

The “Least of these My Brethren” (Matt. 25:40)

(Who is included in “least” will stagger you)

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Summary: The real answer to the question of “who, to you, is the ‘least of these My brethren,” will stagger you when you understand it in its fullness. How we respond to this knowledge will affect tremendously what our Master says to each of us when we meet face to face. It will also affect our eternity. There’s also the reminder of how this topic figures in to the Passover foot-washing.

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(Note: This “transcript” is a close approximation of the sermon, but not entirely word for word. It would be best to use both – print the transcript and use it while hearing the audio. There is always quite a bit in the audio that is not the transcript, and vice-versa. Also note I often use God’s name Yahweh – which is much better translated “Eternal one” rather than LORD. I also often use Yeshua, the Hebrew name of God’s son, instead of the Anglicized Jesus. Yeshua means “salvation” or by extension, Savior.)

Greetings, family members of the Living God. And greetings, dear Abba in heaven, and Yeshua, my Redeemer.

This is Philip Shields with another message and a question for you. But be sure to listen to the last series on “Hearing the Voice of God.” This sermon is actually a result of that. It gets real exciting as we get better and better at tuning in to be able to hear the Creator’s voice to each of us specifically, and frequently. This happened to me just the other day in regard to this sermon.

I thought I had finished preparing this sermon, and after praying further about it, I got up and was brushing my teeth when out of nowhere a strong statement flashed into my mind: “You still don’t have it right. In fact, you still haven’t identified who the “Least of these my Brethren” truly is. Get it right before you preach it.” Then the message stopped. I went back on my knees and the answer came quickly and dramatically – and this sermon is the result.

No doubt you are familiar with the expression “the least of these my brethren” used by the Savior in Matthew 25. Please be turning there. I believe understanding this expression and applying what Yahshua – Jesus-- says about it will change how we think and look at one another, and even how we view our Lord and Master.

Let’s read it in Matthew 25.

As you turn there, let me in fact be bolder: The answer to the question of “who, to you, is the ‘least of these My brethren,” will stagger you when you understand it in its fullness. How each of us responds to this knowledge will affect what Yahshua says to each of us when we meet Him face to face someday.

Matthew 25:31-46

"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. **32** All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. **33** And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: **35** for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; **36** I *was* naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You*, or thirsty and give *You* drink? **38** When did we see You a stranger and take *You* in or naked and clothe *You*? **39** Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'

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

The King goes on in verses 41-46 to say the reverse to those who did not feed, clothe, comfort the least brethren, and in their not taking care of the least brethren, Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus) takes it personally. Let's read Matthew 25:45.

"Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do *it* to one of the least of these, you did not do *it* to Me.'

How important is it that we get this right? Verse 46 gives the answer.

"And these [those who did not help the least brethren] will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

So, how important is it that we get this right? It's a matter of our very life and death. I hope that gets our attention. Whether you are 5, 15, 65 or 80 years old, this message is for you.

WHY would Jesus say "...you've done it unto Me?"

We'll identify who the "least of these my brethren" are in a few minutes. But first, let's quickly establish why Jesus says "you either did something good to me personally, or you were rude and unkind to me personally" – based on the way we treat someone who is seen by most as pretty insignificant.

Here's why. I explain it in the series of how we are "in Christ," or "in God" Himself, when we receive God's Holy Spirit. This has everything to do with this sermon today. That indeed makes us part of the very "body of Christ," the church – but it does more than that. Most people limit that expression – "Body of Christ" – as simply meaning we are members of the church of God. But as

I establish in the 3 part series, when you look at *all* the scriptures on the topic, it has to mean more than just being a member of God's church. It is referring to coming to know our Redeemer deeper and deeper as the years pass, so much so that we are one with Him and in *Him*. So much so that our works are not our own works, but His working in us. It's about the mighty working of *His* power (Ephesians 3:7), not our power. If you study it carefully in fact, you see that *Paul takes it even a step further: what happens to Christ happens to us, and vice versa – including his death and resurrection all the way down to his circumcision!* See Col. 2:11 for example. Understanding what it means to be “in Him” is profound—and must be understood to grasp what it means to do something to the least brethren. But let's read Col.1:29 to begin with:

Colossians 1:29

“To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.”

Christ is the one working with each of us after the Father in Heaven Himself individually chose you and me to be part of the body of His Son (John 6:44; Matthew 11:27). That's why it is all about Him, not about you and me. It's about having, and being given, His mind, His righteousness, His will, His wisdom and even His faith — all of which we can have by faith. It's not something we work up or accomplish on our own, lest any man could boast.

So, when I speak of a brother or sister in Christ, or do or not do something to a brother or sister in Christ – in a sense I'm making a statement about God and to Yahweh Himself about His choice in selecting this brother or sister.

