

God's Single Movement

Series Article 1 – 'Tradition Hinders Spiritual Growth'

Almost all Christians recognize those who trust in the blood of Jesus are members of the Body of Christ. So, when believers read the New Testament Epistles, even in a devotional manner, I believe most think there's little need to study the nature of the Church because it's so prominently on display. Yet, the majority of Christians I know primarily apply biblical principles to their circle of fellowship rather than relating them to all believers in their area. And, while reading Scripture, they tend to interpret it in a manner which approves the practices of their own assembly. I honestly don't think most make a conscious effort to do these things, however, these are common practices which often distance us from other Body members. I see this detachment reflected in statements like 'God has me right where He wants me' or 'My group is Spirit-led'. This outlook greatly concerns me because it almost eliminates the need for checks and balances.

In addition, a lack of healthy critical thinking provides fertile ground upon which division can easily be sown. And, I witness many wishing to cultivate sectarianism, which is already too prevalent in Christendom. Based on this environment I believe we should ask, 'What factors encourage believers to gravitate toward dividing and, at the same time, reduce their desire to interrelate with outside Body members?' I think this lack of interest is largely due to messages preached in most assemblies plus recommended books, audios and videos we choose to satisfy our theological appetite.

In view of this influence, what conditions would we expect to find which suggest a group of believers is headed toward a mindset of exclusion? I see an early sign when Christians begin to identify others who attend their assembly as 'Family' instead of classifying all believers as part of the same Body. Further advancement is characterized by regular attendees, as a group, coming to accept the same list of distinctive beliefs. Generally, this trend suppresses questioning church dogma or practice, for to do so is viewed as divisive or at least creating unnecessary 'waves'. A final stage signifying division is the formation of a *group-mentality of being 'right'*. Then, *targeted doctrines are typically propagated* to support this claim.

I've observed this backward-movement-of-discord many times. And, believers who choose to detach frequently take on a haughty attitude along with a high level of closed-mindedness. Often, I find it difficult to even discuss Scripture since the process of indoctrination seems to desensitize the average believer from attributing much value to views of Body members outside their regular

gatherings. Fortunately, Christians have always had access to *Perfect Medicine for this Disorder* – the Revealed Will of God. With this Basic Asset, every believer is capable of *being in control of their own spiritual condition* which is truly a *default of our own making*. For, when we step into the driver's seat by disciplining ourselves to spend time in the Word, we can achieve the necessary aptitude to test everything we're taught and stay on a Spirit-directed course.

Taking personal responsibility is crucial since, disappointingly, some leaders are happy when believers surrender initiative and follow their teaching. This is because it's far easier to dominate compliant members as well as preserve doctrinal unity. In these controlled atmospheres, members are routinely cautioned from rubbing shoulders with other Christians based on the prevailing view, '*We need to protect our sheep*'. A similar strategy seeks to get members so involved they lack time to be influenced by anyone else. Justification for these practices is based on the thought, 'They're too immature and would surely be corrupted by false teaching, so this is for their own good'. In reality, this Mode of Operation is generally driven by fear of losing supporters and usually includes tactics spawned by the philosophy, 'The End Justifies the Means'.

Ephesians 4:14 addresses this ethical issue as Paul warns believers not to be led astray by "**every wind of teaching**", since *instruction is often used as the tool of choice* for a "**method of deception**". One feature of fraudulent training is expressed by the term "πανουργία", translated "**craftiness**" and "**shameful ways**". This noun consists of two words meaning *to work everything* and, contextually, it represents *all potential methods used to promote or destroy* (Luke 20:23; 1 Cor. 3:19; 2 Cor. 4:2; 11:3 – it's other four occurrences in the N.T.). Of course, Christians should steer clear of any policy which contradicts biblical character. And, the way we can avoid flesh-based strategies is to **sell-out to the Lord** by taking the initiative to acquire spiritual discernment though putting off our old man and replacing it with the new (Eph. 4:20 – 6:20).

Unfortunately, the techniques already mentioned together with many other strategies continue to help manipulative environments prosper and play a large part in the erosion of harmony in the Church. Again, I don't think the majority of Christians are aware of how some daily-used procedures hamper their growth and ministry within their own congregation, let alone how these practices deprive them from mutual edification by collaborating with outside Body members. Yet, this mostly unquestioned 'normal way of doing things' goes on and on, continues year by year, and thrives regardless of how the Word describes the Body and its function (1 Cor. 12:12-26; Eph. 4:7-16).

I wish this picture was better, but I don't think it is. Regrettably, I've been guilty of supporting some of the practices just described. And, I'm not proud of it. At least, during those years I continued to study the Word with the aim of bringing my thoughts and actions in line with what I learned. Eventually, I began to understand how my sinful nature was in control of my mind and heart so I couldn't even rely on my own rationale. After realizing I had need for drastic reform, Scriptures like Romans 12:2 helped direct me to pursue the “renewing of the mind” so I would be able to “approve what the good, well pleasing, and perfect will of God is” (Eph. 5:15-21).

Thankfully, I've shared this journey with several fellow believers who also recognize their need for ongoing growth and with whom I can banter back and forth concerning biblical matters. Without their support, much of what I've learned wouldn't have been possible. So, with these preliminary thoughts in mind, please join this endeavor to sketch a portrait of the Body of Christ from the biblical account.

Core Truth about the Body

Since the Book of Ephesians describes the Body and how it should function in a more comprehensive way than any other, it's an excellent place to start. In chapter one, while praying for the Father to help believers understand the “exceeding greatness of power” we have to live our Christian lives, Paul indicates this same power was used by God to raise Christ from the dead and exalt Him to His heavenly position. Then, he states, “and He (God) subjected all things under His (Christ's) feet and gave Him Head over all things in relation to the church, which is His body, the fullness of the one filling all things in all” (Eph. 1:19, 22-23).

This passage exemplifies the Church in numerous ways. First, the title of “Head” (κεφαλὴν) refers to a *position of leadership*. As our *Top Executive*, Christ is everything to Christians since we are defined by the “spiritual blessings” which we have received in Him (Eph. 1:3). For, through Christ, we were chosen to be God's sons, given “redemption” from sin, provided the “mystery” truth as our “administration . . . to head up (ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι)¹ all things in Christ”, and sealed by the Spirit to assure our eternal inheritance (vv. 4-14). Next, this verse says Christ has been placed “over all things in relation to the Church” (v. 22). This phrase declares the Church is fully protected in our subordinate position under the “Head”, even from hostile spiritual authorities (v. 21; 3:10; 6:12-13, 16). Since Jesus rules “over all things”, believers should “hold fast to” or *cling to* His Person (Col. 2:19). By this connection, we plug into the One who initiated our

entry into the Body and enables us to successfully live for Him (Eph. 1:19; 3:16-19; 4:15-16; Heb. 4:16; 12:1-2).

Both our Lord's position as "Head" and our need to "hold fast to" Him are aspects of the "mystery" revelation introduced in Ephesians 1:9-10. The term "mystery" literally means *a secret*. But, the fact Paul was inspired to still use this designation after it was revealed should serve as a constant reminder it can't be found in revelation known prior to the crucifixion (1 Cor. 2:8; Eph. 3:2-5). Now that this "mystery" is available, believers have access to God's "wisdom" through the revealed "mind of Christ", it discloses God's "administration of grace" for the Body, and it divulges all the "treasures of wisdom and knowledge" needed for spiritual maturity (1 Cor. 2:6-7, 16; Eph. 3:2-12; Col. 1:24 – 2:3).

These three contexts establish how believers can learn about the relationship we have with our "Head" by "reading" the "wisdom" contained in the "administration (οικονομιαν – *house-management or dispensation*) of the grace of God" (Eph. 3:2-4; see also 1:9-10; 3:9-12; 6:19-20; 1 Cor. 3:10-11; 9:16-18). **This "mystery" is exclusively detailed in Paul's Letters** since he's the only one who uses this term and defines the specifics of this revelation. In addition, **Paul is the only one who uses the term 'Body' or phrase 'Body of Christ'**. So, if Body members want to fathom our relationship with Christ, we need to spend time in his Epistles.

