

The Principle of Community: -The Meaning of “The Lord’s Supper”?

Like the last, the 21st Century, is a time of broken relationships, of pain and loneliness. We see it in the separation between parents and their adult children, between parents and hurting grandparents, among siblings and their parents, and even between parents themselves. We see it in male/female relationships, living together yet generally not prepared to commit permanently to one another for fear of hurt from misplaced trust. We see it in the lonely people and solo parents in our churches, still living with the hurts of previous relationships, hesitant to form deep friendships again in case they will be hurt, lacking confidence in themselves that anyone would want to know them if they really get to close, and justifying themselves because their parents were equally unsuccessful in their relationship.

We see it in society at large where its members are incapable of real fellowship without the influence of alcohol. We see it in advertisements which attempt to beguile us into believing that we should indulge and live self-centredly living as we please, selfishly indulging ourselves “*because we deserve it*”. This philosophy permeates our entire Western culture. The words of a popular song by Frank Sinatra a few years ago express it well. It was called: “I Did it My Way”.

Why have we forsaken the protection and support afforded to previous generations? I personally believe that this move to independence is Satanic in origin. It is called: “Divide and Conquer”. As a people, we are all much the poorer as a result. Yet it was never our culture in past ages. Like all peoples, the Western nations adopted a tight family structure where the rights of the individual were second to the rights of the family/tribe as a whole. This created certainty and self-confidence in each individual and a sense of belonging and self-worth. Oh how I wish we had this still today. Instead we have a huge pharmaceutical industry selling anti-depressants. One consequence of this change is that many Christians now see God as a father substitute, due to their loneliness. Today we even view our churches as a gathering together of “individuals”, whereas God sees us as a gathering of “His chosen people”. As Christians we have even lost the ability to think “corporately” as a people - so far has our world-view shifted.

Yes, talk of this change may seem new to you now, but to those in Bible times, the understanding that they were a part of a whole would seem perfectly natural. It may seem to us in our enlightened age that we have progressed far beyond their limited vision. I believe that in our modern culture of independence we have regressed. However we cannot turn back the clock.

- If that is true, can we expect God to change His paradigm to accommodate our change in our world-view? - Obviously not.

You see – God sees His chosen people as one single community, united in fellowship and purpose because we are chosen to bear His name as His sons and daughters, inheritors of the New Covenant that He made with us, which was consummated by His blood at The Cross.

In order to understand God’s intention for His “One Body” to become “One Community”, it is necessary to understand the reason why Jesus commanded us to regularly commemorate The Lord’s Supper. I fear that often in our modern twisted cultural view, we see communion as an opportunity for us to individually draw near to God and renew our relationship with Him.

We have many opportunities to do this, but communion is not one of them. We even mistakenly think that the word “communion” means “to commune” with God. In fact it comes from the word “community”.

Come. It’s time to visit the Bible foundation which most clearly explains God’s purpose, that we are that community of His.

Background

As I explained in my paper: “Tithing – The Bible Principle”, the passage in Genesis 14 v 17 – 24 launches two major Bible principles – The Principle of the Tithe, and The Principle of God’s People as One Chosen Community. This paper discusses the latter.

Please pardon the repetition but I believe we really need to re-read three pages of my previous paper as an introduction to this even more important subject.

Come, I want to show you a real cameo passage, a gem just packed with principles, and very suitable for a teaching sermon in church or at a home group, or even as a series. In fact as I have meditated on it since, I have felt God saying that this passage is the foundation of one of the most important principles of Scripture. I am talking of no less than the true meaning of the reason why we were commanded by Christ to celebrate the Lord’s Supper together “*in remembrance of Me*”. i.e. the foundational Scripture regarding “The Principle of the Community of God’s People”. This is extremely important.

PART ONE:

- The Meeting between Melchizedek and Abraham

Let’s read this astonishing passage together:

*“Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram saying:
“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth.
And blessed be God Most High,
who delivered your enemies into your hand”.
Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.”*

Bread and Wine!

What was so special about “bread and wine”?

What did “bread and wine” symbolise to Abraham?

But more importantly, what does it symbolise for you and I as New Covenant believers?

- Yes – Christ’s redemption on the cross.

Did Melchizedek give the bread and wine to Abraham as a “type” in recognition of Christ’s future crucifixion 2000 years later?

Or, did Christ deliberately choose bread and wine at the “last supper” to deliberately link the event with Melchizedek’s blessing of Abraham?

And why did Christ choose bread and wine anyway?

Let’s turn to “The Last Supper” for an answer.

The Last Supper

I have always been taught that Christ used bread and wine because these were the common foods of the day. But wasn’t the object of the Passover feast the sacrifice of the Passover lamb? Yet none of the gospels or the letters to the New Testament churches even mention the presence of lamb on the menu! Certainly the lamb was to be the chief feature of that last supper, not bread and wine. (Luke 22 v 7 – 8) Yet Jesus deliberately chose to use bread and wine, to illustrate that the bread represented His body, and the wine the “New Covenant” in His blood. - WHY?

I ask that question as a challenge to The Church.

And why did He command that we observe this ceremony using the bread and wine, and not a lamb, as a memorial to Him and a proclamation of His death? (Lk.22 v 19, 1 Cor. 11 v 24 – 25) Didn’t John the Baptist and many others describe Him as “*The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*”. (Jn.1 v 29) Certainly He would have been completely justified in centring the meal on the traditional lamb. The lamb (or goat sometimes) was traditionally the central feature of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Bible reports that Christ’s death on the cross, in the ultimate sacrifice for our sin, fulfilled the Passover. It was the blood of the Passover lamb that saved the Israelites from God’s judgement when they escaped from slavery to freedom. (Ex.12 v 21 – 23) Christ became our Passover lamb. (1 Cor. 5 v 7) He was killed at the very time of the anniversary-commemoration of the Passover Feast. And it would have linked with the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah chapter 53, the sacrificed lamb.

Why then didn’t Christ refer to it in His words at the last supper?

We have to answer that question.

There is something mysterious about Christ’s ‘bread and wine’. I have come to the conclusion that Jesus deliberately emphasised the bread and wine in order to direct us to that time when Melchizedek brought bread and wine to Abraham, and blessed him. There is a message behind that little ceremony in Genesis 14 that illuminates the real meaning of The Last Supper and Christ’s death on the cross.

Melchizedek, I’m sure, didn’t bring the symbolic bread and wine to the rest of Abraham’s men, although they were no doubt just as hungry and thirsty after the conquest. He brought them reverently only to Abraham, to honour him, as he recognised Abraham’s unique role as the Lord’s chosen instrument in the establishment of God’s chosen people. He also brought them as symbolically representing Christ’s body and blood that would be ultimately be given for us by God’s son.

Melchizedek

And why does the Bible call Melchizedek a priest? This, importantly, is the first occurrence of the word “priest” in the Bible. He is priest of “*El-‘elyon*” meaning “the Supreme God” (verses 18 and 22). The Old Testament concept of a priest was: “one who represents God’s among His people”.

Abraham acknowledged him as THE direct representative of “*El-‘elyon*”.

Chapter 7 of the book of Hebrews identifies Melchizedek as both a king and priest of God Most High (El-‘elyon), king of righteousness, king of peace, without beginning or end, and a priest “forever”. It then quotes the messianic prophecy in Psalm 110 v 4 which was addressed to Christ. What does it say?

“You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek”.

