

**DOES
CHRIST'S BODY,
THE CHURCH,
EXIST
AS A
VISIBLE
“GROUP”?**

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**A Biblical Perspective
of the
Inclusive and Exclusive
Characteristics
of the
Church
Built by Jesus Christ**

DOES CHRIST'S BODY, THE CHURCH, EXIST AS A VISIBLE "GROUP"?

The answer to the above question is a resounding **YES! But the group is neither yours nor mine.** It is God's creation in Christ Jesus! Let us delve into what the Bible teaches on this important subject.

The Word tells us that the Lord's body is the church (Col. 1:18, 24). But what is *the church*? The divinely inspired apostle Paul exhorts us in Eph. 4:1-4, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling."

The Bible is very clear about the fact that **the Lord only has one body**, and that body is sustained and maintained by His own life that flows into it from Himself, through the one Spirit He sent for that purpose. **The unity and oneness of God's people is as simple as getting in harmony with and being led by His one Spirit.** His Spirit never fails to baptize into one body. God's Spirit causes people to "come and sing in the height of Zion, and flow together to the goodness of the Lord" (Jer. 31:12). By His Spirit we are brought "to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:22-23).

The word "body" in all the scriptures quoted above comes from the Greek word "soma," and refers to "the body as a sound whole." The word "body" in the English language takes on various shades of meaning, but to narrow it down to its meaning relative to these scriptures I will quote the following from Webster's dictionary: "the whole physical substance of a man, animal, or plant; **a group of people or things regarded as a unit; a corporation; a number of men united by a common tie, by one form of government.**"

In the light of the scriptures above and Webster's definitions it is safe to conclude that the body of Christ is a group, unit, or corporation of people united by the operation of the Spirit of God (that being its common tie), having one form of government (that is, Christ's government – see Isaiah 9:6-7), its object being to convey to the world the whole spiritual substance of who Christ is in a physical, visible manner. **The body of Christ IS CHRIST** manifested in the flesh through the indwelling of His Spirit in human flesh (see 2 Cor. 4:10-11; 6:16, etc.). "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" and thereby "your bodies are the members of Christ" (see 1 Cor. 6:15, 17). Yes, we are even members "of His flesh, and of His bones" (see Eph. 5:30). Therefore, no one is part of the body of Christ who does not possess the spirit and life of Christ in some measure. And furthermore, no religious system or organization has any place in the body of Christ except that which is led, directed, controlled, and organized by the Holy Spirit in accord with the Word of God. All humanly devised, humanly controlled *systems and organizations* are excluded from the Lord's body, but not necessarily all the *people* involved with those systems and organizations. (We will discuss that in further detail later.) Christ is the Head of His body, and its government rests entirely on His own shoulder. He has never given that authority to any man or to any group or committee of men.

In Matt. 16:13-18 it is recorded, "When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some

say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for **flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.** And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and **upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**”

Also in Luke 10:21-22 we read, “In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered to me of my Father; and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and **he to whom the Son will reveal him.**”

Just as Christ and the Father can only be recognized by a divine revelation, so the church can only be recognized by the same. The body of Christ discovers and embraces itself by Jesus Christ and God the Father being revealed to the human heart and soul through the Holy Spirit. It is upon this solid rock of divine revelation that the church is built, and the gates of hell can never prevail against that revelation. It is a revelation of spiritual understanding and knowledge. **Inasmuch as Christ indwells and inhabits our own spirit, soul and body and we walk in fellowship with Him in the Spirit, we will be able to discern His body.** The apostle John said, “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:3).

When Jesus Christ was in the world, the world perceived Him to be but another man among men. But the thing that made Him the real Christ was His divinity. Although “He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not” (John 1:10), Jesus was the real Christ because He was indeed that “holy thing” that was conceived of and anointed by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35; John 1:32-34). When Joseph and his mother, Mary, brought Him to the temple in Jerusalem, there were only two people, out of the many hundreds that frequented that place, who recognized who He really was. They recognized Him because they were in tune with the Holy Spirit and the Spirit bore them witness by revelation (see Luke 2:25-38). To the rest of the folk there, He was just another baby boy.

It is the same with Christ’s body, the church, today. It is perceived by the world as just another church among churches, another sect among sects, its system as just another religion among religions. To the Jews it was but “the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5). But the thing that makes the church the real church, the body of Christ, is its connection with divinity. Although “the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not” (1 John 3:1), the church is indeed the real body of Christ because it is conceived of, anointed, and led by the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8; 1 John 2:27; 4:13; Rom. 8:14).

In Eph. 2:18 it is stated that through Christ we all “*have access by one Spirit unto the Father.*” Those who truly access God by the Spirit gain the revelation of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Thereby they are able to discern the body that is conceived, led, and organized by Him. Christ’s sheep recognize and know His voice (John 10:4-5). There is but one true fold and one Shepherd, and “unto Him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10). All who are gathered unto Him become spiritually quickened with Him, and they all are raised up *together* and made to sit

together in heavenly places in Him (Eph. 2:1-6). Sharing this heavenly fellowship with Jesus in the Spirit makes these spiritually quickened ones all of one heart, soul, and mind. “For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.” Heb. 2:11. They have their ears tuned to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches (congregations) (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). There is no discord or confusion when and where people sit in heavenly places in Christ and are connected with, tuned to, and led by His Spirit.

Every member of the body is born of the Spirit (John 3:3-8) and is set into the body as it pleases God. As each member follows on to drink of that Spirit of which he or she is born and made part of the body, fully consecrating his or her personal body and soul to the will of God, he or she becomes “sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim. 2:21). He or she will then receive “unction” or “anointing” from the Spirit that inspires, illuminates, teaches, and interprets the Word of God. And that which each member learns from this anointing is all truth – never a lie included (1 John 2:20, 27). “And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children. In righteousness shalt thou be established ... This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.” Isa. 54:13,14a, 17b.

By the Spirit every member is set into Christ’s body, individually gifted and endowed according to the will and purpose of God for the overall benefit and profit of the entire body. The whole body is alive with the presence of Christ flowing in and through each member by the Spirit. Those who are inspired and directed by the Spirit to prophesy “speak unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort,” and “ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted” (1 Cor. 14:3, 31). Thus “the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:16). All its growth, advancements or increases are “with the increase of God” (Col. 2:19). “The churches ... were edified; walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.” Acts 9:31. **Christ’s body only increases where God increases.**

Christ’s body is not a loosely flung, segregated body, disjointed and in opposition with itself in various areas of doctrine and practice, but on the contrary, it is “fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth” (Eph. 4:16). Like as Solomon’s temple “was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building” (1 Kings 6:7), so Christ builds His “spiritual house,” His church, out of living stones (1 Pet. 2:5), prepared and fitted together by the tempering work of the Holy Spirit. “For ... God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.” 1 Cor. 12:24-26.

Just as God made the human body to operate in perfect harmony as signals flow by nerve impulses from the brain to every member, telling each member just how and when to move and act, thus motivating and directing the body in an organized and objective manner, so it is with the body of Christ. Signals flow from the Head, Jesus Christ, by the impulses of the Spirit to every member and joint of His body, thus it is motivated and directed in an organized and

objective manner according to the purpose of God. Christ's body is just as organized and objectively motivated as is a sound, healthy human body because of the actual connection every member has with Christ through the Spirit. Not one part of His body is at variance with or opposed to another part.

“The church reflects “the knowledge of the Son of God” here on earth (Eph. 4:13). In it, members of Christ are made members one of another and are enabled by the Holy Spirit “to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge,” and “be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:18-19). As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. ... The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” Rom. 8:14, 16-17a.

Our vision, perception, or discernment of the Lord's body will be proportionate according to our fellowship and communion with the Lord in the Spirit. Where there is a loss or lack of this, there will be a proportionate loss or lack of discerning the body of Christ. Backsliding, apostasy, and sectarianism are the inevitable results.

