

Healing the Wounds in the Body of Christ

Coming together, working together, as one Body

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Summary: Is it God's will that His Church be divided and splintered? Who is really behind the schisms? Who caused the splintering? What condition is the Body of Christ in right now? How will the Body end up as one Bride – and how will Christ do it? Can we ever be one family working together in this era? What first step can each of us start doing to promote healing and oneness of the Body? Christ will marry only one Bride – who is one.

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Warm hello, members of the One Body of Christ, and sheep of God's pasture. This is your brother Philip Shields. I'm expecting this to be the last of the series of messages about how and why the church has become so splintered – at least for a while. Unless Yahweh guides me otherwise.

I prayed SO hard for this message to get through to as many as possible. Pray with me as you hear this. What's this all about? ***I've had "a dream" which burst into full flame at the Feast of Tabernacles 2009.*** Thousands of God's children were worshipping the Eternal God at *His* Feast – *but not together. I don't mean we have to come under one organizational umbrella.* I mean we weren't worshipping together in spirit, as one, no matter where we were. As an analogy, think of us as one big expanded family coming to honor great-great grandparents on their anniversary. Each family has its own center of people, they live different places, but they're still one big family. They are happy to hear about the cousins over here or there. They exchange photos. They love one another and cheer one another on — though remaining autonomous. Even if there's a family fight, they're still "family" – just not acting like one *loving* family at that point. A family like that has some members who are good mechanics, others are outgoing and friendly, some are shy, some are out of shape, and some look like they are training for the marathon. Some are highly educated, some are not. Some are liberals or progressives, and others are conservative NASCAR fans. Some are loudly out front; others stay out of the limelight. Some are Bible scholars, others can barely find Matthew.

But what is so neat is that nothing is more fun than when family gets together, gets along and loves each other. The barbecues are fun, the talks are engaging, the laughter can be heard long into the night – and it's family. There's nothing like brothers and sisters having a great ol' time. Nothing.

Now think "Spiritual Family". The One we're honoring is Almighty God the Father and our Master, Jesus the Christ, or as some prefer – Yeshua the Messiah. But at the last Feast of Tabernacles, we called ourselves "children of God" but the various groups had little or nothing to do *with each other during our Father's festival.* In some cases, different groups even met in the same building but refused to meet even once *together.* In any loving family, brothers and sisters enjoy each other, laud each other, love each other – all while honoring the Patriarch of the family. In this case, our Head is Jesus Christ, and HIS head is God the Father (1 Cor. 11:3).

How does Almighty God, who is the Father of His spiritual family *feel* – with all of us who are His children *refusing to come together as one, to work together* to further His aims, all while we claim to honor and worship Him? Isn't it time we all stand up for Family? Like I've pointed out before, Mal

3:16 lauds those who speak often to one another. We talked about Mordecai telling Esther she was in the royal house “for such a time as this”— and now we are in the Royal House of God. Could it be we are here also “for such a time as this”? It’s time to speak up for the family, for oneness. This is my dream: that the royal family of God will stand up – for wholeness and oneness in the family of God.

I have a dream. I dream that someday soon all the man-made walls we’ve erected that are keeping brothers and sisters of God’s family apart, will come down. I dream a time when God’s children will worship together as one, with the same agape love for one another that Father has for His Son (John 17:23). Yes, I realize we all can already worship Father. But in my dream we’re worshipping together, lovingly, joyfully, acceptingly of one another – and in my dream the in-fighting and backbiting and competition and put downs have all stopped. Instead, we’re using the gifts God has gifted each one with – men and women – to get the true gospel message to the whole world. We use the gifts to reveal a living God of love and joy and peace. In my dream, we finally live the Way of love for all people – especially for one another – “that the world may know” we are His children and Yeshua is the true Son of God.

I have a dream that this One Body of Christ will include many hundreds and even thousands who were once part of the Body of Christ but who have left the faith, got discouraged and have quit, have given up, have lost contact with their Father. *I have a dream* that faithful brothers and sisters in Christ will work to seek out, heal and win back the hearts and minds and restore those lost sheep to the fold of Almighty’s pasture. In my dream the discouraged will be encouraged to pray and restore their relationship with Abba, our incredibly loving heavenly Father. The lost will be found and led back home. Those who are starving, those who hunger for real spiritual food will find sustenance. Those who feel imprisoned by past sins long since repented of – will find forgiveness, acceptance and a loving home by godly brothers and sisters.

