

Part 2, Can Christ's "One Body" be Divided?

What "One Body" is, Who we belong to, Handling Doctrinal Differences

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by Philip Shields November 2009

FINAL DEC 3

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Summary: Whatever happened to the concept that the Body of Christ is One? Today: Why the Fast of Dec 19. What Scripture says the Body is, and how one becomes a member of that Body. How and when might true oneness come? Can we, should we, go back to one organization, under one "umbrella"? Steps we can take to start encouraging "oneness" in the Body. Whom we belong to, whom we follow. Handling heresy or even doctrinal disagreements while remaining one Body.
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Greetings, brothers and sisters in Christ. This is Philip Shields, your brother, with part 2 of this discussion into the state of the Church, the One Body of Christ. First let me remind you that you can download these messages in MP3 format on to your Ipods and PDA's. I also hope, God willing, to do a complete revamp of this website to bring it more up to date with the latest technology.

There's mostly been a positive response to part 1 of the Messages on "Whatever happened to 'One Body'", my new title. There have been suggestions and ideas of things we should do. I'll mention a few things too in this discussion today, but what we really need to do is ask our King what *He* wants to do and how we can get behind what *He* wants us to do. I have no idea what that is right now, frankly, so that is why I've recommended we fast and pray on Sabbath Dec 19, sundown-sundown – to humble ourselves, to get real quiet, and to *listen* to the Spirit of God.

Why fast Dec. 19 on a Sabbath Day? It's a day we all know we can focus, not be at work, and not have to be distracted. Sabbath is normally a Feast day, a day of joy, true. But it's not wrong to fast on the Sabbath on special occasions. Jesus did for at least 5 Sabbaths while fasting 40 days. David fasted 7 days for his son. Moses and Elijah fasted 40 days; Moses 2x I think. So if it were wrong to fast on Sabbath, our Savior would not have ever fasted on Shabbat, or Sabbath. But if you prefer to fast on a different day, by all means, just fast, please do.

We're fasting because we need to repent of the lack of oneness and our part in it. *Division began with a division from our Maker.* We weren't nearly as one with Him as Yeshua said we should be in John 17. That's where division starts, in fact where all sins start: against God, not being with Him, in Him, and behind Him. I'll talk much more about that today. We gotta repent of all that. It's not a day to point a finger at anyone, for we certainly can blame many of the pastors as well as many of us brethren for the mess we're in. Yes, I said "us". I am also to blame. I hope you can admit where *you* are partly to blame. Remember Daniel 9 is our example, as Daniel said "we" all the way through his prayer of repentance and seeking God.

Why am I speaking up on this? Certainly not because I wanted to. I felt nudged, pushed and shoved to – by some of you, and frankly I felt it from above as well. I am *least* qualified to talk about oneness of the body in my opinion, for I've had my part in the splits, in people's disappointment with ministers —for I too was a church pastor. I have nothing for anyone to join. I have no church

except hoping to be part of the end time One Body. I have nothing to gain and a lot to lose by doing this. So why am I doing this? I wish I knew. That's as honest as I can be about it. I didn't feel I had a choice. I waited for someone more qualified, more respected, more spiritual, more gifted and more polished in their speaking to stand up for oneness in Christ, and there are *many* who could have -- but no one to my knowledge was stepping up to the plate. Forgive me if I've just offended 500 who may have, without my knowledge. So frankly, I've felt shoved into the breach, and so here we are.

THE NEW WORLD ORDER and WAR against the Saints

As I look out on the world scene, brethren do you have eyes to see? There is some *urgency* to this. The NWO (New World Order) is coming together at break-neck speed. All the pieces are moving. Many leaders in all the continents openly speak of the New World Order by name. This one world will culminate in one government, one currency and one religion. This new religion could even be a *new religion* that combines elements of all the others. But I strongly suspect that one religion will not allow the name of Yahweh – and maybe not even Jesus the Christ, but that remains to be seen.

But as the world comes together, what have the children of God done? Make no mistake about it, all who confess Yeshua or Jesus the Christ and who don't submit to the teachings of that new religion and to their Great False Prophet, to their calendar and times, to their leadership, and bow down to it, will be terribly persecuted and martyred. I think we will all have to suffer some element of persecution before any final place of safety, for all who live godly must suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12)

But what have *we* been doing? As our enemies come together in one new world, one religion that will be used by Satan "make WAR against the saints" (Dan. 7:21) and will prevail for a time. In the meantime, what are *WE* doing? We're splitting, dividing, and even attacking other groups. We have our ministers marking other ministers, forbidding assembly to some. Brothers and sisters in the Messiah, how can that be? How can we be getting ready for what is about to be unleashed by splitting and dividing? Especially since we know the stated will of God and His Son is that there be NO division.

It's got to stop. I've had my part in it, but I repent before you all for that. This dividing of God's people has got to stop. It's not Yahweh's stated purpose as we'll read shortly, for us to be anything but one with Him and with one another.

YOU'VE BEEN CALLED to STAND IN THE BREACH

And if nothing else, don't forget that Yahweh decides not to let the world annihilate itself, for one ultimate reason: "For the *elect's* sake, those days shall be shortened" (Matt 24:22) Brethren, it also states in Mal 4:5-6, that if we don't turn our hearts to one another, father to child, child to father – and not just in families, but in the larger sense, within the family of God – if we don't turn our hearts back to each other, Yahweh will strike the earth with a curse. In Hebrew, that means "utter extinction". The Complete Jewish Bible says "with complete destruction" for the last words of Malachi 4. So what is God looking for? A people, even one person, who will stand in the breach. Ezekiel 13:4-5

O Israel, your prophets are like foxes in the deserts. ⁵ You have not gone up into the gaps to build a wall for the house of Israel to stand in battle on the day of YHWH.