Does Being a Part of a Group Constitute Sectarianism?

In the September 1971 issue of the *Faith and Victory* publication, editor Lawrence D. Pruitt wrote as follows:

“Letters which come to our desk indicate that self-styled promoters of unity are endeavoring to produce a working fellowship among all they think are in the true church They denounce *all groups* as bad, terming it ‘groupism,’ and thinking that is the root cause of division. **Surely, any religious group is bad if it is not the Church that Jesus built**, but He built His Church and said that it was **a city set on a hill that could not be hid**. ...The very word ‘church’ means a called-out assembly or ‘distinct body of Christians.’ The apostolic church was a separate and distinct group or company of believers. Peter and John knew where their church group was, for ‘they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.’ Acts 4:23.” – L. D. Pruitt, *Faith and Victory*, Sept. 1971.

Also in the Oct. 1975 issue, he says, “The true Church is definitely a visible group – a called out body of saints – but not in the sectarian sense of carnal groupism, factions, or parties which are fostered by schismatic spirits.”

The above statements are true and firmly supported by the Word of God. Let's investigate this subject. First, let's consider the city of God!

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). And, He told His followers, “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid” (Matt. 5:14). Also, we read in Revelation 20:9 about the satanic forces going up on the breadth of the whole earth and compassing “the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.” This shows us the location of the city on the hill. The “city” is located over “the breadth of the earth.” It's a worldwide city, yet, compassed by opposing forces of evil on every side! This corresponds with the vision Nebuchadnezzar saw regarding the stone that became a great mountain and filled the

whole earth (Dan. 2:34-35). Think about the following author's definition and description of this great worldwide city.

“This is the city – a collage of people who have embraced the benefits of living in close proximity, under the authority of the same government.

“Christians are the light of the world, cities that are set on hills and cannot be hidden. We are neither isolated nor alone. We are not self-governed but are under the authority and kingship of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

“No matter where one travels throughout the world and no matter the race, language, or culture, the spirit and atmosphere of the cities of God are the same because they are part of the same kingdom.

“Their histories run parallel. They have like stories of battles fought and victories won. Stories of press, resistance, and triumph. We hear grand descriptions of their towers, bulwarks, and palaces. These are the stories that inspire us, and we determine to experience this kingdom for ourselves.

“As we start the journey, we too, encounter strong oppositions and discouraging setbacks. But the richness of the kingdom, and the love of the King, propels us and draws us as it did the prior generations.

“Then we enter! We arrive! And oh, what a city! What a kingdom! What a King!”

– Darrell Johnson

The prophet Isaiah, foreseeing this glorious worldwide city, this kingdom, this government, foretold its accomplishment on this wise: “For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but **this shall be with burning and fuel of fire.** For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. **Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end,** upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. **The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.**” (Isa. 9:5-7).

The zeal of the Lord of hosts began to perform this “when the day of Pentecost was fully come, ... and suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 2:1-4). In Apostle Peter's sermon that followed, he said, “Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ. ... This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.” (Acts 2:29-33).

The Hebrew writer, in observation of the Lord's work performed, said, "But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For **our God is a consuming fire.**" (Heb. 12:22-24, 28-29).

Again, Isaiah, prophesying of this long before it came to pass, said, "The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly . . ." (Isa. 33:14-15a).

This is how the Lord builds His city, the heavenly Jerusalem – the collage of people who live under His government. He establishes it "with burning and fuel of fire!" (Isa. 9:5). **All who abide in the city must dwell with the devouring fire!**

John the Baptist also foresaw this when he said, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. . . . I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Matt. 3:2, 11-12).

The Holy Ghost Structures and Animates the Body of Christ!

The visible body of Christ here in this world is a Holy Spirit-led, Holy Spirit-directed group of people. It consists of people who "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit," who have obtained freedom from the law of sin and death through the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1-2). **They are acquainted with the Spirit's devouring fire, the fire of divine love which He sheds abroad in their hearts** (Rom. 5:5). **It is this Spirit that animates the body of Christ and tempers it together into a visibly corporate structure.** "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 13:35) The church is God's new creation in Christ and the love of Christ is always on display in this new creation.

"Oh, wonders of redemption! We gaze in silent awe
Upon the new creation, where love is freedom's law."

"Love, the theme of all their praises, Doth in holy bond unite
All their hearts, in Him made perfect (Col. 3:14-15), Turned from darkness unto light.
Thus the saved in Christ together Dwell in sacred unity
In the secret of His presence – Hid away, dear Lord, in Thee."

This love-oriented group is "the household of God," "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God **through the Spirit.**" (Eph. 2:19-22). Both God the Father and Christ the Son inhabit the fitly-framed building through the Holy Spirit. In this corporation God is

“above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:6). “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” Gal. 3:27-28. “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” 1 Cor. 12:13. The Holy Spirit imparts the Christ-life to every member in this body, this unit, this corporation, or group. There is nothing in its structure that is in any way foreign to Christ. The Holy Spirit sees well to that! And “no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed” (1 Cor. 12:3), for all who drink into the divine Spirit readily recognize the presence of Jesus in every fellow member who drinks of the same Spirit. The Christ-life in one member never rises in opposition to the Christ-life in another. Each one, having been baptized into Christ by the Spirit, is bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh (Eph. 5:30), “and every one members one of another” (Rom. 12:5). “He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17). The Spirit of the Lord and the fruit of that Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) become the animating force of all who join themselves unto the Lord. “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: **(For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;)** Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.” Eph. 5:8-10.

The divine Spirit always brings His subjects under one government, into one body that conveys the Christ-life in a visible manner. Therefore, “beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power.” (Col. 2:8-10).

Other Spirits Structure and Animate Opposing Bodies

Because there is a real devil, an adversary of all truth and righteousness, who has sought since the time God placed man in Eden to mar every good thing God created, and since he has agents, real demon spirits under his control, it is no wonder that these opposing forces seek to counterfeit God’s new creation in Christ. As surely as there exists the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, there are also opposing spirits – spirits of error. And because of this fact, there also exists the Lord’s body and other opposing bodies. Every religious group, unit, or corporation is animated and united by some kind of religious spirit. Just as the Holy Spirit animates all who are led by Him, uniting them into one corporate body and making them partakers of the fullness of the Godhead in Christ, so other spirits also unite those who are led by them into corporate bodies, units, or groups, making them partakers of the essence of what they are all about. The Holy Spirit, being “the Spirit of truth,” incorporates Christ’s body, or group, on the foundation God’s own righteousness, goodness, and truth – THE WHOLE TRUTH and nothing but the truth. Absolute honesty and transparency are required of every member of this corporation. Each must willingly and earnestly align personally with the standard of truth – Jesus Christ, the chief corner stone upon which His corporate body is built, compacted, and framed by the Spirit.

Other spirits align their corporate structures based on *partial truth* – truth mixed with error, or scripture twisted to turn the truth of God into a lie (Rom. 1:25). “And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.” 2 Cor. 11:14-15. Jesus also said, “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:16). Do their fruits align with Galatians 5:22-23? Satan and his ministers are excellent scripture

quoters and scripture twisters! Satan even quoted scripture when tempting Jesus (Matt. 4:6), but his application was twisted and not in line with the whole truth. Jesus countered Satan's appeal by answering, "It is written again ..." (verse 7). There is some kind of false spirit working behind every aspect of twisted or incomplete truth. **The real Spirit of God operates only in the realm of complete truth.** The Christ body, or Christ group, obtains its substance and corporate structure from THE FULLNESS OF TRUTH, as it is in Jesus (Eph. 4:21). **It is impossible for the body of Christ to extend corporate fellowship to other bodies whose spirit, substance, and corporate structure is based on truth and error combined. The devouring fire of the Spirit of truth will not allow this!**

Someone asked the question: "If only people that are recognized by the group can have liberty to minister or operate in meetings, does that not constitute a sectarian group?"