I have a dream. One by one, God’s scattered sheep will come together, some how, some way. I have a dream, that the Family of God will go seek the lost and forgotten and discouraged brothers and sisters who once were in the family—and tell them we love them, we miss them, we want them back. In my dream, these brothers and sisters – people all over the world, of every race and tribe and culture – are supporting one another, praying for one another, lifting up each other’s names to our great Father when there are issues, comforting one another, and we see themselves as *one* body, not as part of thousands of separate, or even competing, entities and organizations.

And in this dream, Almighty God the Father and His Son are glorified.

That, in a nutshell, is really what my previous 3 teachings and this one have been all about. Oneness. One Body. Harmony. Working together.

Many of you cite all kinds of reasons why working together as One Body is impossible in this era. Do we dare say anything is impossible with God? If we do, it’s because we’re focusing on what we can see, instead of what we can’t see. “Faith is the evidence of things NOT seen” (Heb. 11:1) – at least not yet, but we know these “things” will happen because Yahweh has spoken it. His stated will is that His children be one. Let’s focus on our unseen Father and Master. God would never speak His will if it were impossible to accomplish that will – including working together as one Body.

Should we wait for the 2 witnesses to unite us? That’s what some suggest. Isn’t their work going on exactly at the same time that the Woman of Rev. 12 is in her place in the wilderness? Others think it is this very “Place of safety” where the oneness will materialize. We’ll have to see. But I

don't personally think people will be given special protection unless we have *first* already shown that loving oneness fills our hearts.

Having said that, this story ends well. In the end, Christ will present to Himself a glorious church, a beautiful wife, without spot or wrinkle (Ephesians 5:27). This body is described as 'faultless' (Jude 24). He is the One with the spot remover. He is the one with the iron to iron out the wrinkles in the Bride's bridal gown – for apparently there *are* spots and wrinkles to be taken out prior to the wedding.

So the ending is indeed very, very positive. We shall be one. But how?

We'll see in this teaching today – and maybe the next one -- that *many of us played a role in the division, and many of us must also play a role in it's unification.* We'll begin to explore Ezekiel 34, but we'll focus more on it next time. Many pastors – or "shepherds" -- certainly have fueled the scattering according to Yahweh. Many of the sheep have added to the schisms and divisions as well. Really, each one of us must repent for the state of the Body right now and ask for Father's forgiveness. And then we need to reach out first to Him – and then to one another.

Oneness among God's children will not happen until we FIRST restore perfect oneness with Yahweh and His Son, the coming King of Kings.

John 17:20-23

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 *that they all may be one*, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

How is oneness to come? V. 21 – "that they also may be One in US..." THAT'S the key.

As a grandfather, I know that as my expanded family grows, it brings me unspeakable joy to see my children, in-laws, grandchildren all living and playing as one. How is Father feeling right now, as He watches the way His children are interacting – or not interacting – with each other? Can we bring some indescribable joy to our heavenly Father? God's Spirit wants that and is leading us there.

So today we'll talk more about God's will in this matter of Oneness, what **condition the Bride is in** at present, and what condition She will be in at the end, we'll discuss **what CAUSED the problems** and **finally what EACH OF US has to do to help promote HEALING and ONENESS** in the body.

THE BODY OF Christ DEFINED

Remember that "the Body" is not an organization. It's not ANY organization. Neither are these series of sermons about us all coming under one umbrella organization. Not at all. Many would say they know that the Body is composed of spirit-led brethren everywhere in various groups but we don't ACT like we believe that. **We must not confuse "church" with "organization".** The church is a *spiritual* organism that you can't box into any corporate churches or organizations. In fact, MANY have had it with "churchianity" and organized religion.

- **The Body is comprised of anyone who has been baptized by the Holy Spirit INTO the Body of Christ.** “For by one Spirit we have been baptized into one body...” (1 Cor. 12:13). Whoever has God’s Spirit and is led by God’s Holy Spirit – setting us apart and sanctifying that person as a “saint”, a “*hagios*” or holy one, a set-apart one—is part of that Body. The *Eternal* places each one in His Body as HE sees fit. No more male or female, no slave or free, we’re all one, or supposed to be one (Gal. 3:28).
- **That one body is not limited to any denomination or even all the splinters of any original denomination. We keep limiting God in our minds to working just with people we know, or to church groups just like ours.** Yeshua clearly said, “I have sheep *not* of this flock, them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd” (John 10:16). Messianics – some of us are over here at church of God groups. COG groups: don’t think God’s spirit works only in the COG organizations. Wake up, children of God. Don’t limit where He’s working.
- Our focus is on the Master. It’s His body. Christ bought and paid for each of us, so He owns us. That means *we belong to Him*, not some church of God organization. We’re part of Him; *we seek to bring others to HIM – not to organizations*. We’re thrilled when people “discover” our Lord and Master – not just when they discover our church website, our church or organization.
- **1 Cor. 12:12-27** has much to say about the Body of Christ. It addresses those who don’t feel they belong. We still need and want you in the Body. It also addresses those who feel superior. Paul says if the whole body was an eye, the body wouldn’t work.

