it grows. Many Christians today are away from God and backslidden because some “Church person” has “bitten” them and left them wounded. You may know someone like that or you may even fall into that category yourself. An uncontrolled cell in our body can wreak havoc in the same way as an uncontrolled Christian not under the “control” of love for Jesus will utterly wound and destroy another member of the Body of Christ. Our freedom in Christ does not give us a license to sin nor does it give us a license to indulge ourselves at the expense of others. If you have taken part in destroying another member of the Body at some time in the past, ask God to forgive you

and heal them. Go to that person and tell them that you were not acting in love. Humble yourself and watch God restore that wounded member by your obedience! If you know someone that has been ravaged because of a religious spirit or an unloving Christian, pray that God will bring a healing to their land. Friends this day is too perilous to live in for any wounded sheep to be left alone. Be a vessel and minister of reconciliation for someone who has been wounded.

I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Phil 4:2

In the Lord. That is the key here when it comes to unity and agreement among brethren. We are to agree IN THE LORD. That means that agreement has a spiritual aspect to it. It is not just a matter of who is right and who is wrong. What matters is that because of covenant I am committed to remaining reconciled with you if you are a brother or sister IN THE LORD. See the connection. Covenant binds us to an obligation that we are to love one another deeply from the heart. Forgive those who do not see eye to eye with you. Pray for God to make both of you reach common ground. I do not know what particular problem Euodia and Syntyche had with each other. Calvin and Armenius had not been born yet, so I guess we could rule one major doctrinal football out. I do wonder what their DIS-agreement was about. Whatever it was, it warranted mentioning by the spiritual father of the Philippian church. Whatever it was had brought a lack of ease in the Body. It had brought DIS-ease. Right? That is what disease is: lack of ease. Two members fighting each other instead of fighting the world and the devil to win souls and fulfill God's destiny in their life. I noticed that Paul did not take sides here. He might have even known who was in the wrong, if one was more in the wrong to begin with. It does not matter who is in the wrong actually. If we are dealing with two believers, then one of them should have the spiritual maturity enough to go and ask for forgiveness and seek reconciliation. I assume that neither of these two had done that yet. I assume that they just let their problems fester.

Brothers and sisters, seek reconciliation with those you are at odds with. Do not wait for them to come to you. Pride is the only thing that will keep you from going to them. We are commanded by the Lord to make the first move in restoring relationship with someone else. God made the first move to restore us to Himself, correct? In the same way. . . how many times have you heard that in Scripture. In the same way. . . forgive like God forgave you, take the initiative like God took the initiative with you, pray for those who curse you, bless those who persecute you, do good to those that use you for evil purposes. I hope it does not surprise anyone that those who curse us and those who persecute us may even be the members of our own "family", i.e. other Christians. Carnal Christians. A spiritual Christian would not curse or persecute another believer. Jesus did not resist the cross. . . He embraced it and in doing so God won the

victory! Make a commitment to be reconciled IN THE LORD with those of the household of faith. No matter what they have done, we are going to have to all live with each other in heaven anyway.

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work--which is by faith. The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm. 1 Tim 1:3-7

False doctrines. Myths. Endless genealogies. Meaningless talk. Controversies. Friends, these are nothing more than diseases in the Body. They cause us not to be at "ease" with one another. They create walls and barriers to what God wants to do in our midst. Paul seemed to indicate that one of the root problem these "certain men" had was that they were "devoting" themselves to certain things. These certain things had nothing to do at all with accomplishing God's work. God's primary purpose in the Church is that by faith we are to work out what God has worked into us. We are to be salt and light to a lost world. We are to make a difference in our generation. If half the Christians who caused controversies in our churches were to devote that same energy to DOING something for God just imagine what difference could be made for Christ in our generation!

DOING something for	the lost,
	the needy,
	the destitute,
	the hungry,
	the poor,
	the blind,
	the hopeless,
	the bruised,
	the neglected,
	the addicted,
	the imprisoned,
	the abused,
	the pregnant,
	the suffering.

That is what the work of God is all about brothers and sisters.

Do you know any Christians who can quote half the Bible, understand all mysteries of the faith and present them eloquently, explain every doctrine known to man concerning Christianity and why you should believe this one versus that one, expound 20 reasons why Jesus is coming back next year, or recite every confessional creed of faith from the beginning of church history detailing the doctrinal error or accuracy of them all? Those things are all well and good to KNOW about. But what matters the most is what we DO for God in this world. If I know all mysteries, have all knowledge, speak in all tongues, move in all faith, prophecy in great power, and give all I have, love still commands me to DO God's will. Jesus said very specifically that if you love Him, you will DO what He commands you. It is in the DOING that we will KNOW the truth and the truth will set us free!

Paul wanted his spiritual children to have a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. You cannot love truly without those three things in place. By DEVOTING ourselves to other lesser, secondary purposes, we defeat God's primary purpose in us and in the Church: to DO His work. The Holy Spirit also inspired Paul to address this issue in a letter he wrote to Titus, a pastor:

But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned. Titus 3:9-11

Notice a connection here. Foolish, meaningless, unprofitable, useless, and endless. In other words, Biblical issues which have no bearing on salvation, holiness, and fulfilling God's will to reconcile all creatures to Himself. That is the bottom line. Like I said, most of our "Personal Preference" and "Important Things" fall into this category. Some of our "Important Things" that deal with holiness and morality are not foolish and unprofitable, though. Godliness is of value in EVERY way:

For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. 1 Tim 4:8-9

Do you understand the issue here? Some issues are controversial, no doubt. Abortion, false religions, homosexuality, euthanasia, unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness. These are all controversial in some way, but they promote death in the end. They all lead to separation from God. If I PRACTICE them,

they will destroy me! That is the difference. If it promotes godliness, then it promotes LIFE. It is part of God's way that He wants us to live. That is why it is acceptable for us to separate ourselves from those who do not wish to be holy and live morally upright lives. Godliness concerns living life to its fullest. Our society is facing many major crises today because it has abandoned godliness and embraced every form of perversion known to man and every view of humanistic philosophy, all under the guise of tolerance. It is so easy to preach on disputable matters and matters that have little to no impact on transforming us or holding us to a Christ-like standard. False doctrines distort or misrepresent God in such a way that people are put in bondage in stead of being set free.

If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. 1Timothy 6:3-5

Some things are worth standing up for. Issues of morality. Issues of holiness. Issues of godliness. Paul does not refer to these. He refers to things that have no meaning, no purpose, no eternal benefit, no practical application in the affairs of life, no practical expression in the life of discipleship, no worth, no use, and no wisdom about them. If people who participated in controversies were wise, they would regain there focus on what we are supposed to be about:

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise. Prov 11:30

If you are ever tempted to get into an argument with someone over doctrine, ask yourself that list of qualifiers I just recited. If it doesn't qualify in that list, then AVOID it. It will only promote quarreling and fighting. Jesus said the world would know the Father sent us not because we agree on worthless or useless or foolish issues of controversy concerning the Bible. He said the world would know the Father sent us because of our love one for another. When Christians fight amongst each other over things that do not profit toward godliness, things that do not lead to LIFE, things that have no eternal significance, then we deny our identity. We deny our purpose. We deny that we are of one Body and of one Spirit. We create "dis"-ease in the body.

Are there some issues worth fighting over? You better believe it. I'll make this illustration. You can talk about what clothes I wear, what house I live in, what part of the country I am from, how I talk, how I walk, and all number of things in a critical way. But when you say something against someone in my family,

I'm going to get mad. When you malign or impugn one of them, I will take issue with that. We are blood. We are kin. When I hear someone impugn or attack who my Heavenly Father is, I will take issue with that as well. Now you are dealing with a "core" issue in my mind. We have left the realm of having different interpretations of meaning. I will not stand for my Daddy to be attacked in His person, His nature, or His attributes. That deals with almost everything I listed in my "Core Beliefs". Who I am flows out of what my Daddy says about me as well. God says I am a sinner redeemed by His free grace. That is good enough for me and not open to debate. Jesus made it clear that people will be either for Him or against Him. If you attack His work, His person, His character, and His word, you are against Him.

Friends, the outworking of God's power in our midst will sometimes create controversy. The presence of controversy does not automatically preclude God as the source. We have already seen that Jesus Himself caused similar controversy. Look at the fruit and look at the what is taught concerning the core beliefs. Above all, do not be caught in the snare of the Pharisee. Remember that it was the Pharisees who primarily missed the Messiah and did not realize that God Incarnate was walking among them!

I hear a lot of "meaningless" talk sometimes in sermons and teachings. In other words, the Bible is being expounded and doctrine is presented, but it has no real "meaning". It has no practical application of how it will work itself out in my life and no capacity of fruitfulness. I also want to make very clear about what God's Word says about a divisive brother or sister. It is a theme that is consistently presented. Warn a divisive person. If they persist, warn them again. After that, disassociate yourself with them. Do not be party to the quarrel or argument. Do not allow factions to form around the divisive issue. So much of what we hear about in church problems today come from this very cause! Factions form around a divisive issue. Seditions flow out of a quarrel or dispute between two or more parties. Disagreements with a pastor causes a split within the entire church.

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? James 2:1-4

Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is

renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. Col 3:9-11

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Gal 3:28

And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings Acts 17:26

Unfortunately, one of the worst diseases in the Body of Christ to this day is discrimination and racism. As I have heard many pastors say, the most segregated place in America is the Sunday morning church service. The church has for so long been guilty of passivity and acceptance in the area of racism and bigotry that we are still playing catch up in a lot of ways. I think the Holy Spirit has done some amazing things in this particular area within the church. I credit a lot of the attention to racial reconciliation as coming from the Promise Keepers movement. They have sounded a clear call that we must become proactive in bridging the differences between the races, at least in our nation. Prejudice used to have a foothold in the church, especially the American church. It had a lot to do with our history as a nation. Slavery and the Civil War are still considered recent history as far as world events go. The Civil Rights Movement did a lot to change the social and political environment in America. It did what the Church, especially the “white” church, in this country should have already done a long time before that. Unfortunately Christianity has been seen as a “white-man’s” religion because of attitudes that have existed in those who have professed it. The Holy Spirit is changing that though.

We must all come to the realization that in the realm of the spirit, which is the realm that Paul refers to when he speaks of the “new man”, we are all one. There is no color in the realm of the spirit. Even in the realm of the flesh, the term “race” is not a Biblical concept—we are all of one “blood” according to Paul. We have ALL descended from Adam. Each one of us can trace our ancestry back to him at some point. For those of us who believe, we have all been “born” of God. We are ALL now descended from Jesus, except we are “direct” children by adoption. The life of God has been “birthed” in each one who accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. His “seed”, as John puts it, lives within us:

Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. I Jn 3:9

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith.

I Jn 5:4

If you are born of God, then you are my brother or sister. We are related. That is all there is to it. The very definition of carnality is looking at the “flesh” and ignoring the “spirit”. If all we see is someone’s color or race or social class or sex or shape or appearance, then we are not seeing with spiritual eyes. We are still carnal in our dealings with people if we do not see past the outward. Our “old man” used to look at others based on “outward” appearances:

*For the love of Christ compels us, because **we judge thus**: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, **we regard no one according to the flesh**. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. 2 Cor 5:14-17*

Until you “judge” that one has died for all, you can’t see that inside we are all the same. When we live from the “new man”, we will no longer see each other as White, Black, Asian, African, Hispanic, or Native American. We will no longer see each other as male or female in Christ. We will no longer see others ranked by class or social rank. That means that within His Kingdom, there is no reason we should make distinctions any longer based on those things. Rank, social status, culture, class, occupation, education, ethnicity, and whatever other distinguishing factor you can think of —none of these has anything to do with how we should relate or serve or view one another in the Lord. James was inspired to remind believers that it is utterly sinful and a sign of a diseased body to show favoritism based on how “rich” or “poor” someone is. Favoritism will destroy you on the inside because at the root of favoritism is a judgmental spirit. A judgmental spirit means that I place myself in the position of determining who has “got it” so to speak and who doesn’t. It says I have the authority and right to do that. James expressed this by saying we become evil judges because we put distinctions back into something that God by the new birth has completely removed.

Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and

destroy. But you--who are you to judge your neighbor?
James 4:11-12

We must judge that Jesus has died for all, and therefore all have died, and therefore all have been born by His Spirit into His family. That is the mark of the spiritual person: one who no longer regards anyone according to the flesh. Let us be careful in passing judgment on those in the Body. We are told that there is such a thing as discipline within the Body towards believers that refuse to leave gross or obvious sin. We are also told that in passing judgment we are to do it with a sense of love and reconciliation for the believer. The Christian army, I've been told, is the only army that kills its own wounded. We of all people should be forgiving and receptive to those who fall and repent and desire restoration. We are who spiritual should try to restore those who are struggling:

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.
Galatians 6:1-2

In regards to judgment, I have heard that John 3:16 has been replaced as the most popular verse among Christians these days. The most popular one now is "Judge not, lest you be judged". For some strange reason, some people have taken that to mean we must relegate all belief systems to be equal and praiseworthy. Hogwash. All belief systems are not equal. All philosophies are not of equal acceptance. Judgment has nothing to do with giving up the belief that there is still only one way to God. Passing judgment does not mean that we should no longer call sin "sin". Passing judgment, as James puts it, concerns me "speaking" against my brother in a slanderous or accusing way. We pass judgment when we believe that "I would never be like that" or "I would never have fallen like that." We judge the Law when we do that. The Law, as a reminder, is given to show us all of our need for redemption and salvation apart from following every last requirement of God's righteousness. When I speak against my brother or sister in a Pharisaic and condemning manner, I pass judgment that I am above the same Law that has convicted the one who has sinned:

The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Cor 15:56-57

Remember the sinner and the Pharisee that Jesus spoke about? The one who was justified from his sins was the one who would not even lift his eyes to heaven. The one who said, "Thank God I am not like other men" went away unforgiven. Think about that one for a moment. Judge not, lest you be judged. If we sow

judgment, we will reap judgment. This particular disease is seen throughout the Body. When people repent, we need to accept them back. Disassociation and punishment have their place in the church. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians demanded and urged this for certain people who had committed gross sins. By the time he wrote his second letter, he then states that the punishment should not be so harsh as to prevent a way back into fellowship.

But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner-- not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person. 1 Cor 5:11-13

For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears,....But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent-- not to be too severe. This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him. 2 Cor 2:4-8

Even in punishment, there still needs to be a spirit of humility and the concern for the soul of the person no matter what.

Let's consider yet another disease now:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. James 3:13-18

Sin breeds disease of all sorts in the church. Those who hold ambitions that do not proceed from Godly desire and wisdom are doomed to cause hurt and pain because they name the name of Christ and people associate their actions "with Christ". People in and out of the church associate Jesus with our behavior! Let us never forget that the wisdom of this world has no place in the Body. Selfish ambition comes from applying worldly principles within the Kingdom of God.

It comes from believing that success and recognition in the Kingdom is based on the same things that success and recognition is based on in the world. James so eloquently tells us that such wisdom comes from the world, is carnal, of our lower nature, and is sponsored by hell itself. Control, power struggles, disorder, and every evil practice can be found behind the doors of some “churches”. It is because the wisdom of God was not chosen. Jesus set us an example that we should follow Him. He has showed us the way to achieve success and the way to achieve greatness. It is to become last. It is to prefer what others want. It is to seek someone else’s good. It is to be a servant. Any other wisdom, whether it be from an eastern mystic or self-help book, is of this world system and not of God. It is yet another disease that attacks the Body.

Finally, one last disease:

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church. 3 John 1:9-10

John had his share of sectarianism to deal with too. Is there a Diotrephes in your church? Is there one who refuses to welcome other brothers of other denominations or missions or races or cultures? Are there those who do not want to support missionaries? Is your entire church full of ones like Diotrephes? Are you a Diotrephes? Do you love to be first to the degree that you will put down others to make yourself look good? Do you gossip maliciously about people? If you do, you are causing a disease in the Body. It does not honor the Lord. It is sin. John went on to tell the believers to imitate those who are good because those that are good are of God. We should never reject the ministry of another in the Body, especially one who proclaims and walks in the righteousness of our Lord; especially one who will boldly proclaim the Gospel; especially one who will tell people of God’s power to change their life! If I don’t like someone’s style or method or extravagance in preaching or method of presentation or candidness or rigidness or whatever, I must get over it! I can’t believe how Christians can criticize those in ministry based on their style of ministry or focus. Let’s receive those in the Body who are doing the work of evangelism and healing and renewal and missions. Let’s support them and not cut them to pieces. If we have a personal problem with one of them, then pray for God to change their heart. And of course, let us never be envious or jealous over others who maybe get more limelight than us. Diotrephes couldn’t stand getting shoved out of the limelight by the visit of the Apostle John. Can you believe the spiritual blessing he missed out on because of his arrogance and pride? Let us receive those that are doing the work of the ministry as a full time calling with open arms. Let us not allow this particular disease to infect our Body.

We have covered quite a few diseases haven’t we? We have just scratched the surface,

but I think I have given you a good list of the major illnesses and disease that are attacking the Body of Christ. These diseases have been around since the early days of the Church and will still be working when Jesus returns. The accuser of the brethren has been around that long, and he will continue working as well.