Ezekiel 22:29-30

The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger. ³⁰ *So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one.*

How can this be? NO one? That may be true for that time, but are we going to let it be true for our time? We must hear God's voice in this and we must get this right. Too much is depending on it. Too much is at stake. The planet's very existence depends on it! I don't believe I'm overstating the case for standing up for oneness. When God looks in your part of the world, let Him see you -- a man or a woman standing in the breach! Let that be you doing your part of the world. Stand in the breach for oneness. As time goes on, God will show us HOW. Right now -- just believe, and submit to His will. I will even say to your men and women, if no man will stand in the breach, then God spare us! You women stand up -- like Deborah did, like Jael did, like Anna did, like Mary of Magdala did, like the Samaritan woman did, like Esther did. Are there any Esthers in the land? Maybe we need to learn what Esther had to learn, that maybe you were called to be where you are -- "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14). If we don't, maybe Yahweh will give life to rocks that will speak!

MOSES stood in the breach -- PS. 106:23. That act, when Moses climbed back up Mt Sinai, and went toe to toe with the Almighty -- and said, "If you blot them out, then blot me out of your book too!" (Ex. 32:32) And God heard, and God changed His mind. Moses' incredible act changed the course of history. You and I are alive today because Moses stood in the breach. Do not be afraid. You are hearing this for a reason. You too, have a part in saving millions of people alive, even millions who at times will seek your life, as they sought Moses' life. But Moses still stood in the breach.

Another time was when Moses sent Aaron to stand in the breach, between the dead and the living when God sent a plague in Num 16. Another one was Esther, who put her life on the line for her entire race of people (Esther 4:16) -- and she stood in the breach. This was not just about Haman. No, it was Satan's attempt to prevent the Christ child from being born!

Don't think I'm overstating this. I am not. I'm not stating it strongly enough. My heart has been heavy for months over this. There are thousands of brothers and sisters who have just given up. They attend nowhere. They meet with no one. They are discouraged. They are lost sheep with no shepherd. But they're not just sheep. They are your brothers and sisters, and as YOU find them, as YOU feed them spiritual food and welcome them and love them, as you love them, as you restore their hope -- you will be doing this to your Savior and mine. "For in that you did this to the least of these my brethren, you've done it unto me". And *you'll* be standing in the breach.

Church is not about seeing your friends and having a cup of coffee in the hall way afterwards. It's not just about having summer camps for your children anymore. It's not about being part of the biggest of the splits, or having the deepest sermons of the splits, or being the most zealous of the splits -- it's about encouraging the finding the lost and scattered sheep. It's about the future of this very planet. It's about your relationship with Messiah -- as shown by your *concern proven by action* for your lost brothers and sisters, and the scattered brothers and sisters.

You will be afraid to stand up, to speak up from time to time, but you must not give in to it. You will become a target yourself for standing in the breach, but you must. You've been called to it.

WHAT IS THE ONE BODY?

Let's go back to basics first, like the famous football coach Vince Lombardi said: "Gentlemen, this is a football". Right now we have hundreds of "church of God" groups. How can that be, and each one took God's name and put it on their group. Let's get back to basics.

Brothers and Sisters, This is what Scripture says about the Body of Christ:

The Head of the Church said "I will build *My Church*" (Matthew 16:18). Who will build it? He said HE will. Whose church is it? It's His church. How many churches or bodies will there be? One body (Eph. 4:4). There are several congregations of that one body, but you never read of "the *bodies* of Christ." Never.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the church: the head is Yeshua the Messiah, Jesus the Christ (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18). The parts of the body are the rest of us who have His spirit, and only those who have his spirit (1 Cor. 12) and their young children (1 Cor. 7:14). We are called "members of His *body*" (Eph. 5:30) Never in Scripture are we called "members of the church" and certainly not "members of the church of Apollos, or Paul, or Peter". Never. Scripture never calls us "Church members". Never. It calls us members of His body and members of one another (Romans 12:4-5). We are the church, we don't go to church. *It's a spiritual organism composed of brethren anywhere and everywhere who have and are led by the true God's spirit.* The organizations themselves are simply that – organizations. The body is not an organization set up by men. So we may not know exactly who all the body members are – scattered into various man-made organizations as they are – but let's pray for eyes to see and start to reach out. Elijah didn't know about the 7,000 faithful either.

You might say, "Philip, you're being unrealistic. Oneness is impossible because we have too many differences in doctrine, our ministers won't allow it, and I don't really want to mix with those folks from so-and-so's group. Besides, scripture is clear that we must not associate with heretics. And who will lead it? Nobody will follow this leader or that leader. So you're wasting your time, this idea of oneness is going nowhere, and just accept what God has allowed."

I've heard that over and over. *Brethren, we just have to know what God's will IS – and get in line with IT whether we understand HOW God's will may come about. When Jesus said to feed the thousands, it made no sense. They had almost no food. But it happened.* We don't ever have to know HOW Yahweh will accomplish His will, we just have to know WHO will do it – and that's the King Himself. We like the disciples question how, and we like the disciples have to come to the point of recognizing WHO. How will take care of itself when we're in line with the One who has no limitations.