The book of Hebrews interprets this verse and explains that Melchizedek was a priest in the same priestly “order” as Christ. (The “order” of each priest determined his duties and responsibilities in the Temple.) **Melchizedek therefore fulfilled the same priestly function as Christ, as God’s representative on earth.**

It’s easy to concentrate on this drama as the account of the tithe given by Abram to Melchizedek, the representative of God himself according to the book of Hebrews. In doing this we tend to miss the mystery of the earlier event that occurred; Melchizedek’s blessing of Abram with the bread and wine, which in turn led to the giving of the tithe. Notice, even the writer in the book of Hebrews seems to completely miss the wonder of the occasion: “that Melchizedek, God’s representative, actually blessed Abraham”, and not the other way round, as we tend to assume. Think about that now.

The Importance of that Meeting

What is the meaning of that little scene in Genesis 14?

-There were two human players who took part in it. One, Abram, (who was renamed Abraham by God in the next chapter) represented God’s chosen people.

The other (Melchizedek) represented God Himself. Melchizedek was the representative of “Elyon”, as I have said.

The Third Link

On a lighter note, there is a third very important link between the meetings between Abraham and Melchizedek, and The Lord’s Supper. The first common link was the bread and wine. The second was the Psalm 110 v 4 linking verse. The third link is:

“Both meetings were the forerunners to the actual covenant that immediately followed”.

I expect in fact that this scene actually portrayed the symbolic meeting between God’s chosen people, represented by Abraham - and God, represented by Melchizedek, who was priest forever in the order of Christ. In other words it was like the formal meeting of two ambassadors, discussing the terms of a treaty over a meal, in preparation for the signing of a treaty by their leaders which would govern the relationship between God and His chosen people at that time. (Remember - sharing a meal had huge significance in the Middle-eastern culture)

Did the ambassadors sign a treaty there? – No they didn’t. This was the preparation by the two ambassadors for the treaty. God Himself was about to formalise the covenant between Abraham as representative of God’s chosen people, and God Himself, in the next chapter of Genesis.

Even more importantly it was a symbolic forerunner of The New Covenant, the new relationship between God and mankind that would later be established through Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross. In other words it was a picture of the **future** re-joining of mankind, represented by Abraham, the father of God’s chosen people, to God Himself, through Christ. (*“You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek”.* – Ps. 110.v.4)

- The bread and the wine in Genesis chapter 14 were the forerunner to the covenant made

with Abraham in the opening verses in chapter, chapter 15.

– And the bread and wine at The Lord’s Supper were the forerunner to the New Covenant created at the crucifixion of Christ that immediately followed.

You could even say that the covenants were made at the meetings between God and His people representatives, and that the ceremonies with blood that followed were the consecrations which sealed the covenants. What do you think?

This then is the reason why Christ deliberately emphasised the bread and wine as a fulfilment of those few simple verses in Genesis.

Matt.26 v 26 – 28, Mark 14 v 22 – 24, Lk.22 v 20 and 1 Corinthians 11 v 24 – 25 all link this celebration to **the birth of the “New Covenant”**. For example:

*“The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way after supper he took the cup, saying, “**This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.**”*

And so do we in that symbolic act called “Communion”, “Eucharist”, or “Lord’s Supper”.

We celebrate the re-joining, reconciliation, of man with his maker, prophesied by the loving sacrament of the bread and wine administered to Abraham (representing mankind), by Melchizedek (representing Christ), and fulfilled later by Christ. Christ made a way so that we could once more be reconciled with our creator (Rom.5 v 10, 2 Cor. 5.18 - 20). Christ has blessed us, as symbolised through the bread and the wine, just as Melchizedek blessed Abraham, and restored the oneness relationship to mankind that we once enjoyed with our creator before the fall.

There is a lot to think and meditate on here, and no doubt you will be rewarded with even more explanations of the wonder of these verses as you rest in Him.

What a lot there is in the Bible. It continually amazes me as I study His principles. The Bible is “one”. We humanly underestimate it.

Is the above “new teaching”? – That the bread and wine at the Lord’s Supper are linked to Genesis 14 v 18? It certainly is news to me! I can’t find any reference to the symbolism of the “bread and wine” given to Abraham in any of my Bible commentaries. It amazes me that they don’t connect it with Christ’s “Last Supper”. Psalm 110 v 4 simply endorses that linkage.

As I have said, Matt.26 v 26 – 29, Mark 14 v 22 – 25, and 1 Corinthians 11 v 24 – 25 all link “The Last Supper” with **the birth of the “New Covenant”**. How often at communion do we? Have you ever heard this taught at communion?

At the celebration are we actually missing the true reason beyond the command: “this do ye in remembrance of me”? Are we missing the fact that we collectively symbolise, in remembrance, that historic meeting between the two parties to the covenant – God and His people?

This is a very serious charge that I make to The Church.

A chorus we used to sing when I led a youth group contained the haunting words:
“God and man at table are sat down”.

That is perceptively true.

There were two parties: God and Man.

Yet today we tend to bring our own personal agendas to communion. I submit that Scripture teaches that that is not the time for a personal chat with our Father.

The New Covenant

“In My faithfulness I will reward them and make an everlasting covenant with them.” Is 61 v 8b

Perhaps at this point we should digress for a moment and again consider what is the hugely important “New Covenant”:

Jeremiah 31 v 31 – 34 prophesied:

“The time is coming”, declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them”, declares the Lord.

“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord.

“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord’, because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

- What a wonderful series of promises. And to think that we have been chosen to inherit this gift of “The New Covenant”.

Can't you hear God's heart here? He says he was a husband to them, but they forsook their marriage covenant with Him, a covenant entered into by the two parties together at their marriage ceremony at the foot of Mount Sinai. God still sees these descendants of those with whom He originally made the covenant oath together, as the same people – His “bride”. But she has forsaken their marriage covenant. Nevertheless, like the message to Hosea, God still longs for “her” and will forgive and forget and will enter into a New Covenant with “her”.

I like the bit that says:

“No longer will a man teach his neighbour, because they will all know Me”.

To “know Me” was a profound statement to make in those days, and one which no doubt was by judged by Jeremiah's critics as blatantly “heretical”. The Israelites weren't to even speak God's name. “To know” even another person was an extremely personal relationship that few could aspire to. It would require, at the very least, a blood covenant. To think that one-day the Israelites could “know” God was unthinkable. We now have that privilege in The New Covenant, yet how often we fail to respect it.

And why do we still need the ministry of “teachers” that Paul describes, if *“no longer will a man teach his neighbour”*?

- I believe there is still the sense in God of ages to come. We still haven't seen the fulfilment of this prophecy, unfortunately. As I said in chapter two, God has His timing. The New Covenant is being progressively revealed to us as the bride makes herself ready. In Col.1 v 26 Paul tells us of *“the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but has now been revealed to His saints”*.

Then in 1 Cor. 13 v 12 he tells us, *“But now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face”*. How often we see dimly, knowing that what we see is only an indication of much more. We

have to learn to trust Him that His timing is best.

In Summary

The bread and the wine at “The Last Supper” appear to have been deliberately chosen in order to link the occasion to that little meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek, as if to show that both ceremonies were a meeting between God and His chosen people.

In the case of the Genesis 14 account, it was a meeting between two ambassadors, as if to prepare the way for the formal signing of covenant between God and His people in the next chapter.

In the same way Christ’s bread and the wine gives us the clue that “The Last Supper” was also the ceremonial meeting between Christ and his “Church of promise”, which was about to be formalised by the “New Covenant” between God and His people through the atonement of Christ on the cross.

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This is particularly important because it explains that God made a covenant with a single chosen people. This then is the hugely significant reason for the celebration of “The Lord’s Supper”. Even more importantly, we celebrate it as “one people”. We are united by the New Covenant God made with us back then, made through the sacrificed blood of Christ on that cross.