If you would like to keep a medical glossary of them, here is a brief recap of the ones we have covered:

- ◆ Dissensions/divisions/seditions/schisms
- ◆ Carnality and worldliness/ biting and devouring one another
- ◆ Unresolved disagreements, quarreling and fights, lawsuits
- ◆ Arguments about the Law, rigid holding of non-essential doctrines
- ◆ False doctrines, doctrines of demons, traditions of man
- ◆ Myths, endless genealogies, meaningless talk
- ◆ Unsound doctrine, foolish controversies
- ◆ Jealousy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions, constant friction
- ◆ Favoritism, bigotry, racism, chauvinism, feminism
- ◆ Bitter envy, selfish ambition, worldly wisdom
- ◆ Malicious gossip, slander of the brethren
- ◆ No receptivity, closed to missionary efforts
- ◆ Pharisaic, condemning attitude toward those who have fallen

Remember this key concept: **disease attacks the functionality of our body.**

What is the function, the primary purpose of the Body of Christ?

The work of the ministry—

living for God and fulfilling God's will on this earth.

“Lord help us to be a spotless bride in this day and hour. Cleanse us and bring a healing Lord in your Church so that we may function as one perfect man, united in your love and flowing in your power. Amen.”

Let's look to see now at what our Doctor, the Great Physician, would recommend as some cures and preventative treatment for these diseases. . . He has a vested interest in these, trust me. If there is to be more room in the house divided, we must seek healing for the diseases that afflict it.

Cures and Preventative Treatments

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. I John 1:7

Walking in the light. So simple to say those words but oh so hard some times to live it out. Yet that is exactly where we are commanded to walk in this path of discipleship. If we walk and follow Jesus, we will automatically be walking in the light because Jesus dwells in the light. Living and walking in the light is given as the requirement for us to have fellowship with one another. It is the core concept behind what I call “cures” and “preventative treatments”. Your doctor will tell you that if you get proper sleep, eat a well balanced diet, exercise regularly, engage in recreational activities, and reduce stress factors from your life, you will be far less susceptible to sickness. I’ve heard studies that say diet and exercise can significantly reduce our risk of heart disease and certain types of cancer, two major killers. You will probably less likely to catch a cold or the flu in cold weather if you are well rested, get a flu shot, and dress properly. We wished that our schools would tell our children that abstaining from sex before marriage is the only 100% guaranteed method of not catching venereal disease and all sorts of other things that will kill or scar them. Giving condoms out in schools really isn’t preventative; it’s sort of like saying “Playing Russian roulette is all right in and of itself, just make sure you only put one bullet in the chamber to decrease your chances of dying”. The point is, however graphic that last illustration may have been, we can prevent some diseases and sickness that come against our physical bodies. It requires commitment and discipline, though. Why is it that we cannot exercise the same discipline in regard to the Body of Christ? Why can’t we be proactive in walking in fellowship and relating to all members of the Body as we ought? It requires commitment and discipline. That’s why. Those things are not easy to do. If exercising and eating right were easy, everyone would be doing it!

There are medical cures available for some diseases although some, unfortunately, have none. The incurable are ones that only God’s power alone could heal. There are, I am sure, some diseases that we will never see removed from the Body of Christ

until the spotless Bride is married to her Bridegroom. That is because as long as we walk in these bodies, we will have a natural tendency to carnality. But I believe the Holy Spirit is calling Christians in this day and hour, because of the soon return of our Lord in this generation, to no longer settle for the natural tendency of our flesh. He is calling every member of the Body to attain to the measure of the fullness of the stature of Christ- and His SUPER-natural tendency. Friends, we can not play any longer when it comes to living for God. The stakes are just too high. The curtain of history is closing on this era of man's history. There will never be an outpouring of God's Spirit on all flesh like we will see and are seeing at this time. The world has never had this large a population. There will never be a greater gathering of souls into the Kingdom than in our generation. The Bridegroom is calling for His bride to get ready for His coming! The Spirit and the Bride say come Lord Jesus. . .

In light of this, the Body of Christ needs to understand how we can avoid the diseases that bring dysfunction to our members. When we do not function correctly, we are diverted from fulfillment of our mission on this earth. Disease will keep us from "being all that we can be", to use the old Army advertising slogan. Disease will keep us from walking in our primary purpose, which is to call this generation to the Savior's love. Let us commit now that we will identify and remove everything in us that brings disease to the Body. Let us commit that we will be a connected member of the Body, built up, rooted and grounded in love, controlled by the Head, and fully productive in our God-given calling and responsibility. Let us allow the Holy Spirit to place us where He wants us in the Body and to grow us up in maturity as we walk with Jesus. Let us remember always WHY we need to be of the same mind and heart:

Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Rom 15:5-6

Now that we have committed to the course, let's look at some principles by which the Body of Christ operates in a healthy manner. Then let's look at what I think doctor Jesus would prescribe to His bride, the Church, to prevent disease and even bring healing to her sick and wounded members that division and internal attack cause.

The healing mechanism of our human body at its core has an immune system that acts as a first line of defense against infection. Science tells us that the state of the immune system and the overall health of the person influence even the course a disease takes once it enters the body. The Body of Christ has an immunity system as well. The purpose of our immune system is that once an infectious agent is identified, white blood cells and antibodies are dispatched which attack and destroy those things that are "anti" or not part of the body. Here is the classic definition of an antibody:

Antibody *noun* A protein substance produced in the blood or tissues in response to a specific antigen, such as a bacterium or a toxin. Antibodies destroy or weaken bacteria and neutralize organic poisons, thus forming the basis of immunity.

T cell *noun* A principal type of white blood cell that completes maturation in the thymus and that has various roles in the immune system, including the identification of specific foreign antigens in the body and the activation and deactivation of other immune cells. Also called *T lymphocyte*.

God has built this functionality into our body. Certain diseases, like AIDS, actually cause the body to not “recognize” these foreign agents. AIDS actually attacks the immune system by causing the T cells not to recognize infectious agents. If these agents are not identified, other cells cannot target them for destruction and they roam through the body wreaking death and destruction. This opens up the body to attack by all sorts of diseases. It is the picture of a wolf entering a pack of sheep and devouring at will... that is until the Shepherd takes a rock and sling and kills that wolf. The Shepherd zealously guards the flock... after all their just dumb sheep who can't really defend themselves.

Consider the immune system of the Church for a minute. The Truth of God's Word acts as our antibodies and white blood cells, the agent that ATTACKS and DESTROYS diseases and infections and viruses entering the Body. The Word of God will destroy and weaken arguments, neutralize demonic and earthly wisdom, and it thus forms the basis of immunity from disease within the Body of Christ. Truth will pull down strongholds, cast down arguments, cast down imaginations, align our thoughts with those of God, and cause us to lead obedient lives.

*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for **pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience.** 2 Cor 10:4-6*

The Holy Spirit is the illuminator, the one who IDENTIFIES which agents are harmful and need to be destroyed. He is equivalent to the T-Cell whose primary job is to mark foreign agents entering the body for destruction. T-Cells also ACTIVATE and DEACTIVATE other cells within the immune system. There are many people in the Body of Christ who are attacking what they deem to be “unbiblical” or “not in accord with sound doctrine.” I sometimes think that they have not responded to the ILLUMINATOR, the one who actually marks which agents that are bad. They have not heard the call of the Spirit to “deactivate, this one is OK.” On the flip side,

many liberal circles have not heard the voice of the Spirit say “activate, danger Will Robinson, this will kill you!” Certain diseases cause our body to war against each other, one part destroying another part. If we will heed the voice of the Spirit, we would avoid injuring own members unaware. I think many minister’s do this out of blindness and ignorance, but the damage to the Body of Christ is nonetheless the same. It doesn’t matter if I run over you with my car by accident or on purpose: *you still are injured either way.*

God considers the immune system so important to the Body of Christ that he called specifically certain leaders to be responsible for overseeing and protecting the flock from these infectious agents: teachers, pastors, prophets, and evangelists. They help fight disease. They help employ the Truth of God’s Word to pull down philosophical arguments that lead us away from the life of God.

There is a dynamic aspect to teaching and presenting the Word of God.

But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching?1
Cor 14:6

Paul tells believers that we profit from 1) revelation, 2) knowledge, 3) prophesy, and 4) teaching. Many people do not realize that these are all different. Many do not realize that being a prophet is different from being a preacher. Revelation is an “uncovering” of something already there. It is not an introduction to something new. In fact, the production of Scripture did indeed die with John the Apostle on the isle of Patmos. We do not get “revelation” of new Scripture, the standard that sets boundaries for all other teaching and instruction and revelation. Revelation is when the Holy Spirit illuminates something new to me about something I possibly have already heard or known. Knowledge is something that produces and leads to wisdom and wise choices. Prophecy, unlike preaching, is receiving direct words of encouragement, exhortation, and comfort for a believer or a group of believers. Teaching is exposition and bringing forth the meat and milk of the word so that growth will occur in a person’s life. We need the dynamic ministry of God’s word to have a healthy immune system. We need both the absoluteness of God’s Word, the Bible, and the illumination of God’s Spirit to reveal its truth. Disease can enter in when our immune system does not function properly:

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. 1 Thess 2:13

If you do not accept the Bible as the word of God, your immunity system is severely crippled. You have no way of identifying “infectious” or harmful agents. Churches and denominations that do not take serious this truth open themselves up to attack from all sorts of perversion and evil. They have no “antibodies” and “white blood cells”. Paul was not even referring to the written word when he made this statement, but the principle is supported by all of the New Testament writers, including Peter, James, and John. Leave the Word of God and you leave Truth. Leave the teachings of the Apostles and you leave orthodoxy. Leave the Gospel of Jesus and you have left the way of salvation.

This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. 1 Tim 1:18-20

Although this book is not specifically about prophecy or hearing God’s voice for today, I do want to direct your attention to this fact: Paul mentions for our benefit that Timothy was a direct benefactor of the New Testament gift of prophecy. Flip through your Bible and see if you can find written anywhere anything about Timothy in the form of a direct word from God concerning his ministry and giftings and calling. I’ll save you some time: *you won’t find it*. What you will discover is that Paul and the elders of a church laid hands on Timothy and spoke prophetic utterances by the Spirit of God over him: things that were not penned in Scripture, but things that did become penned on Timothy’s heart. I lay great odds that Timothy may not have had John 3:16 memorized (Chapter numbers and verses were a much later addition..), but he DID remember that prophetic utterance when God exhorted him and poured into him giftings for his ministry. How many people languish in apathy and in even the wrong callings because the prophetic giftings are not in operation in our churches today? See that Paul wanted Timothy to RECALL to his mind those prophecies so that he could fight and wage a GOOD war. There is such a thing as BAD warfare. We can fight the WRONG things. Look around the church in America and you can see clearly that we tend to focus on WRONG things all the time. The Church attacks the fruit of our society’s problem without ever going after the root. Our immune system is designed to attack the RIGHT things when it functions normally. It is designed to attack things that don’t belong in our body, not to attack part that belong to our body!

My point in bringing up this particular passage from Timothy was to illustrate that the Holy Spirit says rejecting faith and a good conscience can shipwreck us. Rejecting faith and a good conscience, which comes from the counsel of God’s word and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, will leave us in a hospital bed. Some

sickness debilitates us to that point. How much of the Body of Christ is on a sick bed, immobilized, because they have let their immune system get weak?

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. I Jn 4:1-6

Yes, truth is absolute. There is a distinguisher between what is false and what is true. I devote an entire chapter to just the trustworthiness of God's word because this is such an important foundation. We can believe every spirit, no more than our immune system allows "everything" into our body. We would die! God has given us so many pictures in creation of how things work in the spiritual realm. Keep in mind this key immunity principle:

Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins. James 5:19-20

If truth were not important, it would not be important that we can wander from it. That is what the immune system in the Body of Christ is supposed to do. It helps us from wandering from the truth. It helps us fight the right battles. It helps us identify true enemies that need to be attacked and true parts of our body that possibly need correction, but certainly not our venom!

Another important aspect regarding our body is in the area of uncontrolled growth. Cancer is one of the most devastating diseases man has encountered. Pride I believe has a direct correlation to cancer within the Body of Christ. How does cancer work? As I described earlier, it is uncontrolled growth within a body. It is when one cell does not recognize the presence of another cell. It is when one cell or a group of cells outgrow their assigned boundaries. It is when one part of our body is not submitted or responsive to directions from our brain or our nervous system. It is not heeding the command by the brain to "stop growing, you are killing other cells!" Unresponsiveness, lack of submission, independence in growth. These are the essence of cancer within the Body of Christ. Paul addresses cancerous growth in terms of pride, divisions, and factions:

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. 1 Cor 3:1-9

There is nothing wrong with growth. The Body of Christ is SUPPOSED to have a growth mechanism. Cancer is when growth is done apart from the rest of the body or without coordination from the brain. Cancerous growth will kill or injure other cells without recognizing it or knowing it. This is what happens when we identify with one part of the body without identifying with our other parts. There are several prescriptions that can cure cancerous growth: humility, submission, and God's wisdom. I will get to these shortly.

While doing some study on diseases in the encyclopedia and some dictionaries, I ran across a term that struck me funny: *muscular Christianity*. Did you know there was such a word? I was looking up muscular dystrophy and there it was in black and white. It was listed in the thesaurus as another word for piety. I found a wealth of other words that are all intimated by muscular Christianity: goodness, VIRTUE, affection, BENEVOLENCE, attendance at worship, regular churchgoing, fear of God, submissiveness, humbleness, trust in God, devotion, self-surrender, enthusiasm, fervor, zeal, adoration, prostration, WORSHIP, prayerfulness, meditation, charity, good works, Christian behavior. Some times even the secular can get it right. What would be the opposite of muscular Christianity? Muscular dystrophy (MD). A progressive wasting of the skeletal muscles, instead of a progressive strengthening. There is a reason Paul exhorted the church at Philippi to WORK out their own salvation with fear and trembling. Paul was well aware of the tendency toward atrophy that members of a body are prone to. Just as we are prone to never physically exercise our own bodies, and thus we never develop muscular tissue or cardiovascular endurance. Some people call it being "spiritually fat." When we have been bed-ridden for a long time, our muscles break down and lose the ability to work correctly. Astronauts face the problem of the weightless environment of space: the presence of a zero-gravity environment wreaks havoc on their muscular and skeletal systems. One sure cure for the break down of our spiritual muscles is to exercise our faith. Faith is not exercised in our mind. Faith is exercised by what we do. That is

the entire message James was trying to communicate when he talked about the difference between dead faith and faith that saves us. James was addressing muscular dystrophy in the Body of Christ:

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. James 2:14-17

MD comes from an abnormal gene that doesn't produce a protein essential for normal muscle and growth function. How are doctors currently treating MD? They do it by inserting healthy cells into the muscle to produce the protein that the abnormal gene should have made. It has shown some success. How do we promote healthy growth when dystrophy occurs in our body? We introduce healthy members that are functioning properly:

As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend. Prov 27:17

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. Heb 10:24-25

That is why we must put feet to our faith, else it is not real faith. That is why we need input from others within the Body to keep us accountable and on the path of discipleship. That is why sometimes we need to be stirred to action by other "healthy" cells of the body, cells that may actually go to a different church or represent a different tradition than we are used to.

In the final analysis here, the Body of Christ needs to have healthy immune system. That comes from zealously promoting the truth of the Bible while simultaneously pursuing and seeking the voice of the Spirit. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Let us move on now and see if there is medicine available for certain problems that plague the Church. Just like in the natural world, some things can ONLY be cured the supernatural power of God. However, there are sometimes medicines and prescriptions a doctor can give that will provide a cure or ameliorate a symptom. Let's take a look at what Doctor Jesus might prescribe for His Body.

Prescription 1: God's Wisdom vs Man's Wisdom

I touched on this in the last chapter, and so I will start here with this statement: There is an infinite distance between God's wisdom and man's wisdom. We will never function like we should until we renounce the latter and embrace the former. Teachers and preachers, especially, must be wary of the danger of intractability, rigidity, and hardness of heart toward the working of the Holy Spirit and the understanding of the Scriptures. They must also be attentive to walk in righteousness and holiness— in other words, to “walk the talk”. James understood the tendency in those who teach to overlook the impact and accountability of their ministry:

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. James 3:1-2

James goes into an immediate discussion of the tongue and its dangers here in verses 3-8 of the third chapter. He describes how the tongue, though such a small member of our body, has the power to direct the very course of our life. No man has the power to tame the tongue: it can burn like an uncontrollable forest fire and is itself set on fire by the flames of hell. James tells us that salt water should not be flowing from a fresh water spring. James then makes an interesting statement:

With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. James 3:9-10

My brothers and sisters, things ought not to be the way they are in the church today. There should not be blessing of some brothers in one breath and cursing of other brothers in the next. Part of the problem lies in this fact: Teachers, those to whom James was addressing this discourse on the tongue in the first place, were and still are today more likely to tear down, trample, and curse other ministers and ministries with their tongue. Ministers who are on the SAME side. Ministers and ministries who are working for the salvation and deliverance of men and women around the world! Ministers and ministries who are bringing people to Jesus Christ, the true God of the Bible, and not some perverted false Christ. Teachers and preachers please heed this admonition! Now that we understand the context of WHO James was addressing this statement, I hope you can see the true impact of what the Holy Spirit is trying to communicate. It ought not to be that the ones who know the law the best (and therefore should know that a loose tongue is a sign of a vain religion), are the ones who set the course of nature on fire with their teachings and dogmatic confessions. In the last chapter I discussed the disease of worldly wisdom and fleshly attitudes that James addressed in this passage. Now consider the cure and preventative treatment:

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. James 3:17-18

Teachers should truly seek after wisdom. They have to in order to adequately convey the truths of Scripture to others. The Spirit is saying to us here that there is a wisdom that comes up from the pit and a wisdom that comes down from God. The “wisdom of the pit” manifests itself in jealousy, bitterness, competition, cursing and attacking fellow brothers, fanning the flames of dissension, self seeking, boasting, denial of the truth, confusion, and EVERY EVIL WORK. If we truly want wisdom in our life, we must get wisdom from the God of all wisdom, the God of heaven. James says that He gives it to all men that ask Him for it. Not only that, but He is not stingy in conveying it to us. It says that He gives GENEROUSLY. What do we ask for when we ask for wisdom? We are asking for the mind of Christ. We are asking for God to show us how He thinks about something. We are asking God for His perspective, His thoughts, and His purposes in a matter. We are asking for a higher understanding, a supernatural insight, and the divine intent. We are asking for God’s will and desire. Get ready though. The wisdom that comes from heaven is comprised of the very nature of Jesus Himself. It is given under the assumption that we are going to act upon it. God’s wisdom may not coincide with what your church or denomination has taught you either. Think about that for a moment. Do you ask for wisdom with an attitude that would refuse to change even if you are given it? If we ask God for wisdom, we must be ready to have our attitudes adjusted and our lives changed. Jesus taught His disciples that we must be careful to LISTEN and RECEIVE God’s word when we hear it. If we are not open to change, we will lose even the spiritual understanding that we have been given (see Luke 8:18)

Ponder what comprises the wisdom of heaven, the wisdom from above.