Jesus said his brethren are those who do Father's will (Matthew 12:49-50; also Mark 3:35; Rom. 12:2; 1 Pet. 4:2 and many more). I thank one of you who contributed that thought, among many great ideas. So what's Father's will? We better find out, and we better get in line with it, if we want to be brethren of the Christ!

Our job is to surrender 100% to the will of God. Have you ever heard of a nation surrendering 80%? No, a true surrender has to be 100% -- or else there's been no surrender at all! I will confess you to

that part of what I'm repenting off is my lack of 100% surrender. I can claim I have, I can claim total repentance, but if my life or your life doesn't depict total surrender, then we haven't yet totally surrendered! Even in this matter of oneness. Total surrender says "Thy will be done" and we go about promoting oneness. If Yahweh says His will is to be One, we best surrender our reasons why we can ignore that, or worse yet, disobey it. If we're surrendered, we will knock ourselves out finding ways to be One without compromising God's law or truth. Now there's the rub, isn't it? So we will definitely have to address that.

GOD'S WILL ABOUT ONE BODY

Here's the will of our Master and King, in His own words:

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.

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 you all."

1 Corinthians 1:10-13

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you *all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined* together in the same mind and in the same judgment. ¹¹ For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's *household*, that there are contentions among you. ¹² Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." ¹³ *Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?*

1 Corinthians 3:1-4

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. ² I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive it*, and even now you are still not able; ³ for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men? ⁴ For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I *am* of Apollos," are you not carnal?

WHO DO YOU BELONG TO?

If I read this right, we are not United Church of God members, we are not members of the Pacific Church of God, we do not belong to the Church of the Living God, we are not “of” the Philadelphia Church of God, we ultimately are not “part of” the Church of the Great God. Nor do we belong to, or ultimately members of any of the 450-500 other church of God groups! We belong to our Savior.

So why do so many claim they are “members” of this or that group, or go to this or that man’s church? Brethren, are we hearing this? We’ve got to stop calling ourselves members of this or that group, and we got to stop saying we attend with, or worse, ‘belong to’ Mr. So-and-so’s church. If it’s a certain minister’s church, it isn’t the genuine Church of God, which is One, and which is the church Yeshua built. It’s His body, His church. Period.

But this is not Paul’s church, or Apollos’ church, or Peter’s church – so let’s stop already with the descriptives that define us, and brand us, as being this group or that group, instead of simply members of one another and members of the body of Christ, the one church of God. Period, end of story.

How did we get so far off base?

Important Illustration

Let me illustrate this by recounting a time I attended a wedding, summer 2008, where various members of the various “church of God” splits were in attendance.

An older lady asked me if I was a member of ‘the church’. I answered her “yes, I am”.

“Which one”, she asked. I responded: “Church of God”.

“Yes, I know that”, she answered impatiently, “but which one?”.

I smiled and said, “I thought there was only one Church of God”.

She persisted: “You now what I mean. OK, who leads your church?”

This is getting interesting, I thought. I replied, “My leader is Jesus Christ”.

Now she’s getting *irritated*: “I know, I know, but who’s your *human* leader?”

Now I’m the one getting annoyed and say, “I follow Christ. I follow humans only as they follow Christ. Jesus Christ is my leader. Who is the head of your church?.”

She ignored my question, and then she asked one more time: “OK – which church do you *belong* to?”

I decided to sit down next to her and explain. “Belong to” was getting to me.

“Ma’am, we do not *belong* to a church group or go to church. We *are* the church. Scripture is clear that you and I have been bought with a dear price – with the blood of the Son of God (1 Pet. 1:18-19). He bought me, I don’t know why, but He did, so *He* gets to own me. *That means I belong to Christ and to no other (Mark 9:41; Rom. 8:9, 14).* I cannot belong to any church organization except to the One Body of Christ. For me to say I ‘belong to’ this or that minister, or that I *belong* to this or that organization, would be *spiritual adultery*. Jesus Christ is my husband –to-be, so I belong to Him and to no other (2 Cor. 11:2).”

She looked perplexed and gave up the hunt at that point. I'm not sure she "got it". *Do you get it?*

So is this becoming a bit clearer when I suggest we drop the "descriptives", saying we're of this church group, or that church group? How did we get so far off-track, that some ministers even refer to the members who attend, as "their sheep"? How did we get to the point where some brethren refer to the church they attend with as "*our church*" or "so-and-so's church"? It's never my church or my body or your church. It's the body of Christ, the church of God. It's time we start asking pastors to *tear down these walls they've erected that have divided God's family from one another.*

This is not just simple semantics but it lent itself to what happened: vying organizations each hoping you'd send them your tithes.