PART TWO:

– Jesus’ Historic Last Words to His Disciples at Their Last Supper Together, Immediately Before the Crucifixion:

Only in John’s gospel are we **not** told the actual ceremonial words that Jesus used in regard to the bread and the wine. Instead John spends five chapters telling us the remainder of Jesus’ words at that historic meal in five fantastic chapters. Chapters 13 to 17 relate together both Jesus’ emotional farewell to his friends and a period of intensive teaching about relationships that must be established within “the body”. I recommend that you read these five chapters in chronological order at one sitting.

It is, in fact, the inauguration of “The Church under The New Covenant”.

This is Jesus’ prayer, which is both the triumphal culmination of His life’s purpose and yet an intensively personal glimpse into his relationship with his Father. Above all it is a humbling account to us, its recipients, of His love of His Church.

Chapter 13

- He commences this final historic meal, “The Lord’s Supper”, by inexplicably getting up from the table, donning the clothing of a servant, and washing their feet. He then explained to the shocked disciples:

*“Now that I, your Lord and teacher have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that **you** should do as I have done for **you**”.*

NOTE: Throughout these five momentous chapters, whenever we see Christ’s use of the word “**you**”, we need to recognise that He was speaking to group of disciples as a single body and not to themselves (and ourselves) individually. This is the sense in which Jesus spoke, and the sense in which they understood it.

The drama unfolds in verse 27 when we are told that Jesus urged Judas to “*do what he had to do quickly*”.

Then in verse 30 we are told that after Judas had taken the bread, he went out into the night, (not understanding what that bread was to represent).

This marks the end of Jesus’ period of tension. You can feel Him visibly relax from that moment on. Now the final minutes of the clock are ticking down. Now he can spend these last precious moments with his loved ones, His friends, His future Church. Now He feels free to share His heart personally, without the tension of Satan’s instrument, Judas, planted in their midst.

A “New” Commandment

Then in verse 34 He gives them a new commandment. He says:

“A new commandment I give you. Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

- He was correct. This is an entirely new commandment. It is not even found in the Old Testament.

Furthermore, this was to be vision statement, visibly differentiating to all, His Church from the people of “the world”.

In Mark 12 v 29 Jesus had previously declared that there is no greater commandment than that found in Deut. 6 v 4 – 5. He then followed up with the second greatest. This is found in Lev. 19 v 18. I will quote them from Mark 12 v 29 – 31:

“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.”

Are they different from this new commandment?

- Yes, they are entirely different.

As Jesus said, this is a radically new commandment. It wasn’t to replace the former. It was a brand new commandment, given at this, the inauguration of “The Church”. Here Jesus is saying that loving God and others will still be the most important principles for our lives. But when it comes to our relationship with members of His family, there is now to be a special relationship, a relationship of love for one another that will be so sincere and powerful that the world will recognise that it is miraculous, and recognise the source from whence it comes. Furthermore, this is to be the very publically noticeable point of difference the relationship between God’s people in The Old Covenant, and the relationship in The New.

“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

In other words we are talking of “**a community, bound together with love for one another**”.

- As you will see shortly, that was also to be the central theme of Jesus’ prayer to His Father.

Today, are we any closer to being a single loving community than the Church of the first century?

Chapters 14 - 17

Then in four chapters 14 – 17 we have the beautiful chapters that teach how we are to live in

that special relationship as members of His family while He is called away for a time. It is teaching spiced with sorrow and love that He is about to leave them, but they will not be alone. It is teaching them about bearing fruit. *"I am the true vine, and My Father is the gardener." "You are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing."* Jn. 15 v 5

It is teaching them that anyone who has faith in him will do the same things that he has done. In fact they will do greater, since he was going to the Father. Whatever they asked in His name He would do. But they must be careful to do as He had commanded them. He would ask the Father and He would give them another Counsellor, to be with them forever – the Spirit of truth. He would teach them all things and remind them of the things that Jesus had said to them.

It's about loving one another. *"I chose you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. The world will hate you, just as it hated me. In fact a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. The Counsellor will testify about me, and so must you. It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away the Counsellor will not come to you. When he comes he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteous and judgement. I have more to say to you, more than you can bear. But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth."* (Can't you hear Jer. 31 v 33 – 34 – The New Covenant - here again.)?

Finally in Chapter 17 we have Jesus' benediction over his Church – His prayer for his Church. Here we see through a window, the personal relationship between Jesus and His Father. I believe this is an example of the prayer Jesus is still offering to His father today on behalf of His Church. (See Rom. 8 v 34)

John's Account in Summary

It has been said that if you want to see the summary of a great man's life, look at what he says in his final hours to his wife and children from his deathbed. In that, Jesus doesn't disappoint us.

The picture we see here is the love He has, not for them as individuals, but for them collectively, and the many who will follow after them. It's a passionate cry.

Yes, He calls them "My children", and agonises that they will all shortly desert him in His time of greatest need. But He sees past this to the heroic suffering they will suffer in His name.

The final prayer for them clearly illustrates the intense love He has for them. He says:

*"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. **They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.**"*

Then he goes on:

*"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. **May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.**"*

- It's no wonder that the world doesn't believe. It has never seen that "complete unity" that Christ prays for.

Those final words in the prayer - *"I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known, in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."* – summarises to me the intense love of the God-head for His Church. That prayer in chapter 17 is well worth meditating on.

How did John, the beloved disciple, remember all the detail in these five chapters, when

Matthew, who also was there and also wrote a gospel, didn't?

Partly, I believe, it was due to John's temperament as a melancholic. But undoubtedly the inspiration to remember, writing at what must have been near the end of his lifetime, was miraculous. Just as Jesus said in one of those verses, ch.14 v 26, *"But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you,"* it was undoubtedly a fulfilment of that promise.

As I have said, this was the inauguration of The Church.

Let's go on and consider the purpose behind "the Lord's Supper".

PART THREE:

– Paul's Belief that the Church and Christ are "One"

Synopsis of Part Three:

Paul, in his letters to the churches, audaciously teaches that "The Church" is actually **the resurrected body of the Lord on the earth**. Furthermore he claims that God and "The Church" (God's chosen people) entered into a "New Covenant" (treaty) at Christ's crucifixion. As a result of that covenant "The Church" is actually "betrothed as a bride" in marriage to God. This covenant is one of marriage. One day God will take her as His bride. (Remember, in those days a boy and girl were chosen by their parents, and "betrothed" several years before they were old enough to be married.) For these reasons Paul passionately teaches that "the body" is precious and holy in God's eyes, and we will have a glorious future, when we "the bride" are ready for marriage.

Paul doesn't teach how he reached these startling conclusions. Instead he explains them as: "the mystery that was revealed unto me". Thus unfolds Paul's boundless energy and commitment to fulfilling his calling, to making "her" ready for "her bridegroom".

What is the Meaning of His Term: "The Body of Christ", and sometimes "The Body of the Lord"?

Paul's first explanation of why we are "one body" is found in I Cor. 10 v 16 - 17:

"Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf."

- Because their churches were each comparatively small, they used a single loaf of bread, signifying Christ's body, just as Jesus had led the disciples at "The Last Supper". Thus Paul's statement:

"We, who are many, are one body, because we all partake of the one loaf"

We can accept those familiar words as being metaphorical. In chapter 11 Paul is saying that by together drinking from the single cup, and together breaking bread from the single loaf, we become one body – Christ's body. Paul doesn't say that we participate with Christ in His

crucifixion. He says that we participate in the risen Christ, the body and blood of Christ. Just how far he means this literally we are left to guess.