1 Corinthians 12:17-20

If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 *But now God has placed the parts, each one of them, in the body just as He wanted.* 19 And if they were all the same part, where would the body be? 20 Now there are many parts, yet one body.

- *GOD placed each one in His body as it suited Him.* That means you as well. Father wants each of His children to have a part in the functioning of the church, doing the function we are called to do. Each of us has received a gift of the Spirit. Read 1 Cor. 12:7-11 on your own.
- 1 Cor. 12:11 says God distributes the gift of the Spirit *to each one* as He wills. Now here’s the part that seems to threaten those who want sole and absolute power in the church: each of us has a function. That means each of us needs to be *allowed* to function, so “every joint supplies” its part, allowing the body to increase and grow in love – Eph. 4:16. Oneness won’t happen until we trust Yahweh knows what HE is doing and we let God’s spirit flow in each person, according to his or her God-given gift, or his or her function.

We’re coming to the Passover soon, where we partake of the wine and break and eat the unleavened bread, which 1 Cor. 10:16-17 says is about our sharing in the body and the blood of our Savior. But are we once again going to take it while thinking separately from other parts of Christ’s Body —or as working together? It’s all about being part of that one Bread, that one body – together.

The State of the Body of Christ

President Obama recently gave a “State of the Union” address. If the Head of the Body, Jesus the Christ, gave a “**State of the Body**” address, what would HE say?

What shape is the church of God in, the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ? Is it in perfect shape, no worries? Or battered, but intact? Or would you say it is wounded, hurt and scattered, but it will heal and be healthy by the return of the Christ?

It seems to me that most people I’ve talked to about this seem to feel “the Body of Christ is just fine, thank you”, and they wonder why I’ve even been spending so much time lately about the divisions, the schisms, the party-spirit of “I’m of Paul, I’m of Apollos” (stick in the present-day leaders’ names). **They’ll say “this separation is all God’s will**, it’s even something GOD wanted and the Almighty Himself *caused*”. They’ll use scripture here and there to prove their point as they push back at me that this division and scattering into various sheepfolds that want nothing to do with one another – is somehow God’s mind, what He wants. And their reasoning goes like this: “if it wasn’t what God wanted, it wouldn’t be happening.” So they ask me again, why are you talking about oneness when all this division is of God? “We’re fine”, they say.

But doesn’t that sound so much like something Laodiceans would say? “We’re fine. We don’t need anything (or anyone?). We have everything we need (rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing). We don’t need those brethren over there. They do what they do and we do what we do – and it will all be fine in the end”.

Here’s my take: the state of the church right now is so bad that it makes our Master want to vomit us right up and out of His Body (Rev. 3:16-20). I don’t see how it gets much worse than that. On top of that He says we’re miserable, wretched, poor, blind and naked. Or perhaps almost dead (Sardis). Or weak. Or dabbling with other doctrines and false teachers. Or have lost our first love (Ephesus). Take your pick of the 7 churches. Only 2 are not told to repent. But overall, the odds are 2 out of 7 that you and I are part of a group that really has it all together -- in God’s eyes.

As I said earlier, He *will* correct it in time. He will pass us through the refiner’s fire if needed. He will present to Himself a glorious church before it’s all said and done. But right now – the Body needs work, and the Body has to come together. We’ll see glimpses of how He will bring it together.

IS THIS DIVISION SOMETHING GOD REALLY WANTS?

Is division in the Body really reflecting the perfect mind and will of God? For that matter, is everything that happens on earth, necessarily His will? Some of you think we’re divided because that’s God’s will, and if it weren’t God’s will we wouldn’t be divided. So where does free moral agency come in? One day I hope have an in-depth sermon on “the Will of God”. Yeshua tells us to pray “thy will be done on earth *as* it is in heaven”. In heaven, every creature there is in total submission to the will of God, of their free moral agency, and God’s will is always done up there. On earth, we still have to pray for it. That’s a whole separate topic.