Purity: This can be defined as being without contamination. God’s word tells us that we are to hate the garment that is even stained by the flesh. Purity comes from the same word from which we get “holiness” in the Greek. It refers to being “unmixed”. No one likes drinking water with impurities in it. No one wants watered-down gasoline in their car. No one expects oil and water to mix well. God is the same ways towards us. He wants us “un-mixed”. He doesn’t want the stain of the world or of the flesh working in us. He wants 100% Holy Spirit driven living. That is purity. Purity begins with repentance- a change of mind. To be pure, we must allow God to wash us clean. We are renewed by the washing of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God together. He will wash us clean every time we ask, but purity will lead us to stop doing what causes the

offense in the first place! That is purity. Purity brings to mind also the idea of contamination. So much of our thinking in the church has been contaminated with the world, with humanistic philosophy, with doctrines of demons, with the stain of sin. Contamination spoils something that is otherwise good. It is an “infection” in the Body of Christ. We are to be un-contaminated in all we do and remove every ulterior motive from our hearts. That is purity and that is God’s wisdom.

Peace-loving: Peace loving people will avoid an argument if they can possibly help it. Although they would rather see peace than confrontation, they will confront someone when the need arises. The point is that you must seek peace and pursue reconciliation if there is going to be “peace” in your life. Jesus promised that His peace would abide with us because He had overcome the world. Even in tribulation, we can know peace. We must first be at peace with God before we can be at peace with ourselves and at peace with others. We must first have peace within our own inner kingdom if we are going to experience peace in the kingdoms outside of us. This word in the Greek is also used to describe the peace that righteousness brings into our life. Righteousness does not come by accident or by our inaction. It comes through availability to the Holy Spirit and His disciplines for our life. Peace is the state we find ourselves in when we know we have done what God wants us to do. That inner peace can be transmitted to others.

Gentle: Gentle is a word that we use in connection with a wind. We hear sometimes about a gentle breeze that blows. We say it’s gentle because it’s just barely touching us, but it’s touching us enough to know it’s there. We can feel the coolness or warmth of its touch. It is not a gail force; it’s just gentle. This is exactly how the Holy Spirit, the gentle dove, is towards us. He never forces us nor blows us so hard that we are forced to go along. . . He is like a gentle breeze constantly filling us with His presence, the desires of Jesus, and the will of the Father. It is how we are to be in relation to others. Some translations use the word considerate, meaning that we take consideration in every thing we do, say, or accomplish for others. We are considerate of how they feel and what they want before we consider what we want. That is the quality of gentleness. Gentleness is not weakness, though. Gentleness is firm resolve to be courteous and mild even in the face of harshness and rudeness. It is responding, not reacting. It is being “suitable”, or in other words, responding in the way that would seem appropriate to God when we are attacked or disliked. It is not being overly strong or harsh in regards to OTHERS. Would you agree that it is a quality more members of the Body need toward one another?

Submissive: Here is a word that none of us like to talk about. One translation renders this word “easy to be intreated”. Submissive implies that one is under submission, or is willing to submit to others easily. Submission does

not mean bondage or slavery. Submission is realizing our proper position and responding accordingly. None of us has a role, a job, or a function in which we are autonomous from the oversight or direction of someone above us. Once we realize that God is the only being in the universe that has no one above Him, the better off we will be. Submission in my mind warrants the spotlight as a foundational principle for prevention and healing of diseases in the Body, so we will deal more with it shortly.

Full of mercy: How often do we associate wisdom with mercy? Mercy is giving someone forgiveness when they do not deserve it. It is letting someone “skate”, so to speak. It is undeserved, unmerited, and unwarranted forgiveness. *“For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”* (James 2:13) Mercy is a requirement, not an option in our dealings with other believers. Mercy will triumph over judgment any day. People expect judgment, but they rarely expect mercy. Wisdom begs us to be full of this quality.

Full of good fruit: Good fruit is tasty. It makes people want some. Bad fruit leaves a bad taste in your mouth. Fruit is a by-product or outgrowth of a planting. Jesus has called us all to go and bear fruit that will last for eternity. Fruit not only includes those that we will impact during our life, but it also includes the development of Christ-like character within us.

Impartial: Without variance. Unwavering. Straightforward. We should not put up walls with other people in the Body. What they see is what they should get. We should not treat some people one way and some people another way. If we are kind to Mrs. Johnson, then we should be kind to Mrs. Jones. If we don’t talk bad about people we like, we shouldn’t talk bad about people we don’t like. If we would bend over backwards to help one, we should bend over backwards to help another. That is being straightforward. We should not vary how we treat other believers based on how much money they have, what their social class is, what rank or position they hold in politics, what possessions they own, what they can do for us in return, whether we like them or not, what race they are, what sex they are, what church they attend, what denomination they are, what their doctrinal position may be, or any other distinguisher you may come up with. We get in trouble when we treat people differently. We could heal so many wounds among us if we would just follow this aspect of wisdom.

Sincere: Last but not least, in everything we do to others in the Body, let us most of all be genuine. No disguises. No hypocrisy. No feigning. Just sincere. Sincere is closely linked to purity. Sincere people do not do things from selfish, secondary, secular, or spiteful motives. They remain true to their claims. They are the ones who will speak truthfully to you with no condescension or judgment. Sincere people can be trusted with the deep spiritual needs we all

have: needs to confess our sins, needs for sound advice and counsel, needs to have someone speak God's word truthfully to our situation without fear of rejection or condemnation. Sincerity with each other would prevent so many wounds to our members.

This is what God's wisdom is all about. Are we walking in wisdom in regards to one another in the Body? If not, we will more than likely be the source of disease and decay in the Body in one way or another. We will be the source of a stumbling block or offense to another until we embrace the wisdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I find it interesting that in the context of talking about the wisdom from above, James is 1) addressing teachers and 2) dealing with the power of the tongue. The Holy Spirit also gave us a true sign of spiritual wisdom here:

{This} you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak {and} slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.
James 1:19-20

James says that the mark of religion, or a true religion that stems from a personal relationship with God, is primarily evidenced by what we say. It is in the realm of our tongue that we can find the most vile diseases and sicknesses that attack us a collective Body. The Holy Spirit warns us through James that unless we can bridle our tongue, our religion is in vain. Here is another cure for many diseases in the Church body:

If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. James 1:26

The Bible has so much to say about that one little member called the tongue. Proverbs is full of references for how we are to regard that "rudder" that has the power to set the course of nature on fire. The worst way we can betray our identity to Jesus Christ is to allow the enemy access to our mouth. God's wisdom would tell us to be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger. James understood this power of the tongue, and the Holy Spirit inspired this most valuable conclusion through him:

So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by {the} law of liberty. James 2:12

What does that mean? What is the law of liberty? It is something James called the royal law and the perfect law. It is something Paul called the law of the

Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. I call it the law of grace. Read the fuller context of these if you would:

*If, however, you are fulfilling **the royal law**, according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin {and} are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole **law** and yet stumbles in one {point,} he has become guilty of all. For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not commit murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by {the} **law of liberty**. For judgment {will be} merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. James 2:8-13*

*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the **law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus** has made me free from the law of sin and death. Rom 8:1-2*

We know that the Law is good. It is meant to show us God's righteous standard. The Law makes us aware of our carnal nature. There is a law of sin and death associated with our carnal nature just as there is a law of the Spirit of life associated with our new nature. The law of sin and death operates like this: Sin speaks to us and says, "I will harden your heart as long as you embrace me and refuse to acknowledge the one true God of eternity." The law of the Spirit of life, what I call the law of grace, operates like this: God speaks to us and says, "I will help you and give you all power to overcome sin if you come humbly to me and accept me as the King I have the right to be in your life". The first law brings bondage. The latter brings freedom.

In the law, we begin to see a glimpse of the true fulfillment that God wanted us to have from the time of creation, but that was lost. We begin to see also who we are going to **become** in Christ. The Law reminds us of what was lost in the fall of man. Grace speaks to us of what God wants to do in and through us. Friends, you and I will be judged according to the law that brings freedom, not the law that brings bondage. In other words, when we give account of our life at the Judgment seat of Christ in regards to what we did for the Kingdom of God on this earth, we will not be able to say "Jesus I was just not able to overcome my tendency to tear people down with my mouth, to condemn them without forgiveness, to not show partiality or prejudice, to not offer mercy or forgiveness freely." He will show us in that day that all resources we needed were freely available and provided by His Spirit. He will show us that we did not walk

according to the law of liberty. He will in essence show us that we did not walk in wisdom. Let us cleanse ourselves of these things now so that we will not be ashamed at His coming. Let us with God's wisdom resolve to rid His body of these diseases and prevent their spread.

Prescription 2: Humility

Of all the things that we could do to prevent the spread of disease within the Body of Christ and keep focused on the primary purpose to reach this world for Jesus, humility has to be one of the most simple yet overlooked cures. Humility is the expression of Jesus Himself. Consider some of what God's word has to say concerning it:

*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with **sober judgment**, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*

Romans 12:3

The basis of humility is what I call "right-mindedness". It springs from an understanding of our individual calling and gifting, the grace given to us by God, and how we are "fitted" into the Body of Christ. God has set each member in the Body just as He designed it. My eyes would be so frustrated if they one day decided they wanted to be the organ of hearing. They would no longer be "fitted" for their purpose. To be sober minded, as Paul put it, comes from the Greek word *sophroneo*. It means we must be in a right frame of mind concerning ourselves. The word expresses also the idea of exercising self-control. It is putting a moderate estimate on our abilities. It is also, I believe, understanding that we are not the soul source of revelation or understanding in the spiritual universe. When we are set free from any other motive than to just be what God has made us to be, we can truly achieve greatness for God! We will struggle until then with ourselves and with other believers. Understand friends, sober mindedness is not low self-esteem. It is actually high Christ-esteem. If you are using "sober judgment" as an excuse to why you are not DOING something for God, then that is wrong. God has made each one of us with extra-ordinary potential for greatness. Mediocrity, complacency, the ordinary, the mundane: none of these are consistent with a life of faith. They are not what "Christ in you, the hope of glory" is all about. Humility, therefore, has to do with thinking rightly about ourselves: neither over nor under what God has called us to be.

*Remind them to be **subject** to rulers and authorities, to **obey**, to **be ready** for every good work, to **speak** evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all **humility** to all men. For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures,*

living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.
Titus 3:1-3

Humility towards those in the Body of Christ and those in the world takes manifestation in how we treat others. We are to show humility to all people! Not only that, but we are to remember that only God can accomplish His purpose in us and through us. We are just yielded vessels. Humility will allow us to look at each other's ministry and service in that light:

*So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything,
 but only God, who makes things grow. 1 Cor 3:7*

If we will understand that we are nothing, then He will become everything. Whether we have planted or watered, God is the One alone who makes things grow. Only God can bring people to salvation. He will not bring people to salvation unless we are obedient to share the Gospel and live righteously in a loving attitude, though. Do you see the difference?

Without God, we can not. Without us, He will not.

That is the confession of humility. Let us make sure we understand where we stand, who we are, and what we would be without Jesus: absolutely nothing. If that is true, then it should not matter what rank we hold, what gifts others have, what praise someone else gets, whether we get thanked or not, whether we get our way, whether we are first, or whether we get the credit. Here is a life principle that the Church, especially ministers, need in this hour:

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.
James 4:10

If we do not humble ourselves, then there is no where for us to move in God's Kingdom. In order to be "lifted up", we must first recognize that we start at the bottom. God will not honor one that is not humble. God will certainly ALLOW us to achieve power and success apart from Him; He will not prevent us from using worldly ways or foolish pride in His Kingdom. He will ALLOW us to think we are better than others, judge those caught in sin, look down at others not as fortunate as us, return evil for evil, and jealously devour each other. However, He will not honor nor bless any of these attitudes. He will not have any thing to do with these diseases of the Body. What ever gets accomplished will be for man's glory when pride is the motive and humility is ignored. God can only USE those who are humble. God will only flow power from a heart of humility. Consider the attitude of Jesus:

*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit,
 but in **lowliness of mind** let each esteem others better*

*than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He **humbled** Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Philippians 2:3-8*

The Greek word *tapeinophrosune* is from where we get the word “lowliness of mind”. It comes from the contraction of *tapeinos* + *phren*. The first part means to depress or make low, as in not rising from the ground. The second part is a word that means the actual parts of our heart, our feelings, our sensitive nature, our cognitive reasoning, or our ability to judge. Together, these words convey the meaning of reasoning that we are “low to the ground”. *Tapeinophrosune* is similar to sober-mindedness, what I referred to as “right-mindedness”. The difference is “lowliness of mind” acknowledges not only our “right” position with each other and with God, it also acknowledges our “littleness” in comparison to God and our fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord. It speaks of a person who has come to realize his own “littleness” in the grand scheme of things. It speaks of how we are to see things by looking “up” from the ground and not by looking “down” on the world. Paul spoke constantly of how he was the “worst of sinners”, the “least of the Apostles”, and the “least of the saints”. He was one of the greatest men that God had ever used, in our perspective, yet he came to realize how “little” he really was. James wrote how we are just a “vapor” that is here today and gone tomorrow. He said not to think too much of ourselves because of how insignificant we really are in relation to eternity. That is “lowliness of mind”. We must realize that there is no “rank” in God’s Kingdom *according to the standards of men*. Rank in the Kingdom goes from the “bottom” up:

"Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great." Luke 9:48

We have to “get down on the ground” so to speak if we are to ever consider others as better than ourselves. That is exactly counter to what the world teaches us and what our flesh wants us to think. We all want to feel that we are better than someone else so that we can feel good about where we are at. You see, as long as there is someone “below” me, I can always use them to compare myself to. I can always justify things or even rely in the security of what I have because I know I have more than someone else. It is the “I’m not so bad after all” syndrome. This principle can be applied for those we think are below us

spiritually, socially, intellectually, physically, athletically, and financially. When I get “down on the ground”, though, I begin to look “up”. From that vantage, I can not only see you above me, but I can see the heavens above. From that vantage I can see that I am only a speck of dust: nothing more than a vapor here today and gone tomorrow, a molecule in comparison to the grandeur of the universe. When I then consider that this universe and all of creation is not even a tear drop in the eye of the One who created it, it is easy for me to “adjust my attitude”. How would I dare believe that I am anything significant apart from God, the One who made me and gave me a purpose? Likewise, what would ever possess me to believe that I am in any way better to any one in else in comparison of where we both sit relationally to each other? Only till I “get down on the ground” with my thoughts and heart will I relate properly to others. There is a way to greatness in God’s Kingdom, though. Listen to our Lord explain it:

"Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.
Matt 5:19

That it is how we are “great”. But notice that it is not “greatness” as men reckon it. It is in fact exactly opposite to how men reckon “greatness”. Notice as well that Jesus did not define greatness by “who was right”. He defined “greatness” by what we “DO”. Teaching was based on “doing” the commandments. Men’s standards of the “least” are God’s standards of “greatness”. Consider another principle that Jesus gave us:

And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' **Matt 25:40**

It is when we see that we are all equal in God’s sight that we will understand why others must be considered “better” than us. As long as people are “below” us, we will trample over them, use them for our purposes, slander them, talk about them behind their back, ignore their soul, and overlook their needs. Jesus forever removed this possibility in His disciples by saying, “inasmuch as you did it to one of the least”. The least are in terms of man’s standards. What we do to our fellow men, we do it unto Jesus. Now this is not a call to pacifism or an abandonment of justice. It is however a call to be “lowly minded”.

According to Paul in Philippians 2, Jesus, the God of creation, took on a humble opinion of Himself when He came to earth as a man. Think about that friends. It is unfathomable. He who was creator and divine did not CONSIDER it robbery to be equal with God. The mind of Christ, the mind that Paul tells us

to have, is one that says: “Though I may deserve by every indication to be first and pre-eminent, I will instead take on a low opinion of myself and make a conscious choice to lower and depress myself so that others will receive the blessings of God by my obedience.” That is what *humble* means: to make or bring low, as in assign a lower rank or place to. The King became a servant! God’s Son, who was of one essence with God, equal and identified to God, did not blink when confronted with the fact that man’s only path to salvation and redemption would involve His abasement, humility, taking on the role of a servant, and death as a man. One of the greatest workings of God in my life at one particular time came about when I realized that Jesus, being very God, could have exercised His own will, desires, and purposes as a man. Yet, He denied all of that in order to follow His Father. If that was God’s approach to living as a human being, how could I ever dare assume that I could choose my own way, follow my own desires, and please myself in this world? It was the day when I realized what humility was all about.