Continuing in Ephesians 1:23, the "church" is defined as "His body (σωμα)". This expression represents *a human figure*; however, Paul uses it to illustrate the Church as *a spiritual Body made up of many members* (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-14). This "body" is then spoken of as the "fullness" (πληρωμα) of God. The noun, "fullness" means *completeness or full measure* and it brands the "body", the "church", as God's *Perfect-Crown-Jewel*. In turn, "His body" is portrayed as the *full measure "of the one filling all things in all"*. This final statement indicates Body members are *made equal to the complete essence of our Father* by the direct action of His own "filling" (Eph. 1:23). The marvelous consequence is we're now viewed by the Father as being *the full measure* of what He Himself is – holy and righteous – because of the *flawless position* we occupy in His Son (1 Cor. 1:30-31; 6:11; Eph. 1:3-7).

In chapter three, Paul further develops this Body concept by praying that these members might reach their potential of becoming "all the fullness (πληρωμα) of God" (3:16-19). Progress toward this goal occurs when we use the indwelling Spirit to help internalize truths about what God has made us "in Christ" (2:1 – 3:19). Then, Ephesians 4:12-13 explains how "saints" can reach this "fullness" by growing toward "perfection" for "the work of ministry" and specifically for the

objective of the “**building up of the body of Christ**”. This is to happen “**until we might all attain . . . unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness** (πληρωματος) **of Christ**”. Although spiritual maturation is an ongoing process, perfection should be our goal.

Also, the word “πληρωμα” is used twice in Colossians regarding the Person of Christ. First, God desired “**all the fullness**” to dwell in the Son to achieve His purpose of reconciling all things to Himself (Col. 1:13, 19). Later, Christ is exemplified by the phrase, “**in Him, all the fullness of deity presently dwells in bodily form**” (2:9). Again, we see “πληρωμα” is used to *represent the complete essence* of the Persons of God and Christ.

The next verse delivers a most astounding reality since it conveys how close Body members are related to God’s embodiment of “fullness”, our Lord Jesus Christ: “**And you exist as ones who have been filled in Him, who is the Head of all rule and authority**” (Col. 2:10). The participle “ones who have been filled” (πεπληρωμενοι) occurs in the *perfect tense* which means Christians *were initially filled* with Christ’s “fullness” (at the point of salvation) and this *filled state continues* uninterrupted. Beyond this divine action, the present tense verb of being “you exist” (εστε) emphasizes this wrapped-up-state “in Christ” is our *current existence*. By reflecting on the combined meaning of these Ephesian and Colossian passages which articulate all believers’ connection with the “fullness” of God and Christ, we can begin to conceptualize our amazing association with the Lord and His Body. And, these contexts should compel us to *Broadcast this Miraculous Body-State* to others.

Having briefly looked at what Ephesians one and three say about the Body, let’s consider the chapter sandwiched between to see how it adds to Paul’s *Portrait of The Church*. Chapter 2:1-9 speaks of how God has “**saved**” sinners headed toward wrath by extending His “**mercy**”, “**love**” and “**grace**”. Now redeemed, we are described as His “**poem**” (ποιημα), which is how this Greek word transliterates into English. It’s equally well translated “workmanship” and most basically means *a doing or thing made*. Therefore, the Body is poetically portrayed here as *God’s Work of Art – an Expression of Divine Doing*. Then, for the first time in this Book, we who’ve been “**created in Christ Jesus**” are exhorted to “**walk**” in the “**good works which . . . God previously prepared**”, an appeal to live a godly lifestyle which is detailed later in this Book (v. 10; 4:17 – 6:20).

Continuing, Paul explains how “**gentiles**” who were previously excluded from God’s program with “**Israel**” are now included and on the same level with saved “**Jews**” in the Church. This spiritual relationship became possible when the

impediment of the “law” of Moses was set aside so “both” Jew and gentile could be newly “created” and now exist in “one body”. All these feats were accomplished by Christ’s work on the cross (vv. 11-16). The outgrowth of this new Body, the “one new man”, is the solitary haven where Jew and gentile no longer have “enmity” with one another but now have “peace” among themselves as well as with God in our mutually “reconciled” condition (vv. 14-18; 2 Cor. 5:16-21).

The *final benefit* Christians gain from being “in Christ” is found in the statement, “because through Him, we both have access in one Spirit to the Father” (v. 18; Rom. 5:2; Eph. 3:12). This indicates each Body member has a *direct path to God* and, therefore, no need for a human mediator other than “the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). This advantage exists in stark contrast with how Jews needed priests as intermediaries between them and God under the Law. Lastly, this *new creation* of “one body” is portrayed as God’s present “building”, “holy temple”, and “dwelling”, for His Spirit lives in us. So, today, saved Jews and gentiles constitute God’s people and together they replace the Nation of Israel (Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; Phil. 3:2-3).

What an illustration displaying the essence of the Body of Christ! Note how this picture is intermingled with allusions about the inter-relationship of its members such as enjoying mutual “peace” and sharing the common pursuit of becoming “all the fullness of God”. As this story unfolds, one would expect further clarification explaining how believers can attain these platitudes. So it is, instructions for how the Church should function are outlined by its Creator as this Book continues.

Groundwork for Body Function

Paul begins Ephesians four by synchronizing *Church practice* with the *doctrine* already penned in the first half of this Book. Verse 1 tells believers to “walk”, *live our lives*, “in a manner worthy of the calling (*Christian belief and practice*) for which you were called” (ἐκληθητε). Although we’re the subject of this verb, it appears in the *passive voice* which specifies *Christians were acted upon by a force outside of ourselves*. In addition, its aorist indicative form indicates how God “called” us *at the past point of time* we were saved (Rom. 8:30; 9:12, 24-26; 1 Cor. 7:15-24; Gal. 1:6, 15; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:9).

Then, verse 2 urges God’s elect to interrelate with character favorable for “striving to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:2-3; Col. 3:12). As Body members “walk” in the Spirit, we can generate “fruit” which

includes the “**humility**”, “**gentleness**”, “**longsuffering**”, and mutual “**love**” mentioned here (v. 2; Gal. 5:16-18, 22-23). With these qualities, we’ll be able to “maintain . . . unity (ενοτητα)”, the feature God wants to dominate His *Spirit-Driven Movement*. This Greek word is a form of its root “εν”, the cardinal number which simply means *one*.² Occurring in noun form, “ενοτητα” describes *the nature of what* the Body should sustain, that is, *oneness* or *singleness*. Most Versions translate it “unity” which is the intended idea.

Since the phrase “of the Spirit” is in the genitive case, meaning *in association with*, it’s essential we choose to “**be filled**” with the Spirit since the desired “unity” and “peace” in Christian relationships are only possible *in connection with His control* (Eph. 4:3; 5:18). Finally, the participle “striving” (σπουδαζοντες) literally means to *be quick to* or *swiftly pursue* “unity”; and its present tense form suggests we do this *unceasingly*.

This *Responsibility-Provoking-Introduction* precedes a list of seven *ones* which present seven *realities* God’s provided for the Church to successfully operate (Eph. 4:4-6). In conjunction with each component, the *cardinal number* “one” is used which ties these seven realities to the “**unity** (ενοτητα – *oneness*) **of the Spirit**” in verse 3.² In addition, these seven ones follow on the heels of a *four-time use of this same cardinal number* “one” in chapter two. There it describes how Jews and gentiles were made “**one**” in Christ by removing the division-causing partition of the Law, created into “**one new man**”, reconciled “**in one body to God**”, and both given access to the Father by “**one Spirit**” (Eph. 2:14-16, 18). Before proceeding, I’d like to re-emphasize a point from verse 3; it doesn’t say we need to *develop* “unity” (*oneness*), but we are “to maintain (τηρειν)” it. This simply means God asks Body members to do what is necessary to *keep* the “unity” *intact* which He’s already “created”. Therefore, the next few verses set forth *Seven Persons/Things* as a **Celestial-Pedestal** upon which believers can activate this Unity-Potential we’re implored to have.