The answer to the question is "No!" Because the Word says, "And we beseech you, brethren, to **know them which labour among you**, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you." (1 Thess. 5:12). "And **let these first be proved ... being found blameless.**" 1 Tim. 3:10. "A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself." Tit. 3:10-11.

What Constitutes a "Sect" or a "Sectarian Group?"

The word "sect" comes from the Greek word "hairesis," which literally means "a choice, i.e., specifically a *party or disunion*: heresy, sect." It is translated "sect" five times in the New Testament and "heresy" or "heresies" four times. Apostle Paul was accused of being a ringleader of the "sect," or heresy of the Nazarenes (Acts 24:5). Paul said, "this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy (sect), so worship I the God of my fathers." (Acts 24:14). The primitive church of God was considered by those looking on (not discerning the Lord's body or the Spirit that animated it) to be a sect, or a heresy. "As concerning this sect (heresy), we know that every where it is spoken against." (Acts 28:22). So we see that "sect" and "heresy" or "heresies" can be used interchangeably. "For there must be also heresies (sects) among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." 1 Cor. 11:19.

When heresies, or sects, do arise among the body of Christ it really isn't hard to discern who is approved and who is disapproved if we just simply keep our hearts tuned to the Spirit of truth. **The heretic, or sect-maker, is ALWAYS the one who deviates from truth as it is confirmed by the Spirit.** In the third epistle of John, the apostle said, "I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God. **Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself:** yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true." (3 John 9-12).

Here we see that the "approved" brother was made manifest due to the fact that he was **adhering to "truth" and walking in accord with the Spirit of truth.** Truth divides between the heretics (sect-makers) and the "approved."

Apostle Paul also had to deal with a sectarian spirit at work in the church at Galatia. He addressed them, “O foolish Galatians, **who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth ...?**” “They zealously affect you, but not well; yea they would exclude you, that ye might affect them.” (Gal. 3:1a; 4:17). Here again we see a selfishly-motivated party spirit was at work.

When Christ founded His church, He knew full well that heresies (sects) would arise. There would be men, like Diotrephes, who would become self-centered and self-seeking, who would resist the leadings, checks, and balances of the Holy Spirit, twist and wrest the Scriptures, and thus deviate from the truth. Peter warned that false teachers would come in “among you” and “bring in damnable heresies,” or sects, and that by reason of these “the way of truth shall be evil spoken of” (2 Pet. 2:1-2). He also said the unlearned and unstable would wrest scriptures to their own destruction and admonished the saints to “beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness” (2 Pet. 3:16-17).

To become a sectarian means to become heretical or a promoter of a “party spirit.” A sect usually involves “partial truth” – a part or fraction of the truth, but not the WHOLE TRUTH. A group of believers may be viewed by critics as being a sect (just as the primitive church was), however, that does not necessarily make them sectarians. The real questions to be addressed should be as follows: “Are they advocating any heresies?” “Is their doctrine and teaching sound and Biblical in both precept and principle?” Just because they gather as a group, or body, does not make them a sect. The Holy Spirit baptizes people into one body and that body is not heretical or sectarian (1 Cor. 12:13). In determining whether or not a group of believers is a sect, ask yourself these questions and answer honestly: **“What spirit is animating the body, or the group?”** “What spirit incorporates it and binds it together?” “What spirit makes people a part of it?” “Does the Spirit of God inhabit it?” “Does the Spirit of God (the Spirit of truth) direct it?” “Does it endorse or advocate anything that is untrue?” Remember, “any thing that defileth,” or “whatsoever worketh abomination, **or maketh a lie**” (Rev. 21:27) is excluded from the city, the fold, or group led and governed by Jesus Christ. “When heresies do rise up among the group (which is sure to happen), are those whom God approves made manifest and the heresies and heretics exposed for what and who they are?” Answering these questions carefully and honestly will go a long way in determining whether or not a religious group is just a group among groups or a product of “the Lord’s grouping.”

“We’ll follow the Lord all the way, And close to our Shepherd we’ll stay;
How blessed to know as we journey below, He’s with us by night and by day.

“There’s joy in the fold of the Lord, We walk in the light of His Word;
We love to obey all the Savior doth say, Thus living in holy accord.

“By rivers of peace we are led, In pastures of love we are fed;
We ever rejoice at the sound of His voice, Redeemed by the blood He has shed.”

Sectarian groups usually, if not always, pivot on some point of theology or ideology. The animation of each is the spirit that promotes whatever “heresy” or area of doctrine or practice its founder or leaders were seduced in. In other words, its basis lies in whatever area someone failed to heed and follow the voice of the true Shepherd of the sheep. As we have noted, the words “heresy” and “sect” come from the same Greek word, “hairesis,” which literally means “a choice, a party, or disunion.” A sect is ALWAYS the result of a disunion from the leadings of the true Spirit of God on the part of someone, or some ones. We can become disjointed with the

body of Christ because of spiritual choices we make. God wants none of His children to have any connection or identification with any heresy, sect, or schism. To do so is to grieve the Holy Spirit and make one's soul vulnerable to other spirits. "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit (the Spirit of truth), and ye shall not fulfil the lust (or works) of the flesh." Gal. 5:16. One of those "works" is "heresies" (Gal. 5:20).

A common approach to religion is, "it doesn't really matter which group you fellowship with just as long as you love and serve the Lord." Beware! Is that a Bible doctrine, or is it part of a deceitful, humanistic philosophy? Is that not the same as saying you can choose to fellowship any schism, sect, or heresy you please and still serve the Lord? Your choice in this matter will mean the difference in whether, or not, you attain to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Be sure that if you choose to take your spiritual meat and drink at a table that is not spread by the Spirit of the Lord you will soon be spoiled! You will soon cease to discern the Lord's body. The Bible says, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. 6:17-18). In coming out from among them, where should we go? Just simply resort to the Lord's body! **You'll find it, identify it, and be a part of it simply by conforming to every precept and principle of God's Word and being led by His Spirit.** "And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth." 1 John 5:6. The Holy Spirit will bear witness to truth wherever and in whomever truth is found. The same Spirit will also bear witness to error wherever and in whomever error is found.

Can the Sheep of Christ's Fold Become Scattered?

"They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, **Come, and let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.** My people hath been lost sheep: Their shepherds (pastors) have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains [religious high places]: They have gone from mountain to hill [one church group to another], they have forgotten their resting place [the Shepherd's fold]." Jer. 50:5-6.

There can be sheep (truly born-again souls) scattered among various "groups" who hold heretical doctrines and systems of worship, but those folds are not their "native home." Their "native home" is "Zion," the Shepherd's fold – the place where the Spirit of truth is guiding, leading, and directing the flock and confirming its territorial boundaries. It is the Spirit's moving in conjunction with the Word that enables every honest, born-again soul to discern and identify "the heavenly Jerusalem" – **their native home!** (Heb. 12:22-23). **Home is where the devouring fire is burning!** Get well acquainted with the fire! You'll know it when you feel it! "Yes, 'tis love, 'tis burning love divine, filling all my soul's desire!" **Love devours carnality, or selfishness, from which springs heresies and all other works of the flesh.** "Oh, Thou in whose presence my soul takes delight!" Let your soul gravitate to the Lord's presence – to the burning fire of divine love! Don't be discouraged in searching! **The very fact that there are counterfeit groups is proof that there is a genuine!** Just simply join yourself to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, then follow the Shepherd's voice. He will lead you to where the living waters are flowing and the green pastures are growing (see Psa. 23:1-2). "The voice of my beloved! Behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills." Song of Sol. 2:8. "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to

rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions? If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents." Song of Sol. 1:7-8.

The Shepherd's Flock Not Based on Reformers or Movements

"Why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?" Song of Sol. 1:7. "And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore **every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.**" Matt. 3:9-10.