*And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be **gentle** to all, able to teach, patient, **in humility** correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. 2 Tim 2:24-26*

One final thought about humility here. It is important to remember that Paul specifically instructed Timothy to correct those who are in opposition to God with all humility. That means I understand that “if not for the grace of God”, I could be in their same position. We are no better because we do not partake in the sin of that person who is lost and away from God. The 2 greatest words in the Bible to me are “But God”. The attitude of humility begins in me when I realize where I would be if not for “but God”:

*Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. **But God** raised Him from the dead. Acts 13:29-30*

*For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. **But God** demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Rom 5:7-8*

*For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. **But God** has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the*

base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. 1 Cor 1:26-31

*But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." **But God** has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 1 Cor 2:9-10*

*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; **but God** is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. 1 Cor 10:13*

*And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. **But God**, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Eph 2:1-7*

This is the essence of humility. It is the mind of Christ. And most of all, it will cure most any ailment that comes to attack His church, His flesh and blood, His bride. Let's look at another principle that follows very closely with humility.

Prescription 3: Three Levels of Submission

Once we realize how humility and wisdom rightly relate us to one another, the idea of submission should be no big issue for us. In fact, submission will not work apart from humility and Godly wisdom. Submission is the cure-all for all sorts of nasty diseases that cause local churches to split. It is a principle that I believe is missing in many evangelical churches. Submission is a principle that is based on authority. If we do not understand authority, we will never understand the necessity of submission. Submission is also based on another concept that governs a military command structure. Many Christians do not understand that we are at war. Many Christians do not understand that we are enlisted in an army as well. We will not fully understand submission until we understand our call to arms.

Hupotasso is a Greek military term that gives the picture of arranging troops in a military fashion under the command of a leader. It is where we derive the word submission from. It carries the idea of arrangement, subordination, subjection and obedience. It also carries the idea of control. We submit to another when we either obey them or willingly follow their advice or admonition. Control can be a scary concept because, for most of us, we have witnessed too many people in the church abuse both authority and control. My heart goes out to those who have suffered abuse at the hands of those who used control as a means of exploitation or self-gratification. In that light, submission is something that we must use wisdom about. This means we must hold those in leadership to a high level of accountability if we are also to give them the authority to lead. It can also mean that at a personal level we must be absolutely trustworthy with the burdens and struggles of those who share them with us. This for too many Christians, I believe, is the major reason why they will never feel “connected” to the body. Because of a previous violation of trust, a wound caused by a loose tongue, a past failure of confidentiality, or a lack of spiritual mindedness in dealing with personal problems, many supposedly “spiritual” people have betrayed our Lord and the authority He has given them. Submission is what we call a “chain of command” in the military. It is how orders flow down from the commander in chief all the way down to the lowest private in the army. This is why submission is the cure for so many other diseases in the Body of Christ: it is concerned directly with God’s power being channeled from the highest to the lowest. It is part of the “nervous system” of the Body and therefore intrinsic to the nature of how a body is to work properly. Yet this principle is the least applied, at least correctly, of any other principle of unity. Let us consider three levels of submission that should be in operation within the Body of Christ. Here they are:

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. James 4:7

Obey your leaders, and submit {to them} for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. Heb 13:17

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Eph 5:21

The first level of submission is to God. The second to our spiritual leaders. The third level is submission to one another. Notice that I did not mention wives or children or bosses and workers (slaves and masters in NT times). These relationships require submission as well. God’s word also commands us to be obedient to the governing authorities and thus submit ourselves to the sovereign authority of the land. These are all necessary and commanded areas of submission, but I do not cover them because for the most part they are not the root cause of disunity within the Body. Husbands, wives, and children follow a

chain of command that begins with man as the spiritual priest of his house who serves his family selflessly and ends with wives and children obeying that spiritual leadership so that Christ may be exalted in the family. Slaves are commanded to obey their masters and masters are commanded to rule in Godly fear, as those who will give account. This paradigm is translated into our modern work environments. We are to do our work as unto the Lord and not unto men, thereby bringing Him glory and honor even in what we do vocationally.

Christians are also told to not only honor the King and obey those who lead in government, but also to pray for those in these positions as well. It is our submission in this area that establishes our obedience to God's authority in governing bodies. It is our prayers in this area that establishes God's intervening power in the affairs of men. Even though most governments are godless, God has still set the boundaries and power of every nation on earth. Thank God we live in a country that still has some form of religious freedom, though this is changing to mean religious freedom for all other religions EXCEPT Christianity. Regardless, for the most part our government is not putting Christians to death for their faith and in that regard we have it good compared to our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world. Submitting to our governing authority is not that difficult in America.

I want to focus on the root problems of submission within the Body. This is the area that breeds the most sickness and disease among the Church. It is a lack of understanding, both on those who are in authority and those who are under authority, of how submission is to work that leads to our greatest problems. The very first level of submission is the most crucial: submission to God. If this level is not established, then ALL other efforts at submission are fruitless. In other words, if a man does not love the Lord His God with all his heart, mind, and soul, then how can he be expected to love his wife as Christ loved the Church? If we are not first in submission to God's word in our life, how can we expect to be in submission to one another or to church leaders? If church leadership is so steeped in traditions of men, then how can we expect the sheep to voluntarily submit to its guidance? If those in authority walk in selfishness, jealousy, hunger for power, hunger for control, and unrighteousness, how can we be expected to follow? Our first duty then is to be humble, in God's wisdom, and submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit's leading. Our submission to God is best seen in our submission to His word, first and foremost. Horror stories like the Jim Jones fiasco reminds me of how easy it is to overlook the obvious requirements of righteousness and instead focus on the charisma and control of a leader. If we are submitted to God, then we will first of all be walking in the Word of God. It will be living and active in our life, producing fruit and pruning us for further growth by the power of the Holy Spirit. The place of power in our life over sin and the devil is to be found at the foot of the cross. This is the place

where we “bow the knee” to the Lord and say, “not my will Lord Jesus, but yours be done”.

Remember the word picture of what submission means to begin with: it is a military term. If any of you have had time in the armed forces, then you know what I mean. If you were to arrive at boot camp and the drill sergeant tells you to do something, you don't stop him and suggest a better alternative or even ask him the reason why you should do what he says. Those things become very crystal clear the moment they shave your hair off and put you in a uniform. You don't ask questions, unless it is a matter of right and wrong. You obey. That is how a military chain of command works. Jesus is our Commander in Chief. He is the Head of the Body. Lack of submission is the disease of the Body that attacks our central nervous system. What happens when nerve endings in our body do not respond to requests from the brain to do something? It would not be a pretty picture. We would shut down. The church is the same way. Could it be that much of the reason of why the Church has been ineffective in our generation is that we have not listened to what the Head was telling us? This is what submission is all about. It is about being “under authority”. Not all of us may be over others in authority. We all, however, no matter what position or rank we think we may hold, are all under authority. Therefore, submission applies to every member in the Body. No one, even a shepherd of a local body, is out from under the authority and control of the Chief Shepherd.

If the army of Christ is to spread the Gospel and make an impact in this world, it must first “get into formation” and listen to the commander in chief. The first level of submission is to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in each person individually. It is the lack of this first level of submission that has led to abuse of power, sacrifice of righteous standards, reproaches on the name of Christ, lack of trust, and a lack of God's power in the Church. It is not an option to submit ourselves to discipleship and following Jesus daily. That is the essence of what covenant is all about. We are obligated under our covenant with God through the new birth to submit our lives to His inspection and direction. This choice was made the day that we confessed Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior before men. Once that choice is established, falling under the other levels of submission should be no problem, although as Jesus demonstrated in the Garden of Gethsemane, the first level of submission to the Father sometimes comes with struggle in our human nature..

The second level of submission that should be found in operation within the Body of believers is toward those who are in spiritual leadership. This concept varies greatly between Catholic and Protestant and Orthodox. It also varies greatly among the many different denominational flavors we find here in America. Spiritual leadership is focused more at a local church level

than at the denominational level. There are indeed certain things, as far as doctrines and decrees that come down from higher levels of church government and organization, that must be questioned in terms of obedience and submission, especially when they run counter to Biblical righteousness. The primary responsibility of spiritual leadership, however, is to be executed at the local level of fellowship: Peter speaks of it as those who have been given the task of “watching over our souls”. In other words, those people whether they be a pastor or teacher or elder that have the most likely chance of speaking DIRECTLY into your life and your individual circumstance. A deacon body, for example, does not fall into this category in some denominations because of the nature of their role, which may be a voting body or a servant pool that accomplishes the work of the church. An elder body, in some other brands, would fit this role because of the spiritual authority they are given to exercise wisdom and answer questions of Biblical guidance over other believers.

Those in leadership would be best defined as that shepherd or group of people that have evidenced both an established history of spiritual wisdom and consistent living for Jesus. These are believers who do not necessarily have to carry an “official” title, but they carry spiritual credentials of trustworthiness, sound doctrine, demonstrated service, and godly character nonetheless. The title should be there to demonstrate that their qualities and spiritual maturity are recognized by all within the Body and that they are therefore entrusted with a level of authority that we would not normally let them exercise. For some of us, we may not have someone “over” us in spiritual authority because of the nature of our particular church structure. At a minimum, however, the shepherd of a local body of fellowship will have this level of authority. Let me clarify what I mean by submission at this level, however. Submission to those in leadership does not mean that they are “in control” of our lives. It is not the picture of someone exercising dictatorial control over our lives. In fact, that tends to be a trait of satan and his followers than for Christ and his followers. Submission, however, does mean that I give someone the right to correct, discipline, and rebuke me if I walk outside of the straight and narrow path that leads to life. It means that I give someone voluntarily the ability to speak into my life the Word of God and that as part of that relationship I agree to voluntarily submit my will to their wisdom and advice in matters of godliness and righteousness. This is what Biblical submission is all about. Peter said that those who are given the authority to exercise this type of leadership are under a greater accountability. In other words, watch out! If you walk in spiritual authority in any kind over other believers, DO NOT exercise that authority lightly! You will be held to a higher degree of judgment and you will give account for your abuse of that power.

Remember, those that exercise true spiritual leadership are those people in the Body who take watch over our souls. They ensure that we do not forget the hope of our calling, our forgiveness of sins, the commands of Scripture, the sovereignty of God, the grace of our Lord, the power of the Holy Spirit, the truth of God’s word, the

path of holiness, the crucifixion of our old nature with Jesus, our absolute victory over sin, and the form of doctrine that we are called to. They keep watch that we stay on the path of righteousness, the straight and narrow. They look to see that we give place to the authority of Scripture in our life in all matters that pertain to life and godliness. That is a spiritual leader's job. Whether that is a pastor or an elder or just a more mature believer in the Body, the point is that we ALL need to be subject to spiritual leadership of some sort! When it comes to matters of a local church, we need to submit ourselves to the pastor and ministerial staff so that they can see God's purpose fulfilled in our life. Be wise about this type of submission, but do not use "bad experiences" as an excuse to why you do not submit yourself to spiritual leadership.

There are many spiritual "Rambos" and spiritual "Long Rangers" out there in the Body today. They believe that they should not submit to anyone but Jesus. Friends, the Word of God, the Word of Jesus our Lord, commands us to submit gladly to spiritual leadership. If we do not submit to spiritual authority in men, then we are not submitting to the authority of Jesus. It is like saying that I love Jesus, but I do not love church people. That is a contradiction in terms. To love Jesus IS to love His Church. To love Jesus IS to love the Body that you are a part of! No man hates his own flesh. If you are part of the flesh and bone of Jesus, then you have no choice. You are OBLIGATED to love the brethren! You are likewise OBLIGATED to submit to proper spiritual leadership.

So much could be said about this particular area, but consider for right now that a good majority of our problems in the church come from a lack of submission. Peter said that those entrusted to spiritual leadership are given that job by God Himself. Those that are truly called and gifted to do it have a responsibility. They give account to God for that calling. Peter said that we should not make their job HARD. No one wants to exercise stern discipline. As a supervisor in the Air Force I have learned this. It is not fun to have to exercise discipline. As a parent, I am beginning to learn this. No one wants to spank their children. We discipline them because we love them and want them to grow up to be responsible citizens, productive members of society, and most of all submitted children to their Heavenly Father. That is what spiritual leadership is tasked to do and we are told to make their job easy so that they do not have more of a burden than is necessary. Do not bring grief to them brothers and sisters! Lack of submission to spiritual leaders is a true source of disease and decay in our members. We could avoid so many problems if we just followed this simple principle within the church. A carnal nature will not be submissive, however. The only thing a carnal nature is good for is crucifying! That is why carnality destroys the order and purpose God wants to achieve in His Church. Let us submit gladly to those given the job to watch over our souls—it is a job with great responsibility and great accountability.

The last level of submission flows directly from the second level. It is submission to ONE ANOTHER. All three levels build on each other. If we are not submitted to God first and foremost, we will refuse to be submitted to any form of spiritual leadership. If we are not submitted to spiritual leadership, we will see no need to submit to one another as brothers and sisters. They build on each other. Why are we to submit to one another? Out of reverence for Christ. Out of fear for God. In other words,

We do not submit to one another because we feel like it.

We do not submit to one another because we like each other.

We do not submit to one another because it benefits me.

We do not submit to one another because we are in agreement.

We do submit because we revere and honor Jesus Christ Himself.

It is the same reason why we pray for enemies and bless those who persecute us: Jesus wants us to do it so that He can bring glory to His name through us. There is then no excuse as to why we should not be seeking to lay our pride down in our dealings with other believers. The more mature believer is one who will yield and ask forgiveness FIRST.

Why is there disease in the Body?

We refuse to submit to one another.

Why is there disease in the Body?

We refuse to revere Christ.

Why is there disease in the Body?

We refuse to fear God.

You see, they are all equivalent.

We show reverence for Christ and fear for God when we voluntarily choose to submit to each other. A person who walks according to the Spirit does this gladly. The single biggest indication of Spirit filled living is submission. Read the context of Eph 5:21:

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. Eph 5:18-22

Do you see it? When we are controlled by the Spirit, we will evidence it 1) with our mouths and 2) by our submission. That is the evidence of being filled. Submission would cure so many illnesses and diseases in the Body. How we submit to one another is a matter that you need to determine on your own and work out in your

own situation. Suffice to say, the Holy Spirit will show you if you will let Him. Submission naturally leads into our next principle:

Prescription 4: Servanthood

How do we avoid selfishness? It is actually very simple. The energy that we spend on satisfying ourselves is to be redirected. Instead of that energy being focused on us, it is to be directed towards others, whether they be our family or fellow believers. Consider God's word on this matter:

*For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love **serve** one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Gal 5:13-14*

Servants in those days were more akin to slaves. In fact, the word *douleuo* means to be a slave or to do service. I am reminded that at our service academies (like Westpoint and Annapolis), freshmen during their first year there are referred to with some very unusual names. At the Air Force Academy, freshmen are known as "Doolies", which is derived from the same Greek word *douleuo*. This is because for the entire first year you are basically at the mercy of your upperclassmen and their demands. You are in essence a slave. This system is designed to teach future officers that in order to be a good leader, you must first be a good follower. It is a painful process, but when it is all over you will hopefully be able to lead others better because you have "been there". Whereas submission has more to do with voluntary obedience, servanthood has more to do with voluntarily providing a service for another. It is looking to see what I can do for someone else. It is not only looking for the opportunity, but taking it. Consider our Lord and the command we have to follow His example:

*Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a **servant**, being made in human likeness. Phil 2:4-7*

If God had just considered His own interests, man would still be lost. God would have never taken on human flesh. He would have just stayed in Heaven and said, "You created that hell down there by your own choice and your own actions, so now live with it!" Thankfully, He is not that kind of God. Thankfully, He considered you and I and our separation from Him. He loved us so much that He chose to take on the role of a servant. You see, servanthood is the expression of love. If we say we love Jesus, we will become His servant. We will be a love-slave. We will gladly obey Him as our master and gladly give up anything He wants us to.

We will gladly acknowledge that He knows best and accept His judgments without reservation. That is the epitome of a servant. A slave does not have rights; he only has an obligation. A slave who chooses to become one voluntarily, in other words, a slave who volunteers to stay with his master even after he is released, will obey and serve his master out of a heart of love for him and not out of a sense of fear or bondage. That is a bond-servant. It is voluntarily giving up all that we are because we love our master that much. Jesus took on the lowly role of a servant in order that we could know God as our Father! What a powerful story. He took on the role that would bring shame, disgrace, public scrutiny, pain, torture, and eventually death. That was God's expression of how much He would do for us, just so we could be with Him forever! If you ever doubt God's love for you, look at the cross. It serves as the eternal reminder that God loves you individually.

Consider also another crucial and important dynamic element of service. Power flows out of service:

"Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen, my Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased! I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He will declare justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench, till He sends forth justice to victory; And in His name Gentiles will trust." Isa 42:1-3

God is pleased with servanthood. That is why the Father spoke twice with an audible voice from heaven concerning His Son. Once was at the beginning of Jesus ministry when He came right out and said "This IS my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He gave approval to the first 30 years of Jesus' life. If Jesus had not been sinless, the Father would NOT have made this statement. The next time we hear God's voice (apart from the more private transfiguration meeting), the Father publicly gave approval to the three year's of Jesus' ministry and His continued sinlessness. "Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." (John 12:28) Jesus glorified the name of Father by His life and His death. In all things, the food of Jesus was to do the will of His Father. Notice that the Servant in whom God is pleased 1) has the anointing of Spirit upon his life; 2) declares justice (the gospel) to the lost; 3) does not quarrel or cry out (does not seek for the limelight) 4) is not heard and received by everyone (and does not get mad about it); 5) does not break a bruised reed (does not kick someone when they are down); 6) does not quench a smoking flax (always gives hope that God can restore and bring back what was once lost); and 7) acts justly and leads others to victory by his service.