THE TRUE CHURCH OF GOD IS NOT LIMITED TO 'COG' GROUPS or ONE BIG ORGANIZATION FORMED BY MAN

Neither is the true church of God limited to *just* to the "church of God" (COG) groups, many hearing this are affiliated with. There are spirit led believers in other places, and even yet to be called. ***The One Body is a spiritual organism.***

When you and I were baptized, many of us might remember the pastor saying – as we stood in the watery baptismal tank, pool, river, or pond – "I am not baptizing you into any denomination or organization of men..." Remember that? We were baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3-4; Gal. 3:27 – read it!). It pictured our burial in baptism with Him that we could be resurrected with Him and live in Him and He in us. That's all in Romans 6. We confessed *Him*, for "all who call on the name of YHWH shall be saved" (Joel 2:32; Rom. 10:13). We did not confess an organization! So why are *some* church of God groups going so far as to have brethren sign *membership* cards? We don't belong to an organization. If you thought you did, repent. Do they own you? Was that organization crucified for you? So tear up your organization membership cards and come back to truth. Messiah is the Truth (John 14:6), you belong to Him, and Him alone.

But before going further, some of you did not hear me correctly in part 1. Yes, I miss the thrill of having just one venue in any city where we were having the Feast of Tabernacles, as it was in the 1960's. This is in contrast to the scene we've had the past few years with many competing venues within the same town who couldn't, wouldn't, and didn't come together to worship Father, to our shame. So though I missed what we had in the 1960's, hear me loud and clear: *Yahweh took that away from us, or allowed that to be taken away from us. He allowed us to come OUT of that, so I don't think we're going back to that.*

If you think we have to go back to one centralized organization like we had in the 1960's, it's because you're still equating the "Church" with an organization. We have to get that out of our heads. The church is the spiritual organism that is the body of Christ. It's about Him. We belong to Him, we are part of Him, HE is our church, and HE is sufficient for that. We are one in HIM, not in organizations. We belong to Him, not organizations. We follow HIM, not organizations.

For that matter, I question whether Father really wanted us in congregations of 400-, 500, 800, 1000 or more every Sabbath. Impressive numbers, but we didn't get intimate and one-on-one with fellow brethren. We formed cliques. The smaller groups we have now, the small house churches, lend themselves far more to discussion, development and growth – at least I feel this way, as did a brother

who wrote me from the Colorado area. You can't just quit coming in these smaller groups and not have everyone know. In the mega-churches, we lost a lot of discouraged sheep who do nothing now, attend nowhere, and don't know what to do. Well, I don't think the Messiah will leave them out there alone forever – not if I learned anything from the 1 lost sheep and leaving the 99.

Neither was that the picture in the 1960's the complete picture, the complete body of Christ, *nor was that organization the only place where there were people with God's spirit*. Even Herbert Armstrong would have said that, for he himself admitted there were some spirit led brethren out of the organization He left and came out of. And there were more people with God's spirit besides even those.

We'll talk about it more later or in the next message – but we must understand there are brethren who have God's spirit in places we haven't discovered yet. There are spiritual brethren we haven't met yet, who have never been associated with our COG groups.

In fact, one of the fears I have, is that if we don't respond better to Yahweh, Matthew 22 might happen to us. What's Matthew 22:1-12? That's the parable of the wedding Supper where those who were first invited were not worthy, and who didn't show up – and so others were invited, "Both good and bad" to replace those who were first invited! (vs 8-10) That means others may take our crown, others will be given the spirit of God – and I hope and pray so, in fact—beyond the scope of just COG groups.

So as exciting as the 1960's were, it was the Feast of one organization only – and that was just part of the body of Christ. We have to see beyond the obvious. I'm going to explore this in depth in the next message on "Sheep, Sheepfolds, Shepherds and Hirelings". For that matter, the complete body of Christ includes thousands you and I have never met who lived all the way back to Abel 6,000 years ago, who are awaiting the resurrection! It includes thousands more to be called out of the world in the coming years yet.

For now, let me read again what Jesus says in 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.

Yes, I know He may have primarily been referring to the Gentiles and scattered Israelites – but certainly the lesson is there. The King wants us following Him, truly, and not organizations and men – except as they absolutely follow Him as well, and point us to Him.

The true spiritual organism that is the true one body, the true church of God, is composed only of the baptized children of God and their families – who are deemed holy (1 Cor. 7:14) – and who have received His spirit. Period. This is basic, but ESSENTIAL to accept before we can see how and when oneness comes. The One Body is NOT one organization. So many are stuck in their organization because they can't seem to grasp that being a member of that group is not what makes one a member of the Body of Christ. They think they are God's elect *because* they are part of that organization, and nothing can be further from the truth. ***Being part of an organization is not what makes you part of God's elect.*** Having the Spirit and being led by it, is what makes you the Elect of God (Romans 8:9, 14; 1 Cor. 12:12-13).

However, having said that, if we realize Yahweh is not willing that any should perish and will do everything in HIS power to bring people into His family in His time and His way, we should look at *most people – even our enemies – as future brothers and sisters who just don't know it yet*. That's how we can genuinely love them. They're family who don't know it yet. When we have that mindset, the uppity exclusiveness we often display will evaporate.

1 Cor 12:12-14

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ. ¹³ ***For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body*** — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. ¹⁴ For in fact the body is not one member but many.

Romans 8:9 – "...for if anyone does not have the spirit of Christ, he is not His"

Rom. 8:14 – "for as many are led by the spirit of God, these are sons of God."

Are there false brethren in the church? Are there "tares" among the "wheat" in the church? Are there false prophets, false ministers, in the church of God? It depends what you mean. If you mean within the organizations of men calling themselves churches of God – absolutely yes. That is without doubt and was even prophesied and was happening in Paul's day, it's mentioned in Jude, it's mentioned in 1 Peter and 1-2-3rd John. I suspect many "false teachers" don't know they are false teachers, and that makes them all the more dangerous.