Divine Essentials to Maintain “Unity”

The first *Component* designed to achieve “oneness” in the Church is “**one body**” (εν σωμα – Eph. 4:4). We’ve already spent a great deal of time defining the Body of Christ, but now it’s cited as central for aiding “unity”. An explanation of how the Body contributes to “unity” is found in First Corinthians 12:12, “**For, according as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body being many are one body, and likewise is Christ.**” In this verse, Paul introduces an analogy which shows the *interconnected relationship* between the members of our human body, such as ear or eye, and our whole physical body (vv. 12, 14-

17). Then, he applies this concept to the spiritual realm by use of the phrase, “and likewise *is* Christ”. The adverb “likewise” (οὕτως) compares the Name “Christ” as being *in like manner* to how the parts of our human body are interconnected with their whole. Therefore, in this context, the term “Christ” actually represents both our Lord as Head of the Body and us, who are Body members *in intimate connection* with Him. How can we make sense of what brought about this *spiritual bond*?

This interrelationship was initiated by our baptism into the Body when we “**were all caused to drink one Spirit**” (1 Cor. 12:12-13). Through this baptism, believers became so closely aligned with the Lord **We are Now Called by His Name and Exist as an Indistinguishable Spiritual Entity with Him**. For now, God sees us as fully justified “in Christ” and we possess the indwelling Spirit (Rom. 5:1-5; 6:3-4, 11). As a result, Body members aren’t only identified as His “**fullness**” (Col. 1:19; 2:9), His newly created “**poem**” (Eph. 2:10), and His new “**holy temple**” (2:21), but *we’re also characterized by His Name*. This perception is strengthened by the *verb of being* “is” (ἐστίν) in the phrase “and likewise *is* Christ” because it portrays the name “Christ” as *the essence of our relationship* with His Person (v. 12).³ As we contemplate *our existing essence is spiritually indistinguishable* from the Person of “Christ”, this fact alone should bolster the self-image of every believer and eradicate the need to ever suffer an *Identity Crisis*.

The ongoing context further reveals God’s intent for the Body as Paul shifts focus to the interrelationship of its members. First, he *validates the worth of every believer* since membership into the Body comes by divine appointment, “**Now, God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body according as He willed**” (1 Cor. 12:18). Next, based on provided gifts (vv. 4-11), Paul proceeds to stress how *every believer benefits the Church* because each adds “**value**” (τιμὴν – v. 23) in addition to being “**necessary**” (ἀναγκαῖα – KJV, NASV; or ‘indispensable’ – NIV, v. 22). The word “ἀναγκαῖα” most basically means a *forcing*, or a *force containing entity*, which refers to *the potential-impact* each member has by design.⁴ Furthermore, by citing a second analogy about how our physical bodies “**need**” every member (foot, hand, eye, ear or nose), Paul accentuates how each Body member fills an *equally necessary role* (vv. 14-17, 19-24; 12:12 = first analogy).

Anyone reading this portion can clearly see its purpose. It demonstrates *the vital nature of each Body member* since all contribute “value” to and are “necessary” for *the spiritual vigor* of the Church, though each has received different gifts and in different portions (Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:7-16). To emphasize this point,

members are singled out who dare to demean the **Divinely-Calculated-Value** of a brother. For, degrading any believer *opposes God's Determined Design* of placing and gifting each member **"in order that there might not be division (σχίσμα or schism) in the body, but the members might have the same concern on behalf of one another"** as they suffer and rejoice together (1 Cor. 12:25-26). Debasing conceit is also condemned in verse 24, **"God has mixed together the body, after having given more abundant value to the one who lacks"** (emphasis mine). Meditating on these truths should convict any person who accuses a brother of being less valuable than themselves for, in reality, this opinion diminishes their own current value to the Church.

Warnings about the destructive effects of boasting are reiterated in other contexts about the Body. Romans 12:3 says we're **"not to think more highly"** of ourselves **"than it's necessary to think, but to think unto the outcome to be sound minded"**. Pride, arrogance and self-importance ("vainglory" – Phil. 2:3) only reduce a member's effectiveness. For, every member was placed in the Body to have a *positive impact for the purpose of helping the Church grow into God's ultimate vision* (Eph. 4:1-3, 12-16). In practice, each member's value comes to fruition as he or she develops spiritually. So, if we truly comprehend *the Biblically-Stated-Reality of the Body*, we'll accept and promote all fellow believers as **"the dwelling of God in the Spirit"**. Otherwise, we will simply imitate the world-smart Corinthians who thought their vision of how the Church should operate was better than God's (Eph. 2:22). This is why the "one body" is presented as the first essential element in *God's Reality-Empowering-Arsenal* which can help believers "maintain the unity of the Spirit" (4:3).

The second *Component* designed to achieve "oneness" in the Church is **"one Spirit"** (εν πνεύμα – Eph. 4:4). This Person of the Godhead's role is initially seen in His act of causing believers to be **"baptized into one body"** (1 Cor. 12:13). During this procedure, He serves as the deity-force who enlightens the heart of God's elect to see their need for salvation just as He did for Lydia a couple millennia ago (Acts 16:14; see also 1 Cor. 1:18-31; Eph. 1:4, 13-14; 2 Tim. 2:10). After rebirth, the indwelling Spirit offers capacity to understand the written Word plus provides the power behind our lifestyle and gifts which enable us to become a factor in helping to build up the Church (1 Cor. 2:6-12; Eph. 3:16-19; 4:12-16; 5:15-21). The extent to which each of us chooses to be controlled by the Spirit will determine our personal level of contribution to the Body (Rom. 6:15-16; Gal. 5:16-18). This is how the Holy Spirit serves as a second crucial facet of *God's Reality-Empowering-Arsenal* which can help believers "maintain . . . unity".

The third *Component* designed to achieve “oneness” in the Church is “one hope” (μια ελπιδι – Eph. 4:4). This “hope”, to which all believers “were called” (saved), is the return of Jesus Christ, the event when our conformity to His image will become complete (Phil. 3:20-21; Tit. 2:13). As we apply this *common future guarantee*, the present outlook of each Body member can be redirected to concentrate on activities God prescribes for our betterment along with that of our brothers and sisters (Phil. 1:27 – 2:3; 1 Thess. 5:6-11; Tit. 2:12-13). By enabling us to *conceptualize our Shared Eternal Perfection*, the “one hope” positions itself as a vital piece of *God's Reality-Empowering-Arsenal* which can help believers “maintain the unity of the Spirit”.

The fourth *Component* designed to achieve “oneness” in the Church is our “one Lord” (εις κυριος – Eph. 4:5). This of course refers to the *Master* whom we serve, Jesus Christ. As we've already seen, each member must cling to Him as their Head if they're to contribute growth to the Body (Eph. 4:15-16; Col. 1:18-20; 2:9-10, 19). For, He alone is the “chief priest” who paid for our sins and provides access to the Father (Rom 5:2; Eph. 2:18; 3:12; Heb. 2:17-18; 4:14-16). Also, He is spoken of as the only “chief shepherd” who deserves His prominent position as Leader in the Church (Col. 1:18; 1 Pet. 5:5). With His aid, Christians can be prepared to live steady lives and become an asset for the Body's development in addition to evangelizing unbelievers. So, it's not hard to visualize how our “one Lord” is another key part of *God's Reality-Empowering-Arsenal* which can help believers “maintain the unity of the Spirit”.

The fifth *Component* designed to achieve “oneness” in the Church is “one faith” (μια πιστις – Eph. 4:5). This term could be interpreted as “faith” *needed for salvation* or “faith” referring to *the body of revealed truth* Christians are to *believe* or *trust*. Regarding the first aspect, numerous passages show the “faith” we exercise for salvation is provided as a gift from God (Rom. 12:3; Eph. 1:13; 2:8-9; Phil. 1:28-29; 1 Tim. 1:14).⁵ The fact God chooses whom He wills and gives us “faith” to believe *places all Christians on the same level* – entirely saved by His grace (Rom. 8:28-30; 9:11-24; 1 Cor. 1:18-31; Eph. 1:4). So, all Body members have *equal present worth* as a result of the love, mercy and grace of God just as we were *equally saved from our identically hopeless sinful state* (Rom. 11:30-32; 14:4, 10-12; 1 Cor. 8:1-3, 11-12; Eph. 2:1-5).