*I'm questioning His judgment. I'm making a statement – good or bad – about why on earth Yahweh would call him or her into the body. Our actions and statements with those who have any of God's spirit make statements that either say we approve or disapprove of *Father's* choice and selection.*

Remember, we don't get to choose who our brothers and sisters will be, when we grow up in a typical family. Is it any different with God's family?

I hope you're getting this point, because it's huge. Did you realize when you and I say something nice – or something rude – about a person in whom is the nature of God by his spirit, that we are also passing a nice or rude judgment on God and about His choice!

But, regardless, the point is, when we do something to a member of the body of Christ, He feels it personally when we're nice to a brother or sister, or when we're unkind and uncaring to a brother or sister. You also would take personally what I do to your body, any part of your body.

Remember when Yeshua (Jesus) appeared to Paul on the **road to Damascus**? What was the question He asked Paul (called Saul at the time)? He says, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting ME?” (Acts 9:4-5)

Paul probably wondered why the Master would say that. He had never persecuted Jesus himself, directly. At least, there's no record of it, unless Paul may have cast his vote against Christ in the

mock trial, but that has to assume Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin and present when Jesus was tried. That is possible but we can't prove it.

So, what was Yeshua (Jesus) getting at when He asked Paul, "Why are you persecuting ME?"

Paul was busy jailing, beating, killing, and basically making life miserable for the new young body of believers. That's what he was doing. Every time Paul beat someone, or jailed someone, Jesus took it personally.

Understanding this puts everything into perspective. The way we treat anyone really, not just brethren themselves as I will show you, but especially the way we treat God's children, is the way Yeshua feels we are treating Him! Isn't that what He basically is telling us in Matthew 25?

Let me put it another way. Jesus is the Head of the body, the church. We are the parts of His body. Some of us are hands, legs, fingers. Others of us are other very necessary parts, but less esteemed. Some of us may be the armpits of the body of Christ. Or maybe we're the backside of the body. But, as I pointed out before, there can be no part of the holy body of the Messiah which is anything but holy. If we're part of His body, we're holy and a needed part of the body. Not because of our holiness, but because *He* is holy. "Be holy, for He is holy". He is our righteousness and our holiness – as I've so carefully explained in the series on Righteousness. Please carefully study all those series, as this sermon won't make any sense without the foundation from those messages.

So, with that understanding – that no body part of Christ can be anything but holy – and is a part of His body – maybe this becomes clearer.

Not until recently, though, have I realized just how much I've needed my elbow and tendons in my arm. I wasn't as aware of them until other body parts of my body ignored its pleas for help that it was hurting – and I badly pulled the tendons away from my elbow. Now, I can't even button a shirt without pain. I certainly can't pick up even a book and hold it out from my body without severe pain. My point is: because my other body parts decided to ignore the pleas from the forearm and elbow, now I can barely use the arm. And guess what? I'm so aware of how much the tendons are involved in everything I do with my hands and arm. [Note: I do get over this eventually, but it took a year plus.]

You see, once you have a part of your body, the rest of your body has to work together with each and every part. I'm saying this takes a conscious decision to accept someone God is working with as a member of your body too. We don't get to choose our brothers and sisters. And the Creator is the One who designs each of our bodies. The other body parts have to accept what is created.

Romans 12:5 and Ephesians 4:25 make very clear that I should accept you and work with you because we are members of each other. I'll speak on that more in a minute. Each one has a God-given part to do. Each one of us has a gift, whether we each know that or not. Each one is expected to contribute the benefits of that gift to the whole body (1 Pet. 4:10-11). But that's not effectively happening right now.

1 Peter 4:10-11

"As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. **11** If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone

ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Jesus is the Head of His Body (**Colossians 1:18**), the church. If I’m nice to *HIM* as I praise Him and pray to Him, but then treat *you* with malice, gossip, or unkindness – *it would be like someone being nice to you to your face as they speak with you, but then kicking you in the shins!* Or jabbing you hard in your stomach. What would you think of someone who is nice to you, to your face (the “head of the Body”), but then thinks nothing of kicking you in the shins (the parts of the Body)?

Some of us think we can treat a spirit filled brother unkindly and get away with it especially if they’re part of that fellowship “over there.” We think that’s OK somehow, as long as we pray everyday, pay our tithes and attend a church service. Remember we *are* the church, more than we *go* to church.

Here’s the point of Matthew 25 – whatever we do, positive or negative, we’re doing to the Christ. And another point that is made in Matthew 25 is that the primary thing that makes us sheep instead of goats is the love we show one another.

They DID something!

The Sheep are the people who see a need and do something about it. They don’t just pray about it and say “I’ll remember you in my prayers” but then do nothing else about it. Scripture is clear that we must “love in *deed*.” See 1 John 3:16-18. We have to prove our love and concern by actually feeding someone hungry if we have the means to do so and not just assure them of our prayers. God’s sheep, God’s children, act like the Master acts. *We DO something about a need.*

James 2:15-16

If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, **16** and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit?