2 Peter 2:1-2

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction. ² And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

I also find fascinating, John 10 says that our Shepherd leads us in *and out* of the sheepfold. Don't you feel like you've been in and out of a few sheep folds? The fold is not the flock, but the "keep", the enclosure they would go into for a time – at night, or in times of danger. These "folds" or keeps, were scattered over the hills. Is some of what has happened making more sense now?

John 10:2-6

But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear His voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow Him, for they know his voice. ⁵ Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." V. 9 repeats: "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will *go in and out* and find pasture.

Also, when we understand that the parable of the wheat and tares says "the field is the *world*" – not the church – then you understand even these organizations we attend are in this world, and therefore have tares. Even Simon Magus (Acts 8:12-13) was baptized and even believed after all. Think that one over.

The wheat are the children of God. The Tares are children of the enemy. (Matthew 13:36-43). A tare looks like wheat – but cannot ever be wheat. It can only be a tare. Wheat can only be wheat. But in

the *organizations* the wheat and tares meet together. Part of what's going on is that Father is identifying by our conduct, doctrine and allegiance – who are wheat, and who are tares. We must be close to the end of the age, when this becomes more obvious. The tares are going to be pulled out of His Kingdom at the very end. Read it for yourself in Matthew 13:36-43.

I've recorded this on Thanksgiving weekend. God has allowed this situation we're in, so I'm sure even in this, we give thanks to God. He is going to win in the end. All things He gets involved in will work out for good – as Romans 8:28 says. So I thank Him in our current state, and even *for* our current state, for if nothing else -- it is driving some of us to repentance and a seeking of His will.

I think Yahweh is waking us up. After all, *every single one of the ten virgins – even the wise ones – were sound asleep* just before the coming of the Bridegroom (Matthew 25:1-10). In Revelation 3:19-20, we find the Master of the House (Heb 3:1-6) pounding on the door, locked out of His own house. How did we ever let that happen? What's He doing out there? Let's repent deeply, let's open that Door, which pictures Him. He is the door (John 10:7) to His Father's House.

Having said all that, when will final, total and complete Oneness come?

TRIBULATION AND 2ND COMING required for Oneness?

It may be true that perfect oneness may not happen until the return of Messiah. That's up to Him. But we should just be aware of the goal he set: so one that we are like Christ and the Father are.

Perhaps we'll start coming together more when persecution really starts. Our Persecutors won't care about nuances in the calendar or what we do on the Sabbath – or not. They'll only care that you're not submitting to their new calendar and rules. We better be understanding that now.

We can learn all doctrine perfectly in a nanosecond when we're changed to spirit, but building and forming a strong relationship with Messiah – and one another - takes a lifetime. Even Paul, years after his conversion, called it his principal aim: “that I may know Him” – and then goes on to say, “Not that I have already attained...” (Philippians 3:9-12). We need to focus on being one with Christ – and then one with each other – or we won't even be there.

When Yeshua returns, He will gather his elect from the ends of the earth and the 4 corners of heaven – Mark 13:26-27. Is that the time Father will bring into One all things into the Christ?

Ephesians 1:10

“that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth — in Him.”

Physical temple / Spiritual temple

There may be an analogy from Solomon's temple. The stones were quarried and polished miles off site, perhaps even from many quarries. If those stones could speak, they probably wondered how they were *ever* going to be a glorious temple and “come together as one House of God”. It was only when the stones did all came *together* that anyone could see a temple take shape. That won't happen in its final form until all the stones – including those who have died – come together.

Now you and I are “living stones” of the spiritual temple (1 Peter 2:5), which is supposed to be more glorious than the first temple (see Haggai 2:9). Yes, you and I are also said to individually be “the temple of the Holy Spirit” now (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; etc.), but the full glory of this spiritual House of God won’t be apparent in all its unity and glory until all the elect are resurrected and gathered from the far ends of the earth. Just like the stones of Solomon’s temple had to come together from far and wide. But this time, it will be resurrected saints, the living stones, changed to brilliant spirit bodies coming together as one glorious holy temple. *But none of that gives ELDER SERVANTS any permission to divide, despise, beat up and abuse fellow servants before the Master returns* (Matthew 24:49).

Oneness is being one in and with our Savior and Father and loving the body of Christ wherever it is. Some believers are scattered within hundreds of organizations at present. Those true believers make up the one spiritual Body of Christ. As you attend where you attend, seek a personal, closer walk with your King and Redeemer. As you enjoy the fellowship of the organization, remember your real fellowship is your fellowship with Yahweh. Then see Him through the lives of spirit-led believers everywhere. At the resurrection and 2nd Coming, those true believers will be revealed in glory and come together as one glorious temple.

DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCES – AND ONENESS

Now let’s tackle the main thing that has seemingly divided us: doctrinal oneness.

First things first: We left the former organization because of massive doctrinal changes. We *stayed* with the truth, but left the organization. The organization is not the church – just a man-made organization. They left truth; we stayed with truth, but had to leave their church services. That was right and good.

Then when we left, rather than staying together, different bodies began to form *apart* from each other, and *labels* that divide began springing up. There were the official labels, and then there were nasty labels. One group called everyone else Laodecians. Well, some of us are, Master says so. So don’t let that rile you much, because Master says so.