But what is Yahweh’s clearly stated will on the Body being one?

Ephesians 4:1-6

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. **4 There is**

one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in..all”

- Paul in sheer horror in reacting to where the Corinthians were going exclaims **“Is Christ divided?”** In 1 Cor. 1:10 he clearly states, *“There should be NO divisions among you”*. Can it get any clearer? We call them “splinter groups” and we say the church is “splintered”. How can that bring our Father any glory? Paul continues: “Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in my name?” – 1 Cor. 1:10-13. He calls those who were of different factions “carnal” – 1 Cor. 3:2-5. **1 Cor. 12:25: “there should be NO schism in the body”**.

So how can anyone teach these divisions are of God, or God’s will? God is not confused. He has given us His clearly stated mind on these things.

- You and I were bought by the blood of Jesus the Christ, or as He was actually called, Yeshua. He paid for us and so HE owns us, we belong to HIM, and we follow men *only as far* as they follow Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). I’ve been teaching that we should not say we “belong to the --- church of God group” – but simply say “Church of God” or “body of Christ”
- He prayed before His arrest, that we be as much “one” as He and His Father are one (John 17:20-23). *This oneness should produce phenomenal joyful love for God and one another.*

So that’s what our Father says: be one, work as one. Therefore ***the spirit that wants to divide us and keep us divided cannot be of God***. A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, but falls (Luke 11:17). We are the House of God (**1 Tim. 3:15**), the forerunners of the kingdom of God.

Christ said HE would build His church and – get this – ***the Body of Christ will actually go on the offensive against any attempt to destroy us***. “The gates of hades, death, shall not prevail” (**Matthew 16:18**). **Gates don’t attack. They defend.** That means some of us in the Body get sick and tired of the division and do things, with God’s power, against the forces of division. We go on the attack against the gates of death. Gates are defensive positions and won’t prevail. Have you thought of it that way before? *Our enemy is not one another*. Our enemy and our fight is a spiritual fight against wicked beings in high places who wish our demise (**Eph. 6:11-12**).

Ephesians 6:11-12 (Apologetics Bible)

Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the tactics of the Devil. 12 ***For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens.***”

So don’t think we’re ever really fighting a brother or sister from another group, over there, if they are in Christ. Our battle is not with brothers and sisters in the Lord, but with the evil spirit forces.

We have no time to waste! The world’s leading economies are hurtling toward utter collapse – and out of its ashes will rise a whole new cast of leading players on stage. Many European nations are on the verge of economic collapse. So is the USA. Now watch Germany and China. Watch for the Muslim “12th Imam” – the Mahdi—to surface. The stage is being set to prepare the forces which will persecute God’s family mercilessly. In the meantime, we seem to be content to be divided and apart.

It's time, brethren. It's time to wake up, it's time to reach up, look up, it's time reach out, and it's time to pull together. It's time to visit one another. It's time to forgive and accept and strengthen one another.

SO, WHAT CAUSED ALL THIS SPLINTERING AND DIVIDING?

When we ask brethren that question, I usually get 2 answers:

1. Doctrinal differences
2. "It's the ministers. They all want to be in charge of their own group and nobody wants to come under the leadership of someone else. Too many chiefs and not enough Indians among them.

But I think scripture clearly shows we all have had a part in it, and here are the 4 main reasons for the splits as I see it.

1. SIN
2. Doctrinal differences, heresies
3. Abusive Ministers (not all ministers)
4. Abusive Brethren

#1: Sin is the PRIMARY cause of separation from God and from one another.

Isaiah 59:2 "...*your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.*"

When we become separated from God, we also tend to get separated from God's people. What sin or sins in particular have separated us? Really, any and all sins, but I want to be more specific. Sin is the transgression of God's law, the Torah, the commandments and way and teachings of the true God (1 John 3:4). **LOVE fulfills the commandments.** *Division* is part of the carnal or sinful nature, and that's why Paul said it's proof of carnality when we keep dividing (1 Cor. 3:2-5).

Romans 13:8-10

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." **10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.**

Galatians 5:14-15

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

So many of us think we are obeying God because we keep the Sabbath, don't swear, don't eat pork and don't keep Christmas. *How about understanding that "obeying God" is evidenced by acts of LOVE?* If love fulfills the law and if sin is the transgression of the law, then ***sin is - in its simplest terms – when we're not showing love either to Yahweh or to one another.*** That's why James says "to him who knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). He didn't show love.