If we want power, the endowment of God's Spirit upon us, to reach the lost and to make a difference in God's kingdom, then we must take on the role of a servant. Service is the fuel that the fire of the Holy Spirit burns in our life. When I

was a Sunday School teacher a few years back, the Lord showed me that the anointing to teach others is magnified and sustained by my service towards the people I teach. I had to be willing to see them not as people that I expounded Scriptural truth to, but as people who were there for me to serve. This concept would put such a new face on ministry within the church. I am learning that “servant evangelism” is the method of reaching people that Jesus used Himself. Remember the story of the five loaves and the one of the seven loaves? Jesus practically demonstrated God’s supernatural power while caring for the real needs that people had. At a minimum, if you were there as a participant in that miracle, all you got was some bread. Bread is pretty common and ordinary, unless you are hungry and starving. Then bread becomes “something” extraordinary. That is our goal in this life: to meet the needs of others in practical ways so that an ordinary thing can become an opportunity for God’s extraordinary power to enter in.

If God Almighty was willing to take on the role of a servant so that we could be reconciled to Him, then how much more should we be willing to be a servant to one another in the Body so that others will know the love of God. It is hard to bite and devour someone that you are being a servant to. Did you know that? It’s true. If I am busy serving you, I will hardly find the time to stab you in the back with my words, be jealous over your position, or hold bitterness in my heart towards you. If I am busy thinking of ways to serve you, I will hardly have time to think of ways I don’t like you. That is how servanthood works. When Jesus fulfilled the ultimate role of His service on the cross, did He look down and say, “Father strike them down dead for their audacity to crucify me, the King of Kings, their own Messiah!” No. Instead, we hear, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” That is the dynamic released when we serve one another. It is another healing balm that can be used within the Body to keep the unity of the Spirit and fight off disease. We are told to submit to one another out of fear for God. We are also told to serve one another out of love for Jesus. Have you ever considered the “one another” verse in the Scriptures? If we were to obey them, we would be so busy loving each other that we would hardly find time to be divided against each other. Servanthood will encourage and facilitate a unity of mind. Coming to unity of the faith comes more by what we DO for each other than by what we agree on. Think about that for minute. I want to close this principle by giving you what God’s word says we need to be doing in relation to each other. If we will do these things, there will be a balm of healing in the Body of Christ as we have never seen before:

The One Another’s

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. John 13:34

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; Rom 12:10

Be of the same mind toward one another. *Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.* Rom 12:16

Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way. Rom 14:13

Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Rom 15:5-6

Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God. Rom 15:7

Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. Rom 15:14

Greet one another with a holy kiss. Rom 16:16

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. Eph 4:1-3

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you. Eph 4:32

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. Col 3:12-13

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. Col 3:16

Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing. 1Thes 5:11

But exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Heb 3:13

*And let us **consider one another in order to stir up love and good works**, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. Heb 10:24-25*

***Do not speak evil of one another, brethren.** He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. James 4:11*

***Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.** The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. James 5:16*

*Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, **love one another fervently with a pure heart.** 1 Pet 1:22*

*Finally, all of you be of one mind, **having compassion for one another**; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. 1 Pet 3:8-9*

*And above all things **have fervent love for one another**, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." **Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.** 1 Pet 4:8-9*

*As each one has received a gift, **minister it to one another**, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 1 Pet 4:10*

*Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you **be submissive to one another**, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." 1 Pet 5:5*

If we will just follow God's word in relation to one another in the Body, no matter what race, denomination, sex, creed, doctrinal persuasion, or distinction that separates us, we will see a Body of Christ that functions in health.

I hope it has become crystal clear how our Commander in Chief wants us to address the disease that we find in His ranks. These four principles are a good beginning, although I realize there are other principles just as worthy. These four seem to flow together:

God's Wisdom

Humility Submission Servanthood

If I walk in Godly wisdom and not in man's, I will be humble. An attitude of humility will birth two children: submission and servanthood. *"But wisdom is justified by all her children."* (Luke 7:35) One principle really overlays all of these: love. It is the circle that bonds them all together, and it is the bond of love in unity that identifies us as disciples of Jesus. If love is the "wrapping", then forgiveness I believe is the "bow" that sits on top. Forgiveness deserves its place as an overriding principle of disease prevention on its own. It is the "activator" so to speak. Forgiveness is what frees all these principles to operate in us. Unforgiveness will block God's power at work in us quicker than anything I know. If all these principles may seem a little hard to implement in your personal situation right now, the ONE thing that you can do is forgive. It is the easiest place to start and probably the most logical entrance for God's healing. Forgiveness will cover over a multitude of problems and cure a number of our ailments in the Body. May the Holy Spirit lead us into this attitude across the entire Body, in every denomination, across all sectors, and within the heart of every true believer.



We are at a turning part here. Like I said, I would not want to discuss doctrinal issues without first giving the Holy Spirit a chance to address the root issues of our divisions, bickering, dissensions, and hostilities. We now take a step forward into thoughts about doctrine and Scriptural viewpoints. Let us keep in mind the lessons we have learned as we turn our attention now toward the scripture. More importantly, I want to first turn your eyes to the God of scripture. He is indeed, a God of incomprehensibility. Let us approach His throne with caution, for in many ways to our human minds, He can appear to be the God of Opposites. Let us first before considering this proposition turn our eyes to the subject of doctrine in general. Let's try to understand what role doctrine should and shouldn't play in our Christian life and the true purpose that it is to serve in our practical affairs. Let's also turn our eyes to the source and basis in our belief of God: the Bible. Let's first establish our foundation and the structural blueprint for our building. We are going to build a lot of things on this foundation, so I want to make sure in your own mind that you believe it to be a rock solid foundation. If you don't think that right now, I pray the Holy Spirit will show you otherwise. We are building a house on this foundation, divided though it may be, where there is room for you and room for me. Let's press on

Holding Fast the Word of Life

Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain. Phil 2:14-16

Of any place to start in doctrinal discussions, it is very important to understand what degree of value and importance we place on the Bible. This determines to a large degree the scope and depth of understanding we will receive from its study. It also determines our ability to receive what God has for us in this life. To the degree that we treat the Bible like any other book on our bookshelf we will find that the Christian life will have no meaning, no significance, and certainly no power. To the degree that we compare and hold the Bible equal to other “inspired” works of religious doctrine and philosophical writings we will find that the person of Jesus Christ does not compel us in any way other than just “one of the great teachers of all time.” To the degree that we would question the authority of the Bible over our lives we will find a corresponding lack of direction, a sense of continual seeking, a yearning in unfulfilled desire, and a mind ruled by uncontrolled thoughts. Sooner or later, a true disciple of Jesus Christ will be confronted by His Word. The ultimate questions He would ask us concerning the Bible are “Does it settle all issues of faith, doctrine, teaching, and ultimate truth in your life? Have you continued in My Word, and so proved to be my disciple?” We can only answer that in our own personal walk with Him. For certain, however, only those who hold the Bible as the lampstand of faith, the guidebook for living, and the bulwark of truth should expect to be called a “disciple” of Jesus. Discipleship in Jesus’ mind constituted a following, a continuance, in His Word and teaching:

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. John 8:31

To the degree that we will hold fast this word, or *apply* it as the Greek interpretation would suggest, we will shine in this world as sons of God. To the degree that we will read, study, hear, teach, proclaim, apply, live, and walk in the world of LIFE we will LIVE above and beyond the NORMAL human existence. That is what it means to be a child of God: we are called to a higher form of living and existence, one that involves the knowledge of God Himself. We are called to stand out in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. To the degree that we will become serious students of the Word we will find not only the promise of this LIFE that is above-average, super-natural, more-than-overcoming, extra-ordinary, God-filled, and peace-full, we will also find the Person who will give us the power of this promise fulfilled.

When we hold the word of *life* fast, the Spirit of *Life* will rule and reign in our inner being unhindered. He will have control of our life to the degree that we will allow the Word to wash us and cleanse us. That means subjecting every thought, deed, motive, act, word, and plan to the washing power of that Word as the Spirit breathes life on it. So let us consider this word of life just briefly. After all, it is our foundation. If it be not a good foundation, friends, we are all people most to be pitied. In fact I am plain crazy. If the merchandise is not what it claims to be, we are all strongly deluded and we are deluding the world with our message. It is true of Jesus the same way: if He was not WHO He said He was, He was either a lunatic or a horrible liar! There is no other way around it. He removed all other options. The Bible does the same. It removes all other options concerning itself: It is either what it claims to be or it is the “best-selling” fraud and the biggest lie every perpetuated through history as the “truth”. Paul said that he wanted to rejoice in the day of Christ, knowing that he did not run the race in vain. He wanted to hold out the word of life. If Paul knew this word was not “THE” truth, he would have indeed spent his life in vain. Paul knew better, though. He knew the confirmation of this word. The power of God confirms this word; history confirms this word; archaeology confirms this word; the world as we see it today confirms this word; science confirms this word (boy, would I love to talk about that lie of evolution here. . .); fulfilled prophecy confirms this word; your own heart will confirm this word if you will let it. There is indeed a witness to be heard. Will you hear it? That is the question.

The Witness of the Bible to Itself

The word Bible means “The Book”. It is a humorous commentary that God Himself would capture the market on the use of this word when it came down to the name for His inspired book, the Bible. Much like the use of the word “Kleenex”, all tissues are called “Kleenex” even though they are not the brand name “Kleenex”. The Bible of itself is called and recognized by many names. Let’s take a quick survey:

The Bible Speaks About the Bible

Psalms 40:7

*Then I said, “Behold, I come; in the scroll of **the book** it is written of me.*

- Rev 22:19 *and if anyone takes away from the words of **the book of this prophecy**, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.*
- Isa 34:16 *"Search from **the book of the LORD**, and read: not one of these shall fail; not one shall lack her mate. For My mouth has commanded it, and His Spirit has gathered them.*
- Nehemiah 8:3 *. . . and the ears of all the people were attentive to **the Book of the Law**.*
- Gal 3:10 *. . . "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in **the book of the law**, to do them."*
- Heb 6:5 *and have tasted **the good word of God** . . .*
- Romans 1:2 *which He promised before through His prophets in **the Holy Scriptures**,*
- 2 Tim 3:15 *and that from childhood you have known **the Holy Scriptures**, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*
- Psalms 1:2 *But his delight is in **the law of the LORD**, and in **His law** he meditates day and night.*
- Romans 3:2 *. . . to them were committed **the oracles of God**.*
- 1 Cor 15:3 *For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to **the Scriptures**,*
- Dan 10:21 *"But I will tell you what is noted in **the Scripture of Truth**. . .*
- Eph 6:17 *And take the helmet of salvation, and **the sword of the Spirit**, which is the word of God. . .*
- James 1:21-23 *Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted **word**, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the **word**, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror;*
- 1 Pet 2:2 *as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the **word**, that you may grow thereby,*
- Luke 11:28 *But He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the **word of God** and keep it!"*
- Heb 4:12 *For the **word of God** is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*
- Col 3:16 *Let the **word of Christ** dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*
- Phil 2:16 *holding fast the **word of life**, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.*
- 2 Tim 2:15 *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the **word of truth**.*
- James 1:18 *Of His own will He brought us forth by the **word of truth**, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures*

Each of these titles is revealing, just as every name and title of God in the Bible is meant to show us a picture of Who God is. Consider what these titles suggest to us.

It is a “book” and “THE” book, first of all, meaning something written by man, and something higher than all other books ever written.

It will show us things that have happened and things yet to come (book of this prophecy).

It shows us the moral nature of God, the Author. (the Book of the Law).

It is good, as all things that come from God are good for us! (the good Word of God)

Holy in its root meaning is ‘set apart’. The Bible is set apart from every other book or canon or collection or writings in the world, thus they are known as the *Holy* Scriptures.

It is through this book alone that we can find the pronouncements of the Lord’s righteous standard, His Law. (the Law of the Lord).

This book, though “written by men”, is “spoken by God”. It is God-breathed. (the Oracles of God).

This book is the Scriptures by which we find divine Truth. (the word of Truth, the Scripture of Truth)

It is a Sword meant to cut away the sin of our soul and works of our flesh through the power of the Holy Spirit (the Sword of the Spirit).

It is a binding oath that God has freely given to us: in other words, it is HIS Word.

It represents the very pronouncement of God. (the Oracles of God).

It speaks of the human Messiah, the Christ, who has ALL authority and power over His fellow brothers and sisters and IS the exact image of God. (The Word of Christ)

It is the source and ultimate authority concerning Life and Truth. (the word of life)

We can see even from its own pages, the Bible reveals a picture of what its Author has intended it to be: **the source of ultimate truth.**

There are several principles that we should keep in mind based on this premise. The premise is that what the Bible says about itself is TRUE. This itself is based on a causal chain of events. God spoke over history and established the canon and entirety of the Old Testament. He preserved the very lives of the race of people that transmitted these oracles to us throughout history (the Jewish

nation). Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning God's ultimate and final revelation of Himself, the Messiah, pointed to the validity of the Old Testament canon. The New Testament, on the other hand, was composed of only those letters penned directly by one of the original Twelve Apostles called by Jesus, to include Saul of Tarsus, or a letter that received apostolic approval as a divinely inspired writing. The canon was to be closed after the original apostles had died out. This is not to say that there were not others then or even today who are called to the office of apostle; it just means that the approval of "canonical" writings which would form the New Testament passed away with the death of John on the isle of Patmos as the last of the original apostles. Let's take a look at each one of these principles now. Most of these principles are almost universally accepted across the Body of Christ by those who are truly born of the Spirit of God and are therefore a disciple of Jesus Christ. These principles are the foundation of everything you and I should believe:

Principle 1: The Bible does not merely contain the Word of God, but rather it IS the Word of God in its sum and in its parts.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness 2 Tim 3:16

The *all* of Scripture refers to the totality of scripture, to include the Old and New Testament. Paul says that they were "God-breathed", given by inspiration. The Greek word for inspiration, *theopneustos*, refers to the source of the whole Bible as being beyond or above human inspiration. Men were used, yes. But they were not the originating "source".

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. 2 Pet 1:20-21

None of Scripture came from the opinion of the writers. . . each writer involved in the production of scripture was "borne along" by the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that the writer was a robot whose intellect and sensitivity was overridden by God the Holy Spirit. Writer's were not seized upon by God's power to write without their conscience participation. It is a picture of a leaf being picked up by the wind and blown along. As the Spirit moved men, just like a leaf being moved by a gust of wind, they wrote exactly what God wanted them to write. That is precisely how Jesus described the operation of the Holy Spirit:

"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." John 3:8

There are many New Age "writers" who become possessed by a demonic spirit in order to pen words of revelation. Some of these are known as "channelers" or "automatic writers." Let me point out that in these cases, full control of someone's body is used to produce the "revelation". That is the difference between satan and the Spirit of God. Whereas satan and his co-horts will seek to CONTROL every aspect of the human will that is yielded to them, God's Spirit seeks to move men to USE their will in accordance to His leading and direction. One is DICTATORIAL. The other is PARTICIPATORY. Please notice as well the *source* makes all the difference in the world. There are many "divine" revelations supposedly that are floating around out there today. Some may come from "enlightened beings", "ascended masters", "extraterrestrial messengers", "angelic host", "golden tablets", or "visions" just to name a few.

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. Gal 1:6-9

One of the most advertised and promulgated religious writings today are those of the LDS (Latter Day Saint) church, to include the Book of Mormon. This book and those who promote it are not abashed at all to say that it is "Another Testament of Jesus Christ". Paul said specifically that we are to examine carefully ANYTHING that claims to be "another" or "different". What makes this so amazing is that the Apostle Paul even said that if *they*, meaning the apostles themselves, presented something different than what they had already said, the Galatians were warned to ignore it! Paul went even so far as to say if a person (like Joseph Smith or Mohammed, for example) or an angel from heaven (like the angel "Moroni" for example), preach any OTHER gospel, that they should be accursed. Muslims and Mormons have a lot in common, believe it or not. Both religions acknowledge Jesus to some degree or another, believe sin is wrong, and believe in the supernatural aspect of the universe.. They both have a "prophet", who in both cases received an "up-to-date" revelation from God. Mohammed's "revelation" was recorded in the Qur'an, Joseph Smith's was recorded in several books, with the Book of Mormon being the most notable. In both cases, the more "current" revelation was to take "authority" or precedence over the Bible. You see, both Muslims and Mormons hold that the

Bible is part of their “scripture”. They will pay lip service to it, but of course the writings of “their” prophet are to take precedence, even in cases where they conflict with one another. Friends, this is expressly where Paul said, if ANYONE presents anything CONTRARY to what you have received, then do not TRUST them. The Muslim “gospel” denies that Jesus was the Son of God. The Mormon “gospel” denies that Jesus is the ONLY Son of God. Both “gospels” require belief in the “prophet” of their religion as a REQUIREMENT for gaining entrance into heaven and both “gospels” base entrance into heaven on the good works of its followers, not the shed blood of Jesus. I could go on in listing differences, but I think you get the point.