So over time, some wanted to keep the Hebrew calendar with “postponements” – which is what most of the groups do, and some wanted to reject postponements. So several splits occurred. Some wanted to split over eating out on the Sabbath; others thought it was no big deal. So we split again. Some wanted to keep Pentecost on a different day every few years, so we split again. Several believe Passover should be kept at the end of the 14th, instead of the beginning of the 14th, so there were still further splits. On top of all that, some want to wear head scarves and others not. Some want to forbid the use of the names “Jesus” or “Christ” – and always, with no exceptions, say “Yeshua” or Yahweh. And on and on and on we go with the splits.

Our knowledge puffs us up. We start thinking we know better than others. WE forget to “esteem others more highly...” (Philippians 2:3). I have forgotten that lots of times myself, hence the need to fast and repent on Dec. 19. The church has taken a tumble. Why, and how? *Pride* goes before a fall (Proverbs 16:18). We have had ministers who thought they were the only ones who could teach, but again, to think that, one would not be using all the scriptures. The King often speaks to us through His Body parts – other regular members – and not just ordained ministers.

Acts 18:24-26

Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man *and* mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. ²⁵ This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

When the apostle Apollos was preaching incompletely, an ordinary man and his wife – yes, the wife is mentioned as being a part of this – Aquila and Priscilla took him aside and taught him the word of God more perfectly (Acts 18:26). And apparently the preacher listened. Imagine that. Incredible, huh? So doctrine was preserved, because one couple stood in the breach, stood up – but humbly, and privately addressed the matter – and the preacher humbly realized he could learn from them. He did not insist he was the only one with any insight. What a concept.

When we look at the gifts of the spirit, when they're listed, they are listed as being for each one. Many of the gifts listed -- we would think today -- sound like gifts for pastors, but that's not the context of 1 Cor 12:4-11. Eph 4:14-16 specifically says each member of the body is like a joint that has to do its *share* to bring completeness to the body. We each have a *part* in the growth of the body of Christ – not just ordained pastors. I was ordained a church preaching elder, but some of the greatest learning I've had has come by listening to regular unordained brethren. If you read Ephesians 4:11-12 carefully, the *brethren* are also trained for the work of Ministry or serving – not just ordained pastors. In Eph 4:12 KJV says “of the ministry”, but most translations just say “for the work of ministry” – no “the”. Much of our trouble has happened because pastors wouldn't listen humbly when someone was willing to ask questions of a sermon, or to even point out some errors, even when done quietly and privately and humbly. No, the one who was asking questions was made to look like a troublemaker. Why?

1 Cor. 14:29 says in fact, that when someone speaks, “let the others judge”. What a concept. Other translations say “Let the others weigh carefully what is said” or “let the others evaluate what is said”. There is accountability in the Body. And in a working body, it works *together*, with all the parts doing its part – together, and humbly. We'd have far fewer splits if this had been practiced – with humility on both sides, so there's Q&A, give and take, openness, and oneness.

OK, so back to basics again.

WHAT IS TRUTH? WHAT IS TRUE DOCTRINE? WHO DETERMINES TRUTH?

*Since 'doctrine' seems to be a point of division, what and who determine true doctrine? A doctrinal committee? What is truth? “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17). Truth may- or may not – be what we believed in the past, presently or in the future. It may or may not be what we published and preached. How many times did we change our understanding about Pentecost, about makeup, about end time events and time lines, and on and on. Did “truth” change, or just our failed understanding of it? So when we come to understand something we hadn't seen before, we used to call it “new truth”. There is no new truth. It's always been there. It's just new to us. And I'll guarantee it isn't new to *someone* out there who has taught it all along.*

Psalm 119:160 says even more, which could explain part of our problem: "The entirety of your word is truth". We can't just use this or that verse, but ignore others on a topic. We must be able to justify our stand by *all* the scriptures on any particular subject. That's where we need one another so we have many searching the Scriptures – and that's where we need humility, and a serious plea to Almighty to let His spirit of Truth *lead us* and guide *us into all truth*, as Yeshua promised (John 16:13). Even the Spirit is said to speak only what it hears from Father.

John 16:13

However, when He, **the Spirit of truth**, has come, He *will guide you into all truth*; for He *will not speak on His own authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

Here's the killer question: why are we so apart, so divergent in our beliefs, if God's Spirit is present, and if we are in tune to its guiding? That's where we're falling down on the job.

We either are devoid of God's spirit of Truth entirely – or we're not seeking it. Nor have we learned to humbly *listen* to God and *hear* His voice. We must learn how to do that. Once we do learn that, we should have Yahweh's one spirit lead His One body into this one mind that is Christ, so we all end up speaking the same thing (1 Cor. 1:10) – as surely as Yeshua spoke the same thing as His Father!! (Let me repeat what I just said, for this is the core of the issue) We should have one mind – the mind of God (Phil. 3:16; 2 Cor. 13:11)

WHO determines truth? The ministers? Leading brethren? The internet? Jesus said, "I am the Way, the truth, and the Life" (John 14:6). Our King determines truth. His entire word does. That's IT. It's not one of us, or a group of us – it's the King, and only as we hear Him, and follow Him, will WE have the truth. His truth is one. His truth should be consistent.