I didn’t say that. Our Master did. So, the Bridegroom says that whatever we are saying, doing, or not doing to any brother or sister in Christ - - whether we like them or not – we’re doing to Him.

God is really, really serious about the fact that he wants us respecting each other, caring about each other and loving each other. Are we hearing the voice of our Savior on this?

But, what has happened in the body of Christ? We have brethren who won’t even talk to some other brethren who belong to “that group over there.” Or, we like to make comparisons about how our group is “doing the Work,” or, more spiritual than the others. Some ministers actually even forbid their membership from fellowshiping with brethren from other groups.

From now on, Almighty Yahweh is asking us: “If you knew somehow that the old man, the little girl, the teenager, the man or woman in front of you was actually the Savior Himself disguised as an old man, how would you treat that person?”

Now we must get this: This is exactly the point. Sometimes in the past I've begun my messages with "Good day, Jesus" – as I address the audience. I say that, because you and I make up the body of Christ. We are part of Him. We are in Him and He is in us. We are one with Him. And so Yahshua sees us as being part of Him himself.

So, Mathew 25 is really telling us that we should treat one another as we would if we knew that person was actually Christ Himself. Everything we say and do to one another, good or bad, the Savior takes personally as done to Him.

If we really, really grasped this, think how much more respectful we would be of one another – and really for all people.

We give this kind of respect to ministers, especially when directly talking to them, now let's give the same honor and respect to all the body parts of the body of Christ. Isn't that what Paul is getting at when he talks about it in 1 Cor. 12 and Romans 12?

Once we have the Holy Spirit, we have Yahweh living in us, we become the holy sanctuary of the Eternal, we become His dwelling place – and that demands utmost respect. Having God's Holy Spirit makes us His children and Scripture calls those with God's spirit "the saints" – meaning the holy ones. So, it's safer to assume someone *has* the spirit of our Creator and to treat him or her with respect and love, and be wrong – than to assume they don't, and find yourself doing something bad to Christ himself.

The problem is that we hold ourselves in too high esteem. This is very common even among the ordained ministry. The fact is, there are about 6.8 billion people on this planet at last count, and Yahweh says "all the nations are less than nothing." That makes you and me 1 six-billionth of less than nothing. So, how can we possibly feel we have somehow earned the right to look down on anyone?

That's the real problem here: we don't see ourselves as we should, or as Yahweh sees us. We're not humble enough. We like to exalt ourselves over others and we feel higher than someone when we disrespect or disdain them – but beware: we're doing it to Christ.

SO – WHO is the "LEAST of these My Brethren?"

I asked early on, "who, to you, is the 'least of these My brethren?" How would you answer that now?

The staggering answer begins with this: whoever is a brother or sister of Christ, no matter how "least" this person appears to you or me, that person is seen by Messiah as Himself.

Now get this: Therefore the "least of these my brethren" is STILL synonymous with the Christ Himself. HE is that person, as far as HE sees that person.

Therefore, for practical purposes, "the Least of these"... is our Savior, for He identifies HIMSELF with "the Least – including you and me. The Messiah has no shameful or unholy body parts.

He says “I am the king of Kings, I am soon coming in all my glory, I am 2nd only to the Father in Heaven – but how dare you call anyone, ANYONE, insignificant when I spilled all my blood for that person? The way you treat anyone for whom I died, I will take personally as the way you are treating ME. So get the point: the “least” is any and all of these – and the “least” for the point of this sermon, is your very King! Your King Himself said several times that he was also your servant, and is also – for the point of this sermon – the “least of these My brethren.”

I know Messiah in fact is the greatest, not the least. I’m just making the point that He will so identify Himself with each person in His body, that even the least parts of His body, He claims personally. That is why I say – ultimately, even “the least” is Jesus the Christ himself!

It’s in my head now, at least –to ask Yahweh to help me humble myself to give honor, love, service, courtesy and respect to everyone. Isn’t that what Peter says – “Honor all” (1 Pet. 2:17). Do you not consider your thumb, for example, to be a part of you, and what makes up the total you?

If you and I would just really get the point Messiah is telling us -- to treat people like we would treat Him directly if we knew the Messiah was in front of us – if we would just do this, our lives would change overnight. The world would change overnight. The attitudes in the assemblies of God’s people would change. And I’m also sure we would end up seeing more healings and miracles from Yahweh.