One of the biggest indications that the Mormon writings, for example, are not authoritative and of divine origin comes from the fact that Joseph Smith was not “moved” by the Holy Spirit when he wrote them.. Those writings were not “God-breathed”, as even the author, Joseph Smith, will admit. In fact, they were the result of an angelic visitation. By his own account, the Book of Mormon was “translated” from “golden plates” by using a “Urim and Thummim”, a decoder of sorts. Smith claims that this mechanical translation was the “gift and power” of God. What is even more amazing is that Mormons accept this book as equal to and above the Bible (“it is the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book”) even though its first edition published in 1830 has passages that are omitted, rewritten, and added in the modern edition. There are many great books that deal with the errors inherent in Mormonism, but I bring this up to illustrate a point: the Book of Mormon, along with the Qur’an, the Talmud, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Vinaya Pitaka, the Vedas, the Ramayana, the Nihongi, the Tao Te King, and the Five Classics (just to name a few) all have this in common: they contain true statements about God. The Book of Mormon, which surprised me when I first read it, teaches that there is only one God, that God the Father and God the Son have been eternally God, that God is unchanging, and that God is spirit (just to name a few). Most Mormons in fact do not realize that their own religion’s beliefs contradict things that are found in their own writings!

However, just because they contain true statements about God, that is not the same as saying these books or writing are the “Word of God”. In fact, without having an objective standard to measure them by, any revelation from the spiritual realm could be considered the “word of God”. By the way, that (anything of the spirit is good, therefore all supernatural revelation must be good) is one of the basic tenets of Gnosticism, another New Testament heresy that the apostles spent much energy and time dealing with and writing about.. Do you see why from a practical level you need to accept and believe the Bible as the Word of God, and not just a book that contains the word of God?

But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

1 Cor 2:10-13

Even the words used in the giving of the Bible (not just the ideas, but the precise terminology) were planned by the Holy Spirit. As writers compared “spiritual things to spiritual”, they literally matched spiritual thoughts to spiritual words, both given by the Holy Spirit. The technical term for this is known as the **PLENARY VERBAL INSPIRATION** of the Scriptures which states that EVERY WORD is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Friends, if this is not true, we should just toss the Bible. Why is plenary verbal inspiration such a big deal? Because without it, the Bible is just an ordinary book full of the wisdom of man. I can get the wisdom of man from any number of millions of sources. Just go to Barnes and Noble and see what I mean. Who wants to settle for coal when you could have a diamond, though? That is our first principle: plenary verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. Let’s look at our second principle now.

Principle 2: There is an absolute, complete, and entire trustworthiness of the Holy Scriptures which constitute the Bible.

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.
Psalms 19:7

The Word of God is *perfect* in its accuracy and sure in its *dependability*. Two terms are generally used to describe this.

The first term is *inerrant* (perfect) and means there was no error or mistake in the original copy of each manuscript written by each Bible book’s respective author. The Holy Spirit has also strived to protect the transmission of the Scriptures down through time. . . the Bible itself is the most completely reliable of any book transmitted from antiquity, in terms of its actually remaining unchanged and dependably accurate. *Transmission* has to do with how the scriptures were handled from the time of their writing to how they have been copied and reproduced over time and passed down to us from history. Transmission is the topic of a much more in-depth study on its own, and I would recommend any academic study on Biblical translation and text transmission as a further reading.

The second term concerning God's word is *infallible*. It means that the Bible is un failing as an absolute trustworthy guide for our faith (belief in God) and practice (life and behavior). We can say the Bible is infallible because of three reasons:

Three Reasons Why The Bible is Infallible

Reason 1: God is true.

"He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true."

John 3:33

"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

John 17:3

Reason 2: His Word reveals His truth.

"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."

John 17:17

Reason 3: God cannot lie.

"God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent.. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"

Numbers 23:19

"In hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began. "

Titus 1:2

"That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us."

Heb 6:18

Not only are the scriptures inspired, but they are trustworthy. Let's look at our third principle now.

Principle 3: The content of God's word is complete.

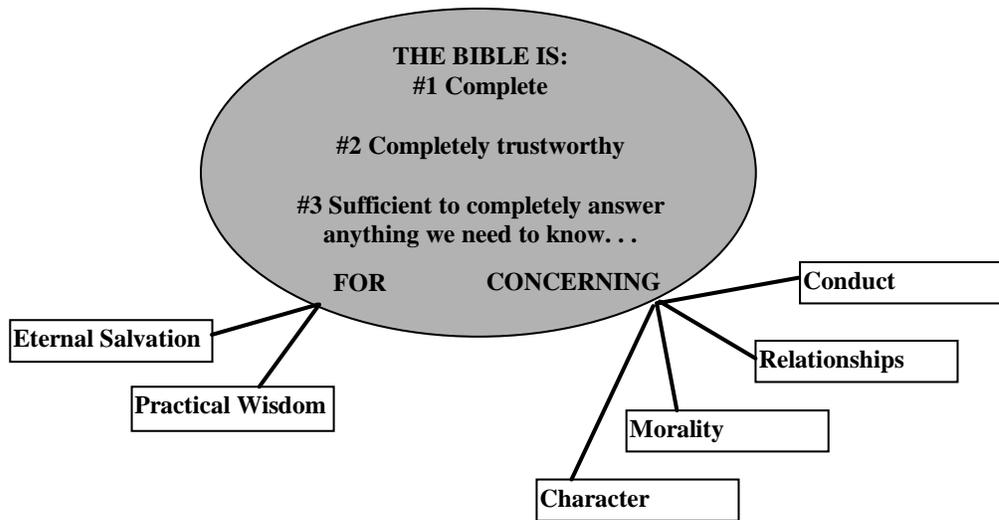
Every word of God is pure; he is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar. Prov 30:5-6

The word “canon” is the term used to describe the completed number of the books of the Bible- the CLOSED canon of the 66 books of the Holy Scriptures. It is derived from ancient words meaning “measuring stick”, and is applied to designate those books that meet the requirements of being acknowledged as divinely inspired. There are other scholarly and academic works which cover more in-depth the topic of how the canon was composed in addition to the actual transmission of scripture manuscripts.

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book;
Rev 22:18

Do not add or subtract from God’s word, period. Don’t mess around with it. The ending of Revelation, which has been situated at the very end of the Scriptures themselves, lays a strict warning about this. “Add to or subtract from the Bible at your own risk.” There is a classic study of the judgment for “taking away from” God’s word found in Jeremiah 36:20-32. The judgment on Jehoiakim was very harsh: for his attempt to destroy or take away the Word of the Lord, he was ordained to have no one sit on the throne of David. Him and his entire family would be punished severely for his arrogance and defiance. Even Jerusalem and Judah will suffer the doom that was pronounced.

In understanding terms, the “revelation of the Scriptures” should be defined exactly. There is a vast difference between a revelation (which is an insight, thought, or an idea that may be of God, of man, or of the devil) and **the revelation of God**, which is in the closed cannon of the Scriptures. Many books claim to be of divine origin. Many people believe that even the divine books themselves contain errors and additions. A casual or gullible attitude about this can easily lead to confusion and eventually destruction. Even in Jesus’ time, several books held by some today to be intended for the OT were in existence then. Yet, in the 64 times Jesus quotes from the OT, not once does He quote from any of these books.



Principle 4: Jesus and the Holy Scriptures.

*"And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for **one tittle** of the law to fail." **Luke 16:17***

*"For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, **one jot** or **one tittle** will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled." **Matt 5:18***

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself, our resurrected King, God's Messiah, and our Savior, has given the most important statements concerning the Word of God and its nature.

Jesus confirms the truth that every word of the scriptures is given by God. He goes so far as to make direct reference to the smallest letter ("jot", literally yod, the Hebrew counterpart to our letter "i" or "j"), and the smallest punctuation point ("tittle", which in the Greek means little horn or extremity, point) used by Greek grammarians of the accents and diacritical points. It means the little lines or projections by which the Hebrew letters, in other respects similar, differ from each other, as c and h, r and d, b and k. The meaning is that not even the minutest part of the law shall perish.

Jesus believed and taught the plenary verbal inspiration of the Bible.—that every word is God-breathed as 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us.

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away,

*one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. **Matt 5:17-19***

Jesus also contends that every truth the Bible teaches is to be held inviolable. He insists here that anyone who teaches anything running at cross-purposes to the Scriptures is not in harmony with his Kingdom order.

*If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken) **John 10:35***

The statement that Scripture cannot be broken is a literal description of the inviolability of God's word from man's side (do not try to diminish its truth or meaning) and the utter dependability of it from God's side (He will uphold it—His word will not dissolve or be shaken.)

*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. **Matt 24:35***

All creation may dissolve but God's word will stand forever!

*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. **John 5:39***

Jesus affirms the credibility of the Old Testament.

Jesus also affirms the miracles of the OT: He did not look upon them as superstitions. He was the Incarnate Truth; His testimony is the embodiment of truthfulness. His testimony is decisive. Note the following biblical records which Jesus affirmed the truthfulness and historicity of.

<i>Adam and Eve as the first pair</i>	Matt 19:4-5	And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' "and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?"
<i>The literal destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah</i>	Mark 6:11	"And whoever will not receive you nor hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than

		for that city!"
	Luke 17:29-30	"but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. "Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed
<i>The actuality of Noah's flood.</i>	Matt 24:37-38	"But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. "For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,
<i>The trustworthiness of Daniel's prophecy</i>	Matt 24:15	"Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand)
<i>The truth of Jonah being swallowed by a great fish</i>	Matt 12:39-40	But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.
<i>The miracles of manna and other wilderness experiences with Moses</i>	John 3:14	"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,
	John 6:31-32	"Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.
<i>Jesus forecasted and authorized the writing of the NT Scriptures.</i>	John 14:26	"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you
	John 16:12-13	"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will

		tell you things to come.
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What is the whole point here? In our intellectualized world and our secular society, belief in the trustworthiness of the Bible has taken some blows over the years. Even so, the church has become infected with a disbelief in the Scriptures as well. However that is what I term “**secular disbelief**”. Just plain out denying the infallibility and inspiration of the Scriptures to begin with. Once you do that, it certainly makes room for “other” spiritual revelation and writings. It even opens up room for modern day revelation from the spiritual realms of darkness as well.

The father of lies is still lying to people today through some so-called “modern” day techniques that are really just a revival of “ancient” practices of paganism. Yoga, channeling, crystals, worship of angels, tarot cards, psychic hotlines, palm readers, witchcraft, mediums: you will encounter one or all of these on any week day night, right in your own home— just turn on your TV and see what I mean. Although the TV show “Touched By an Angel” is the closest thing to the gospel we have on TV, angels are not the “messengers” that are tasked with the presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We, the Church of the Living God, are the intended messengers of the Gospel and the ones who have been given the keys of the kingdom of heaven, with the power to both loose and bind here on earth. I am still amazed at a modern day resurgent interest in “spiritual” activity. TV shows and movies are regularly presenting topics such as witchcraft, spiritism, voodoo, satanism, meditation, enlightenment, spirit guides, and actual demon possession as “cool”. Networks like Warner Brothers and Fox have been fairly unashamed at promoting shows that have occultic and supernatural overtones.

I mention these things to say this: we are spiritual beings and we have a deep hunger within us to touch the spiritual realm. The Word of God, the Bible, is the only trustworthy guide that tells us how we can contact and enjoy the fellowship of the greatest supernatural being there is: God Almighty. He has put a hunger for Himself within us all. In our modern day, this has been used by the prince of darkness to entice people into a hunger for the “supernatural” and the “spiritual”, apart from a hunger for the Living God of all creation. It’s the same trick the kingdom of darkness uses in regard to sex. It promotes and makes sex look so good and satisfying and desirable; however, satan knows that our sexual drive can only be satisfied fully in the context of marriage between one man and one woman, that God created and ordained as the vehicle of sexual fulfillment. However, he has stirred the sexual appetite of our society to such a degree that we can’t even advertise shampoo without using an orgasm as backdrop. The same goes for spirituality. Every other attempt to touch the “spiritual” world and satisfy our thirst apart from the truth of the Bible and a

personal relationship with Jesus Christ is going to lead to destruction and our deception.

The story of Jesus and the disciples on the road to Emmaus I believe sums up best what we can expect in the experience of God if we come the way God has ordained:

Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him. And He said to them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?" Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, "Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?" And He said to them, "What things?" So they said to Him, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see." Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them. Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the

Scriptures to us?" So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread. Luke 24:13-35

Do you open the Word of God expecting to meet with a person? If not, maybe you should learn from these disciples. This account is for any of us who wants a deeper understanding and walk with God: come to God's Word expecting to meet Him, and constrain Him to come and stay until the Holy Spirit breathes life on the very words you are reading. The Holy Spirit has been given to us so that we may understand the "deep things of God", without having to have a seminary degree by the way. If the Word of God is only a proof text, or an assigned reading chore you do every day, then it will soon become boring and you are likely to lose interest. If you actually *believed* that as you opened God's word every day that He Himself draws near to you (just as He came up along side of those disciples on the road to Jerusalem), wouldn't you make TIME in your schedule to meet with the King and Sovereign of the Universe?? If you actually expected Jesus to come and open up the scriptures to you, so that you could see Him, just as He did those disciples, wouldn't your whole perspective of the Bible be radically different?? The Word of God is our strength, and it keeps us honest with ourselves and God. The disciples were SLOW of heart to believe what Jesus had already said would happen. We can also be slow of heart to believe the promises that are found in the Word of God as well. Not only that... we can be slow of heart to believe that God will act in the same way, today, in our situation, from what we read in the very pages.

Outright denial of the Bible as the Word of God is again what I term **secular disbelief**. While many in the walls of what we call the "church" in America can be guilty of this form of unbelief, I want to briefly mention another form of disbelief that conservative, evangelical, Bible-believing Christians can be guilty of: **spiritual disbelief**. Whereas secular disbelief attacks whether the Bible is trustworthy and reliable, spiritual disbelief accepts the inerrancy of the Scriptures and the absolute authority of the Scriptures as the Word of God. My definition of spiritual disbelief is believing in the Word of God without believing in the God of the Word. Jesus said that the Scriptures are there to bear witness to Him. We can believe in the miracles of the Bible, from the parting of Red Sea to Elijah calling fire down from heaven, and still be guilty of spiritual disbelief. A large portion of conservative, evangelical Christianity in America sits in this category.

How?

The same way that the Pharisees of Jesus' day could probably quote every Messianic prophecy in the Bible of their day (the Law, the Writings, and the Prophets, which is our Old Testament) and yet be stooped in disbelief when the Messiah walked in their midst. They were guilty of spiritual disbelief.

Likewise, a Bible-believing Christian can read the supernatural accounts of God's miraculous dealing with people all throughout the Bible and all throughout history, and never expect or look for or even believe that God will do the SAME things TODAY. The Pharisees of Jesus day believed in a Messiah... they just did not believe that Jesus fulfilled their interpretation of what the Messiah should be; they never expected or believed that the Messiah would visit THEM, nor that He would come in THEIR time. They effectively denied the Scriptures by their unbelief. The Pharisees of the modern church age are much the same. They can read of the promise of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on all flesh, read of the day of Pentecost, read of the exploits of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts, and then stare and stand in unbelief when the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our modern day does not fit their interpretation of how the Holy Spirit should be poured out "biblically". Friends, if an experience of God is commonly found in Scripture, yet it is not a part of our experience, then something might be wrong with our experience. Names were given to God in the Bible in response to the experiences people had with God, not in response to something they read about Him in a Sunday School lesson book or a commentary on the Scriptures. They didn't even have Hebrew Radio stations that told them what God was like.

Do you know God as your Provider, your Healer, your Sanctifier, your Redeemer, your Righteousness, your Peace, your Banner, your Shepherd, or your ever present Friend??

Do you have experience of Him as an all-consuming Fire, the Oil of Joy, the Well of Life, the River of Living Water, or the Seal of Righteousness?

Can you say that God has been your Shield, your Counselor, your Prince of Peace, your Governor, your All-Sufficiency??

Unless you have *experienced* something in your life where God has shown Himself to be one of these to you personally, it is hard for you to believe that He is actually all of these and more. I can tell you till I am blue in the face that God is Your Healer, Jehovah Rapha. I didn't come up with this name... this is what the Word of God tells us. In fact, I could explain all about the doctrine of healing and its availability through the cross of Christ and spend a lot of time trying to convince you that this is what the Bible says. You may even believe that God's word does call Him Jehovah Rapha, God our Healer. However, unless you have experienced or seen God heal on your behalf or someone that

you love, we are more likely to see God as “God the Healer of other People, but Not Me” or “God My Healer, But Only If It Is His Will, Which I Can’t Be Sure Of”. I’m not trying to make a case that God heals in every circumstance.. please understand. However, you can not likely refer to Him with great confidence and absolute assurance as God My Healer, unless you have *experienced* His healing.

Do you see the importance of experience?

Do you see how :”spiritual unbelief” in the God of the Word is equivalent to “secular unbelief” in the Word of God??

What difference does it make if I believe the Bible is inerrant if I don’t believe that the God who acted in the Bible will act on my behalf in the same way?? Salvation hinges upon our belief that God will save us the same way He saved Saul of Tarsus, the thief on the cross, the Peter who denied Jesus three times, and a doubting Thomas.

Holding fast the word of Life involves not only having correct belief based on the Word of God, but it also invites us to have correct experience with the God of the Word. The Bible was not written primarily as a book of doctrine and law... it was written as an ACCOUNT. It was the account of Adam and Eve being kicked out Eden, the account of Noah and the flood, the account of Abraham offering up his son, the account of the sufferings of Job, the account of David being a man after God’s own heart, the account of Daniel in the lion’s den, the account of Nehemiah rebuilding the wall. It was the account of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil. It was the account of what John saw when he went into heaven. It was the account of how the Holy Spirit acted in the early days of the church, through Paul, Peter, Stephen, and Phillip.