BEING IN TUNE TO THE SPIRIT'S GUIDING

The early disciples were much more in tune to the spirit than we are. I recommend you read these verses carefully and prayerfully and ask if you are as in tune to the Spirit "talking" to you. The apostles heard God's spirit and followed it – Acts 8:29; 10:19; 11:12; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6-7; 1 Tim. 4:1. Please study these verses. (Spent some time going over these points). In Acts 21:4, we even have brethren telling Paul – through the spirit – not to go to Jerusalem. Imagine that happening today? Can you really see a church top leader accepting a message from regular brethren that comes—they say – from God's spirit? Please read Acts 21:4 before proceeding.

We are so afraid of spiritism, or evil spirits or being seen as being just 'plain nuts' – that we have blocked ourselves off from being receptive to God's voice. If we are ever to have unity, we need to unblock our ears (Acts 7:51, 57). We're warned about being "dull of hearing". If we are to hear God's messages in the coming time of trouble, we need to fine tune our hearing now. I gave a sermon a few months back on "Hearing God's voice" and recommend you hear it. It is very, very inspiring when you see it working, for real, in your life, and I certainly am more in tune to this than I was a year ago. We need to hear His voice and to be guided into all truth by the spirit of truth.

So here's what we know from scripture about handling differences of understanding on doctrine – let's start the discussion and finish it next time.

1. False prophets and false teachers are prophesied to be here and they're here. We have men proclaiming themselves to be apostles and the 2 witnesses. You and I have been warned for years and years about having zero tolerance for serious doctrinal heresy. Ministers must teach the word accurately and carefully, with no knowing allowance for error. That is made crystal clear in Titus 1:9; 2:9, 1 Tim. 6:3-5; 1 Tim. 4:3, 13, 16. Probably many heretics have *no idea* they are heretics.

When you and I stood up to the ministers who wanted to teach the Trinity and change the Sabbath, there was some stirring of the pot that occurred. That *wasn't a bad thing* when it involves truth, and you're waking up other sheep who are asleep to the errors. Many just quietly left, but the first to confront error caused uproar.

We certainly want to always try to discuss things peacefully and privately first, if we can and see if agreement can be reached as we are led by God's spirit. But when a person insists on causing division by his error, heresy even, that can be shown from Scripture to be error – that's a different matter and he must be either confronted, or put out, or if it's a pastor we're talking to, he may end up putting you out. That's OK. Scripture is clear on that. And that is why we need to know Scripture so well so we *recognize* error. Read III John 9-11 for an example. Diotrephes.

Romans 16:17-18

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. 18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.

Also read the warning in Phil. 3:15-19. By the time 2 John and 3rd John and Jude are written, the apostasy had come strongly into the church, as we can even read in the descriptions of Rev. 2-3. So by the time we read 2 John 7-11, we're being admonished not to even invite someone into our home who doesn't bring the right doctrine about Christ and the Father, for if you abide in the doctrine of Christ, you have *both* the Father and Son (2 John 9). Then Jude warns that these bad teachers don't even have God's spirit (Jude 17-19). You can also read 2 Pet. 2:1-2; 1 John 2:12 on your own study time.

We can't ignore those scriptures. So someone causing division and insisting on his *heresy* and errors in a way that is dividing the church – *must be called out, identified, and if he doesn't stop -- put out*. That's not division. That's keeping the body One and clean. But remember again, standing for *the truth* will *also* cause division and be polarizing if your pastor ends up being the one who is the false teacher we were just discussing. So indeed, stand up, speak up, indeed be willing to cause a stir in those circumstances, just like Paul did in the church, when Jewish believers were insisting on circumcising the Gentile converts.

“SALVATIONAL ISSUES” AND DOCTRINAL UNITY

2. What about so –called “salvational issues”?

Over the years I've heard it said that we have to draw the line “on salvational issues”. Of course what you may call “salvational” may not be “salvational” to another pastor or brother, so we split. Scripture is clear that if someone insists on being divisive and upsetting on their pet peeve, pull away. But what if some aren't trying to be divisive but just see things differently? They really, really

think it's wrong to go to a restaurant on the Sabbath, for example. Do you disfellowship them because they won't pay the charge for a church-sponsored buffet on the Sabbath?

Would you agree that the Resurrection is a "salvational" issue? Your future resurrection, the resurrection of Christ, all resurrection – understanding there has to be a resurrection, including most of all that there was the resurrection of Christ—*has* to be salvational? Now, what would you say or do about people in the group who are touting their belief that there is no resurrection, not even Jesus' resurrection? Would you throw them out? How would you handle that?

We know Paul wasn't shy about putting people out who needed to be put out. He ordered the man living in ongoing sin with his step-mother, for example, thrown out of the church (1 Cor. 5:1-5). We also know Paul urged them to bring him back in, by the way, when he repented and proved he had, by the conduct ending. Neither did Paul leave him out there, lest he get sucked up by too much sorrow and Satan's devices (2 Cor. 2:6-11 – read it!).

But we don't find in 1 Cor. 15, on a very "salvational issue" like the Resurrection, Paul saying, "This is nonsense. Throw those heretics out!" *No – He addressed the issue and taught the right answer.* See 1 Cor. 15:12-32, in fact the rest of the chapter! That should be very instructive to us, that perhaps we're making some things too big of an issue and then divide and separate too quickly. We can mingle and meet – and bear with one another – to a point. I agree there is a point where you have to leave, as I did and you did back in 1992 or 1993 or whenever you did.