What does all this have to do with our schisms and splinters? *Schisms are caused, in its simplest terms, when we're not living the way of Love for God and for one another. Schisms will be healed, in its simplest terms, when we start to be more loving, first towards Father, and then to one another.* I'm convinced this is true.

We did some backbiting, for example. **Backbiting wounds!** Sin divides. Gossip divides. Adultery will most certainly divide us from one another. Where's the love in that? The sin of heresy will divide. Splintering into yet more groups hurts the body. Splinters hurt! *Since all of us have sinned, we've all contributed to some extent in causing some degree of division.*

I also think we're secretly glad to have many options of where to worship the Eternal. If we don't get along with someone, or don't like the teaching style of the pastor, we can just start attending somewhere else and never have to deal with the issues. It was too easy. But not pleasing to Father.

So all those who think the same way, let's call them "Yellow pencils", all assemble over here, the green ones over there, and red ones somewhere else. **It became too easy to not have to work things out** with various ones, but simply move to a different meeting venue. *We didn't have to practice Matthew 18:15-18, or the verses about forgiving one another, or stopping your prayer until you've reconciled (Matt. 6:23-24).* It was just too easy to not have to deal with any of that – so we didn't. And we splintered, and splintered. But that isn't of God. He doesn't want all the yellow pencils over here and all the green ones over there.

Lack of love in action causes division. Agape love in action will restore oneness.

Dividing, at least within the Body of Christ, is evidence of inability to love in all its ramifications. The KEY to Oneness with each other is to love God with all our heart – and be ONE WITH GOD first. As Jesus said, "...that they may be one in Us" (John 17:21). We read John 17:20-23 earlier. In John 1:6-7, notice how being at one with the Almighty helps us have fellowship with one another.

1 John 1:6-7

If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. **7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another,** and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

As we become one in God and He in us – HIS agape love flows more and more in us – and we can't help but overcome and be one with one another.

Sign of God's people

What was THE central sign that we are God's people (**John 13:34-35**). *Some of you believe 7th Day Sabbath keeping is the central sign* – but that's what Master says. Sabbath keeping is "a" sign – but the "the" sign of who we are. That sign is having intense agape love for one another just as Jesus has for us (John 13:33-35). **The "one another" part of the command was not to be confined just to the little circle of people** we knew and loved being around – or we'd be no better than the unconverted (Matthew 5:43-48). We are supposed to have such *profound* love for each other that the world takes notice of it!

Sins divide us from one another. *Personal sins of immorality. Sins of drunkenness*, sins of adultery, of lying, of swearing. Sins of Sabbath breaking – doing business on the Sabbath, not having stopped our work by the time the Sabbath begins. Sabbath should be a big “stop” sign in our week.

Agape Love Reconciles the repentant brother or sister

All these sins keep people apart. That’s true. But it’s also true that love will reconcile and win people back from sin. It’s also true that agape love will FORGIVE sin and accept the sinner back into the fold.

Brethren read the end of **1 Corinthians 5:9-13** and realize it says we’re not even to eat with someone who is a brother who lives in ongoing sin. We all sin from time to time, but this is referring to someone living in sin as a way of life. This passage says we are not to “hang out” with brethren who have rampant disregard for God’s law. Let’s read it, for ongoing lives of rampant sin cannot be tolerated. That does divide us from our sinful sister or brother.

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (Apologetics Study Bible)

“I wrote to you in a letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— 10 by no means referring to this world’s immoral people, or to the greedy and swindlers, or to idolaters; otherwise you would have to leave the world. 11 But now I am writing you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother who is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a reviler, a drunkard or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person. 12 For what is it to me to judge outsiders? Do you not judge those who are inside? 13 But God judges outsiders. Put away the evil person from among yourselves.”

But a word of caution here, brothers and sisters: *so many of us are so quick to apply 1 Cor. 5 but not so quick to apply 2 Cor. 2 – where the church was told to bring back into the fold the now-repentant sinful brother who had been cast out.* Turn please to 2 Cor. 2:6. As you do, think of brethren and even ministers who may need to be forgiven so we can come together again. Ask dear Abba in Heaven to speak to your heart as we read this from the Apologetics Study Bible:

2 Corinthians 2:6-11 (Apologetics Study Bible)

“The punishment by the majority is sufficient for such a person, 7 **so now you should forgive and comfort him** instead; otherwise, *this one may be overwhelmed by excessive grief.* 8 Therefore I urge you to *confirm your love to him.* 9 It was for this purpose I wrote: so I may know your proven character, if you are obedient in everything. 10 Now to whom you forgive anything, I do too. For what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, it is for you in the presence of Christ, 11 *so that we may not be taken advantage of by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his intentions.*

Let me read it again: “forgive and comfort him...don’t let him be overwhelmed with excessive grief. ..confirm your love to him...”