As we come to the Passover, this is such an important lesson of the unleavened bread representing righteous humility. 1 Cor. 11:29-30 says we bring judgment on ourselves when we don’t recognize the body of Christ, and that is why so many are sick and so many are dying prematurely. I didn’t say that; God’s word says it. When it says we’re not respecting and recognizing the “body,” He is saying you’re not accepting the people who are making up the body of Christ – and therefore there is a price to pay. Read it for yourself.

1 Corinthians 11:29-30

“For whoever eats and drinks without recognizing the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30- This is why many are sick and ill among you, and many have fallen asleep.”

It’s not necessarily the fault of those who are sick and dying. But it is clear that we’re not receiving as many and as dramatic healings as we have experienced in the past. *A large part of the reason is the way we are treating Christ*, by the way we are treating His Body parts – the brethren who have His spirit!

Do you recognize the Messiah Himself knocking outside your door?

Now stop and think: when Jesus says to the 7th church in Rev 2-3 that he’s standing outside the door and knocking, what could be one reason why the brother or sister in the house wouldn’t open to Christ? (Rev. 3:20).

I have a theory.

I don’t think any of us would knowingly refuse to open the door if we knew it actually was Yahshua, or Jesus the son of God, out there. But, if we looked through the peephole in the door

and saw a brother or sister “from the other fellowship,” someone we don’t even like all that much, we just might not open the door.

Back to Christ’s point, rephrasing it to apply more to the door situation in this case: “In as much as you would not open the door for the least of these my brethren, you did not open the door unto me.”

Why would we not have opened the door? Was it because, instead of seeing the Master, we saw *someone we don’t even consider a brother or sister? Beware, brethren that we may in fact be refusing to open the door to the King Himself – appearing to us as a disgraced brother or sister?*

I hope you’re hearing God’s message for His children today.

I think Yahweh in fact wants us showing honor and respect to everyone and anyone. This is made clear in **Acts 18:9-10**. Jesus the Christ appears to Paul early in his ministry in Corinth and says He has “many who are My People in this city”. If we could have observed the daily actions the very next day of the ones Yahweh was calling “my people”, we would be appalled at what some of them were doing. (Listen to audio for full explanation of this point).

God is simply *not* going to tolerate His children being mean, uncaring, or unloving with one another – even the parts of the body whom people may call the arm pit or backside of the body of Christ.

We’ve just got to forgive one another of any and all hurts. We’ve got to come together. We’ve got to let the Spirit flow and start crossing corporate or organizational lines and start coming together. You may *prefer* one fellowship to another, but don’t let that keep you from fellowshiping with, or phoning, or having interaction with *all* who have God’s spirit. Don’t assume someone “over there” doesn’t have God’s spirit.

Who could you call and be nice to - - whom you haven’t seen for years because they attend a different fellowship? We’ve been talking to old classmates who no longer even attend church services. People all around the world – people who need encouragement and are warmed by knowing they have a friend in you. And remember, you represent Yahweh Himself as His ambassador. As you are friendly to someone who might be feeling rather lonely or rejected right now, you are being friendly to the Son of God.

Yeshua the Christ himself said that the time is coming when He will bring into *one* Flock all the sheep scattered abroad. Do you think your church, your fellowship, your group is the only one true church of believers? Look what Jesus said:

John 10:16

And *other* sheep I have which *are not of this fold*; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock *and* one shepherd.

Are we getting it?

Are we letting the Messiah break down the middle wall of partition (Eph 2:14) that separates us from others we consider **“spiritual Gentiles”, not part of “the Israel of God”**, or ones we should

have nothing to do with? Just as the Messiah showed that it was time to let Gentiles and Israelites come into one body, so we must also apply that same principle today.

Besides, brethren, don't forget, that even as we like to think that we are members of the body of Christ – guess what that makes us? ***It makes us members, or part, of each other.*** Let that sink in. I'm a part of you, and you're a part of me – like me or not – and together we're a part of Christ together. Or not at all. It's been too easy for us to dismiss one another by simply saying, "I don't consider him a brother". Shame on us if and when we think like that – or act like someone's not a brother or sister in Christ.

Romans 12:5 says "So we, being many are one body in Christ, and members of one another."

Indeed we may rub others the wrong way, or they rub us the wrong way. It doesn't matter. If they have God's spirit, we have to come together, work together, to the fullness of the stature of Christ, and "until Christ is formed in you" (Gal. 4:19).

It is a very, very SICK body that has its own body parts consuming the others parts, destroying other parts. But that's what I sometimes see in the so-called body of Christ.

In a physical body, when one body part tries to hurt, kill, take over or destroy another body part, it's called --- **cancer**. There must be no cancer in the body of Christ, where one part metastasizes, consuming the others until they're destroyed or unable to function. We do that when we're ashamed to be seen with one another, or look down on one another, or forbid fellowship and interaction with one another.