Truth given for the Church is also defined as “faith” (πιστις). Ephesians develops this concept beginning with the Body's need to be built up “until we might all attain unto the unity” (“ενοτητα” – *oneness*, same as in Eph. 4:3) *of the faith and full knowledge of the Son of God* (4:13 – emphasis mine). The genitive case in the phrase “of the faith” indicates “unity” in the Body is directly associated with

this “faith”. Later, this same “faith” is included as part of the “armor of God”, *absolute truth* enabling us to quench all “fiery darts” the “Evil one” may throw our way (6:16, see also Gal. 3:23-25; Phil. 1:25, 27; 2:17; Col. 2:5, 7). In addition, this word is used to describe the “faith of Christ” or “faithfulness of Christ” which encompasses *the totality of His faithful work* demonstrated by His sinless life, death on the cross, and resurrected role as “Head” (Eph. 3:12). Jesus’ *faithful actions which Christians should trust* are recorded throughout the Church Epistles (Rom. 3:22, 26; Gal. 2:16, 20; 3:22; Phil. 3:9). When believers put faith in this *Divine Instruction Manual* in tandem with recognizing our *common gift of saving faith*, we become catalysts for the unifying-glue offered by this dynamic of *God’s Reality-Empowering-Arsenal* which can help us “maintain the unity of the Spirit”.

The sixth *Component* designed to achieve “oneness” in the Church is “one baptism” (ἐν βαπτισμῷ – Eph. 4:5) which is described in four passages (Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27-28; Col. 2:11-12). The word “baptism” basically means: *Two things contact one another with an effectual result*. The two initial items colliding are *the Holy Spirit* with *sinners*. The effective result is how we are *closely associated with* our Lord’s “death”, *spiritually identified with* His Person (“Christ”), and *completely affiliated with* His “body”. In all four contexts, the verbs appear in the aorist indicative form which denotes *past completed action* and designates *the historic point of our salvation* as the time this spiritual “baptism” took place.⁶ Furthermore, each action word has a common subject – all Christians. However, since these terms also appear in the passive voice, they stipulate *an outside force acted upon these subjects* (us) to accomplish this “baptism”.

Two of these contexts allude to who this *outside source* is. First Corinthians 12:13 says it happened “in one Spirit” and “we were all caused to drink of one Spirit”. Similarly, Colossians 2:12 says we have “been baptized through the faith (or “faithfulness”) associated with the operation of God”, the same “operation” (ἐνεργείας) or *energizing* God used to raise His Son “from the dead”. Therefore, this “one baptism” which all believers have equally undergone, is *the single divine act behind our initiation* into the Body of Christ. In addition, our “baptism” is the reason all Christians have the indwelling “one Spirit”, who then provides us potential to “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4; 7:4-6). So, it should be easy to see how understanding “baptism”, *our Divine Initiation into the Body-Fraternity*, is an indispensable part of *God’s Reality-Empowering-Arsenal* which can help believers “maintain the unity of the Spirit”.

The seventh *Component* designed to support “oneness” in the Church is the importance of our “**one God** (εἰς θεός) **and Father** (πατήρ) **of all**” (Eph. 4:6). Some prominent personality traits of the Father are: He developed the Master Plan for Creation; He executes this Plan; He receives glory for the effects of this Plan, and He’s the one to whom prayer is addressed. Yet, the feature which most closely relates to “unity” in the Church seems to be represented by the fact He is the “**one God**” who is “**the Father of all**”, both Jews and gentiles (Rom. 3:29-30; 4:11). In this dispensation, the Father has chosen previously “**alienated**” gentiles and reconciled them with elect Jews for the single goal of placing us together as His “**sons**” (Eph. 1:4-5; 2:11-16; 3:2-6). As Body members absorb the significance of this achievement, we’ll *Elevate the “One . . . Father of all”* (emphasis mine) *to His Proper Place* as the Essence of our “fullness” (Eph. 1:23) and, as such, the final piece of the *Reality-Empowering-Arsenal* which can help believers “maintain the unity of the Spirit”.

Applying These Unifying Essentials

Having taken this bird’s-eye view of **God’s Seven Foundational Tools for the Maintenance of Unity**, notice how they *represent everything God has made available to believers in order to accomplish this task*. These *Spiritual Elements* comprise God’s TOTAL FORMULA which enables the Body of Christ to operate in a unified manner. *No other Groundwork exists for this*. Let me repeat: **No other Realities are needed to Comprehend the Essence of The Body or to Fulfill Its Function!** When Christians grasp this point, we should promote the *only two physical entities* which exist to accomplish His purpose for the Body: *The Revelation of His Word* (“one faith”) and *Every Gifted Member* (“one body”). We should also promote the *Other Five Realities/Beings* each believer must depend on to perform in a manner approved by God.

Okay, what am I driving at? It should be apparent, God’s creation of and provisions for the Church *are complete* – **No Add-Ons are Needed**. For, His “new creation” of the Body is already as perfect as His original creation was before sin entered into the world. And, He’s made available “**God-breathed**” truth for the “**man of God . . . to be fully equipped for every good work**” and have access to “**everything pertaining to life and godliness**” (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3). Paul calls this same revelation “**sound teaching** (υγιαίνουση διδασκαλία) **according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, which I was entrusted with**” (1 Tim. 1:10-11). We derive the English word ‘hygiene’ from the word translated “sound”. It’s used as an adjective to describe *the healthy attributes of this teaching*.⁷ As this “sound teaching” is related to “**the dispensation of God**” (οικονομίαν θεού) introduced earlier in the passage, both phrases describe God’s

truth which is supposed to administer or manage the Church (v. 4; see also 1 Tim. 3:9). So also, **Revelation in The Bible Contains Everything We Need to Direct the Body's Management and Health.**

Consequently, *anyone who changes* biblical definitions, administrative principles, or stated practices for the Church, **will only Cause God's Flawless Movement to Operate in a Less-Than-Perfect Manner.** The very act of adding to or ignoring part of the divine record will always mitigate, deflect, replace, and/or contradict God's established standards. For, His revelation was given to be implemented by all Body members for the purpose that His *"fullness"* would function in the unified way for which it was *"created"* (Eph. 1:23; 2:10, 15 – emphasis mine).

Ill-advisedly, this is exactly what many Christians have done through the ages which has resulted in many divisions and cheated members out of their divine benefits. This outcome has happened each time a person or group initiates or puts emphasis on a *Humanly-Labeled Church, Group, Denomination, Movement, Religious Organization, or whatever designation* is chosen. Note, I didn't title the last name a 'Christian Organization', for **The Only Christian Organization is The Body of Christ.** So, it should be clear, any amendment which supports a Humanly-Created-Add-On violates the Word and will impede God's stated desire for the Body to maintain *"the unity of the Spirit"*.

Rooting Out "Division"

God, through His foresight, has highlighted our foremost obligation to maintain "unity" by providing an extended passage which contains corrective measures for division plus directions to help prevent factions from ever taking place. In his First Letter to Corinth, Paul states he'd heard about *"divisions"* (σχισματα) and *"quarrels"* (εριδες – or *strife*) among Body members there (1 Cor. 1:10-11). The following declaration speaks to the root cause, *"each one of you says 'I indeed am of Paul', also 'I am of Apollos', also 'I am of Cephas', also 'I am of Christ'. Has Christ been divided?"* (vv. 12-13).

The *genitive* case in the phrase "I am of Christ" expresses *association*, so this verse is well translated *"I am associated with (or belong to) Christ"*.⁸ When this concept is applied to the question, "Has Christ been divided", it shows *only believers who identify with our Lord are correct*, for true Body unity only exists around His Person (see 12:12). Yet many Corinthians, *prompted by their flesh*, routinely identified with men such as Paul, Apollos or Cephas. Though these were the greatest possible human 'celebrities' known to them, identifying with

humans rather than “Christ” is the main reason “divisions” and “quarrels” existed and persisted at Corinth (3:1-4).

Now that this Grim Sickness is exposed, the Spirit guides Paul to give *Unifying Instructions* which serve as **Heavenly Medicine Prescribed to Heal the Body** – a two-plus-chapter remedy for their “divisions”. For, who knows best what this Spiritual Body needs than the One Who Designed and “created” it? To symbolize this diagnosis and treatment, compare God’s Creation of the Body of Christ with man’s creation of the automobile. The proper maintenance for a car is specified in its owner’s manual. Who’d follow this guidebook to maintain the engine but not for the transmission or wheel bearings? Mechanics who’re experts in their field faithfully follow these manuals to keep vehicles in optimal working condition. All analogies break down at some point because these manuals may contain faults since men wrote them. In contrast, there’re no faults in the revelation designed to govern the Church. So, **Careful Adherence to this Manual will Enable Believers to Maintain the “unity” God Invented** (the “one faith” of Eph. 4:5).