*The former **account** I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to **do** and **teach** Acts 1:1*

Do you begin to see the picture here?

Sure, the Bible is full of doctrine and laws, and codes of conducts, positive commands and negative commands, and clear statements about the character of God. But most importantly, it relates human *experience* with the Almighty God. It is important for us to realize that Jesus *did* as well as *taught*. The Holy Spirit wants you to know that He desires you to experience the words of Scripture as well as know them. He wants you to do the will of God as well as know it. He wants you to experience the love of God, as well as quote it from John 3:16..

The Bible is a book of principle as well as a book of law. When we see it only as a book of law, we can become hard, bitter people who completely exclude the working of the Holy Spirit and His ability to breathe on those words and illuminate our understanding. Two major forms of heresy existed in the New Testament: gnosticism and pharasaism (or legalism). These two heresies actually had a lot in common. Each were rooted in how spiritual revelation was handled and they represent the extremes of the spectrum when it comes to divine revelation and the Scriptures.

We can be guilty of both forms of New Testament heresy in regard to the Word of God.

Gnostics believed that all supernatural revelation was to be received and accepted without any judgement. They in essence committed secular unbelief in the Bible, because they denied it as the only source of inerrant and inspired revelation from God. As a result they embraced all sorts of doctrinal error concerning sin, the person of Jesus, and ultimately salvation. The Apostle John along the way challenged Gnostic heresy head on in his writings. When we build our life on anything other than the Word of God, we can commit secular unbelief. Gnostics represent the danger of being so open to the Spirit that we leave objective Biblical truth and wander into error.

Pharisees, on the other hand, believed that the Bible was the inspired word of God. However, they placed their own interpretation of the Bible above *any* illumination of the Holy Spirit. As a result, they did not show up at the manger in Bethlehem to welcome the Messiah of Israel into the world. They refused to believe the Messiah was lowly, humble and meek and that He would challenge their human traditions and teachings. They committed spiritual unbelief, because they did not expect the Messiah of the Bible to come in the manner that He did, even though their very own Scriptures were in exact agreement with the person and life of Jesus of Nazareth. The Apostle Paul constantly challenged Pharasaical attitudes, even within the church, and brought people back to the “promise” instead of the “law”. Pharisees denied any outside revelation other than the Scriptures, thus shutting off the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit on the Word of God. They represent those in the church who cannot accept the modern day supernatural power of God when it doesn’t fit their interpretation of the Bible.

Lord Jesus, come meet with us as we look into your perfect law on a daily basis. Fulfill your promise, that you will keep us in perfect peace when we stay our minds on your word. Let us not be guilty of unbelief, whether secular or spiritual, in your Word. Show us the God of the Word, as we look into your Word oh God. Let us

not settle with knowing your Word, but let us experience your Word in our lives. Amen.



Let's take a look at where we have come:

- ◆ Unity In Diversity: A House Divided That Holds Core Beliefs
- ◆ The Purpose of the Church: The Work of the Ministry
- ◆ Hindering the Church: The Diseases of the Body
- ◆ Healing the Church: Cures and Preventative Treatment
- ◆ The Foundation of our Faith: Holding Fast the Word of Life

It's a pretty good foundation, and it at least gives you some idea of whether you and I can agree on the basics.. Let's talk about doctrine now. That is really a major focus I want to deal with.

What is good doctrine to begin with? That question I think should be answered first, and although I have briefly touched on it earlier, I think it is worth repeating some basic concepts concerning doctrine. Then it's onto what I call my "spectrum theology". It fits almost every doctrine, especially those that are disputable, that I can think of. Understanding spectrum theology begins with understanding that we cannot understand God—He is to our human understanding sometimes a God of opposites, and this should help frame our understanding of theology.

That Form of Doctrine

Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. Romans 6:16-17

There are so many spiritual footballs out there in the Christian doctrine arena, it would be foolish to think the word itself wouldn't evoke as many different definitions as there are doctrines themselves. What images does the word "doctrine" conjure in your mind? Do you see pictures of a seminary? Do you visualize people arguing? Do your words like dry, boring, dull, and sleep come to mind? Do you picture books, classrooms, lectures, or men in religious garb expounding deep theological truths that their students are struggling to grasp? Do you picture a cult of some type? I personally picture people sleeping in the pews of a church while a pastor drones on and on about "doctrine" and why it is so important. The truth is, one of the major problems I believe facing the church is not only how we deal with doctrine, but what we believe sound doctrine is to begin with.

Before I talk about what I call spectrum theology, I wanted to lead us through a quick word study on doctrine in the New Testament. I want, at least, to give a background for what "good" or "correct" doctrine really is and what it should really be concerned about. We will take a brief stop at some of the different places in the New Testament where this concept is used and how we should consider this in our modern day. It concerns also how we should look at the Bible in regards to its study and application in our life.

The Holy Spirit tells us through Paul that early believers associated the "form" of doctrine with neither creedal statements nor collections of scriptures that supported a belief in some particular statement of orthodox truth. In fact, Paul said doctrine was something to be obeyed, from our hearts, and that obeying "doctrine" would lead us away from a lifestyle of sin and death into a lifestyle of righteousness and the *zoe* kind of spiritual life that comes from God's grace. Creeds of the faith, catechisms, doctrinal statements, and seminaries were not even thought of when the New Testament was

being written. Although Jewish schools of the Torah were still booming in business, Christian theology was still being formulated from the writings of the apostles and by the direction of the Holy Spirit. If the early church had a creed, it would have most certainly been “Jesus Christ Is Lord”. That was really the major doctrine. Of course as the church begin to grow, false teachings and false religions had to be addressed. Thus, the Holy Spirit directed Peter, Paul, James, Jude, and John to each address in some way particular forms of error that leaked into the body of the church over time. However, the original idea of “doctrine” did not concern itself so much with right believing as it did right living. The “doctrine” Paul delivered to his spiritual children, in person and via letters, was something that they could not only “learn” but “follow” as well.

Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. "If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. John 7:16-17

Jesus made it clear that His doctrine, *didache* in the Greek, was not His own. The word *didache* is also translated as “teaching” quite often. Jesus fulfilled many offices in His life-- as Rabboni, He was indeed the greatest Teacher that ever lived. He frames best what our understanding of doctrine should be. If we are not willing to *do* the will of God (which, by the way, includes minor issues such as loving our brother, offering forgiveness and mercy when it is not merited, and relating humbly to other believers), it should not surprise us that we will not be able to understand or discern correct doctrine. Our Lord Jesus also pointed to the fact that “doctrine”, His teachings, is not so much something known in our heads as something resident in our heart and performed in our actions. Even in dealing with unbelievers, it is important for us to understand and know that unless someone is willing to follow and do the will of God, then they cannot really ever discern true or right doctrine. It should not surprise us either that our doctrines can be tainted some times by our own biases, our own experiences, and our own unwillingness to yield to the Holy Spirit.

If you look at the context of John 7:16-17, Jesus offered this response to a question posed by the Pharisees as He taught in the temple. They asked basically how this man could know anything about God or the Scriptures without having been to school or having studied. It is a common attitude that still lives in the church today. In fact the whole idea of “clergy” and “laity” breeds the idea that some are more “educated” about the Bible and thus “better” able and trusted to discern its truth and expound its doctrines. What the Pharisees of Jesus’ day were saying between the lines was “How can this man expound spiritual truths without having gone to one of OUR schools of religious training? How can he be a true teacher without knowing OUR way of interpreting the Scriptures?”

In Jesus’ day, a student of the law, or Torah, attended one of two formal schools of training. It was required for anyone who wanted to be a teacher of true orthodoxy. You see, one of the main reasons that Jesus was rejected by so many of His Jewish

brethren in the religious circles of His day was because He did not attend nor graduate one of these schools. The only religious training that we know He “received” was in attending synagogue in Nazareth for the 30 years of His life before beginning public ministry. It hurt the religious pride and sensibility of a strict Pharisee or Saduccee to think the Messiah of Israel would not come from one of their own religious schools. Jesus did not have any of the credentials that they thought He should— He was from Nazareth, an out the way truck stop of no consequence and of no significant prophetic mention in the Bible, and He did not have any formal training in the schools of either Hillel or Gamaliel.

Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." Mark 1:27

Yet Jesus, almost invariably, astonished the crowds with His teaching and His doctrine. He spoke as one who had authority and as one who had the anointing to back up the words which He spoke. I believe we in the church of Jesus Christ need to learn something about this in modern times.

Today in the church it still offends the sensibility of many that anyone who is not trained at one of “OUR” seminaries does not have the correct view of the Bible. It also offends the sensibility of many that a person can be in ministry and preach or teach without having been to “seminary” at all. I am not downplaying education by any means— I have a Bachelor’s Degree in Computer Science, an Master’s in Business Administration, a Master’s Degree in Computer Engineering, and I hope to get a Ph.D. one day myself. However, I never place any reliance on my education. That is the difference. In ministry, the only reliance I have is on the Spirit of God. If the Spirit of God does not anoint my teaching or my ministry or anything I put my hand to do, then it is a product of my flesh. I try to never place any correlation between religious education and whether I can make a difference in the Kingdom of God. The last time I looked at my flesh (my carnal nature), it was pretty rotten and ugly! Paul even went so far as to say that *nothing good* dwelt in his flesh. After seeing how ugly mine is and can be, I tend to agree with him. The only thing the flesh (our old unredeemed nature apart from Jesus) is good for is crucifying.

For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Phil 3:3-7

Saul of Tarsus had it all going for him: he not only had a PhD equivalent study in the law, he also had the zeal to defend his theology and orthodoxy, even if it meant imprisoning and killing this sect of the Nazarenes promoting blasphemy with all their “Jesus” talk. However, Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles realized that none of his religious credentials from his B.C. (before Christ) days gained him anything in the economy of God’s kingdom. He realized knowing God was far more important than knowing *about* God. Anything we might attempt to rest our authority on-- whether the seminary we attended or the number of Sunday Schools we have taught or the level of degree we have attained-- none of them will gain me a thing without the relational power of God working through Christ in me.

The point here is that we need education and Bible study and training and learning, especially in terms of preparation for ministry. This same Paul admonished all believers, teachers/pastors in particular, to *study* in order to show themselves approved in how they handle the word of God. However, unless the Holy Spirit is anointing what we do and what we study, then people will not *receive* anything from what we do. Sure I may gain knowledge, but knowledge apart from the breath of the Spirit leads to pride and arrogance. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge will puff up. Knowledge pursued because we love God and want to be consumed by Him is a different story. I am of the mind that doing anything apart from the empowering of the Holy Spirit is a wasted effort. If all I have to offer people is my flesh and my own fleshy understanding of theology, and my own fleshy ability to read and understand the Bible, then they might be intellectually stimulated but they will certainly not be spiritually transformed. Why bother?? Seriously. Why expend energy if you know that nothing is going to get accomplished spiritually in the lives of other people? Jesus knew and expected that the Holy Spirit partnered with Him every time He opened His mouth to teach. That is what caused the astonishment. That is what brought the authority. That is why Jesus said that His doctrine or teaching was “not His own.” We need to have the same attitude. If Jesus dared not claim that His doctrine originated with Him, being the Son of Man in the role of a servant, how much less as servants of Him should we dare not claim that “WE” can originate true doctrine as well.

Let me share another journal entry with you at this point. It was something the Holy Spirit shared with me a while back about being a teacher:

Give me control of your tongue; learn to give control of it to me, and I will teach many people through you. Teaching is repeating what I have spoken to you, just as Jesus spoke only those things that the Father through Me told Him → Bondages will fall off of people as you teach; the eyes of the blind will be opened; the deaf will hear; the lame will walk. I will anoint you with my own Spirit and you need not fear when you teach others: I am with you and my Spirit will speak through you to many people. Give me control of your tongue through praying in the Spirit. "May 1992

This explained a lot to me about what teaching was all about. The Lord was trying to relate to me that teaching was not so much cramming my brain full of Bible verses, theological terms, Greek meanings, verb tenses in Hebrew, or even following sound hermeneutical practices. Teaching was more drawing out of my own well of water what God was going to pouring into it. If I wanted to be a good teacher, I had better learn to let the Holy Spirit make good deposits, on a regular basis, within me. This is very similar to how sound doctrine works. Doctrine is sound because it leads us to a healthy, full, vibrant relationship with God. Doctrine for the sake of doctrine (in other words, just wanting to make sure I am theologically correct) really doesn't do a whole lot for me. In fact pursuing knowledge about God apart from pursuing God (which you might define as "religion") can lead us to become just like those Pharisees in the New Testament times. Many Christians believe that because they are saved that they are exempt from falling into the same trap as the Pharisees—far from it! Just like everything in the Bible, they stand as stark warnings to us today of how NOT to think and act.

*For whatever things were written before were written for our **learning**, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Rom 15:4*

The Greek word for learning in Romans 15:4, *didaskalia*, is a close cousin of *didache*, or doctrine, and is also translated into English as doctrine in other places within the New Testament. Paul used it when referring to believers who are unstable and childish because they chase after every sort of different teaching in an attempt to gain spiritual maturity:

That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting Eph 4:14

Paul says that men easily use craftiness and cunning and deceit to lure unstable Christians away from the simplicity that is in Christ. He likens these believers to a ship on a stormy sea whose rudder has been broken—they drift in whatever direction the wind blows them. The wind blows one direction for a while, then it blows another. By the way, the context of Ephesians 4:14 speaks that a unity of faith and a reaching toward the fullness of the measure of Christ will cause us to mature and be built up as believers, NOT gaining knowledge and understanding of deep theological truths. We are to be blown by the wind of the Holy Spirit, not by the wind of the teachings of men. It is hard to distinguish the difference between these two sometimes. I can't count how many times I have tried to learn "head" knowledge about the Bible without concerning myself with what God was trying to do in my life at the time. It takes us all time to realize that God is more concerned with what we do than what we know. Knowledge will puff us up quicker than anything, but love for God and a desire to do the will of God will draw us into a deeper walk with Him.

Theological knowledge and spiritual growth are related, but they are not synonymous. In fact, some times they can even be opposed to each other. I was prevented from maturing and finding Biblical understanding in many areas as a young believer because I had already formed doctrinal strongholds in my mind about certain things. It took many years of painful experiences to learn that spiritual maturity is not based on how well you know the Bible or how well you can expound truth to other people. Maturity does not come from going down the list of orthodoxy and placing a check mark next to each tenet of Christian belief as you master the understanding of each one. Spiritual maturity, as doctrine in the New Testament context indicates, comes when our actions line up with what our beliefs are.

Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: "Jacob shall not now be ashamed, nor shall his face now grow pale; But when he sees his children, the work of My hands, in his midst, they will hallow My name, and hallow the Holy One of Jacob, and fear the God of Israel. These also who erred in spirit will come to understanding, and those who complained will learn doctrine." Isa 29:22-24

Did you notice that in this passage from Isaiah that doctrine was related to an attitude of the heart? Ah, when is the last time you heard a sermon on the doctrine of joy? How about the doctrine of not complaining? Does the doctrine of Godly speech ring any bells? I didn't think so. We don't think of doctrine in those terms. But, doctrine is all about right inward attitudes that motivate right outward actions and in turn reinforce right thought patterns in our mind. Teaching is always meant to be applied in some way to practical affairs of life. Just knowing a doctrinal truth does me no good unless I can find an application for it in my life. Sure, doctrinal truth keeps me from joining a cult or being deceived by false teachers, but above all it should ultimately find some manifestation in how I live.

*Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and **His** doctrine may not be blasphemed. 1 Tim 6:1*

Do you realize that doctrine belongs to God?? That is why attitudes in how we treat our boss, our wife, our husband, our kids, our co-workers, our pastor, our brothers and sisters in the Lord, our friends, our enemies, and our family become so important to establishing the name of God. God has many names in the Bible, but according to Paul, we are to be the living epistle known and read by all men:

You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. 2 Cor 3:2-3

That is why doctrine is to be practical more than it is to be intellectual. If we are the only Bible that our unsaved friends and loved ones will read, then does it not make sense that we will also by our lifestyle define what true doctrine is?? That is why for the New Testament church, doctrine was something that belonged to God, not to man, and it was something that was lived more than it was learned.

Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. Titus 1:9

Paul wanted those in spiritual leadership to know and be able to expound “sound” doctrine. Sound is another word for healthy or well. There is such a thing as “sick” or “weak” doctrine. What makes it ill? I like to equate a healthy lifestyle with a balanced lifestyle... in other words, a lifestyle not marked by great extremes in any one thing. A healthy life style is also marked by exercise and physical conditioning. Do you get a picture here? Sound doctrine in my mind is one that is not only free from error, but one that is free from error because it is 1) lived out practically at the experiential level of life and 2) not prone to seek the extreme or one-sided viewpoint of Scripture but rather seeks the whole counsel of what the Word of God has to say. It is interesting to note that the Greek word for sound, *hugaino*, is also translated as “wholesome” and used in reference to wholesome words in connection with doctrine.

*And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things. 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. 1 Tim 6:2-5*

The definition of wholesome means conducive to sound health or well-being. It is composed of the word “whole”. When Jesus healed people, it was said that He made them “whole” or “complete”. When Jesus healed 10, only 1 returned to give thanks... the Lord said that the others were healed, but the one who returned to give thanks was “made whole.” If doctrine is going to be wholesome, in my mind then it needs to present the “whole” picture. We are all familiar with the idea of the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth (impeachment trials notwithstanding). I believe many of our denominational doctrines present the truth, but not the whole truth. If we want to get the whole truth, most of the time we have to consider the “other” side of the doctrine. Paul related that wholesome words are based directly on the words of Jesus and that the resulting doctrine always accords with godly living.