Let me put it another way: if Yeshua is not ashamed of you – or me -- to call you or me His brother or sister, how dare *I* be ashamed of any of you, or not want to be seen with any who has God's spirit? Or how dare *you or I* be ashamed of any of "these my little ones" or "the least of these my brethren."

Hebrews 2:11

"For He who sanctifies (or makes holy) and those who are being sanctified – or being made holy – are all of one [they come from one source, God. They're all one family]; and for this reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren" [or 'brothers and sisters].

The Foot Washing's Tie-in to this topic of "did it unto Me"

Soon, we'll be washing one another's feet at the Passover service. Over most of the years I've done foot washing, the preachers taught that it represented the spirit of humility and service. That's all very true. But I think saying that, misses an even bigger point.

To me, at least, when I prepare and think about the Passover, as we should all be doing now, I try to remember a more salient point for me. Let me start with this mental picture: If you knew the person in front of you was literally Judas Iscariot, as you get in line to do the Foot Washing, would you humbly wash his feet? Be honest with yourself.

I remember that Jesus washed each of us, thoroughly, our whole body in fact, as we were immersed in baptism. Then, at the Passover, the son of God washed the disciples' feet, even Judas Iscariot's feet (John 13:1-16).

If Messiah has washed my feet and your feet – in fact our whole bodies – who am I not to be willing to view a brother or sister as already washed by the Savior, and forgiven by our Redeemer? What dirt did he/she commit that I'm not willing to be the one to acknowledge my willingness to wash it away and accept this part of Christ? Who out there would you really not want to spend time with or be seen having dinner with? Think again brethren – this is the way you're treating the very Christ himself.

So, to me, washing feet represents also our willingness to let a person be clean again in our eyes. To accept them, to let them start up again – this time accepted by you and your friends. Who is hurting out there, feeling unaccepted? I know, I've sure been there myself. People will be more able to see and feel the love of God for them, when they see this new start, this willingness to forgive, demonstrated by Yahweh's children.

Oh, people would claim "I'd wash anybody's feet," but I can assure you there are groups that simply would not let a lot of people into their meeting for Passover and foot washing. Even I. If I was to just show up at any number of fellowships in town on the night we do the Passover and foot washing, I am confident several groups would not even let me in.

And Yet Messiah even washed Judas Iscariot's feet, even though Jesus knew Judas would betray Him shortly (John 13:2, 27-30) – ***and, get this, knowing Judas was possessed by Satan himself*** even before the Passover (Luke 22:3) and again during (John 13:27) the Passover meal. Would you and I have washed Judas' feet? Jesus did.

When you wash feet this year, see yourself as washing the Messiah's feet as you wash the feet of whomever you end up with.

As you wash his or her feet, think to yourself (this is what I do): "I love you, I forgive you, I accept you, I serve you, I respect you, I honor you, I am one with you, you are a part of me, and together we are a part of Messiah. And now, I wash your feet symbolizing I'm willing to wash away any hurts and misgivings I have about you... and shortly I will rejoice to know you're willing to wash away any hurts and misgivings you have about me as well, when you wash my feet."

Again, "as you did this to one of the least of these my brethren, you've done it unto me". So, this Passover night, wash Jesus' feet as you wash a brother's or sister's feet.

No matter what you've done, or I've done, or anyone else has done wrong – if it's past and repented of, and if we're seeing a new life in Christ, cheer on the sprouting life of the Christ evident in that person's changed life! In weakness, the Messiah is made strong. When we are weak, He is strong. When we fail, He can turn it around to victory in Him.

Yeshua our life is the success, Jesus is the strength, He is the Light of life, He is the Life, and He is the righteousness. Cheer on any change. It is a process, "until Christ is formed in you" (Gal.

4:19). Let us consider one another to encourage one another while we can (Hebrews 10:24-25). As we accept someone to assemble with us, we're accepting The Christ Himself.

Let's start doing it. Let's come together. Let's pray for one another, every single one. Let's pray God forgives us of our sectarianism, our splits, our painful splinter groups, our descent into making church just another social club, instead of being vibrant and active witnesses of the new Living Way.

Some years ago I gave a sermon about Healing and the Passover. It was not the typical sermon you might expect from that title, but rather about what happened during a Passover season in King Hezekiah's day – that brought Israelites and Jews together again. And how pleased Yahweh was.

I hope you hear it, as it has everything to do with this topic today. Besides, we could sure use more healing. We also need more active involvement from Yahweh in our groups and individual lives too. But the factionalism we have has been allowed by the Eternal, but we know what's pleasing to Him: to see brethren dwelling together in unity (Psalm 133:1).

It's the spirit also shown in Ezek 37:19-22—which you can read on your own. Oneness.

Brethren of the body of Christ, wherever you are, whoever you are – I appeal to you, by the love of the Christ to forgive all, to come together for our own good, and for the sake of the whole world!