But then he makes the quantum leap in the next chapter of 1 Corinthians, chapter 12, with the following statement:

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” (v.27)

He is no longer using the metaphor in chapter 11 of a single loaf. He has now given the term a far wider meaning. Verse 27 is his summary verse following a whole chapter of intensive teaching, that together, all the Christians that make up the world-wide Church literally make up the separate parts of Christ’s risen body.

“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say.....” v.12 – 14

Can we still accept that as a metaphor too, or does he really believe that we collectively, literally, are the continuing presence of Christ in human form? Is he really saying that we, by partaking of the bread, have become His transformed body here on earth?

Paul gives no explanation for his bold statement. Given the obvious immaturity of the Corinthian Christians, he apparently concludes that teaching them on the theology of his conclusion is only going to distract from the real issues he is dealing with in his letter.

And, what is the meaning of the verses: *“a man ought to examine himself”* in chapter 11? This really depends upon the meaning of Paul’s words that I have underlined in the following passage:

“Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgement on himself.” 1 Cor. 11 v 27 - 28

I have always wanted to assume that both underlined phrases refer to **Christ’s physical body**, just as in chapter 11 verse 24 when Christ, when speaking of the bread, said: *“This is **My** body, which is given for you.”* But on deeper reflection I believe that Paul, when using the term in verse 28: *“for anyone who eats and drinks without recognising **the body of the Lord**”*, is now referring to the whole Christian Church, world-wide.

He again teaches it in Ephesians 1 v 22 – 23:

*“And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, **which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.**”*

- What does he mean by *“the fullness of him who fills everything in every way”*?

And in Colossians 1 v 24 he again draws the analogy between his own physical body and Christ’s physical body:

*“Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, **for the sake of his body, which is the church.**”*

And in Eph. 5 v 29 - 30 Paul says that we feed and care for our own bodies **“just as Christ does the church, for we are all members of his body”**.

Then two verses later he says, **“This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ**

and the church.”

“A Profound Mystery”

- I’ll say it’s a profound mystery – how he reached that conclusion. It’s as if it’s too profound to explain to his readers, because they wouldn’t understand it.

Christ’s Marriage

Let’s spend a little longer looking at Ephesians chapter 5 v 25 - 33.

Here Paul uses the analogy of marriage between Christ and his Church in exactly the same way as Jeremiah in chapter 31 prophesied that the New Covenant would be a marriage between God and His people. We usually treat it on the surface as teaching on the husband’s role in marriage. But take another look; there is something much deeper below the surface: Paul says:

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife, loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church – for we are all members of his body. For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”

Relationship between Christ and “The Church”

Most of us have heard these wonderful words taught in association with the marriage relationship. The analogy of the relationship between Christ and The Church only enhances to us His teaching on marriage.

However I’d like you to look at it, this time, as primarily a teaching on the relationship between Christ and The Church – and allow the analogy of marriage to enhance our understanding of that relationship between Christ and The Church. Paul, in his Jewish method of writing, entwines the two as he slips from one to the other.

Firstly he states that Christ loved (past tense) her (The Church) so much that he surrendered his life for her salvation in order to wash away her impurities and present her to Himself as a radiant bride, holy and blameless (now future tense).

Then he says that Christ feeds and cares for The Church as his own body – *“for we are all members of his body”*. – There’s that term again.

Does he mean that Christ loves The Church because it is his body?

- I don’t think so, or that would imply that he is only interested in himself.

- No, the analogy here is again “marriage”. Husbands should love their wives as they (the husbands) care for themselves, in the same way as Christ loves The Church because it is a part of himself. **He is really once again teaching us that Christ and The Church are “one body”**.

Then he further endorses this by plainly stating it as fact.

- Just as the husband leaves his family and becomes united to his wife and the two become “one flesh” (as ordained by God in Gen. 2 v 24), so is the relationship between Christ and The Church - “one flesh”. This, I believe, is why he says that the relationship is “a profound mystery”.

I think this is the nearest Paul comes to explaining to us how he decided that The Church is literally Christ's body.

He is either saying that **Christ and The Church are “one flesh” in the same way as a married couple is “one flesh” in God's eyes, or he saying that Christ and the Church will become “one flesh”.**

Does Paul really believe that we, The Church, have literally become the physical body of Christ?

Paul knew full well that the resurrected Christ is presently sitting in heaven at the right side of God, interceding for His people, His Church. He doesn't need a physical body any more. On the other hand Christ, like His Father, is omnipresent everywhere and is not subject to “time” like we are. So why does he call us “*the body of the Lord*” then?

–It really seems that he believes that we are, or we will be literally the physical body of the Lord (one flesh), because we are “betrothed”.

- Think about why he does so.

Could it be because **WE have replaced Christ on earth, literally?**

Was this why Jesus said'

“greater things than these shall you do, because I am going to the Father”? John 14 v 12

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..... And surely I am with you to the very end of the age.” Matt 28 v 18, 20

“You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what My Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” Luke 24 v 48 - 49

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1 v 8

Is Paul saying that as Christ's representatives, we have been clothed with his power and authority to continue **His** ministry, witnessing to all we have seen and heard?

In 2 Cor. 5 verses 19 and 20 he says:

*“And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. **We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.**”*

In other words, we are continuing Christ's work in Christ's power and authority, **because we are Christ**. We don't simply represent Him. **We are, or soon will be, literally “one” with Him**. Together we are continuing His work and ministry here on earth, as if it is Christ who is still present is doing it.

What is our collective relationship to Him?

ANSWER: – **“One flesh!”**

PART FOUR:

-A Man Ought to Examine Himself

Have you ever considered the meaning of the following passage, spoken by Christ at “The Last Supper”? -

“Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgement on himself.” I Cor. 11 v 27 - 28

We often hear the words in church: “*a man ought to examine himself before he eats the bread or drinks the cup*”, as an introduction to our celebration of the sacrament, but have we ever really considered what Paul is referring to here. Just what it is that we are supposed to examine ourselves for? Are we supposed to examine ourselves for any known sin? Are we supposed to seek fresh cleansing before we partake of the Lord’s Supper?

- But then, haven’t we already received the fruit of Christ’s atonement – “righteousness” in God’s sight?

Do we have to seek cleansing every-time we celebrate communion? If we do, then surely this denies that we have already become a “new creation” in God’s sight – the very principle we are celebrating at communion!

- No - That’s certainly not what this commandment is talking about.

Most of us in our self-centred culture automatically assume that this passage says there is some **personal** spiritual standard that each of us must reach before we can enter into “**personal**” communion with God through The Lord’s Supper. But do we really have to seek forgiveness before we can participate? Didn’t Christ bring the very redemption and cleansing from sin through His atonement on the cross that we are about to celebrate together? Shouldn’t the only standard required of each of us before we approach the throne is love for Him, thanksgiving, and a desire for a fresh commitment to the principles of the New Covenant that He brought? Surely to require of us any other standard would simply be a denial of the power of “the cross”.

Self-examination in regard to sin is not the examination that Paul says we need to carry out. But what is the self-examination for then?

According to my bible commentary, in the early church they regularly held a common meal to which all contributed as they were able. This became “the Eucharist” as it became associated with the observance commanded by Christ. It was held in the mornings. There were also “love feasts” (Jude v.12) held in the evenings. The latter gradually died out, whether due to the excesses referred to by Paul in I Cor. 11 v 17 – 22, we don’t know. The Eucharist (Lord’s Supper) became the dominant meal. In verses 27 and 28 Paul was attacking these excesses.