Forgiving and accepting will produce healing and oneness. WE do that, led by God’s spirit. Christ will act through His Body, just as your arms and legs and eyes do what your mind wants to do.

*This forgiveness does not first require a long, long track record of new righteous living, as is commonly taught. Yeshua forgave the repentant woman caught in adultery – *instantly*. “Neither do I condemn you”, He said (John 8:11) and He taught her to go sin no more. Overcome this sin, put it behind you and don’t repeat it. Now how well do you and I obey that command, to “go and sin no*

more”? How many times do we have to repent of the same sin, over and over? That’s recorded for our admonition too. So let’s not be too harsh on our brethren whom we think has not perfectly put away his sins of ... whatever. Let’s take out the plank in our own eye first, so we can see clearly to help our brother or sister with the speck of dirt in his or her eye (Matthew 7:4-5).

Another example: Saul – later called Paul, was knocked off his high horse on the way to Damascus. How about him? How much time would you require as a “track record” before you could accept the man in your congregation who had come to beat and torture you? When Ananias was sent to him, Ananias’ first words were “Brother Saul” (*Acts 9:17 “...and putting his hands on him, said ‘Brother Saul...’*). “Brother”. Instantly. He hadn’t even been baptized yet, or received the Spirit yet! Think about that. *Was* he even technically a “brother” yet without God’s Spirit?

Who can *you* think of, who could you extend the hand of brotherhood to after all this time? Let God’s spirit speak to you, and then go do it. One life at a time. Bring the family together again. Do what Christ wants you to do. You know what that will be, because He showed us what HE does with sinners. Now let’s go do the same.

Start oneness in our own families

There are even FAMILIES that for various reasons have nothing to do with one another.

Something offensive happened and dad, or grandpa or mom or sister got cut off. ***PLEASE, brothers and sisters, start this unity and oneness with your own families.*** I preach to myself too. Reach out to your loved ones who may feel distant from you. Show your forgiving love. Don’t be like the older brother of the prodigal who did not really want that so-and-so brother of his to ever come home. Do you feel some sins are unforgivable? Who do you know who is hurting out there and has nowhere to go? Especially in your families. It starts with asking for God’s mind, God’s heart. God loves us and has a heart for us. ***We too, must turn OUR hearts to one another.*** Who do you know, has given up on religion and churches out of despair, discouragement – and perhaps no one has even ever reached out to them during their time away? Has anyone even noticed they aren’t attending anymore? Sure, there are hardhearted carnal folks who will say “they separated themselves”. Maybe so. But what about the many verses of going out and looking for the lost sheep, even those who have departed from the faith (James 5:19-20)?

Don’t wait too long; you may not have the chance to do this later. I was at odds with my Dad for years. One year, I grew up a bit and wrote him a letter telling him I wanted to be reconciled, to be one with Dad again. I told him how I loved him and admired him for the hundreds of lives he literally saved alive in his mission in the Philippines. I asked his forgiveness for not being the son I should have been. A couple weeks later I got a letter from him and he was deeply touched and said he wept as he read my letter over and over and over. We were healed, we were whole again, we were one again. What joy swept his heart – and mine! No more than 4 days later, I got a phone call from my Mom. Dad had just died. Brethren, you never know how much time you have with the ones you really love.

Do you have a father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, uncle, aunt, nephew, cousin, brother, son, daughter, daughter in law – someone in your family – you won’t have anything to do with? Is that of God? Really? Take decisive action. Right now. ***Turn your heart around – back to your father, back to your son, back to your daughter, back to your Mom. And don’t forget grandma and great-grandma.***

Oneness in the Body will reflect, to a large degree, oneness in our marriages, oneness in our families and oneness in our homes. We must not forget the older generation. My grandmother died soon after being burned in a house fire. I wish I would have made the time to build memories with her before that.

My Mom and I were estranged when she went back to Sunday keeping. I thought - for a time -- in my stupid childish view that somehow I should keep my distance, keep the kids away and all that. Thank God I came to my senses in time and we had some wonderful times of healing for several years before she died suddenly of a stroke.

Brethren, it's time. Reach out. Be one. Start at home. Start with your wife, your husband.