Through the centuries of time the Lord has blessed the labors of various men who have risen and placed emphasis on some aspect of truth in God's Word that had been obscured beneath the rubbish of apostate religion. Movements, or groups, sprang up from their labors. But, as a brother in Christ said many years ago, "**The Lord is not married to any movement; He's married to the truth.**" Inasmuch as those movements adhered to the Word and the Spirit for their guidance, the blessings of the heavenly Shepherd rested upon them, leading them into deeper depths and higher heights in God. But later, something went wrong in most cases! The followers of the reformers became misdirected in their focus and began to deviate from the Word and the Holy Spirit's leadership in interpreting and applying the Word. They incorporated some wood, hay, and stubble upon the Foundation their reformer was endeavoring to extol. Thus, we have not only sectarian (party spirit) groups that sprang from heretics but also sectarian groups that sprang from less-than-Spirit-filled, professed followers of men who were truly blessed and used of God in extending His kingdom. Unfortunately, because of a lack of *spirituality* among Christians (that is, the lack of being "**filled**" with the Spirit), carnal groupism has been repeated time and again since the dawning of Christianity. Listen to what Apostle Paul says about it:

"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but **God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.** Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For **we are labourers together with God:** ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. **But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.** Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because **it shall be revealed by fire;** and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." 1 Cor. 3:1-15.

Again, as Isaiah prophesied, this battle “shall be with burning and fuel of fire. ... The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isa. 9:5-7).

“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.” Heb. 12:28-29.

“... He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” Matt. 3:11b – 12.

Who is willing to commit his life and his works to the burning, purging fire of the Holy Spirit and suffer the loss of his chaff (or wood, hay, and stubble) to the Spirit’s burning flame? We can do nothing about the stubble that men have built on the Foundation through the passing of time, but we can allow the Spirit to burn up our chaff and thoroughly purge the floor of our own hearts.

Let the Fire Fall on Me

“Lord, I would be wholly thine, I would do Thy will divine,
From the world and sin and self I would be free;
On the altar now I lie, And with all my heart I cry,
Let the holy fire from Heaven fall on me.

“I would have sufficient grace Ev’ry foe to bravely face,
And an overcomer evermore to be;
That I well may fill my place, and that I may win the race,
Let the holy fire from Heaven fall on me.

“Holy Spirit from above, Fill my longing soul with love,
Till **the Master’s image** all in me may see;
Make me gentle, true, and kind, Meek of heart and humble mind,
Let the holy fire from Heaven fall on me.

“In the kingdom I would stay, There to labor night and day,
Any way and anywhere Thy will may be;
But that I may do my best, And that others may be blest,
Let the holy fire from Heaven fall on me.

Chorus:

“Let the fire fall on me, Let the fire fall on me:
The fire of Pentecost, consuming sin and dross,
Let the holy fire from Heaven fall on me.”

– W. J. Henry

Come Holy Fire

“Come Holy Fire of love to my heart, Flames of Thy holiness sweetly impart;
Burning the dross with Thy fire of love, Kindle within me Thy flame from above.
All to the altar I gladly resign, Yielded I lay in Thy presence divine.

Lord, send the fire to sanctify me, Fashion my heart in the likeness of Thee.

“Come Holy Fire of blessing I plead, Send down Thy ocean of fullness indeed.
Visit my soul with Thy Heavenly Dove, Pour out Thy boundless resources of love.
Fill me and use me to witness for Thee, Perfect salvation and heart purity.
Make me Thy vessel o’erflowing with love, Pointing the lost to their Savior above.

“Come Holy Fire within me I pray, Stamp Thy own sweetness within me to stay.
Fill with Thy holy compassionate flame, Deeply engrave with the print of Thy Name.
Lord, by Thy love, I would ever be Thine, Walking each day in Thy presence divine.
Oh, make me constantly tender and true, Keeping the love of my Jesus in view.

Chorus:

“Send down the fire, my heart to refine, Fill with Thy fullness of love so Divine.”

– Mrs. Lena Martin, *Heartland Hymns* #164

How to Discern the Shepherd’s Flock – the Lord’s Group

In 1 John 3:24 and 4:1-3 we read: “He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And *hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.* Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. **Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God:** and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”

This is how we can tell whether or not a spirit is in harmony with God’s Spirit: if it confesses through its manifestation in human flesh an identity with the life of Christ, in all humility, holiness, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts (which is what the anointing of the true Spirit of grace teaches us – Tit. 2:11-12), and in keeping unspotted from the world (James 1:27), then we know this is by the influence of the real Spirit of God. But if a spirit manifests evidence of carnality and self-interest, a love for the things of the world, a making provision for the lusts of the flesh, or a disposition to reason around the mandates or the principles of the scriptures, we know that this spirit is not of God, but is a spirit of antichrist. Whoever is not joined to the Lord in one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in his body (2 Cor. 4:10) is not confessing that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, therefore cannot be identified as part of His true body. Again, “they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” (Gal. 5:24). They identify as real members of His flesh and of His bones (Eph. 5:30) because they are crucified with Him (Gal. 2:20; 6:14). They are dead, and their life is hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3; 2 Cor. 4:11).

But Paul said, “Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.” (Phil. 3:18-19). Peter said, “For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them **liberty**, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.” (2 Pet. 2:18-19). Whoever chooses to give

liberty to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life will certainly be brought in bondage to corruption and will imbibe a spirit of antichrist. The apostle John, after warning against the love of the world and the **things** that are in the world, said, “Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.” (1 John 2:18-19). Jude said, “These be they who **separate themselves**, sensual, having not the Spirit.” (Jude 19).

People **separate themselves** from Christ’s body, His fold, His flock, or group by their choice of spiritual affinity. The body of Christ shares no affinities foreign to the Spirit of Christ. If we choose foreign spiritual affinities, we put ourselves at odds with His body. “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” Rom. 8:9b.

The Basis of True Christian Unity

Unity cannot be produced by any other means than the Holy Spirit as He reveals and interprets the will of God to man and man walks in the light of the Spirit’s interpretation. We can agree to disregard or overlook doctrinal differences and differences of belief and just all come together and act like we are one body, but that does not make us one body, nor does it produce unity: only a “union,” and an imperfect one at best. C. W. Naylor once wrote, “Let all contentions, names and parties, be forsaken FOR THE TRUTH ALONE.”

“In that day (the Gospel Day) shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, **that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in.**” Isa. 26:1-2.

“Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the LORD: This gate of the LORD, into which the righteous shall enter.” Psa. 118:19-20.

“And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.” Isa. 35:8.

“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood (Rev. 1:6), **an holy nation** (under the government of Heaven’s King – Isa. 9:5-7), a peculiar (special) people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” 1 Pet. 2:9.

The Scripture teaches us that the church is “the pillar and ground of the truth.” (1 Tim. 3:15). The only church God recognizes is the body that embraces the whole truth and nothing but the truth and is inhabited and animated by the Spirit of truth. As Peter Riedemann, an Anabaptist who lived hundreds of years ago, so accurately stated: “It is evident that **the church is gathered through the Holy Spirit; the church has its being, and continues to exist, through the Spirit.** ... The church of Christ is a pillar and foundation [ground – 1 Tim. 3:15] of truth and continues to be that. **Truth itself is expressed, confirmed, and put into action in the church by the Holy Spirit.**”

Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” (John 17:17). It is truth put into action by the Holy Spirit that sanctifies (sets apart) the real church of the living God from all other religious groups or churches.

Everything that is not truth is excluded from the church of Christ and God by virtue of the “Spirit of truth” who directs her. Therefore, **the all-important thing is that we fully imbibe the Spirit of truth and walk in all the light of truth as He reveals it. If we do this, the Holy Spirit will group us with all others who follow His leadings and walk in truth, for “the church is gathered through the Holy Spirit.”** The grouping is not by the choice of man but God’s. Whenever and wherever people walk in truth and fully submit themselves to the guiding Spirit of truth you will find them grouped together – united in one corporate body directed by Heaven’s government. They will be one in heart and soul with all the heavenly host. But whenever and wherever people turn away from or reject revealed truth, other spirits take control of their thought processes, and confusion and division is the inevitable result. Only the Holy Ghost can impart the mind of Christ and express, confirm, and put truth into action in the church that God recognizes as His own.