My commentary upon verses 27 and 28 says:

“Here the two (morning and evening meals) are clearly united, and it is not clear whether the Lord’s Supper means the whole feast, or the memorial service preceding or following the “Love Feast”. What ought to have been an evidence of brotherly love had become an exhibition of selfish greed; and under these circumstances it was impossible to administer the Holy Communion in an orderly and reverent manner.”

- But is the commentary correct? Was the excess called “gluttony” the reason why Paul calls us to examine ourselves before sharing in The Lord’s Supper?

According to Paul it is of the utmost importance that a man examines himself before he eats of the bread or drinks of the cup. *“For anyone who eats and drinks **without recognising the body of the Lord**, eats and drinks judgement on himself.”*

How then should we examine ourselves?

Another commentary says that this refers to recognising the sacrifice that Christ undertook for our redemption.

Another commentary says that it could mean that, or it could refer to the importance of noticing one’s fellow worshippers and caring about them - the meaning of **the term: “body of the Lord”** in the next chapter: 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

So now we have been offered three possible meanings. Which meaning is correct?

What then does he mean when he says, *“For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising **the body of the Lord** eats and drinks judgement on himself?”*

In the light of what we know was Paul’s belief in regard to “the body of Christ” - that we, “The Church”, are now literally Christ’s continuing presence and ministry, I believe he is saying that if anyone participates in the communion feast without respecting and loving his/her fellow brethren, i.e because that person is not in fellowship (not in unity) with some members because he/she will not recognise them as a part of “the body”, then that person is not respecting Christ Himself.

He is saying, **“The Church not only represents Christ, it is Christ”**

It’s not just the people in our own church fellowship we must love and respect, but in all churches, worldwide. Do we have difficulty in accepting and loving those whose Christian theology, structure or style of church worship, differs from our own? It would equally apply if we have some issue that is unforgiven against a fellow believer. If so, then we will bring God’s severe judgement upon ourselves individually if we partake in the Lord’s Supper.

- Why is he so severe?

“Eats and drinks judgement on himself” 1 Cor. 11 v 29

– Because he believes that every member of The Church is an integral part of Christ’s restored body. (See 1 Cor. chapter 12). To join with someone in the sacrament of remembrance whom you don’t like, or against whom you harbour a grudge, literally denies the New Covenant that God treasures so dearly and Christ paid the ultimate price for. To say, as Paul did, that we are literally the collective ongoing presence of Christ, insists that we, “The Church”, are a single holy vessel, sinless in God’s eyes. How dare we judge any part of His sinless body, or fail to fulfil that part of it’s commission that God has assigned to each of us. By failing to fellowship with any part of “The Church”, or join with it in regular worship and observance of “The Last Supper”, or failing to support it in its ministry of “The Great Commission” we have effectively judged and slighted His betrothed bride. It is no wonder that Paul so fiercely upholds the sanctity of The Church and the importance of regular fellowship, and unstinting loving support for one-another.

In fact He almost seems to worship The Church, so holy is it in God’s eyes.

Is he correct?

What does *“without recognising the body of the Lord”* mean when Christians float from church to church, never really integrating into “the body”, or worse still, drifting out of fellowship completely, seldom or never celebrating communion with others because they haven’t found a church fellowship **that suits them**? By refusing to recognise *“the body of the Lord”* and the

command: “*this do in remembrance of me*”, are they in fact denying Christ’s risen body, and His huge sacrifice and offer of a New Covenant with His chosen people, His sons and daughters?

“Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgement on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged (examined) ourselves, we would not come under judgement. When the Lord judges us we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it shall not result in judgement.” 1 Cor. 11 v 27 - 34

“A Man Ought to Examine Himself” - Two reasons why we will be judged if we don’t:

Paul is saying in 1 Cor. 11 that there are two reasons why we will be judged.

(a) - Failure by a member to “recognise or respect **“the body of the Lord”** – His Church. (V.29)

- And (b) - failure by members to respect **the Lord’s Supper itself**, either by non observance or due to poor behaviour or gluttony. (V.27)

Why is observance of the command to keep The Lord’s Supper so extremely important?
- We shall see in a minute.

Both reasons emphasise the “single people nature” of those who share in the Lord’s Supper.

PART FIVE:

-“Do this in remembrance of me”.

– Why did Jesus give such a solemn command to us?

We don’t often use the word “remembrance” these days. The only other time we seem to use it is when we gather at ANZAC services of **remembrance**, to honour those who gave their lives for us. We don’t gather as individuals. We gather jointly as **one single people** together with our brethren in Australia, in remembrance, to honour and thank those who gave their lives. Do you see any similarity with your church’s communion service?

I would liken it again to a married couple, meeting to remember in respect, that solemn promise they made, and to repeat their marriage promises in an act of re-dedication to each other. Or again, to a couple celebrating their wedding anniversary together. It’s really an opportunity to reaffirm together the act of commitment to each other that they made those years before, and to rededicate their lives to those ideals and solemn promises that they made

to each other on that memorable day.

And so it is with God. He made a “New Covenant” with His people, we are told by Jesus, through His blood on the cross. At a rededication of their marriage vows, the couple meets as **two parties, to reconfirm a contract that they entered into together**. So it is with the Lord’s Supper service of “remembrance”. As a Western Christian I struggle with the humility of that: that I am only a part of a whole, but to Jesus and those in Bible times, and indeed to people in most other cultures today, that seems perfectly understandable.

We meet as two parties: - God and His Church.

At each communion I listen in hope for that message: that we meet collectively with God as one people, but almost always I wait in disappointment as the speaker misses the point, and talks as if Christ gave his life on the cross for each of us **individually**. But Christ gave his life on the cross for **a people**: his future body. I owe a huge debt of gratitude for that, one that I can never repay, that through sheer love, God chose to send His Son to win and redeem a people for Himself, a people who would respond, because He first loved us.

*“For God so loved **the world** that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

We can choose to interpret “the world” in this context as meaning “every living person”, and we are right. But there are two right answers. He also gave his Son in order to redeem “**a people**” for himself. This is the great message of the Bible, from the call of Abraham in Genesis 12 v 2 – 3 to Revelation. Certainly God calls to each one of us individually (Rev. 3 v 20), but his purpose was always to “build My Church”. (Matt. 16 v 16 – 18)

The Two Commandments to “Do This in Remembrance of Me”

Jesus made two extremely important commandments at “The Last Supper”.

(a) **“This is my body which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.”** (1 Cor. 11 v 24)

And:

(b) **“In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this whenever you drink it in remembrance of me.”**

(1 Cor. 11 v 25)

Again, just like the two reasons why “*a man ought to examine himself*”, (two pages previously) both reasons emphasise the “single people nature” of those who share in the Lord’s Supper.

The First Command to “do this in Remembrance of Me”

-The Bread – His Body which is given for you:

- The first remembrance command, emphasising the unleavened bread, symbolised His sacrificed body. By deliberately timing His death to the Feast of Passover, and deliberately linking “The Last Supper” with the symbolism of the Passover meal, one would expect that He would take the lamb and say, “*this lamb is My body that is given for you*”. One would expect that He would emphasise His atonement, as the lamb which would enable us to gain salvation and life. But instead He took the unleavened bread. Why did He depart from the Jewish traditional emphasis on the lamb? (Note: Deut.16 v 2 says: “*an animal from your flock or herd*”. A “herd” refers to cows or cattle.)