To begin this Therapy Session, Paul reminds the Corinthian believers Christ was “**crucified**” for them; he wasn’t. Also, he reminds them they were “**baptized**” into the name of Christ, not into his name. Then, the context details how God initiates regeneration in “**the ones being saved**” by means of His “**wisdom**” and “**calling**” (1 Cor. 1:18, 24, 26). In verses 26-28 this *call to salvation* is linked with God’s *election* or *choice* of both Jews and Greeks (v. 24). So, because the source of their salvation is “**out of Him**” (ἐξ αὐτοῦ), *from within the Person of God*, all “**boasting**” should be directed to Him, not men (vv. 29-31). This passage plainly details how no Corinthian had any part in their salvation, but their conversion was *solely brought about by a sovereign act of mercy* (Rom. 9:15-18; 11:30-32). To the extent these believers realized *they were all undeserving* of this spiritual transformation, a *Humble Sense of Camaraderie* would’ve overcome their congregation achieving **the first stage of God’s Cure for their Illness of Division**.

Then, after addressing the humble mindset and down-to-earth presentation of the gospel believers ought to have during evangelism based on God’s elective purpose (1 Cor. 2:1-5; 1:26-31; Rom. 9:11-13), Paul lays out the Prescription of Foundational-Teaching as *the next remedy* for their detachment (the “one faith” of Eph. 4:5). These “**teachings of the Spirit**” were once a “**mystery**”, *an unknown secret*, until after the Lord was raised from the dead (1 Cor. 2:7-8, 13). This instruction is also labeled as “**the wisdom of God**” and “**the mind of Christ**” (v. 7, 16). Any believer can mature by using the “**Spirit**” to internalize “**the deep things of God**” found in these “**teachings**” (vv. 10-16). For, “mystery” truth recorded here

and in Paul's other Letters enables Christians to comprehend the reality of who we are as Body members, how we should act toward one another, and how God wants us to share the gospel with the world as a unified force (Phil. 1:27). By accepting Paul's offer to be inoculated by this *Mystery-Treatment-for-Body-Awareness*, the Corinthians would gain a *Reunifying Appreciation* for who they are "in Christ" and, by so doing, experience **the second stage of God's Cure for their Illness of Division.**

This Divine Prescription continues in chapter three where the Corinthians' *fleshliness* is bemoaned and singled out as the underlying cause for their "jealousy" and "strife" (1 Cor. 3:3). After connecting these attitudes with how many were identifying with men, Paul reprimands them by profiling himself and Apollos in the correct way, as simple "ministers through whom" they "believed". In contrast with their minute ministry, the emphatic statement "But God causes the increase" credits all real growth to its source, the Person of God (vv. 5-7).

With this distinction, he and Apollos are relegated to being lowly "fellow-workers" laboring as "one" in the Body of Christ, which is then described as "God's field" and "God's building" (vv. 8-9). Now that the practice of idolizing men has been squashed, our Lord is again made the *Person-of-focus*. Accordingly, verses 10 and 11 emphasize how Paul, as the "wise master builder", established "Jesus Christ" as the only "foundation" of our Christian faith. Then, in connection with our service to Him, each believer's warned concerning how he or she builds on our Christ-Centered Message.

Christians should take this warning seriously since after ministering we'll receive a "wage" (μισθον)⁹ for any good "work" produced. However, any action the Lord assesses as *flesh-based* will be burned (1 Cor. 3:11-14; see also Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10-11). When these bad works are burned, each believer "will be caused to suffer loss", yet verse 15 clarifies this Judgment has nothing to do with our eternal salvation. On a positive note, rewards received for "good work(s)" will endure forever (Eph. 2:10; 2 Tim 3:17; Tit. 2:14). When Church members at Corinth contemplated this Sobering-Future-Judgement, the *Expectation of Their Individual Accountability* would've had a massive humbling impact on them as **the final stage of God's Cure for their Illness of Division.**

Wrapping up, Paul advises the Corinthians that any person who "corrupts" this "temple" (the Body of Christ), which is "holy", "God will corrupt this one", that is, burn his/her fleshly works resulting in personal "loss" (1 Cor. 3:16-17). Then, the imperative mode is used to command every single believer not to "deceive himself" by following a type of "wisdom" other than God's, for this approach to life

is complete “foolishness” (see 1:18, 20-21, 23, 25, 27; 2:14). Like a dictionary, **this Two-Plus-Chapter-Condemnation of Division Pinpoints “foolishness”** to *define the Corinthians’ choice to “boast in men”* (vv. 18-21 – emphasis mine). Based on the Discord-Causing-Blunder of “foolishness”, Paul concludes his rebuke by articulating the proper view they should have of the Church as a whole (“the temple of God which is holy”) **“all things belong to you”** (vv. 17, 21). The phrase “all things” represents the persons of Paul, Apollos, and Cephas in addition to everything else in creation. So, the intent of the combined words “all things belong to you” is to turn on an illuminating spotlight so we can see **The Body of Christ is the Most Important Entity in the Material Universe.**

Now, the crescendo: **“all things belong to (or are associated with) you, also you belong to Christ, also Christ belongs to God”** (1 Cor. 3:22-23).¹⁰ The genitive case used in these verses is the same found in the phrase “I indeed am of Paul” which *stresses association* (1:12). Therefore, Paul is saying this *Divinely-Endorsed-Viewpoint is the Only Theological Perspective Christians should ever Associate Body Members with* – **Our Lives and Ministry should be Monopolized by The Centrality of Christ and His Church.** This Correct-Statement-of-Identity should’ve convicted the Corinthians back then, and it should shame anyone today who similarly corrupts the Body (3:17). If “division” is to be averted in today’s assemblies, **This Corinthian Remedy Must Penetrate the minds, hearts, and conscience of all those in management.**

Disregarding This Remedy

A disturbing Reflection: I don’t see support for the idea Paul, Apollos or Cephas was teaching any different doctrine by the time this Book was written (1 Cor. 15:5-11). So, the Corinthian state of affairs appears to be mostly a *personality preference issue*. A more-upsetting Application: Since most divisions today are justified by a combination of *preferential doctrine* (beliefs which aren’t considered ‘heresy’) and *emphasizing personalities*, I can only conclude **many of today’s splits are Worse-Than-Corinthian.**

Moreover, it’s worth recalling the Corinthian believers had **“every bit of knowledge”** and didn’t lack any **“gift”** (1 Cor. 1:5, 7). Still, they are forever chronicled as examples of disunity. Since this Book confirms knowledge and gifts alone can’t produce “unity”, it demonstrates how Christians need to learn to integrate the facts of “knowledge” with Spirit-empowered character if we want to successfully minister in a loving manner among all Body members. Otherwise, our **“knowledge”** simply **“puffs up”** (φυσιοῦ; or *makes proud*) and *will propel us to*

repeat the same factious spirit which is evident in the rest of this Book, then in Second Corinthians (1 Cor. 8:1; 13:1-7; Gal. 5:16; Phil. 2:12).

Focusing on this haughty attitude, note how Paul concludes the first three chapters of this Book by setting himself and Apollos forth as an example for how believers should work together in unity (1 Cor. 4:6; see 3:4-9). Then, drawing from this model, he teaches the Corinthians **“not to go beyond which things have been written”** so that **“one (brother) in behalf of one (another brother) might not be puffed up against the other”** (a third brother, 1 Cor. 4:6-7). Paul’s dual use of the term “one” forms the plural subject for the verb “be puffed up” (φυσθίουσθε; or *be proud* – same verb as in 1 Cor. 8:1) and indicates how these two brothers were *gratified to gang up against* a fellow believer. Also, the preposition translated “in behalf of” (ὕπερ), or *instead of*, shows the first mentioned brother is *lobbying as an advocate* for the second brother so they together can oppose the third – their fellow brother.

Furthermore, this verb’s voice could mean they *acted upon themselves* (middle) or *were prompted by an outside force* (passive). Since either grammatical option is possible, we can combine the meaning of both voices to indicate *each person’s choice controlled by their flesh* formed the thrust behind the joint pride which resulted in this “division” with their brother. The application: Today, each of us should ask, ‘Am I going to “go beyond which things” God has “written” and choose to repeat this Corinthian Tragedy?’ *Unless each of us makes a conscious determination to promote the Preeminence of Christ and His Church, we will repeat their “foolishness”!* (1 Cor. 3:18-23; 12:24-26; Col. 1:18-20 – emphasis mine).