We MUST, therefore, allow the discerning mind of the Spirit to reveal to us the boundaries of the sheepfold! It is not the flock who set the boundaries of the fold but the Shepherd. The Shepherd said concerning the Spirit, whom the Father would send in His name, “He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak ... for He shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you” (John 16:13, 15). **The Spirit leads all who follow Him into the fullness of Jesus Christ.** All who are led by the Spirit become joint-heirs with Christ and, therefore, sons of God. (Rom. 8:14-17). By virtue of this connection, they become partakers of His life, His nature, and His holiness. (2 Pet. 1:1-4).

Abiding Within the Shepherd’s Fold Does Not Make One a Sectarian

There is no scriptural foundation for the idea that it is bad thing to be a part of a “group” or that being a part of a group makes one a sectarian. Jesus spoke of His “one fold” (John 10:16) and also of His “little flock” (Luke 12:32). “Fold,” in John 10:16, comes from the Greek word “poimne,” meaning “flock,” and “flock,” in Luke 12:32, comes from the Greek word “poimnion,” meaning “a group of believers.” Paul said in Acts 20:28, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock (poimnion – group of believers), over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”

“Fold” is also defined by Webster as “a pen or enclosure for sheep, a place where a flock of sheep is kept; a flock of sheep: hence, figuratively, the members of a church; (v.t.) to keep or confine (sheep) in a pen; (v.i.) to be gathered into a fold.” So, a “fold” is most certainly a group, a flock, or herd of believers, and the Shepherd of the flock sets the boundaries for the herd. Jesus said, “other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold (one poimne, one flock, or group of believers), and one Shepherd.” (John 10:16).

There is no danger in being confined to the enclosure of a fold, or flock, if the Lord is the Shepherd who is leading, grouping, herding, and restraining you.

“Following Jesus, following Jesus, Gently He leads me in the heavenly way;
Watching and praying, trusting obeying, He will restrain me from going astray.”

The Chief Shepherd and the Under Shepherds

Apostle Peter said, “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when **the chief Shepherd** shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder, Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble.” (1 Pet. 5:1-5).

“For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the **Shepherd and Bishop** of your souls.” 1 Pet. 2:25.

The word “Bishop” here, is referring directly to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and comes from the Greek word “episkopos,” which means “a superintendent, i.e, church officer in general charge of a church: overseer.” Jesus Christ is the chief Bishop, or Superintendent in general charge of His church. He is the “Overseer” and “Shepherd” of every individual soul. And we all are individually and directly accountable to Him for our own souls. However, He also chooses and appoints “bishops” or “shepherds” under Himself, whom He holds responsible and accountable for overseeing and feeding the sheep of His pasture.

In the 20th chapter of Acts we find where Apostle Paul called a meeting with the elders of the church at Ephesus and gave them the following admonition: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all **the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers**, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28). Notice **who** made them overseers! Being a shepherd, bishop, or overseer of the Lord’s flock is not a matter of personal ambition. To be a true under-shepherd of Christ’s flock is a matter of divine appointment. And it carries with it great responsibility and accountability. The bishop, or shepherd, is personally responsible for receiving food from the chief Shepherd, through the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and dispensing that food to the sheep. Therefore, his ministry must necessarily be Holy Spirit-led and inspired. He must lead by example and never by coercion. Sheep cannot be driven; only led. The bishop who becomes corrupted and begins to promote himself or makes himself a “lord” over God’s heritage or becomes greedy of filthy lucre (personal gain) will give an account to the chief Shepherd and Bishop of his soul with great sorrow!

Jesus taught His apostles, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and **he that is chief, as he that doth serve.**” (Luke 22:25-26). In accordance with Jesus’ teaching, Apostle Paul declared, “we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5).

Paul also exhorted young Timothy, who was ordained the first bishop of the church of the Ephesians, “the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth” (2 Tim. 2:24-25). And to Titus, who was ordained the first bishop of the church of the Cretians, he said, “a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Tit. 1:7-9).

Speaking of the gifts given by Jesus Christ to His church, Paul said, “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, **pastors** and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” (Eph. 4:11-13).

“Pastors,” in the above text, comes from the Greek word “poimen,” which simply means “a shepherd.” “Pastors” are simply shepherds who feed the flock of God under the jurisdiction of the chief Shepherd, or chief Pastor, Jesus Christ. Their purpose is to assist His flock in coming to the measure of the stature of His fullness by so “speaking the truth in love” that every member “may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Eph. 4:15).

“So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us ...” Rom. 12:5-6a.

“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. ... For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body ... and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” 1 Cor. 12:4-7, 13.

Staying Clear of Seducing Spirits and Doctrines of Devils

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly (clearly), that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, *giving heed to seducing spirits*, and doctrines of devils.” 1 Tim. 4:1. The chief Shepherd has sent the Holy Spirit to be the agent through which His sheep hear His voice and receive guidance into all truth. But whenever children of God become seduced by “other spirits” and begin to listen and give heed to “other voices,” discord, confusion, schisms, and divisions always occur. The voice of a seducing spirit desensitizes one’s spiritual ears to the voice of the divine Spirit – the sentinel provided by the Shepherd. A spiritual illusion then takes place. Spiritual landmarks that were once clear by virtue of the eye salve of the Holy Spirit’s anointing become foggy and dim. Understanding that was once revealed to the inner man by divine inspiration begins to give way to human reasoning and philosophical criticism – “a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Prov. 14:12; 16:25). Sacred standards and boundaries that were once perceived clearly in the light of scriptural principles begin to move or disappear. The voice of the seducing spirit now reveals doctrine from a different perspective, in a “new light,” suggesting to the mind a different slant or interpretation of the scriptures. The illusive spirit may even produce an emotional high to accompany that new

light. But yet the fruit of that new light is “variance” and “discord,” which “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Eph. 6:17) declares to be “works of the flesh” (Gal. 5:19-21) and “abomination” (Prov. 6:16-19).

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. **For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.**” Heb. 3:12-14. **It is vital and essential that we keep our spirits tuned and our souls in harmony with the Holy Spirit, as well as our physical bodies always subjected to the Spirit.** Otherwise, we will lose our direction and cease to discern the Lord’s body, the Shepherd’s fold. Whoever becomes out of joint with the divine Spirit is out of joint with Christ and His body. Therefore “grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.” (Eph. 4:30). Any *work* of the flesh or unholy *provision* we make for the flesh grieves the holy Spirit of God and will break the seal of our redemption if not repented of.

The way that leads to Heaven and eternal life is just what Jesus declared it to be: “strait” and “narrow.” “Strait” means “tight, strict, rigid,” according to Webster. The desires of our flesh **MUST** be tightly, strictly, and rigidly restrained. “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.” Gal. 5:17. “And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate (exercises self-control) in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. ... But I (Apostle Paul) keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” 1 Cor. 9:25, 27. “Temperance,” or self-control, is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:23). “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” Rom. 8:13. “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth ...” Col. 3:5. “Asceticism,” or self-denial, self-discipline, and self-restraint has been a characteristic of true Christianity since its beginning. Jesus taught His followers they must deny themselves if they would be His disciples.

The Boundaries of the Shepherd’s Fold

There are boundaries placed around God’s sheepfold by the good Shepherd Himself, whose own the sheep are! Those boundaries protect them from danger and separate them from enemies of the truth. The Scripture says, “Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.” (Isa. 26:1). Also, “Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks.” (Psa. 48:12-13). Zion, the city of God, is a walled, or hedged-in, city, and her wall is “great and high” (Rev. 21:10-12). “Without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.” Rev. 22:15. Let us, therefore, never forget that our Shepherd has warned us, “whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.” (Eccl. 10:8). We will end up serpent-bitten if we cross boundaries that were established by the Shepherd!