I can think of three reasons for His emphasis on the unleavened bread:

1. **The relationship of “The Last Supper” with “the first supper”, in Genesis 14 v 18.**

As we have considered earlier, the bread has everything to do with the bread and wine brought by Melchizedek. This symbolised the covenant that was about to be entered into with Abram, just as the bread and wine symbolised the New Covenant that God was about to enter into with His people through the cross. The two meals were linked through the prophecy in Psalm 110 v 4:

"You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

2. The meaning of "Unleavened":

Undoubtedly Jesus commanded that we meet around a meal of unleavened bread to acknowledge God's great gift to us, of His son. The word "leaven" has more than one meaning in Scripture. When used by Jesus when He talked of the leaven of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians, it meant "corrupting" or "corrupted". But in this context, "unleavened" is meant to symbolise "purity" in this case.

3. The link between unleavened bread and covenant relationship.

There is another very important reason why Jesus shared bread together, and commanded us to do the same:

This follows from the very strong Middle Eastern cultural tradition, that when people meet and share a meal together with another, they enter into a binding covenant relationship with each other that can never be broken. This is termed "a covenant of salt" in Scripture. (Lev.2 v 13, Num.18 v 19, 2 Ch.13 v 5)

We see its effect in Joshua chapter 9 when Joshua made a treaty with the Gibeonites, after Israel believed their false story that they were from a far country and were starving. They made the treaty by the act of sharing a meal with them, which no doubt always included salt to give the bread its taste. It is not known as a covenant "of bread", but "of salt".

Then in 1 Sam chapter 21 we read that during the reign of David there was a famine in the land for three years. David sought God and was told:

"It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death."

Verse two says that Saul, in his zeal for Israel, had tried to annihilate them. So David asked the Gibeonite survivors: "what shall I do for you?" They replied that David should hand over to them seven of Saul's male descendents for hanging. – By God's law of "a life for a life" (Ex.21 v 4, Lev.24 v 20, and Deut.19 v 21) they could have demanded all of Saul's male and female descendents.

The Gibeonites understood that it was Saul, not Israel, who had broken the "covenant of salt" which had been made with Joshua and the Israelite leaders. God wanted that covenant honoured and restored, even at the cost of seven innocent lives, and even though the Gibeonites had lied to Israel and had been spared in contravention of His command given to Joshua.

However David spared Saul's only remaining son, Mephibosheth; - why?

- Because he had eaten with him at his table. David's action in sharing meals with him had created "a covenant of salt" with Mephibosheth. In the same way, we share "a covenant of salt" when we share bread with Our Father.

Perhaps the most vivid illustration of the cultural practice is one that occurred during the First World War. Colonel Thomas Edward Lawrence, an officer in the British army who is now known as "Lawrence of Arabia" had a large price placed upon his head by the Turks. Turkey at that time governed most of the Middle East, including Israel. Lawrence was attempting to persuade the Arabs to drive out the Turks – a tactic that proved ultimately to be extremely successful.

One day, while travelling by camel in the desert, Lawrence and his band of friendly Arabs came upon a group of Bedouins, a nomadic people. After exchanging greetings the Bedouins were

obliged to follow the normal Middle Eastern custom, and invite the travellers to eat with them. During the meal the conversation turned to the price offered for the capture, dead or alive, of Lawrence, and what they would do with all that money if they ever found him. Lawrence must have enjoyed that conversation.

At the end of the meal Lawrence, knowing full well that Eastern custom had now given him complete protection, removed his turban, revealing who he really was. The shocked hosts could do nothing to harm him because they had just partaken of a meal together.

Jesus partook of a meal with his disciples at "The Last Supper". In doing so they entered into "a covenant of salt" and shared an intimate relationship henceforth for life that could not be broken. They had broken bread together.

- Hence Jesus' command to us – "Do this in remembrance of Me". We are to share together in that same "covenant of salt" that bound Jesus and His disciples into an intimate relationship for life with each other. Every participant, including Christ, is bound to each other. The Jews in Jesus' day did not share a meal with each other lightly, and never would with a gentile. They realised the huge responsibility/obligation that such covenant ritual would create.

We commonly celebrate The Lord's Supper, thinking we are meeting with God.

In reality God wants us to meet and share the meal, and thereby renew a covenant relationship, together as a part of His body.

And, furthermore, God intends that we take very seriously our covenant relationship with our fellow members of His family. We all renew our covenant relationship together.

The sacrament of "communion" is also a time of fellowship with fellow members of Christ's body.

- What a lot of symbolism there is behind those words "*Do this in remembrance*". And Christ deliberately ordered it as a time when He can also join with us in that time of remembrance and rejoicing, "*Until the kingdom of God comes*". Luke 22 v 18

Just when do you think that is?

"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."
Matt.18 v 20 (KJV)

The Second Command to "do in Remembrance of Me"

-The Wine – The "New Covenant in My Blood" which is given for You:

- The second remembrance command emphasised the wine. Unlike the bread which represented Christ's sacrifice, it symbolised "the New Covenant".

Why?

- All covenants in the Bible are accompanied by the mixing of blood of the two individuals. Jesus candidly told us that the wine represented His blood, soon to be given.

In fact He told the disciples: "*This is the new covenant in my blood. Do this in remembrance of Me.*"

Again, the account of that covenant meal where Melchizedek, who represented Christ, brought, bread and wine, emphasised the blood covenant that God was about to bestow upon His chosen people.

I don't intend to present a Bible study on the subject of "the blood" and "the wine" at this time due to the length it would take. I've found it a fascinating study. "Blood" in the Bible represented "life". In this case though the wine, which represented Christ's blood, represents far more. It represented "new life" and "redemption". In fact it represented "The Holy Spirit" itself. In the New Testament "wine" always represents "renewal". I recommend it as a most worthwhile study in a church service to accompany the sacrament of communion.

And the reason for the command: *"This do in remembrance of me."*

- I think I understand the reason why Christ commanded us to commemorate "The Last Supper" as a sacrament in remembrance of the creation of the New Covenant, since my wife and I have experienced quite a few marriage anniversaries since we were married. I believe the female part of God's nature "longs to"- "cries out to" see and experience the re-dedication of His people, as one single people, to the New Covenant relationship that He made with them through Christ's sacrifice. It is as if God lives to hear the affirmation from His people that they are His people, His family. He lives for their reaffirmation of their marriage vow, their re-dedication of the unique relationship that they have both individually and corporately chosen in response to His call. These occasions of "remembrance" are special times for God (and His Church), just as they are for all couples who are deeply in love.

This is God's heart. Just as He was continually distraught by the tragic re-buffs by His chosen people throughout the period of the first covenant, so He longs for a mature relationship of fellowship and returned love from His new redeemed and chosen people, His family. In order to understand, this we have to first understand His nature.

If it weren't for our modern cultural tendency to think that **we** are individually "all-important", rather than being a part of "one body", we would have no difficulty in understanding that **both** the symbols of the cross, (the bread and the wine), and **both** the commanded remembrances, relate to God's restored relationship with us. It is a relationship between God and His single chosen people.

To Reiterate:

The Bread referred to the covenant relationship of God's people with each other, having entered into a covenant shared by all who share the meal together. That relationship is of the highest intimate degree that is humanly possible. Do you recall the words of Jesus to John on the island of Patmos in Rev.3 v 20?

"Whoever hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me."

Those words from Christ, promising a relationship with each of us as individuals that would be more intimate than anything we can humanly imagine, were addressed to "whoever". It was to be an intimate relationship promised by Him with each one of us individually. On the other hand Jesus' commands to the disciples at "The Last Supper" were to the group as a whole. History records that that was certainly the sense in which those present understood them.

The Wine referred to *"the new covenant in my blood"*. There can be no doubt that this referred to the New Covenant made between two parties – God, and His People, and symbolised at The Lords Supper.

The First Commanded Remembrance was given to ensure that we continue to regularly share a meal together and continue that **covenant relationship with each other**, united together in the remembrance of that night in the upper room when Jesus set us the precedent, and said:

“This is My body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me”

Today, we are His body.