How “Division” Enters the Church

Having observed this biblical standard for how Christians are to be unified in “one body” (Eph. 4:4), how can we evaluate whether our assembly is in conformity with this mandate? Initially, we need to define how a gathering of believers can legitimately claim to be God-Ordained. First, there must be Apostles, literally *those sent from* God to distribute a message (Rom. 10:15). To establish His Old Testament program for the Nation of Israel, God sent Abraham, Moses, The Prophets, Jesus and The Twelve to preach **“the gospel of the kingdom”** (Matt. 4:23; 24:14; Acts 8:12). After Israel rejected this kingdom message, God sent Paul and other Apostles to establish the **“mystery”** message about The Body of Christ, His new program which persists to this day.¹¹

Second, to verify Ambassadors are sent by God, they must distribute Revelation to a target audience by the use of supernatural miracles. These two mandatory requirements, reinforced by a massive amount of Scripture, should persuade all saints to acknowledge: **Today, The Body of Christ is the Only Legitimate Movement** and it has replaced God's program with Israel. Consequently, all beliefs and practices permitted in our assemblies should be consistent with this conviction.

This principle of God-Ordination has been correctly applied by 'Protestants' to condemn the validity of the 'Catholic Church' which claims to be established by God. An additional issue is this organization claims truth can be added "beyond which things have been written" including proclamations made by their popes (1 Cor. 4:6). These same criticisms have been voiced to condemn the legitimacy of the 'Mormon Church' which claims authenticity based on assertions that Joseph Smith received divine revelation; 'Christian Science' which is based on the writings of Mary Baker Eddy; 'Scientology' based on the book *Dianetics* and other writings of L. Ron Hubbard; and so many other Groups. The error of adding outside teaching to Scripture will be further discussed shortly. But, one comment now: Any humanly-instigated group which **Claims the Bible doesn't contain Sufficient-Divine-Authority for The Church is already Descending a Slippery-Slope with no corrective brakes.**

To be fair, we should equally apply this standard of Divine-Initiation to so-called 'Protestant' Groups. **Under this scrutiny, how can any of these organizations claim to be God-Ordained?** I realize most assert they were commenced by revelation from the Spirit, visions, dreams, a voice, or some other kind of divine message or leading. This claim is made even though the act of forming a separate group, in and of itself, clashes with God's definition of the "one body" which He "created".¹² So, *even the commonly accepted belief that it's valid to form or operate a fellowship separate from but within the greater Body of Christ lacks any support from Scripture.* Just ask yourself: **Does Scripture support the idea the Holy Spirit would ever sponsor any subdivision in the Church?** Simply based on passages covered so far, let alone the rest of Scripture, anyone should respond to this question with a resounding '**NO**'! For, *the Spirit is the One Who Moves God's Single Movement.* Because this issue is so important, the next article of this series will focus on how the Spirit leads and works in believers in this dispensation.

Proper Body Attitude & Focus

At this point, a reader may say, 'Wow, you're anti-denominational!' Yes, that person would be correct. I'm opposed to any faction endorsing an entity smaller than the Body of Christ or any stand which promotes just a portion of the revelation given to the Church. For, I believe, the only way Christians can avoid becoming participants in an IT-GROUP is to *actively promote the application of all truth God delivered for the Body of Christ*. If we fail to follow this *Refuge for Both Mind and Heart* by venturing beyond or falling short of it, **we won't be able to escape Some Degree of Participation in Emptying His "fullness"** (Acts 20:20, 26-27). Whether we think the group we fellowship with practices Christianity the right way or if we discourage fellow believers from associating with other Body members, either way, we've already decided to be **Accomplices of the Division-Causing-Problem within the Church**.

Before proceeding, I'd like to share a couple valuable lessons which've helped shape my outlook about ministry in the Body of Christ. More than 40 years ago, I asked Doc McNeilly why he attended a denominational church since he didn't believe in segmenting the Body. He recounted, while in the Navy, he attended a non-denominational church but noticed the dominant mindset was just as sectarian as in attached churches. This experience prompted him and his wife to choose a fellowship and quietly minister as Body members wherever they landed to practice medicine. From my standpoint, they were highly successful as they influenced countless believers in and outside of that Conservative Baptist Church.

Yet, it wasn't always easy for them to practice this conviction. For, over the years, I've heard numerous believers testify how the McNeilly's Body-Attitude helped them maintain fellowship with all believers whether they chose to stay at their assembly or not, even during church splits. Also, Doc once shared how they were criticized by their own leaders for chaperoning a Bible study in which the majority of participants didn't attend their church.

Another lasting impression came by way of my best friend, Jeff McCleary. During one of our final chats in the year before he met the Lord, I remember being moved by an idea he was contemplating from his current study in Ephesians. At that time, while preparing to teach, he'd been deeply convicted by the concept of *how close believers are portrayed to be in the Body of Christ*. Back then, this thought made an immediate impact on me. This and so many other memories have continued to inspire me. For, Jeff was a great example of how truth from the Word can synchronize with daily intentions and actions in the pursuit of a

balanced Christian life and mutual ministry with all believers. Apart from my wife, his testimony has touched me more than any other peer.

Recognizing Seeds of “Division”

Based on deliberations to this point, I hope you can see why I fear for anyone who ‘cheer-leads’ the tenets of their ‘faith’, for I’ve seen how ‘preaching to the choir’ develops a condescending mindset of exclusion in those who participate. Also, I fear for leaders who use the strategy of “**lording it over . . . the flock**” to gain allegiance rather than seeking to train these same believers to become independent members who can profit the Body (1 Pet. 5:3).

I know what I’m talking about because I haven’t been innocent of quite a few of the divisive practices detailed in this article. As a consequence, I’ve suffered a great deal of remorse. At the time, I defended my actions by thinking they were for the ‘ministry’. And, part of my rationale was based on the mantra, ‘Those who are not for us are against us’. The intent of this phrase was to define friends by those who verbalize only positive things about an organization and/or financially support it, otherwise *they are enemies*. How sobering and humiliating it’s been to admit my “foolishness” (1 Cor. 3:18-23). Over the years I’ve come in contact with many who have this same reasoning, yet think it’s no big deal.

This same mindset infiltrates many Church leaders today, though, virtually every group asserts their ‘ministry’ is patterned for the glory of God. How can this be when members are purposely kept so busy they don’t have time to fellowship outside their group? And, what about calculating statements like ‘These folks are dear brothers, but . . .’ followed by some *So-Called Justifiable Warning* their members should avoid these ‘dear brothers’? This same condemnation can be applied to a vast number of cleverly-phrased put-downs worded simply to steer members away from other brothers and sisters. Finally, what about the use of glib labels and derogatory names with the hidden agenda of terminating relationships between believers? Are these methods in line with *God’s desire for us to exert effort* “to maintain the unity of the Spirit”? (Eph. 4:3).

Also, how can anyone claim to promote “unity” if they actively squelch the voice of some believers or discourage the exercise of these members’ gifts?¹³ Then, what about Christians who agree to discuss the Word but each time a difference arises they try to correct that person? Or, what about those who routinely bring up known differences just to exacerbate an ‘open wound’? Are these actions prompted by love and the command to preserve peaceful interactions (Rom. 14:1; 15:1-6; Eph. 4:3; Col. 3:4-17)? I don’t know how many times I’ve heard the

expression, 'We need to agree to disagree and still love one another'. In my experience, this claim's often made but it's usually a smokescreen for what really takes place. For all too often, *there's a conscious effort to get around biblical directives* just to keep current practices in place.

Division often starts between individual believers (1 Cor. 1:12; 4:7). When brothers have a disagreement, unless both parties seek resolution by attempting to understand the other person's position, reconciliation can't occur.