Cross church lines. Invite brethren to your home from the “other” fellowship. Visit other groups, and invite them to come with you to your group.

It's almost funny to me how the various churches of God (isn't there just one church of God?) measure growth – but basically it's just a shifting of the sheep from one flock to another. I think the problem is primarily in the leadership. The *brethren* want to come together, but too many ordained ministers want to hang on to their power and control of the purse strings. Not all of them, but way too many are that way.

At a recent wedding, one older lady asked me, “which church do you belong to?”

I replied: “The church of God”.

She asked further: “Which one?”

I replied with a slight smile: “Is there more than one? I thought there was only one church of God.”

I suspect she missed my point. I suspect she thought I was saying that the group I fellowship with was the one and only body of Christ and no other. That wasn't my point at all.

Anyway, let's become more conscious now more than ever before that whatever you and I are saying about the minister, the brethren, the various groups – we're saying and doing to Christ.

I preach to myself – but this is why I'm becoming so cautious about saying or doing anything bad against a brother or sister, even if – maybe especially if – they don't attend with me or think exactly like I do.

And sometimes, like Jesus said, it's not a matter of what we do – but what we don't do when we have the opportunity. Remember, "I was hungry and you didn't feed Me."

Greatest and Least, who are they?

So, first of all, we must remember that anyone who has God's spirit is part of His body (1 Cor. 12:13; Romans 8:9).

But now whom do we consider to be the armpits, or the backside, or the least parts in the body of Christ? For indeed, 1 Cor 12 makes it clear there are many body parts, including some "unseemly" parts.

So, who are the "least" brethren to you? *The Scriptures identify there are indeed those who are called "Least or greatest."* Yahweh Himself talks about "from the least to the greatest." Can you think of some examples?

Hebrews 8:11

None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD ,' for all shall know Me, *from the least of them to the greatest* of them.

Matthew 5:19

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

Matthew 11:11

"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one *greater* than John the Baptist; *but he who is least* in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Luke 9:46-48 (also Matthew 18:1-6)

"Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest. ⁴⁷ And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a little child and set him by Him, ⁴⁸ and said to them, "Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. *For he who is least among you all will be great.*"

Paul considered himself "the least of the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:9). He also called himself "less than the least of all the saints" (Eph 3:8).

Let's break down now who some "least" brethren could be. If we first start by asking who would be considered the "important" people in the church, the "great ones" -- who honestly comes to mind?

Whom many consider "the greatest" in the church:

Who has preeminence? Some church groups even have impressive titles – Most Holy Father, Right Reverend so-and-so, Archbishop of..., Senior Pastor, Pastor General, and on and on. Paul was simply Paul. Peter was simply Peter. But, today, so many groups have to have their so-called

leaders have impressive titles, drive flashy new cars and live in expensive homes. As far as I know, Jesus did not have the latest chariot, but walked everywhere.

The church titles are getting to be almost like the lodges – Worshipful Master, Grand Exalted Ruler, Grand Master, and Grand Commander of the Scottish Rite, and on and on. It's just ridiculous.

So, whom would you normally consider to be “the greatest” in a congregation?

Of course, the pastor would be considered “the greatest.” Or, perhaps someone “from headquarters.” Or the televangelists, public speakers, any other ministers, priests, those on the speaking list, elders, deacons, song leaders, praise leaders. Perhaps even the choir in some churches – they get to sit behind the podium in their fancy costumes and uniforms. Maybe it includes those who have rank and position in the body. Perhaps they're the editor of the church magazine or author of a book. Certainly, those who have been in the church for a long time and have a lot of people they know in their clique... these we would consider to be the dominant brethren in the body.

Now, ask yourself honestly: if the Pastor asked you for a favor, let's say something he thinks isn't that big of a deal – like getting a group of church men together to build his house for him (no labor costs to him, of course), or to drop in for an hour, how quickly would you react? You know you probably would, for it makes sense to look good to someone “great.” Now, if an insignificant brother or sister asks us for the same few hours – how quickly would we respond?

I preach to myself. I've fallen prey to that sometimes in my life – and even recently felt I should have tried harder to be available for a sister who asked me for some help on a day I was fully booked up.

Why is this so important to Messiah?

Because He's sick and tired of this lording it over one another and minimizing one another. He got a full dose of how it feels. Here He Himself was God, was with God (John 1:1-2). God the Word became flesh – commonly called the Incarnation of God to mere flesh. Though being very God Himself, He experienced right from birth total rejection. The world had no room for the Son of God to be born in a proper home – so He was given an animal stall to be born in. We put the son of God, and His pregnant mother, in with the animals.

Then, the world tried to kill Him, through the massacre of all babies 2 and under during Herod's reign. He grew up with the loud whispers, hardly concealed, as people openly implied he was *a bastard* (See John 8:41) – “*We were not born of fornication.*” He was the stone that the builders rejected, who became the chief corner stone.