The Second Commanded Remembrance was give to ensure that we continue to regularly share a meal together **as a single people, with our Heavenly Father**, in remembrance and honour of the New Covenant He restored with His people.

In fact Jesus told His disciples:

“I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it again with you in My Father’s kingdom.” Matt. 26 v 29. and Mark 14 v 25. –

When would that be?

In Luke 22 He said this both after eating the bread with them, (v 16) and later, after sharing the cup with them, (v 18) He refers to the time when it finds fulfilment in the Kingdom of God.

Question: When will that New Covenant be fulfilled?

- I believe there can be no doubt. Jesus taught extensively on the coming kingdom. It is none other than The New Covenant itself. **It is here and is now!**

In verse 15 He said; *“I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”*

Don’t you think He just as eagerly desires to share with us in this “love feast” of intimate fellowship now, with we - His children, at this feast of remembrance!

We then have the Severe Warning in the Words of Paul, that anyone who drinks without recognising “the body of the Lord”, eats and drinks judgement on himself. Whether or not we agree that Paul was correct in using that term that I have underlined to describe “The Church”, there is no doubting his intended meaning when he wrote those words. He was saying that anyone who either eats the bread or drinks the cup in an unworthy manner, or who eats and drinks without recognising that “The Church” now represents Christ Himself, and who does not reverence that representation due to his/her unworthy relationship with parts of that body, eats and drinks judgement on themselves. It is a severe condemnation, and, again, another evidence that God has created a relationship with His Church; a “one flesh relationship; and we had better not play around with our relationship to it and ignore God’s marriage that he holds very dearly, or we bring down God’s wrath upon ourself.

- I am confident that The Lord’s Supper is completely about our obedience to Christ’s prayer in John 17 that we be “ONE PEOPLE”. Nowhere in The Lord’s Supper is there any room for celebrating a relationship between us as individuals and God. And any teaching that we celebrate communion in recognition of the gift He gave to each one of us, is completely wrong. There is nothing anywhere in the symbolism about our relationship to God, through the cross, as individuals. While we have each been promised a wonderful intimate relationship with Him in Rev.3 v 20, The Lords Supper is not the time to renew it. Instead God is saying that this is His one chance to relate to His Single Chosen People in an intimate relationship with His Body – a relationship we don’t yet understand because we don’t yet understand how we can relate to each other as parts of ONE BODY.

I am again finding it difficult to express this in words - something which I sense is very dear to God, and which I know you share equally with me.

- This, then, is behind the emotional cry of God's heart: -
- **“Won't you do this in remembrance of me?”**

I know at times like this it is His Spirit interceding. It's at times like this that I find my ability to teach as a teacher cannot give words to the sense of passion I feel that God is speaking through His Word, the Bible. It is as if, by comparison, all teaching is cold and heartless, tickling the intellect but not the heart.

On the other hand I hear God crying out to each and every one of us:

“I love My Church. She is betrothed to Me. I am a jealous lover. Don't you dare criticise Her, or play around with Her, tempt Her, or treat Her without the respect She is due by failing to honour and support Her.

You, My children, are Her beating heart. I have chosen each one of you for a particular part of Her function. As a part of Her body you are a part of My Body, yet your criticism of parts of Her body and your disunity and failure to fellowship, dishonours My body and My covenant with Her.”

It is this failure to function as “one body”, the criticisms by us of other branches of The Church or The Church itself or its leaders or of individual members that we cannot tolerate, or worst of all, our failure to remain in fellowship, that effectively snub the gift of His Son, and insult His loved one. I don't think any of us can understand the degree of craving God has for deep fellowship with His chosen bride. None of us can understand the intensity of His love for this bride whom He has chosen, and God's aspiration for a final consummation of that relationship as “one flesh”.

Can you hear what God is saying? Can you hear His cry of anguish at the behaviour of His Church today, just as He cried over the behaviour of His people of The Old Covenant?

Do you understand what I mean by “His beloved Church”?

In Ephesians 2 v 19 – 22 Paul says that we are *“members of God's household”*.

In chapter 3 v 15 he says: *“the Father, from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.”*

“In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.” Eph. 2 v 21 - 22

- We “are being built”. This is present tense, and it is progressive.

It is **“all those persons who are chosen by Him and have acknowledged that choosing, and have been washed clean, and who honour their relationship of “covenant” with each other regularly through The Lord's Supper.”** Unfortunately it also includes those who eat the bread or drink the cup in an unworthy manner and are thereby guilty of sinning against the (literal?) “Body and Blood of the Lord” - to God's anguish.

Please excuse my emotion, but at times like this I know we are touching the very heart of God. It is if I can sense the Spirit's grief at our callous self-centredness.

But to conclude our narrative:

Paul in 1 Corinthians (above) emphasises that **both** the bread and the wine are to be re-enacted together in remembrance of that single occasion. Why?

Are there really **two** separate features of “The Lord’s Supper” that we must honour in remembrance?

– The unleavened bread = His broken body
and – The wine = the New Covenant“.

Do we who commemorate “*in remembrance of me*” really understand this?

Before we leave this section, why don’t you in your capacity as a pastor or leader, introduce this concept to your congregation at your next celebration of communion together? As a part of the sacrament, after you have explained the two reasons (above) for “communion”, ask everyone to stand, holding hands, and repeat after you a prayer or creed that acknowledges the covenant relationship you share together as a part of the one body universal with our Lord and Saviour, thanking Him, and committing yourselves as a part of His body to continue in that awesome partnership and fellowship together.

Obviously you cannot share the bread and wine while you hold hands. Therefore the “standing holding hands” portion needs to be enacted at the conclusion of the ceremony as a final prayer of dedication. And why not adopt this part of the communion sacrament on a permanent basis in future? You could even write a prayer to be prayed as a standard creed, so that the true meaning will become a permanent ending of the sacrament, as you stand holding hands, each time you celebrate it together. In some churches the celebrants pass the elements to their neighbour as symbolising the corporate nature of the act. You could do both.

I am not a person who likes formal creeds, as they can become so common and trite that they become meaningless. Nevertheless Christ ordered us to repeat this ceremony again and again “*in remembrance*”. A permanent creed provides us with structure in our lives that in turn helps to provide a foundation when everything else in life seems to be in a state of change. Research clearly shows that people need and value small traditions and ceremonies in their lives. For example, just the act of saying grace with your children before meals adds an invaluable heritage to your lives and theirs. If there was ever a God-appointed time to repeat **together** a creed, then the Eucharist (communion) is it.

“For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.”

PART SIX:

- SUMMARY

Why am I spending so much time teaching the principle of “community”?

Surely the principle of “community”, that in God’s eyes we are one single people, should be self-evident from Scripture in the life of The Church.

It is a fact. The Church is one unique community, Christ's body. The fact that it must be "one" before we can celebrate communion together, creates a unique relationship between its members, a special relationship which was taught by Christ in those five chapters in John's gospel, 13 – 17, beginning with:

"A new commandment I give you. Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

We can try and dismiss this relationship as being only a spiritual relationship, but can we?

One nugget I can remember learning and retaining during my years of attending Sunday School and Bible Class as a child, is that "a church is not a building.
- It's the people inside that comprise "a church".

But while God desires that His children dwell as one people, how far do His children accede to their parent's wishes?

To take it a step further, if it's the congregation that makes up "a church", what makes up "The Church"?

As long as we absorb the culture of this age - that it is only the individual who matters - we cannot understand Paul's vision that the Church and Christ will one day grow so close in marriage that they will one day be united as "one flesh". (Eph. 5 v 32) We are incapable of thinking that. We are so immersed in the self-centred culture of today that it makes me cry.