Psalm 48:1-3 says, “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. **God is known in her palaces for a refuge.**”

Spiritually, this is that same city that Jesus spoke of in Matt. 5:14 that is the light of the world and is set on a hill and cannot be hid. She is a worldwide city that is situated on the top of a great mountain that fills the whole earth! That mountain is the high place of God's own holiness, and the light is the light of the gospel of Christ. Isaiah prophesied of it, saying, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it." (Isa. 2:2). On the top of this high mountain, exalted above all the hills (religious high places of men) sits a city where all nations can go and take refuge from the world, from its sin, and from every defiling influence. Wherever people subject themselves to the King of heaven and allow the devouring fire of His Holy Spirit to consume their carnal nature and make them "partakers of the divine nature" – where "self" is truly slain and "Jesus" does truly reign – people gravitate to the "top of the mountains," to the "mountain of the LORD'S house," and become part of this glorious city of light! **Here they find refuge in a life that is hid away with Christ in God. The boundaries of their lives then become that which lies within the parameters of God's own holiness** (Ezek. 43:12). Thus, they find themselves part of the "city of the living God" (Heb. 12:22-23), "the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God" (Rev. 21:10). **Every element in the structure of God's church is found in the substance of that which descends from God out of Heaven to man, and it only exists on earth where man is a recipient and partaker of that substance. Thus, the church is clearly visible!**

"Church of God, 'beloved city,' Thou art of celestial mold;
Lo! From God and out of Heaven, Came the city of pure gold.
Stones of jasper, clear as crystal Is the building of thy wall;
And the Lamb, thy light forever, Jesus, Jesus, all in all.

"God's own holiness within thee, His own beauty on thy brow;
Glorified in His own image, This thy wondrous portion now.
In thee dwells the triune fullness, Blessing all thy pilgrim days;
All around thee His salvation, And before thee gates of praise."

This is that city that is set on a hill that cannot be hid! **"I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation.** The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. **This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.**" Psa. 118:21-23.

"Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner, this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and **given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.**" Matt. 21:42-43. Read about it in 1 Peter 2:4-10!

The Shepherd's Fold – Both Inclusive and Exclusive!

The idea that all church groups ought to just lay down their differences and come together and fellowship as one is far from the mind of God. God is only interested in uniting people **in Himself and "in truth."** God hates every false way and every false doctrine. When Christ addressed the churches of Asia, He reprov'd every one of them that was coming short or condoning false doctrine and commanded them to "repent." To the church at Pergamos He said, "So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. Repent; or

else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.” (Rev. 2:15-16).

What was “the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes” which Christ hated? (Note: “Nicolaitanes is also spelled “Nicolaitans.) I collected the following information from various sources:

“Although the majority of the early church fathers wrote about the Nicolaitans being followers of Nicolas of Antioch, mentioned in Acts chapter six, Clement wrote that the Nicolaitans were followers of another Nicolas. Whatever the truth may be, one thing is for sure, the Nicolaitans were deviated from the sound doctrine of Jesus Christ and the apostles.

“The doctrine and works of the Nicolaitans came forth from a wrong interpretation of the grace of God that was preached by the apostles. They [the Nicolaitans] believed and said that a person is saved by grace and therefore it doesn’t matter how you live. By faith in Jesus Christ, the spirit of a person is saved, but since you are bound by the flesh, in which evil is present, you will always remain a sinner and always keep sinning. You serve God through your spirit, but you keep serving your flesh and its lust and desires during your life on earth.

“According to the writings of the Early Church leaders, Nicolas taught a **doctrine of compromise**, implying that total separation between Christianity and the practice of occult paganism was not essential. It seems that the ‘doctrine’ of the Nicolaitans was that it was alright to have one foot in both worlds and that one needn’t be so strict about separation from the world in order to be a Christian. This, in fact, was the ‘doctrine’ of the Nicolaitans that Jesus ‘hated.’ It led to a weak version of Christianity that was without power and without conviction — a defeated, worldly type of Christianity.

“When believers allow sin and compromise to be in their lives, it drains away the power in the work of the Cross and the power of the Spirit that is resident in a believer’s life. The evil fruit of Nicolas’ ‘doctrine’ encouraged worldly participation, leading people to indulge in sin and a lowered godly standard.

“As you are well aware, compromise with the world always results in a weakened and powerless form of Christianity. *This was the reason Jesus ‘hated’ the ‘doctrine’ and the ‘deeds’ of the Nicolaitans.*”

– Excerpted from various online sources.

Does any of the above sound familiar? There are many doctrines floating around among people professing to be “the church” (or a part of the church) today that Christ truly hates! He will accept nothing less than repentance. He is under no obligation to incorporate any of the doctrines or the people who endorse them into His fold. Anyone who desires to be a part of His “flock” can be. The boundaries of His flock and His government are as wide as all nations of the earth. But in coming inside the boundaries of His one, worldwide fold, all nations, kindreds and tongues must leave behind everything that He hates! He is the door (John 10:9). “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Acts 4:12. He says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). Also, “strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matt. 7:14). Both the “gate” and the “way” that leads to life are just as strait and narrow as Christ Himself is. Because He is the gate,

or door, and He is the way, all who would enter into life and be a part of His fold must come inside His “strait” and “narrow” boundaries. It is for this reason “few” enter the gate, find the way, and become a part of His fold. They deem its boundaries too narrow for them! It excludes the will and the ways of the “natural” or unregenerate man.

“Exclusiveness” is one of the attributes of Christ’s church that people like to ignore. While His church “includes” every truly born-again soul, it also “excludes” every unregenerate soul and every heretical doctrine, spirit, practice, and system of worship. Jesus, the Head and Governor of the church, says, “... Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33). “For many are called, but few are chosen.” Matt. 22:14. The cost of being one of His “chosen generation” (1 Pet. 2:9) is a complete surrender of ourselves to His will and way and bearing our cross of self-denial (Luke 14:27; 9:23, etc.). We must “put ... on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.” (Rom. 13:14). No wonder so few find the way and become a part of His one fold!

The church is a society of common people of the earth who, by their obedience to and connection with Jesus Christ through the Spirit have assimilated, or are in the process of assimilating, the mind of Christ. Because of this, they have become heavenly-minded people who are not of this world, even as He is not of this world. They have become “partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb. 3:1), “separated unto the gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1). They are “stewards of the manifold grace of God,” and they “speak as the oracles of God ... that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 4:10-11). Because “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:9), the Spirit of His Son, whom He has sent into their hearts, crying, Abba, Father (Gal. 4:6), leads them to “all speak the same thing” and to “be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10). They are sanctified (separated unto God) through His truth (John 17:17) as the Spirit of truth guides their minds and hearts in understanding and interpreting the Word of truth. **Not every member of this heaven-born society arrives at the same understanding and interpretation of the Scriptures at once**, but because they trust in the LORD with all their hearts and lean not to their own understanding, and in all their ways they acknowledge Him, therefore, the Lord, their Shepherd, faithfully directs their paths (Pro. 3:5-6). They, as His faithful followers, endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace until all come to the unity of the faith, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:3, 13). **To know and possess Christ in His fullness is the objective of His body, the church** (Phil. 3:7-16). All are subject one to another and clothed with humility (1 Pet. 5:5). None are wise in their own conceits, but they fear the Lord and depart from evil (Pro. 3:7; Rom. 12:16-21). They ever follow that which is good, both among themselves, and to all men (1 Thess. 5:15). They do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God (Micah 6:8). They are careful not to quench the Spirit or grieve the Spirit by whom they are sealed (Eph. 4:30). They prove all things and hold fast that which is good, abstaining from all appearance of evil. Thus, the very God of peace sanctifies them wholly – spirit soul and body (1 Thess. 5:19-24). **Through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, they obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ** (2 Thess. 2:13-14). Jesus prayed thus to His Father: “And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” (John 17:22-23).