It is the one who loves his brother or sister who abides in the light (1 John 1:10). They've passed from life to death (1 John 3:14). Those who are truly of the body of Christ will give up the satisfaction of keeping someone away, but lay down their lives for their brothers instead (1 John 3:16). If we don't love people, even repentant sinners, we simply don't know God (1 John 4:7). To say we love God, we must love our brother (1 John 4:20-21).

You see, we have to become more like the Head of the Body – Christ. He was called “a friend of tax collectors (publicans) and sinners” (Luke 7:34). You know what? He even went out of His way to become a friend of these folks – like Zacchaeus. It was through that expressed love that Zacchaeus was led to repentance and change. People are moved by love. Let's read it. It's our example.

Luke 19:1-10

“Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. 2 Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. 3 And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way. 5 And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.” 6 So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. 7 *But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, “He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.”* [Would you or I have said the same thing?]

8 Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.”

9 And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; ***10 for the Son of Man [and those of His Body will be the same] has come to seek and to save that which was lost.***”

Who's the “Zacchaeus” in your life? Someone who won't make you look good to have as your friend? But someone looking *for* a friend and looking for brotherhood in Messiah? Reach out to that person like the Head of the Body did. That's being a “connector” kind of person, a gatherer of men and women. Bringing people together (see Luke 11:23).

The BODY – you and I – will be doing what the HEAD wants us to do. ***See verse 10 again: for the Son of Man [and those of His Body will be the same] has come to seek and to save that which was lost.***”

THIS is how we attack the gates of hell and the church Jesus builds gets stronger and stronger – by the bond of love, acceptance, forgiveness, forbearance.

But our Beloved Savior was also a friend of so many others: the woman caught in the act of adultery. No track record of repentance required first – months or years – but immediately. He was a friend of Mary of Magdala, from whom He cast out 7 demons. He was a friend of Nicodemus, a Pharisee. He went to dinner at Pharisee's homes. He was at ease with fishermen and tax collectors. What a great example. That's our Boss! That's our Leader, that's our king – He's our example. I'm so proud of Him and want to be just like Him.

When we are a friend to all types, reach out to all types, befriend all types, love all types – we're acting like Him. We're restoring the wholeness of the body. That's what Jesus did when He healed: he made the body whole. Let's be like Him and find ways to bring restoration and wholeness to *the Body*. **How? STOP THE SINNING – and be forgiving and accepting of one another.**

#2 DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCES AND DISPUTES

#2 Doctrinal differences is a real issue, and I'll tackle that in a future sermon soon. For now I'll just say this:

- There *are* times to mark and avoid those who cause divisions Romans 16:17
- Certainly some wolves and false prophets came in our midst (see 2 Pet 2; Acts 20:28-30) and have certainly helped to cause division. Jude says a lot about this also.
- There are ALSO times when differences don't really matter that much to God – Romans 14 is all about this. We should be willing to agree to disagree on some issues.
- **Let's focus on what our King says are the major issues. You know – the 2 big commandments, practicing love. Matthew 23:23 says** the weightier matters of the law are justice, mercy and faith. There He teaches us to focus on those things and not minutia. The topics we divide over aren't even major! We divide over the calendar, 14th-15th Passover, eating out on the Sabbath – shouldn't GOD judge those? Can't we agree to disagree and focus on the big stuff? So we separate, and I have too – when we can't agree with the preacher. ***Think of THIS: Jesus attended the synagogue every Sabbath. Do you think He agreed with their teachings all the time or even most of the time?*** In fact, He told them, "You err, *not* knowing the Scriptures" (**Matthew 22:29**). But He still went and sat in their synagogues. So did Paul. Over and over. Are we dividing from one another too easily, too soon, over tiny issues compared to love, mercy, truth, faith? *I preach to MYSELF!*
- I do think we have made doctrinal differences a reason to split and segregate *far too soon from each other*, when we might have sorted these out had we allowed **the Spirit to lead and guide us into all truth (John 16:13)**. But that takes humility, prayer, a desire to be one, and submission to God, and esteeming one another.

#3 ROGUE SHEPHERDS

#3—Now let's cover another big reason for divisions: **Ministers, pastors; at least those who crave power and control. That's NOT all pastors, or ALL ministers....but there are too many. So let's read what God says in Ezekiel 34.**

WHY study Ezekiel 34? Because here Our King says we're ALL involved in the splintering to some degree – shepherds and flock alike. That's why I called a day of fasting Dec 19, 2009 for each to focus on our own part in this, our own repentance, and not point fingers at all. As I read Ezek 34, please – I preach to myself too.