Then we, the world, mocked him, spat on him, beat him to a bloody pulp, then nailed him to a tree or stake—a version of impaling our very Savior.

Oh, He knows what its like to be mocked, disrespected, rejected, kicked out alright – and even viciously killed. He knows what it feels like when everyone he thought were his friends desert

him in His greatest time of need, except for a few stalwart women who stayed with Him as He suffered His last hours nailed to the stake.

Praise God for women, when the men are afraid! He knows the pain of being kicked out, mocked, laughed at, rejected, and disfellowshipped or even falsely accused.

And He's sick of us doing this to His body! His kingdom won't have any of that in it – or the ones who want to do that simply won't be there! He's done with it. He wants His body members – US – to even love those who hate us. He wants us to honor all, even the king – even Barack Obama, even Nero in that time (1 Peter 2:17).

Now, by contrast, can we imagine what a wonderful world it will be when everyone honors and respects everyone and anyone? He wants us learning that now.

Again, I preach to myself. I have a long way to go with this too. I can be hot tempered and impatient and rough on people when things aren't going right – and I've got to, by the Holy Spirit, stop that, and you have to stop that too, or we may not be part of that loving God Family. They have a way of doing things in the Kingdom of Yahweh. Jesus even said kindly to Judas, as he betrayed His Master with a kiss in the garden of Gethsemane, "Friend, why have you come?"

It's called "sending rain to the just and the unjust." It's called forgiving while we were yet sinners. It's called agape love that bears no evil, remembers no wrongs, keeps no score of wrongs, and is always patient, kind and gentle. It's called reconciling. It's called having no condemnation to anyone who is in Christ (Rom 8:1). It's called cheering someone onward as you see God making a new creation in that former horrible life. This is what identifies us as children of this family. This is what identifies us members of one another – and a member of the body of the Living Messiah.

Matthew 5:43-48

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

As we do these things, we'll be identifying ourselves as the children of the Highest (Matt 5:45). We are to be presented perfect in Christ, and that's the only way (Col. 1:28).

Brethren, sure -- knowledge and right doctrine are important. But knowledge puffs up. We won't be identified as the children of God just by our beliefs. Or, by the fact that we were baptized by immersion instead of sprinkling. We won't primarily be identified as the children of the Highest because we understand about the "place of safety" or understand all prophecy. No, no, no brethren! Even Paul said "If I understand all mysteries... but have not love, I am nothing." Nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:2).

What identifies us as children of the Highest? I just read it in **Matt 5:44-45**. Love. Not just loving one another – but respectfully loving everybody, even those people we can be tempted to think of as stupid idiots! No – they are future children of the highest, future brothers and sisters who just don't know it yet. We have to stop calling people or even thinking of people as stupid idiots. I preach to myself too.

But, we are supposed to know it, and we are supposed to treat them as we would treat Yahshua the Messiah Himself.

John 13:34-35 says agape love for one another, the same kind Yahshua (Jesus) had for each of us, is the highest defining trait of God's children. How are we doing? How are you doing?

Who else would we usually consider to be “the LEAST?”

When we say “he's a nobody” – who or what kind of person are we describing? Usually it is **someone with little or no power or influence** in the work place, church, or in the community. He/she is not part of the “in” crowd. Not a big performer. As I go through this remaining list quickly, think of people you would have to admit you think of as insignificant.

The “little ones”, the very young, or any of the children. This can be either spiritually or physically. We tend to think a new convert hasn't earned his/her stripes yet, so they're the “least.”

Matthew 18:10 "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.

Do you know their names? Do you ever take time to talk to each one over time? Do you help the mom with 5 children and babies struggling with everything as she comes to the door of your assembly?

The Poor, any who have little money.

It always struck me how it was the richest brethren who seemed to end up as elders and deacons. I made a point not to make that a consideration. I'll be talking soon about our obligations to the poor according to Scripture.

The elderly, especially older widows, people with little physical capability or energy.

You may not *think* you treat this group as “the least” – but what do your actions say? Do you take time to talk to each of them? Are you respectful in how you talk about them? Have you adopted your own “widow” – and be sure to call her up from time to time to see if she's OK or take time to be sure her yard is cared for?

The “outsider” (foreigners, immigrants), those guys with the really thick accent and who dress funny. Really anyone who doesn't quite fit in; the “odd ball” personality-less people. Again, a sermon coming soon on what Scripture says about our responsibilities to the stranger.

Who else would be considered “the least” by people? Remember, if God has forgiven these and given His spirit to them, they too are part of His body... and they too are a part of Jesus Christ!

Someone who had been disfellowshipped and therefore disgraced.