The church of God is the visible expression of the will of God being done in earth as it is in Heaven. Whatever is outside the will of God is excluded from the church of God. Our part in helping Christ to build His church is simply to so submit and commit our own body, soul, spirit and mind to Him that He can work in us “to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). We must allow ourselves to become “his workmanship,” for the church can increase by no other means than by “the increase of God” (Col. 2:19). Inasmuch as God’s work in you and me increases, His work in building His church increases!

“The pillar and the ground of truth, Built without hand of a mortal;
 No man with heart by sin defiled Standeth within her portal.
 None but the pure and the holy, Humble and meek and the lowly,
 Dwell in the light of her glory, The Lord is her Judge and her King.”

The True Vine and His Branches

Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. ... He that abideth (remains or continues) in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not (continue not) in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” (John 15:1-2, 5b -6).

“For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear. For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, **if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.** And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again.” Rom. 11:16-23.

“Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: **But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;** Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And **that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross,** having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. **For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.** Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together growth unto an holy

temple in the Lord; In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” Eph. 2:11-22.

“For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, **Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;** Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Tit. 3:3-7.

“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body (into Christ Himself – Gal. 3:27), whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” 1 Cor. 12:12-13.

“And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” 1 John 3:3.

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; **Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.**” 1 Pet. 1:13-16.

“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” Heb. 12:14.

Harmony and oneness with God and all things that are of God are made available to us all through a direct connection with His Son, Jesus Christ, **by the Holy Spirit**. The sap of the Vine is the life of the branches. Thereby we all have the privilege of being made partakers of God’s nature – holiness. By degrees, “from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18), we can be changed into the image of Jesus Christ by following the leadings and guidance of His Holy Spirit. Jesus said concerning the Spirit, “He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.” (John 16:14). From the primary glory of being “born of the Spirit,” that is, regenerated or “born again” (John 3:3-8) as a babe in Christ, on to the glory of being wholly sanctified and preserved blameless in spirit, soul, and body (1 Thess. 5:19-24), the process of perfect salvation is made available “by the Spirit of the Lord” to all who believe and will faithfully pursue Christ in His fullness.

“Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.” 1 Cor. 3:21-23. This is the dispensation in which God is gathering “together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth” (Eph. 1:10). Read the entire chapter! “The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory,” desires to give unto every one of us “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him,” that we “may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe ...” (verses 17-19). Just as we pick up on the traits, the ways, and the thought processes of

friends that we become closely connected and acquainted with, so it is with us when we become intimately connected and acquainted with Christ through the Spirit.

Christian Unity Is the Result of the Fullness of the Spirit

Heresies, or sects, are but the natural result or consequences of a lack of, or a backsliding from, entire sanctification – not necessarily a backsliding from the doctrine, or theory, but from the actual experience, which imparts “the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” “Heresies” are simply “works of the flesh” (see Gal. 5:19-21), or natural outcroppings of carnality, as are variance and strife (see 1 Cor. 3:1-4). They are proofs and indicators of Christians lacking maturity in Christ – not being baptized with, filled with, and living and walking in THE SPIRIT. The words written by J. C. Blaney in the September 15, 1910, issue of *The Gospel Trumpet* are so true:

“... To be filled with the Spirit is a safeguard against false doctrine, compromise, or fanaticism. It is because there is a lack of being full of the Spirit of God that people fall a prey to spirits and doctrines that are foreign to the Spirit of God. There never was a soul deceived by a false doctrine while he was careful to keep filled with the Holy Spirit. A soul thus full of God is safe from deception, for when the enemy comes in like a flood the Spirit of the Lord will raise up a standard against him (Isaiah 59:19). If we keep filled with the Spirit, we shall have no difficulty in keeping clear of division. **The early church was a unit as a result of the fulness of the Spirit.** See Acts 4:32.”

Unity naturally follows wherever Christians collectively allow the Holy Spirit complete control of their mind, spirit, soul, and body. Because “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling” (Eph. 4:4). The primary requirement to become a part of the one body, the church, or kingdom of God, is to be “born again,” or “born of the Spirit” (John 3:3-8). After that, it is necessary to go on to perfection and “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18) by personally offering our “bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” (Rom. 12:1). This will give the Spirit full capacity to transform you into the image of Christ, “by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:2). This will bring the baptismal power and “unction,” or “anointing,” of the Spirit that “teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie” (1 John 2:20, 27). The Spirit knows the mind of God and He “maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (see Rom. 8:26-27). We must “quench not the Spirit” (1 Thess. 5:19). We must learn to know the voice of the Spirit (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) and be “led by the Spirit” (Rom. 8:14) and to “live” and “walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25). The Spirit is a faithful Guide. He will reveal to everyone who honestly and earnestly follows Him the mind and will of God and will also bear witness to everything that is contrary to the mind and will of God. He leads unerringly. The Spirit is a mighty weapon “to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:4-5). Therefore:

“Yield unto the Holy Spirit, Let Him have His way with thee;
Be thou ready to obey Him, He leads to victory!

“Let the Spirit do the planning, Point the way thy feet shall go;
Greater than thine own His wisdom, He the will of God doth know;
Better, wiser than thy choosing Is the way that He will show;

He wants His way in thee.

“He doth sometimes work in silence, When thou dost not know at all;
He doth sometimes speak so softly Thou must listen for His call.
 But if thou will trust Him fully, He will be thine all in all:
He wants His way in thee.”

D. S. Warner wrote:

“**Fellowship is of the Spirit (Phil. 2:1) and exists where heart-purity exists.** It is the conscious blending of hearts filled with the same Holy Spirit. One may have been led into all truth, the other not [yet]. This does not interrupt fellowship. Nevertheless, it is the duty of such as ‘know the truth,’ in meekness to instruct others who do not. Ignorance of some truth does not destroy fellowship, but resisting the truth does; because it forfeits salvation. We must not sanction people’s errors, but if saved, show our love and fellowship to them, so long as they do not give the evidence that their wrong doctrines have become willful, or they have in some way lost salvation. Then fellowship ends but love and kindness still continue in faithful efforts for their salvation. **To ignore fellowship simply because of some doctrinal error is bigotry. To agree to disagree, or to put on an equality truth and error, is babel confusion. To know the truth is our privilege; to teach the truth our duty; but to have fellowship with the pure and upright of heart is an involuntary and spontaneous fact. Sects are the result of carnality; nothing but perfect holiness destroys carnality, and thus removes both sectism and its cause.** The fire of God’s love saves the soul, harmonizes all hearts that receive it, **leads them into perfect and uniform obedience to all truth,** and drives afar all who refuse to pass through its purging fire, and gain the plane of holy fellowship.” – *The Church of God – What It Is and What It Is Not*

The Holy Spirit is our guide from earth to heaven and is the interpreter of the living Word of God. So, as Paul said in Ephesians chapter 4, let us all endeavor to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” D. S. Warner also said, “**both union of heart and soul, and harmony in outward worship and life, will follow as a result or fruit of the Spirit.**”

It is through the Holy Spirit that the life of the Vine flows to every branch in Christ. The Holy Spirit is like the blood that flows through the body and feeds and replenishes all the living cells. The Holy Spirit feeds every living cell of Christ’s body, the church, the very substance of Christ. “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” Gal. 5:16. Jesus said, “He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.” (John 6:56). Through His Word and through His Spirit we eat His flesh and drink His blood and *abide* in His body – His church – His fold – His group.

To Know and Do the Truth is a Universal Privilege and a Personal Responsibility

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and **the life was the light of men.** And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. ... **That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.**” John 1:1-5, 9.

“If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. And he said unto them, **Take heed what ye hear:** with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and **unto you that hear shall more be given.** For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.” Mark 4:23-25.

“Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.” Luke 8:18.

“For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.” Matt. 13:12-15.

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But **whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.**” James 1:21-25

“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. **For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.** But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” 2 Cor. 3:18 – 4:1-7.