Much of what will be said there has my name all over it too. There, you heard me say it, and I mean it, and before Yahweh and man, I repent. I've spent hours and hours over the past few months seeing my part in all this. It has changed me. I want to be one with those who hate me, if they'll let me. And I've learned so much by reading and re-reading and studying the Greek and praying on my knees about Romans 12-13-14, chapter 14 especially. Some things don't matter as much to God as we like to think! Read Romans 14 yourself! Now quit dividing over that.

We ALL have to admit our part in the splintering and humble ourselves before this Body will ever heal and become whole again. Some of us, even I, have been very hard at times. Tough as nails. Throw people out. Disfellowship them.

There's a huge wave of disrespect for ministers right now – especially those not part of your association. Brethren, let's put an end to that too. Respect goes every way: we are to honor ALL. Elders must serve and honor brethren. Brethren must esteem those who work as overseers as we'll soon read. If we understand we are the holy place housing the very glory of the Eternal's Spirit – we are the temple of God's spirit – we would be SO respectful and loving of one another.

As we see ourselves and our own sins more clearly, we will also be more forgiving of others. That must include even ministers who really, really screwed up. And thanks be to our Father, there have also been some wonderful, wonderful faithful, humble, hard working ministers. And finally – there are more and more ministers who were abusive, or sinful, or tough, domineering little dictators – who have come to see all that and have repented deeply. Do we not forgive pastors who repent? That's part of the oneness process too. Frankly, when we forgive, that act heals US probably even more than one receiving the forgiveness. It allows us to move on, to cut out the bitterness.

We'll read Ezekiel 34 – more so next time, as we're out of time, as I think the infection needs attention and treatment – and then please, we must move on. There's way, way too much negative stuff being said. So we'll just read the introduction today and finish it the next time. But you'll see next time how many brethren themselves also play a huge part in causing the division we've seen.

Ezekiel 34:1-24 (lets' read v. 1-6 to begin with)

And the word of Yahweh came to me, saying, ² "Son of man, prophesy *against* the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, "Thus says Adonai Yahweh to the shepherds: "***Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves!*** Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? ³ You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, *but* you do not feed the flock. ⁴ The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with ***force and cruelty you have ruled them.*** ⁵ ***So they were scattered because there was no shepherd;*** and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. ⁶ My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and ***no one was seeking or searching.***"

OK – we'll come back to Ezekiel 34 next time, but let's jump to the end of the story in the short time we have remaining. ***Someone will seek the lost (Luke 19:7)- and He'll do it thru His Body.***

Everything we do should be to bring glory to our Master and to God in the highest. The wedding is coming soon, and the Bride shall be one, somehow, some way. We want the walls that divide us – to be torn down. We shall be one. Lift up your eyes, for your redemption is near. The Wedding Supper draws nigh. Let's read the end of the story, it's pretty exciting. ***The wounds in the Body that are so raw now will be healed. The divisions will be a thing of the past. We shall be one.***

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Matthew 24:31

And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

How exciting that will be! You'll see your assigned angel – an incredible spirit being of brilliance and power – your own angel -- flying down swiftly to pick you up.

Revelation 19:6-8

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! 7 Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for ***the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.***" 8 ***And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright,*** for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Psalms 45:13-15

The royal daughter is all glorious within the palace; Her clothing is woven with gold.

14 She shall be brought to the King in robes of many colors;

The virgins, her companions who follow her, shall be brought to You.

15 With gladness and rejoicing they shall be brought; They shall enter the King's palace.

You have your name at the formal dinner table. ***Only those who love our Master and love one another as one, now, will be part of the Bride.*** He will marry a Bride who is ONE BODY, who is holy, and who has no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but who stands before Him faultless (Jude 24). His Bride will be a Bride full of love for Him and for all people. Yeshua loves His Bride and is excited about you being in His – and your - wedding supper. I hope we're excited about it too.

Until next time.... love like you're a child of God. Be one with one another. Reach out – and follow the Messiah wherever He leads you. ***Let's be One in Him, by Him, and take steps to heal the breach in the Church of God. Act like a part of the body would act when our Head decides to do something.*** As a body part, let's do what the Head wants. Reach out and touch someone with love, forgiveness and acceptance. ***Let's be one family again. It's time. You and I have a crucial part. Christ will be the One doing it, but I'm convinced He will bring us Oneness through His family.***

Philip Shields signing off til next time. May the love of God bind us all together – SOON.