Unfortunately, what happens most of the time is *flesh-based guesswork prompts wrong conclusions*. Since we can't fully know why a brother or sister thinks the way they do or what their intent is, if we proceed without practicing Christian due-diligence we'll just deepen the rift. In addition, we shouldn't act self-righteously by quoting 'Bible based' condemnations or accusations which simply add fuel to an argument. For, the simple truth is, any believer can find something wrong with any other brother if this is our motivation (Phil. 4:8). Instead, we should choose wise words tempered by Christian character so reunion is possible while **"forgiving** (literally, *showing grace*) . . . **as God forgave**" us (Eph. 4:32). At the end of the day, all "division" results from believers building themselves up at the expense of tearing others down, a process transgressing so much biblical advise (Rom. 12:3, 16-21; 1 Cor. 8:1; Phil. 2:3 to cite a few).

When contentious behavior is encouraged, personality vices follow such as ostracizing, gossiping about, disdain, or dividing from fellow believers. At that point, it doesn't matter what doctrine we hold if our actions violate other instructions found in the Word which we claim govern us. This kind of hypocrisy is driven by ignorance or choice. Either way, this state-of-mind is a *far cry from the connection God wants us to nurture in His Beautiful Body*. As its members, **God wants us to Acquire Character which Represents our Spiritual Profile – the "new creation", "poem", "fullness", and Name of "Christ"**.

As a substitute for operating in a spiritually beneficial manner, many groups run like cut-throat businesses which do what they need to do in order to survive regardless of how it affects their employees. When this model is copied, financial security is by and large placed as the top priority and usually *The Entity's Image is protected at all costs*. By publicizing virtues and covering up problems, the organizational infrastructure is preserved and monetary support is maximized. Also, leaders are commonly elevated to positions of prominence above other members, so much so, that at times they reach *Celebrity or Even Idol Status* (1 Cor. 3:3-9).

Yet, truths found in First Corinthians 12 should discourage this practice as well as motivate us to promote the True-Reality: *Each Body Member has Equal-Ministry-Value by God's Design*. If our goal is to conform to God's portrayal of the Body, *those in charge need to take the lead* to ensure the worth of each believer is recognized. This change is possible when a group is willing to **Make a Concerted Effort to Lower the Perception of Leaders to Simple-Brother-Status**. Then, the congregation can make an Eternal-Investment in all its members by emphasizing edification accompanied by love, patience, long-suffering, and tolerance – qualities needed to successfully foster any Christian relationship.

Formula for Body “Unity”

What does the picture of a practicing assembly look like which strives to “maintain the unity of the Spirit?” Initially, all members need to self-assess to make sure all aspects of their agenda for belief and conduct are consistent with God's commands for the Body. Second, when the Word is shared, we should apply what's taught to all believers, not just to ‘our group’. For, a group-centered-focus will create a superiority complex in everyone who hears (2 Tim. 4:3). Third, we shouldn't promote part of God's message for the Church while shying away from the rest of its teaching (Acts 20:20, 27). Forth, we should allow biblically based discussion and criticism of both doctrine and practice, show tolerance for differences of opinion, and be committed to treating one another with love regardless of conviction (Rom. 14:1, 22-23; 15:1-7). Fifth, we should actively encourage believers to seek fellowship with others in the Body so all can mutually profit from one another.

Those who wish to preserve Body unity should ask the following questions: ‘Am I going to promote God's stated equal-value of each believer or *am I going to fall prey to the Corinthian folly* by demeaning fellow Body members?’ And, ‘Am I going to fellowship across the Body to encourage new friendship, mentorship and counseling possibilities with brothers?’ The payoff for becoming an asset in Body ministry yields independent, stable members capable of building up the Church and sharing the gospel with the world (Rom. 10:15). I believe each of us needs to decide if we're going to be part of this solution or part of the division-problem. We should ask, ‘Am I going to ‘settle’ for humanly devised structures believing they can work better than God's “new creation”?’ Please consider how **Any Policy which Elevates organizations or persons above the Rest of The Body Systematically Hampers God's Operational Design** from taking place.

To partake in this solution, we need to first concentrate on personal growth by the difficult process of dying to our fleshly “old man” and putting on character consistent with the “new man” (Rom. 13:12-14; Eph. 4:20-24; Phil. 3:9-11; Col. 3:5, 9-10; 2 Tim. 3:12). To the degree a believer is transformed by spiritual renewal, he or she gains the capacity to contribute to the “increase of the body which results in the building up of itself in love” (Eph. 4:16). Note, this same verse states *Body-Wide Advancement Happens* “through the supply of every joint according to the energizing in the measure of each part”. This means, **Each Believer's Efforts are the Primary Source Stimulating Growth in The Body of Christ** (see also Col. 2:19). So, if anyone feels they're too insignificant to make a difference, please recognize how vital you and every other member of the Church are in God's purpose. After all, He's specifically chosen and gifted each one of us! (1 Cor. 12:18; Eph. 4:7).

Some might say, ‘Do you believe in a Christian Utopia?’¹⁴ In fact, I do. For the beautiful reality is, **We Are the Actual “fullness” of God in Christ**. We can aspire to this reality or we can continue to replace it with our own and ‘settle’ for *Less-Than-The-Best*. Which do you think is “foolish”, and which pleases God? So, how can this reality be implemented? We need to ‘imagine’ it; or in Paul's words, we should “consider” ourselves “to be dead indeed to sin and living in relation to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:10). To accomplish this feat, we first need to visualize our justification before God as He accepts us in Christ. After internalizing how faultless God sees us, we must “walk” by our indwelling Spirit so we can be conformed to the image of His Son (Gal. 5:16; Rom. 5:1-2; 6:1-6, 15-23; 7:4-6; 8:1-39). This is the way believers who uncompromisingly try to source 100% of “the mind of Christ” can effect personal and Body-wide progress toward perfection. Remember, this Present-Day-Goal-of-Perfection *will become a reality for the entire Body* when our Savior returns (1 Cor. 2:16; Phil. 3:10-21).

Final Considerations

Before concluding, I'd like to share a few more passages which demonstrate “oneness” in the Body. In the Book of Romans, Paul addresses “all the beloved of God who are in Rome”, then in chapter sixteen he greets several separate groups of believers who combined represent the Church there (1:7; 12:5; 16:3-16). Also, the “church” at Corinth appears to have been made up of many assemblies physically detached by that city's vast size.¹⁵ Not only were assemblies at Corinth addressed as a portion of the Universal Church, but “saints” or churches in other cities were spoken to as part of the same Body (1 Cor. 1:2; 16:19; 2 Cor. 1:1; 13:12; Gal. 1:2).

In fact, every Epistle written to “**saints**” or a “**church**” in a single city is directed to **Believers Who are Considered Part of One Entity** (Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1). In those days fellowship was limited by geographic distance, still many contexts confirm the commonality of, need for interaction with, and concern for all believers everywhere (Rom. 15:25-31; 2 Cor. 11:28; Col. 4:15-16). Today, with our superior ability to travel, *We Have Fewer Excuses* to fellowship with more of the Body.

Summarizing, spiritual growth occurs when we don't “**shrink back from teaching**” or practicing “**the whole counsel of God**”. This means we shouldn't go beyond or fall short of applying every part of this “**sound teaching**” (Acts 20:20, 27; 1 Cor. 4:6-7; 1 Tim. 1:10-11). Just like banks train employees to spot counterfeit bills by studying real ones; in the same way, believers become competent to evaluate all teaching as we take heart to internalize this divine truth with Spirit-sourced power enabling us to handle anything the world throws our way (Eph. 6:10-18; 1 Tim. 4:6-16). For, **The Sole Energy Propelling God's Single Movement is the Movement of His Spirit.**

On the flip side, our lingering “**old man**” will never cease to tempt and urge us to compromise or go to extremes. But, if we choose to personalize what we know, we can make significant headway toward *Optimal Spiritual Balance* and become *Maximum Contributors for Unity* in the Church. This same approach can simultaneously protect any believer from falling victim to Humanly-Introduced Tradition which should be seen for what it is – A Growth-Stunting Device.

Comparable Counsel from: **Philippians**

“Paul . . . to the saints . . . in Philippi with the overseers and deacons . . . I desire you to know brethren that the things relating to me (his sufferings and imprisonment) have happened rather for the advancement of the gospel . . . according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be made ashamed, but in all boldness as all the time, also now, Christ will be magnified in my body whether through life or through death . . . Only, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ in order that whether having come and having seen you or being absent I might hear things concerning you that you are standing in one spirit, in one life-essence (or, *soul*), working together like athletes in the faith of the gospel” (Phil. 1:1, 12, 20, 27).