“We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth.” Col. 1:3-6.

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this

present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; **Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.** These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.” Tit. 2:11-15.

As for God, His Way Is Perfect

“As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him. For who is God save the LORD? Or who is a rock save our God? **It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect.** He maketh my feet like hinds’ feet, and setteth me upon my high places.” Psa. 18:30-33.

“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And **hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.**” Eph. 2:4-6.

Through lack of understanding, or through lack of having their spiritual “senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14), sincere and honest Christians do sometimes become misled and entangled with degenerate religious groups that they suppose are the body of Christ, or at least a part of it. But after a while they come to realize the system that governs the group they joined up with falls far short of the divine system of government that God and Christ set in order on the day of Pentecost. **The system either endorses heretical doctrine, makes provision for sin in the flesh, or some element of human control is involved where Holy Spirit leadership ought to be. The Word and the Spirit of God do not have free course there.** All who are truly born of the divine Spirit find themselves not “at home” there because they are by virtue of their heavenly birth members of Christ’s body, His group, His fold. They are citizens of the “holy nation,” the “righteous nation that keepeth the truth.” They are God’s people – the ones that He is calling to “come out” of religious groups that are animated by spirits foreign to His own (Rev. 18:1-4).

How, then, shall we rise to the plane of fellowship with “the spirits of just men made perfect” (that is, “made complete” in Christ) and discover the “general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven” that we read about in Hebrews 12:22-23? Simply **be led by the Word and the Spirit.** Allow the Spirit to interpret the Word to your heart and mind, then follow and apply the Spirit’s interpretation. As Adam Clarke once said, “Christ, His Spirit, and His Word are the only infallible teachers. Every man who wishes to save his soul must search the Scriptures, by prayer and faith. Reader, take counsel with the pious; hear the discourses of the wise and holy: **but let the book of God ultimately fix thy creed.**”

“This Book of Heaven shall endure forever;
And from its wisdom we’ll never turn;
Weighed in its balance all the creeds that sever,
Are only stubble, ere long to burn.”

– D. S. Warner

Eat Christ’s flesh by assimilating His Word. Drink deeply into His Spirit that supplies the living essence of His blood to all the members of His body. That divine substance is one of a kind and, just as the human body naturally recognizes its own blood as its life, so the Christ body

naturally recognizes its own blood as its life. Its life, or animating force, is nothing more or less than Christ's blood coursing through its veins by the heartbeat of the Holy Spirit! There is no substitute for it. There is no other drink that has a flavor like it!

“I have tasted life's pure fountain, I am drinking of His blood,
I have **lost myself in Jesus, I am sinking into God.**”

“I am drinking at the fountain, Where I ever would abide;
For I've tasted life's pure river, And my soul is satisfied;
There's no thirsting for life's pleasures, Nor adorning, rich and gay,
For I've found a richer treasure, One that fadeth not away.

“I can see far down the mountain, Where I wandered weary years,
Often hindered in my journey By the ghosts of doubts and fears;
Broken vows and disappointments Thickly sprinkled all the way,
But **the Spirit led, unerring, To the land I hold today.**”

Only by following the unerring leadings of the Holy Spirit can we arrive at and enjoy this wonderful place of sweet, pure, heavenly fellowship and communion with God the Father, Christ the Son, and all who are sanctified and made one in them through the Spirit. Here every craving and longing of the soul will be fully satisfied. By living and walking in the Spirit and rejecting every spirit, element, or system that grieves, quenches, or hinders the Holy Spirit, or is foreign to the Christ-life, we will be guided to and kept in the Christ-body – the Christ-group. We are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones, insomuch as we are in harmony with His spirit, nature, and life. The fruit will be love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance: against such there is no law (Gal. 5:22-23).

“Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. **And above all these things put on charity**, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.” Col. 3:12-15. This **charity** (which is only imparted by the Spirit) suffers long and is kind; envies not; boasts not itself, is not puffed up, does not behave itself unbecomingly, seeks not its own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil; rejoices not in iniquity, but **rejoices in the truth**; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and **never fails**. (See 1 Cor. 13:4-8.)

“God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). He that dwells in love dwells in God and God in him. Also, “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). And, “if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). We are safeguarded against becoming entangled in heresy, error, or works of the flesh (which is all a part of the kingdom of darkness), “because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” (Rom. 5:5).

“Love leads the way, so all is well. His praise I'll sing, His story tell.
No fear have I that I shall stray, For, bless the Lord, **LOVE LEADS THE WAY!**”

The Spirit guides into all truth (John 16:13). In this blessed place (living and walking in the Spirit) a clear discernment, vision, or perception is opened to the soul of the Lord's body, the

church. As other verses of song express, “He that dwelleth in love ever dwelleth in God, Sweet home never clouded by fears; And this heaven of love is our native abode Through time and eternity’s years. I’m at home, blessed home, I am safe in the bosom divine; Oh, the home of the soul, Thy heaven of glory is mine.” “Where Jesus is, ‘tis heaven there” – wherever His presence abides through the Spirit. In Him is life and that life is the light of men. The “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2) will recognize and embrace itself wherever and in whomever it is found. In that element alone do we find true Christian fellowship.

In closing, I would like to include these words of exhortation from D. S. Warner, published in the November 15, 1883, issue of *The Gospel Trumpet*:

“And now we are led to say to all men, **YOU ARE NOT SAFE UNTIL YOU GET IN SUCH CLOSE RELATION TO GOD, THAT HE WILL BE THE ONLY ATTRACTION OF YOUR SOUL; AND WHERE YOU CAN HEAR THE SOFTEST WHISPER OF HIS LOVE AND NOTE EVERY BREATHING OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD TO YOU.** If you are not there you had better take time to wait before God for the sanctifying and anointing grace of God. We must be like Christ – of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord; not judging after the sight of the eyes, neither reproving after the hearing of the ears, but with righteousness shall He judge. (Isa. 11: 3, 4.) Yea, we are positively commanded to “judge not according to the appearance but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). To do this we must be so illuminated by the Spirit of God, that we may read the inward condition of man, and fellowship, and dis-fellowship as we discern by the real Spirit of God.”

Holy Fellowship

(1 John 1:3)

“Sweet fellowship, thy crystal tide, Flows joyful in our souls;
Baptized in one, naught can divide, While heav’nly peace controls.

“God over all, and through us all, In floods of blissful light,
Is fellowship in ev’ry soul That’s pure in heaven’s sight.

“O fellowship, my brethren dear, In bonds of perfect love;
How blest the seal of union here With all the saints above!

“This fellowship with Father, Son, And all who love the Lord,
Is heaven here on earth begun, ‘Tis Paradise restored.

Chorus:

“O brethren, how our spirits blend In fellowship so dear;
Though sundered far by God’s command, We feel you still so near.”

– D. S. Warner

Fellowship

“Sweet fellowship unites our souls as one,
It is the bliss of heaven now begun;
When heart to heart by this blest tie is bound,
We seem to stand each day on holy ground.

“The mingling flow of kindred minds and hearts,
That only from the fount of true love starts!
The sweetest but most fragile gift of grace,
Which only with the blood-washed has a place.

“Unseen thy beauty and unknown thy worth
To all who have not yet the Spirit birth:
Where ranketh hate and sitteth lordly pride,
Thy gentle presence doth not there abide.

“All hearts where thou dost dwell must be as one,
For thou dost flee where strife is but begun:
Nor wilt thou show again thy timid face
Where there may be of wrong or sin a trace.

Chorus:

“Sweet fellowship with God on high, And with His Son, who came to die,
With all His saints in ev’ry clime – Be this my portion all the time.”

– C. W. Naylor

“The Church has one foundation, ‘Tis Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is His new creation, Through water by the Word.

“Elect from ev’ry nation, Yet one o’er all the earth
Her charter of salvation – One Lord, one faith, one birth.”

– C. W. Naylor

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