I have gotten the feeling sometimes from listening to certain doctrines being presented that the Words of Jesus are not as important because He was operating as an Old Testament prophet who had not gone to the cross and achieved redemption yet. They would believe and argue that certain statements He made were not intended for the Church doctrine because it was pre-crucifixion. Have you ever heard anyone say that? Have you ever thought or said that? I have heard people wrestling with theological footballs and in the process ignore the very words of Jesus Himself because they did not quite fit into the box that the theological argument came in. It is the problem we get into when our doctrines don't cover all the bases scripturally speaking.

This is personally why I use the term and concept of "spectrum theology". Spectrum theology does not attempt to necessarily define what a doctrine should be "exactly". It just states that here is what the Bible says about a particular area, and in doing so this presents a spectrum of sorts. The spectrum presents the "whole" picture so to speak, and offers up wholesome words concerning a particular thought or practice. The spectrum most often has two extremes and you may find yourself far to one end of the spectrum in how you believe. This in turn causes you to act a particular way as a result. The goal of spectrum theology is that what you believe keeps you somewhere in the "middle" of what the Bible actually says, and this in turn keeps you from going to extremes on either end of the spectrum. You will get a better picture once I give an example, but I hope you get the idea: our doctrine determines how we think and how we act. If our doctrine is out of balance, then our lives will tend to be lived on extremes. In other words, we will tend to be swayed from one extreme to another, just like that ship without a rudder caught in the storm. Friends, the Captain of our ship wants us to quit riding the winds of doctrine and move on toward maturity.

Now when His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said to them, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees." And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "It is because we have taken no bread." But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, "O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread? "Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? "Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up? "How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?-- but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Matt 16:5-12

This passage relates very closely to a type of heresy I mentioned in the previous chapter: spiritual unbelief. It is what Jack Deere refers to as "reading an unreal Bible". We might infer from this exchange that Jesus overheard the disciples first discussing

that someone had forgotten to bring bread after they had crossed over the lake. Jesus had just wrangled with Pharisees and Sadducees who were looking for a sign from Heaven to prove that Jesus was who He said He was. With this in mind, He told them plainly: “Beware of the false teachings of the Pharisees..” Of course, He used the term leaven and later had to clarify to His disciples what He meant. What false teachings did these two groups represent?? Pharisees had reduced the covenant relation of God with the Jewish people to nothing more than form and ceremony. The Sadducees had rationalized the supernatural power of God to the point that only material aspects of Judaism were necessary. They both were guilty of denying the power and the personal aspects of the covenant that God had given to Moses. Their doctrine denied the supernatural power of God acting now (today). They in fact read an “unreal” Bible—they believed all the supernatural stories of God’s deliverance and power from the days of Adam to Noah to Moses and on, but they did not believe that God would do that in their day. When doctrine creates forms and ceremony that are absent of God’s power, this is the leaven Jesus referred to. When the supernatural aspect of God is removed, our doctrines become teachings of men. When the practical aspects of godly living are excluded from our doctrine, we become puffed up with pride in our theological knowledge. We can wind up being proud, knowing nothing, and having a form of godliness that actually denies the very power necessary to walk in that godliness.

But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust. 1 Tim 1:8-11

Things contrary to sound doctrine were for Paul things that went against the heart of God in the Law. We know that the Law was never given to make us righteous, but instead to expose our unrighteousness. Paul, however, uses it expressly in terms of conduct and living to define what sound or healthy doctrine was all about. In the arguments within the liberal church today over certain controversial issues, like whether homosexuals can be ordained as ministers and whether abortion is wrong or not, we can see clearly that sound doctrine places sodomites, fornicators, manslayers, murderers, unholy, and profane in the category of things contrary to the heart of God. If in the Law we see the heart of God, then it is in unsound doctrine that we see things that break the heart of God. Adhering to this principle would settle many doctrinal disputes of this nature. As I have stated earlier, coming to like-mindedness is not equivalent to abandoning holiness.

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. 2 Tim 4:3-4

A strict warning is here for anyone who wants to pursue their own desires apart from what God desires. Paul told the Romans that God will give us over to our desires if we continue to refuse His offer of grace and mercy. That is a scary state to be in, because we become numb to our own sin and depravity. It also means that we will begin to seek out acceptance for our sin and rebellion. We begin to seek out teachers that will accept our behavior as “normal”. We begin to reject doctrine that brings healthy and sound living— that is precisely what is happening to many liberal denominations within the church. It is spiritual law that cannot be broken: God will let us seek our own way and will let us reap the consequences as a result when we stubbornly refuse to seek and follow His way. As a result, those who are in this state can not even endure “wholesome” words any longer, and they shut themselves off from the way of life..

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. 2 Tim 4:3-4

It should not surprise us to find so many false doctrines abounding today. Doctrines that lead people away from faith in Jesus as God’s Son and as the only atonement for our sin. It is important to note that doctrines ultimately have their root in spiritual sources. If the Spirit of God can author sound doctrine, it makes sense that the kingdom of darkness has something to offer in this arena as well. We must always be on the guard against error. It is of utmost importance that we not only know what we believe, but we live what we believe.

Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine....Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you. 1 Tim 4:13,16

But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra-- what persecutions I endured. 2 Tim 3:10-11

Paul illustrated one of the many ways we can keep from being deceived and lead down

the path of error in terms of doctrine. Paul modeled sound doctrine in holy living and in a sacrificial manner of life. One of the quickest ways to be deceived is to no longer walk in conformity to Biblical holiness. Just ask the followers of Jim Jones (oh, I forgot you can't ask them—their all dead now). Paul said that if we want to save ourselves and those who hear us, take heed, lay a hold upon, put your attention to, turn your mind towards, and give diligent concern towards your life and your doctrine. You see, our life and our doctrine are synonymous. You cannot separate them. You live out of what you believe to be true, no matter what you say you believe. Paul said that continuing in sound doctrine is the sure path of salvation. Paying attention to our doctrine will keep us from being deceived. Living what we believe will keep us from being religiously proud.

There are many other ways that we can become deceived in terms of doctrine. Because deception is a universal problem that we find anywhere fallen humanity exists, we must realize that it can exist with our own conception of doctrine as well. How does a person become deceived to begin with?

If I claim to be always and only right, I can open myself up to the same religious pride that caused the Pharisees to miss the Messiah.

If I make judgments from a distance, basing my opinions solely on what “someone else” has concluded, I leave the door open for strong bias.

If I ignore concrete testimony and the actual experience of those who are participant in God's moving, I can become an unjust judge rendering pious criticism from the sideline at those who are actually playing the game.

If I isolate myself from the Body of Christ (I mean the Body of Christ outside of the 4-walls of your church by the way), then I can become so insulated so that my understanding of “normal” is not God's understanding of “normal”. This is what Paul suggests when he says that we are to “submit to one another” out of reverence for Christ.

Most of all, if my starting point is not from the Bible, then I will very quickly open myself up to error and “unwholesome” teaching. In terms of spectrum theology, I believe this point needs to be stressed very strongly.

ALL Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. 2 Tim 3:16

Read that again. ALL Scripture is... profitable for doctrine. I like to think of it in these terms: profitable doctrine will use ALL of the Scriptures. If we truly believe that the Bible is breathed by the Spirit of God and that it is without error in its original writing, then we must also believe that to exalt one part of the Scripture to the detriment of another part will leave us with a “half” picture of what the Holy Spirit was

trying to communicate. A doctrine, if it is a doctrine coming from the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, should fit across the entire range of scripture. This is the problem with some denominational doctrines: they have become in some ways doctrines of men based in part on traditional viewpoints and interpretations of Scripture.

I felt the Lord speak to me about this a few years ago, and so I will share with you another one of my journal entries here:

The Spirit of God, who master minded and moved prophets, kings, shepherds, military leaders, priests, fishermen, lawyers, doctors, and tax collectors (not to mention tent makers) to pen the written Word of God—the Spirit who detailed through the entire Old Testament the coming, nature, purpose, and work of Jesus—who also skillfully devised types and shadows and foretold exactly what things would come about → He will not author a doctrine that cannot fit across the entire range of the Scriptures. How can 2 apparently diametrically opposed doctrines both be true at the same time? Can or does someone have to be right and someone have to be wrong? Can 2 opposite doctrines both be true (at least partially true to some degree)

If that's too tough or hard to believe, consider this:

- ◆ How can 3 uniquely divine Persons that equally share the divine essence be one God? How can one God manifest in three Persons, distinguishable from each other, yet be indivisible?
- ◆ How can God (the Creator) become a man (a created being) and yet remain fully, 100% divine and yet, be fully, 100% man???

You tell me...

If doctrine is truly to be doctrine, it should consider the broad range of scripture, from Old to New, from the 1st Covenant to the 2nd Covenant. It should not struggle to find meaning or explanations for scripture that appears NOT to fit into the doctrine, but rather, it needs to include those apparent “discrepancies” as being part of, not exclusionary, to the rule...

Everything we find in Scripture is FOR A PURPOSE→ if we really believe it is God's Word, if we really believe it is divinely inspired & authored, then we must realize that the Holy Spirit orchestrated EVERY word, jot, and tittle that is in it. Jesus said not on iota would fall from the law until ALL WAS ACCOMPLISHED....

Would this help nurture unity in the body of Christ? Would we have to yield ownership of our “doctrines” to the Holy Spirit—if that's what it takes?? Paul said to the Philippians... if there be ANY... if there be any... if there be any... the slightest amount in any way--- keep the UNITY of the Spirit.

Is a have/have not attitude divisive? Why can't we all just HAVE?? What if

there REALLY is a situation where some HAVE and some don't HAVE within the Body of Christ??? What if our doctrine does keep us from all that God wants to give us?? What if we walk around with half empty sacks of spiritual power and character because our doctrine bags are half sized to begin with??

5 Feb 95

Deep thoughts from such shallow minds, huh?? Not only do we sometimes have half-sized bags when it comes to doctrine, we sometimes don't even have a bag for certain things to begin with. The Holy Spirit indicates several things in Hebrews about doctrine:

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. Heb 6:1-2

One of the things that struck me about this statement was that there are "elementary" doctrines concerning the faith: repentance from dead works, faith toward God, baptisms, laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. I know two of these in particular do not get much attention in terms of doctrinal exposition: baptisms and laying on of hands.

Noticed I said *baptism*s. That's because the Holy Spirit said "baptisms" and not "baptism". Consider the following verses:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit Matt 28:19 [Water Baptism = Identification with Christ]

I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. Mark 1:8 [Power Baptism by Jesus with the Holy Spirit]

One Lord, one faith, one baptism. Eph 4:5

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. 1 Cor 12:13 [Regenerational Baptism By the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ]

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Rom 6:3-4 [Baptism into the Death of Christ]

But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished! Luke 12:50 [Baptism of Redeeming the Lost]

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory. But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Can you drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able." So Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared." Mark 10:35-40 [Baptism of Servanthood]

Have you ever considered how one little letter (like an “s”) could make so much difference? Doctrinal bags in almost every denomination and sect that I can think of, Protestant/Catholic/Orthodox included, cover “water baptism” or what I would call identification baptism. The last time I checked my grammar book, though, baptism was still a singular noun. With the exception of the charismatic circles and some evangelical circles that attempt to explain what the baptism of the Holy Spirit is, the concept of “two or more” baptisms and their corresponding doctrine can not readily be found. However, we learn that in the day this letter to the Hebrews of the dispersion was written, the church had already formulated doctrinal ideas concerning *more than* one baptism. Paul stressed that there is only one baptism that matters, that of being in Christ. The New Testament speaks clearly of being baptized in water in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit to symbolize the true baptism where the Holy Spirit takes our dead spirits and places us as live members into the Body of Christ, those that are redeemed. Paul believed and taught the universal Catholic church of those whose names are written in the Lambs Book of Life.

It also speaks of a baptism of the Holy Spirit, which would accompany and be available to all who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Himself spoke of a baptism of service that He was called to and that He desired His disciples to enter into. The Lord Jesus told two zealous disciples that they would drink the cup that Jesus drank and be baptized with the baptism that He was baptized with. Therein lies a whole teaching and doctrine on how we are to walk in the same baptism of ministry that the Father called His own Son to while on this earth. The lack of participation and the refusal to heed the call of the great commission to make disciples of all nations can be traced back to a lack of understanding and teaching of this particular type of baptism.

This is a very small example, but I hope you get the idea. Most of us have never considered or heard that there were multiple baptisms or have heard a doctrine concerning them. When is the last time you heard a teaching that concerned the Biblical foundation of laying on of hands??..... Can't think of the last time?? How

about never?? I can't honestly say I've heard one myself.. I've had to read books about it. Yet here again, the doctrine of laying on of hands was an obvious *foundational* principle that accompanied salvation in Christ and merited inclusion in one of the many rudiments that all believers should be founded in *before* moving on to maturity. If there is a part of you that is saying, "Well didn't they lay hands on people because things were so primitive in that day?" or "Anointing someone with oil is equivalent to us going to the doctor in our modern day", let me just nudge you my brother or sister on toward maturity here. When it says to lay on with hands and to anoint with oil, my best understanding of the Greek is that it means to put your hand on someone and to rub oil (of some kind) on them, both meanings respectively. I have heard good meaning and well-intentioned preachers belittle and explain away in some modern terms what both of these principles accomplish. Anointing with oil is not equivalent to making a trip to see your doctor, no more than calling the elders is equivalent to calling the pastor. Calling the doctor may be warranted, but lets just do what the Bible says, in simplicity, and see what our God will do!

What things are fundamental to sound doctrine? Here again, Paul uses practical daily living as the ingredients that comprise this very thing:

*But as for you, speak the things which are proper for **sound doctrine**: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things-- that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. Likewise exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you. Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the **doctrine of God our Savior in all things.** Titus 2:1-15*

Soberness, reverence, temperance. Balance in faith, love, and patience. Chastity, obedience, goodness. Not slandering others, not drinking much wine, teaching good things. Pleasing our masters, not answering back, not pilfering, showing fidelity and faithfulness. That is what Christian doctrine is all about. I personally think before we begin to argue about what Bible translation we read or whether we should be dunked or sprinkled in water, we need to examine ourselves to see if our "doctrine", i.e. the way we live, is first of all in accordance with "sound" doctrine that Paul lays out here. How much conflict would we avoid if we just followed that simple admonition? The great commission places a premium on teaching people to obey what Jesus said and entering into a lifestyle of discipleship.

If I had to summarize this whole chapter it is to say this: don't settle for intellectual understanding of doctrine without practical application to your life. We evangelicals, especially Western ones, influenced largely by the Reformers and the Intellectuals (St. Augustine) of our day, can be in danger of worshipping our thoughts of God, our doctrine, our theology, our understanding of God rather than worshipping God. The last time I checked my Bible dictionary, that was the definition of idolatry: substituting the worship of God for something that is not God. It is the definition of knowing God vs knowing about God. It is exhibited in seeking His hand vs. seeking His heart. It is demonstrated by performing miracles, signs, and wonders (to include casting demons out), yet being forced from His presence because we did not have intimate knowledge of Him. It is manifested when we settle for intellectual expansion and not true spiritual growth. It is seen when the Word of God is elevated above the God of the Word.

I leave you with one last journal entry concerning this matter. Here again is another insight I believe the Lord was giving me concerning correct doctrine.

The Sword of the Spirit is His Sword, not man's. When we yield it in our darkened misunderstanding, it will lead to doctrines of men which follow traditions rooted in generations of unbelief in what God says. Why so many different interpretations? Why so many confusions and divisions? The sword was picked up by a man and not by the Spirit of God. When My Spirit wields the sword, truth will align itself to actuality. The two-edged sword coming the mouth of Jesus-> it cuts and tears an enemy down when used in perspective. To rightly divide means to put the sword in the hands of the one who will use it (best), as it was intended-> the Holy Spirit. The sword prunes as well.

8 Feb '94

As we look at the Body of Christ, we find a spectrum of theology presented to us. What should be our guide and ultimate arbiter? If I could answer that, I would be touring the country making millions. The truth is, there is no easy answer. We know the Bible is ultimately the final arbiter, but the Spirit must be given permission to illuminate. We know that Spirit is the Lord of the Church within the church, communicating to us the desires and heart of our Lord Jesus, the Chief Shepherd. Look at the fruit produced by the doctrine...Does it accord to soundness as described in the New Testament?? Does it provide a full interpretation? Does it fit into practical application in my life?? Follow the doctrine out to its logical conclusion and ask yourself if you are willing to live with its conclusions. If we followed certain doctrines out to their logical conclusion there would probably be loud sirens and flashing red lights all around as our car runs over the "DANGER: BRIDGE OUT" sign while continuing to accelerate. Get the picture?

Father, open our eyes to see your truth. Holy Spirit, come take your sword, prune us and chip away the rock of our outer shell until the image of Jesus emerges from within us. Forgive us for trying to swing your Sword. Like trying to take Excalibur from out of the rock, only you can truly show us how to use your Sword. Let it cut within our soul and spirit, and let it cut deep. In our brokenness, bind us up. In your healing make us more mature and worthy of the name, "Disciple of Jesus Christ". Make our doctrine and life be equivalent, and let them both be worthy of you. Amen.



That form of doctrine is that form which produces Christlikeness and a balance in our life. We need each other for balance. The very definition of imbalance is disproportionate and asymmetry. We need each other some times to see the spectrum of God's theology. My own testimony confirms this. It is where my concept of spectrum theology came from....the need for each other.