“Therefore, if there's any encouragement in Christ, if there's any comfort associated with love, if there's any commonality of the Spirit, if there're any compassions and mercies, fill my joy so that you might think the same thing,

having the same love, *existing* together in life-essence (or, *soul*), thinking one thing, also *thinking* nothing according to selfishness or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind considering one another as superior to yourselves . . . Think about this attitude among yourselves which also exists in Christ Jesus . . . So that, my beloved . . . with fear and trembling put your own salvation into action . . . Do all things apart from grumbings and disputes in order that you might become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation while actively holding to the Word of life” (Phil. 2:1-3, 5, 12,14-16).

“Although, I while possessing *a reason to have* self-assurance in the flesh, if any other thinks to have confidence in the flesh, I more . . . But which things were gain to me, these things I consider loss . . . in order that I might gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my righteousness out of the law but that which is through the faithfulness of Christ . . . with the outcome to know Him, both the power of His resurrection and the commonality associated with His sufferings, being conformed with His death if somehow I might attain to the resurrection out of the dead . . . Brethren, I myself don’t consider to have taken hold of *it*, but one thing, while forgetting the things behind and extending out to the things before, with an objective, I pursue in the direction of the prize associated with the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus . . . Moreover, unto which we’ve attained, *we’re* to walk in the same” (Phil. 3:4, 7-11, 13-14, 16).

“So that, my brethren, beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, likewise stand in the Lord, beloved. I encourage Euodia and I encourage Syntyche to think the same thing in the Lord. And, yes, I ask you, genuine yolk-fellow, to help them . . . Finally, brethren, as much as is true, as much as is respectable, as much as is right, as much as is pure, as much as is lovely, as much as is of good report, if anything is virtuous and if anything is praiseworthy, consider these things. Which things you’ve learned and received and heard and seen in me (Paul), practice these things and the God of peace shall be with you” (Phil. 4:1-3, 8-9).

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New Testament quotes are original translations by the author from the Greek texts.
Old Testament quotes are from the King James Version unless otherwise specified.
All Bible Versions cited can be found on the internet by use of the noted abbreviations.

¹ The infinitive “ανακεφαλαιωσασθαι” consists of the preposition “ανα”, meaning *up*, prefixed to the verb “κεφαλαιω”, which has the same root as the noun “κεφαλη” translated *Head* in Ephesians 1:22. Therefore, the action expressed is *to head up* or *sum up* all things in Christ, the Head. The only other occurrence of this word is in Romans 13:9, where the Law “has been summed up” (ανακεφαλαιουται) in the phrase “you shall love your neighbor as yourself”.

² In Ephesians 4:4-6, the cardinal number “one” occurs in all three genders. Masculine forms are derived from “εις”, feminine forms are derived from “μια”, and neuter forms are derived from “εν”. However, all forms in all genders still simply mean *one*.

³ In the Greek text, this verb of being is absent in the phrase “and likewise *is* Christ”. However, it’s understood to be present because the grammatical intent is that it’s to be distributed from the former phrase, “many *exist* (εστιν – emphasis mine) as one body”. This grammatical feature of distributing one word or phrase to subsequent words or phrases is common in New Testament Greek. This’s why most Translations add the verb of being here unless they’re designed to be a ‘very literal’ Version.

⁴ The definition of “αναγκαιος” is ‘*of or with force . . . constraining . . . necessary*’: The Abridgment of *Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford, October 1871, pg. 47.

⁵ The specific meaning of these verses based on grammar and context will be detailed in an article on the topic of ‘Election’ later in this series.

⁶ In Colossians 2:11-12, the word “baptism” (βαπτισμῷ) is a noun. The two action verbs are “you were circumcised” (περιετμήθητε) and “you were raised with” (συνηγεθητε). The action word directly connected with “baptism” in verse 12 is the aorist participle “having been buried” (συνταφέντες). By grammatical rule, the action of an aorist participle precedes that of the main verb, so the idea is “after having been buried in the baptism” (our association with Christ’s death), believers were then “circumcised” in Christ’s circumcision (separation from sin on the cross) and subsequently “raised with” Christ to be able to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4). Then, the word, “raised with” (συνηγεθητε) is repeated in Colossians 3:1, introducing our need to “put to death” the flesh and “put on” the “new” man in the same way Romans 6 focuses on Christian growth (Rom. 6:12-23; Col. 3:5-17).

⁷ This “sound teaching” is to be used by the Elder/Overseers to “encourage” believers and “refute those who oppose” (Titus 1:9). This “sound” message is presented as *Health-Causing Instruction* for the function of the Church, and it’s mentioned several more times in Paul’s Letters (1 Tim. 6:3; 2 Tim. 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:13; 2:1, 2, 8). **Just like the terms ‘Body’, ‘Body of Christ’, and ‘Mystery’, Paul’s the only one who uses forms of the verb “sound” (ὡγαίνω) in regard to truth.**

⁸ Versions translating this phrase ‘I belong to Christ’ are: WNT, Riverside, JMNT and ISV. Those translating it ‘am a follower of’ are: LAMSA, AUV and JMNT. Also, some translate it ‘follow’: WEB, NHEB, NSB, BSB and VIN.

⁹ Although most Translations render “μισθον” *reward*, many translate it with its literal sense (Rom. 4:4; 1 Tim. 5:8; James 5:4). It’s translated ‘wage(s)’ by: YLT, Geneva, CLV and JMNT. Etheridge translates it ‘recompense’. It’s rendered ‘pay’ by: Goodspeed, Williams and JMNT, who also gives ‘compensation’ as an alternate meaning.

¹⁰ The phrase “all things belong to you” in verse 21 is translated this same way by the modern Versions: NASV and NLT. Older Versions rendering it this way are: Moffatt, Goodspeed, Williams, AUV, and ISV. Also, JMNT gives ‘pertain to’ as a meaning. The exact same Greek phrase occurring in verse 22 is translated ‘belong to’ only by: NASV, NLT, Williams and ISV. Then, the same genitive case relation to “Christ” and “God” in verse 23 is translated ‘belong to’ by NASV, NLT, WNT, Williams, AUV, COMMON, JMNT and BSB. Also, many more Versions render this genitive relationship in verse 23 as ‘Christ’s’ and ‘God’s’.

¹¹ “Apostles” mentioned in association with Paul’s Church ministry include *Barnabas* (Acts 14:4, 14; 1 Cor. 9:5-6); *Andronicus* and *Junius* (Rom. 16:7); *Apollos* (1 Cor. 4:6-9); *Silvanus (Silas)* and *Timothy* (1 Thess. 1:1 with 2:7); *Epaphroditus* (Phil. 2:25); and *Titus* in addition to two unidentified brothers (2 Cor. 8:23). Paul, Barnabas and Silas (Silvanus) are also called “prophets” (Acts 13:1; 15:32).

¹² It’s worth noting, the term “one body” is mentioned first in the list of the seven unity-building-truths in Eph. 4:4-6.

¹³ The only legitimate reasons for excluding believers from Church life are members who’re presently involved in doctrinal heresy or immoral activities. For, in and of themselves, these actions necessitate “divisions”, otherwise, they’d cause a departure (division) from morality or doctrinal purity, both of which will corrupt the Body (1 Cor. 5:11; 11:18-19; Titus 3:10-11).

¹⁴ The English word ‘utopia’ comes from combining the Greek words “ευ”, meaning ‘well off’ or ‘good’, and “τοπος”, which refers to ‘a place’ or ‘a spot’. Definitions for these two words are from: The Abridgment of *Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford, October 1871, pgs. 278 and 710.

¹⁵ Around 55 AD, the approximate magnitude of the city of Corinth can be seen in comments recorded on *Wikipedia*: ‘Ancient Corinth was one of the largest and most important cities of Greece, with a population of 90,000 in 400 BC. The Romans demolished Corinth in 146 BC, built a new city in its place in 44 BC, and later made it the provincial capital of Greece.’ In addition to the city’s size, First Corinthians 11:17-34 gives the impression believers from different assemblies around Corinth periodically gathered to partake of the Lord’s Table. This context indicates some brothers didn’t know other believers at these gatherings very well. Their disconnection appears to have worsened a lack of mutual concern, drunkenness, and unwillingness to share food – some of the happenings at that event.