Don't forget the lesson of the man in Corinth who had to be disfellowshipped, but Paul stepped in for him and told the church to welcome him back once he stopped the previous behavior and obviously repented (2 Corinthians 2:5-11). Look at current fruit of their lives, not sins and allegations from years ago. Some ministers just don't want someone around and they don't ever welcome him back. That is something the King will take up with them someday, I assure you.

When you see that someone is not being allowed into fellowship more as a power grab by the pastor – you call that person. You befriend the hurting and lost sheep. Remember Yahweh castigates the bad shepherds who fed on the flock and did not seek the lost and wounded.

You can read **Ezekiel 34 and Jeremiah 23** if you want to see God's opinion on this matter. That's a different topic for another day [Note: see “Healing the Wounds in the Body” – Feb. 2010]

“The Samaritan” in our lives. People from other cultures and beliefs, whom we just don't care to be seen with. Who's the “Samaritan” in your life?

We have to be careful that we don't look down on those God is calling from other cultures, races, or countries. This web ministry has helped brethren in the past from Kenya and Uganda who are coming to understand Christianity and the Sabbath and the Way of God. They are poor, they need some help, and many are in the midst of a literal famine. I hope you will find ways to help us get the word out in Africa. It costs to rent buildings to meet in, and to help equip the local pastors to get the word out.

If they are “the least” to you – beware, for Christ sees us treating Him that way.

If God the father is calling them, in spite of how different they are from us, don't spurn the Father's choice. Don't put it down. If the Messiah is not ashamed to call them His brothers (Hebrews 2:11-12), neither should we. But remember the earlier point, that true love is evidenced by actually doing something, not just praying about it. I'm not putting down prayer. I'm saying James 2:15-16 says we need to back that up with action.

This matter of “rank”; The attitude of a servant

In the beginning I asked, “Who is the ‘least of these, My Brethren?’”

The answer should be clear by now: As far as Messiah is concerned, it is He Himself, for however we treat, think about, regard, or talk to – *anyone* of the members of His body, He considers it personally. “You did it unto Me.”

I know Messiah in fact is the greatest, not the least. I'm making the point that He will so identify Himself with each person in His body, that even the least parts of His body, He claims personally. That is why I say – ultimately, even “the least” is Jesus the Christ.

Now, we must start treating every single person in the body of Christ as you would if the very son of Yahweh Himself was standing in front of you in all His glory.

Are we getting it?

We are all brothers and sisters, and there is no lordship among us – except the one Lord and Master we have, Jesus the Christ, or as I prefer – Yahshua the Messiah. This hierarchal attitude, this lording it over one another, is a big reason we have issues with who are considered “greatest” and “least.” Yahweh identifies that reasoning with the way of the Gentiles.

Matthew 20:25-28 (also Luke 22:25-27)

“But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. ²⁷ And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave — ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

I always thought “rank” means something stinks. Let’s get our minds off rank, lordship, who’s up and who’s down – for that’s so worldly, so pagan, so ungodly and so wrong. That’s what our Master says (Matthew 23:5-12; Matthew 20:25-28).

There’s no “lordship” over one another anymore.

Yahweh told me in some clear thinking as I ended the preparation of this sermon: “You’re all brothers and sisters. There is no more Jew or Gentile, no more free or slave, no more male or female, no more of any of this old thinking that one group is somehow higher or greater than another group (Gal 3:28).”

It’s time to rid ourselves of this notion of position, hierarchy and rank. It does stink! It’s not of God. It’s of Satan and the way of his world. It’s the way of the Roman emperors and the church that copied their model of rank and position and hierarchy. Sure, there are different functions – but no one is more important than anyone else. We’re all part of the holy body of Christ, yes, even those of us who are the arm pits of the body!

Yahweh is telling us we’re “all brothers and sisters. Get over it. You’re all one in Christ. Be kind to all. Love all. And remember, that however you treat *anyone*, I will take that personally – for that person is me, part of my body. So honor all, and in so doing, you’re honoring me, as I will someday honor you.”

Instead, He said to focus on serving one another and behaving like we’re actually everyone else’s slave. That’s what He said. Humility. Abasing and humbling ourselves. That’s what He’s looking for.

It’s OK, in other words, to be treated by everyone as “the least” – because frankly you and I probably are the least in the body anyway. If we humble ourselves, God will place us where He wants us when and how He sees fit (James 4:10).

Just remember: “When you do it to the least of these my brethren, you’ve done it unto Me.”

So, I hope you got the message: see Yeshua the Messiah even in whomever you consider to be “the least.” Honor all. Love all. Serve all. Pray for one another. Be kind and helpful to all.

That’s it for now. If this has blessed you, and helped you – tell others about it so they can get this message too. www.LightontheRock.com

Til next time – your brother and servant in Christ, Philip Shields.