SOMETIMES AGREEING TO DISAGREE AND MOVE ON AS BROTHERS

3. We should be able to "Agree to Disagree" on some issues and not divide over those. Romans 14 is a textbook case study of this point.

Paul explains in ROMANS 14, however, that some things just aren't worth making a fuss over. What we eat or don't eat, whether we eat meat or are vegetarians, even what day we keep for this or that – just "agree to disagree" but don't divide over that. Why? Because "God has accepted" the brethren on both sides of the issue. Don't make issues about food and drink arguments. The kingdom of God is not in meat and drink (Rom. 14:17).

Let's apply the lessons from Romans 14 to other issues also and not be so quick to attack or divide over smaller issues. We'll review this more next time. Apply the *principles* here to many of the issues that are dividing us. Plus, once again, if we had God's spirit, and were *led* by God's spirit into all truth (John 16:13), how come we're *not* coming to the same *one truth together*?

Romans 14:1-6

Receive one who is weak in the faith, *but* not to disputes over doubtful things. ² For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only* vegetables. ³ Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; *for God has received him.* ⁴ *Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.*

[let that sink in! It was OK with God!]

⁵ One person esteems *one* day above another; another esteems every day *alike*. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ He who observes the day, observes *it* to the Lord; and he

who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe *it*. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. (now v.10) 10 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ"

(Now jumping to v 15-18, but read the whole chapter yourself)

15 Yet if your brother is grieved because of *your* food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. 16 Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

I'm gong to make an observation here: too many of us, including me for years, have made the study of the Scriptures a lifelong quest to know the Scriptures. But Almighty doesn't want us to just know the BOOK. He wants us to know the Author of the Book even more so. So often we divide over scripture, wrangle over words, get upset over differences that Romans 14 shows can be something we live with in some cases, and some cases not -- and miss the point: Scripture is to lead us to Messiah, to come to know HIM that we might have life. Let's let HIM say it so much better!

John 5:39-40

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. 40 But you are not willing to come to ME that you may have life.

Oneness is being one in and with our Savior and Father and loving the body of Christ wherever it is. Some believers are scattered within hundreds of organizations at present. Those true believers make up the one spiritual Body of Christ. As you attend where you attend, seek a personal, closer walk with your King and Redeemer. As you enjoy the fellowship of the organization, remember your real fellowship is your fellowship with Yahweh. And see Him through the lives of spirit-led believers everywhere. At the resurrection and 2nd Coming, those true believers will be revealed in glory and come together as one glorious temple.

I know this barely scratches the surface of the questions this can engender about oneness and handling doctrinal differences.

But let's start by seeking *Him*, being motivated by His love in all we do, listening to the Spirit , even *asking* God to lead us by His spirit into all truth the same mind. It comes by humbling ourselves, seeking to be one with brethren, tearing down walls that divide. I'll say again: oneness is mostly about being one in Him. Then we need to understand oneness is not about having yet one more big organization. That misses the point. The Body of Christ is of those of like mind, of the Same Spirit, though right now we are sprinkled into many different flocks or some just stay home and stream on the internet for the messages.

When we fast, ask Yahweh to show you what He wants *you* to do. What He wants of you may differ from what He wants of me. And most of all, let's repent, humble ourselves and see where He leads us. Part of this day is about confessing sin and seeking His righteousness, and being done with sin as a way of life (Romans 6:1, 12). Sin no longer reigns in our body. Heb. 12:1 – we should lay sins that so easily ensnare us aside. I preach to myself very much so.

Other quick points:

- Let's not limit God and what He can do about this subject or any other.

- Mal 3:16—start talking across party lines, go thru the church walls, speak to brothers and sisters
- Just humbly and firmly start to let pastors know you are so tired of the divisions in the church and are praying for oneness. Just speak up, stand in the breach, say it, and see what happens. Many will defend why we have to stay separate from brethren. Tell him humbly, that Jesus clearly prayed that “we be one, as Father and Christ are one.” Tell him, Paul clearly stated there should be no schisms. Plant the seed. See where it goes.

I'm going to ask one more thing: As many of you who are of this heart, I'm going to ask you to call 2 people you know you haven't talked to in years, who may or may not even still be keeping Sabbath. Don't tell them you're fasting. Just call to say “I was thinking of you, and miss you. How are you? I remember the old times we had together...” and reach out and touch someone's heart. It won't be easy. Follow where God's spirit leads you. Say what God's Spirit leads you to say. Don't worry about what to say. Let God lead it – and believe, and obey – and reach out and start causing oneness to happen. I'm doing that now too. In almost every case, I've been pleasantly surprised. A couple times I've been hurt by a cold shoulder, but that's OK too. I'm going to call at least one minister when I fast, a minister I haven't talked to for 30 years.

I'm out of time. Next time I will speak about Sheep, sheepfolds, flocks, shepherds and hirelings – if that is what Yahweh wants me to speak on. If not, it will be on something else. OK, brethren, we're one body. Not members of this or that church, but members of Christ, and members of each other.

The Spiritual Body of Christ is one, always will be one, though the members of that spiritual organism- - the body of Christ -- for now are scattered into many organizations of men. Forgive me for not doing a better job on such an important topic... but I'm hoping the Spirit spoke to you with what Yahweh wanted you to get out of this message.

I'm looking forward to you participating in the Fast we are calling on a voluntary basis for Sabbath Dec 19. If you feel led to do so, let others also know about it.

Until next time, this is your brother Philip signing off...