We are so far from an understanding that Christ came and died on the cross that He might sanctify and redeem "**A People**" unto Himself. It's almost as if we don't want to hear it – so much are we caught up in a belief that He came for you and I personally.

You can read Christ's vision for "His People" for yourself in John chapters 13 – 17. There, in His last words before His death He pours out His heart to His future Church. At that symbolic occasion He emphasises only the bread and the wine, apparently in a direct reference to Genesis chapter 14, to the little meeting between the representative of God's people and God's representative (see Psalm 110 v 4) – the meeting leading to the historic First Covenant between the two. I believe He did so in order to explain to us the historical importance of the meeting that we call "The Last Supper", before the Second Covenant was established between God and His people. He did it to explain the true meaning of the "cross" - the betrothal of The Church to Christ himself.

He said at that last supper: *"This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this whenever you drink it in remembrance of Me."*

When we drink that cup we are actually taking part in a re-enactment of that same solemn covenant ceremony. We are representing God's people as we formally meet with God in an act of recommitment to that bond of "Covenant" that unites us with Him as "His Chosen People". It is an awesome privilege.

It is no wonder that Paul says:

"Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgement on himself.

That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But

if we judged (examined) ourselves, we would not come under judgement. When the Lord judges us we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it shall not result in judgement.” 1 Cor. 11 v 27 – 34

Notice the words I have underlined. Paul is talking about dishonouring two things:

(a) Jesus’ crucified body, represented by the bread. – *“This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”* Luke 22 v 19 - and

(b) The New Covenant which restored, through Christ’s crucifixion, the relationship that God’s heart so ached for – the relationship of family – sons and daughters (children) of God, that had been lost through Adam and Eve’s original sin. It was represented by the wine. - *“In the same way, **after supper** he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”* 1 Cor. 11 v 25

Did you notice the words in bold type? It is significant that the two commandments were not spoken by Christ one after the other. The first, the reference to the bread, was spoken during the supper; the second was spoken after the supper.

Why the separation? I didn’t know.

My wife found the answer for me recently during a discussion at our mid-week home group. The answer is in John 13 v 30: *“As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.”*

Apparently Jesus deliberately waited until Judas left before sharing the wine with His disciples. Why?

There must have been a difference between sharing the bread together, and sharing the wine. – What was it?

Jesus and the disciples had shared the bread together despite the presence of Judas. No doubt they had shared a fellowship meal many times before. I wonder what Judas thought when this time Jesus said, *“This is my body, given for you.”*

- But they couldn’t take the wine together with Judas, as this represented The New Covenant. Complete unity when symbolically celebrating the New Covenant that was about to be established, was essential. Is it still the same today when we share the wine together?

This is why Paul states in 1 Cor. 11 v 29:

“For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord, eats and drinks judgement on himself.”

By celebrating communion with God we are collectively confirming our covenant with Him, made through His shed blood. We, the assembled representatives of His body, solemnly recommit His Church to the awesome gift and privileged relationship that He gave, to enter into “righteousness” as “His family” – His sons and daughters. Unless we are in complete “unity” with all other members of His body, we dishonour His sacrifice.

But it’s important to realise that the supper partaken by Christ and His Church was not the covenant itself. As in Genesis 14 it was a symbolic picture, the forerunner of the New Covenant relationship that was about to be come into existence. The New Covenant was written through Christ’s shed blood on the cross.

Recall the Middle-Eastern emphasis on the amazing degree of bonding between any people who ate together? By sharing a Middle-Eastern meal together the disciples and Christ formed

a relationship that would last for their lifetimes.

Christ's invitation to us in Rev.3 v 20 is:

"Here I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."

To a Jew, to even speak God's name was unthinkable. – To be able to eat with God was completely blasphemous. Yet here was Christ at The Last Supper inviting us to join "in remembrance" in such a meal with Himself and His people, the two objects of which were:

- to together remember Christ's martyrdom, and
- to together recognise and recommit, as representing God's People, to the amazing covenant relationship He had given to us through the cross.

We simply cannot meet with Christ at the Lord's Supper if, together, we are not in complete unity with Him and with our brothers and sisters in Christ. And the fact that we attempt to, must make Him very sad indeed.

In Joshua chapter 7, when Achan took some possessions from conquered Jericho in disobedience of God's instruction to Joshua to destroy all, God deserted His people. This resulted in their army's rout by the inferior army of Ai, who killed about 36 of them in battle. In response to Joshua's shocked prayer of protest God replied:

"Israel has sinned; they have violated My covenant which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction. Go, consecrate the people. Tell them, "Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow; for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says:"

"That which is devoted is among you, O Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove it."

This breaking of The Covenant was by one member only, yet God states that *"Israel has sinned."*

Notice that it was the temptation of Mammon that caused the mortal breaking of their covenant with God, by all. In fact:

"Covenant" with each other is "Community".

According to Middle Eastern tradition, we are as much in "oneness" with our brothers and sisters at The Lord's Supper, as we are with Christ himself! -

Think about that now! You see –

If we are not "one" with those present and those absent in other fellowships and churches, we are dishonouring the entire meaning of "The Cross".

If you don't mind, I need to repeat that statement again:

"According to Middle Eastern tradition, we are as much in "oneness" with our brothers and sisters at The Lord's Supper, as we are with Christ!"

After-all we are all sharing the meal in fellowship together. By sharing a meal together we equally bond in "oneness" with both Christ, and with each other.

However we must not confuse the effect of Middle Eastern sharing of a meal together as being the same as that of "Covenant". Meeting "in covenant" is far more obligatory than meeting "in fellowship to share a meal". Under "Covenant" the participants did much more than share a fellowship meal. They also shared each other's blood in a symbolic act of "oneness". Two

examples of this ceremony in the Bible are in Genesis 15 between God and Abraham, and in 1 Sam. 18 v 1 and 3 between Jonathon and David:

“Jonathon became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. And Jonathon made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.”

The Fellowship Meal which we are commanded to share together, symbolises the “oneness” that Lawrence of Arabia experienced around the campfire with the Bedouins, that Christ experienced with the representatives of His future Church at the Last Supper, and Melchizedek (as God’s priest in the order of Christ) experienced with Abraham, the representative of His future chosen people.

The New Covenant itself was made between God and his adopted people – a single chosen people.

The New Covenant itself which followed The Last Supper was made between God and a **chosen people**.

Sure – the Last Supper serves to symbolise our “oneness” over that meal, but, strong as it is, that Middle - Eastern tradition is incomparable to our “oneness” created when we join together to symbolically accept, “*in remembrance*”, the New Covenant.

The reason we meet in remembrance of Christ is because we meet to honour **the covenant** He gave His life to bring, and to rededicate and honour, as His Church, that covenant. In God’s eyes we meet as one people. There is not the slightest opportunity, particularly at this second step in the sacrament, to meet with Him as individuals.

(a) As one people we meet to honour in the bread, His broken body.

(b) As one people we meet to honour in the wine, the New Covenant which He brought when he established a new chosen people.

Bread and Wine – We are instructed to remember both. Why are they different?

In church last Sunday I listened as the speaker said in his sermon that the bread represented His broken body, and the wine His spilt blood. This is a commonly repeated saying at communion that I have heard many times. However, this time I felt challenged in my spirit by his second statement – “that the wine represented His spilt blood”. Did it really?

Back at home I looked up in my concordance all the New Testament references to “blood” in the context of Christ’s crucifixion.

It was most revealing. In every case “blood” referred to “**new life**” and “**redemption**”.

Examples are Eph. 1 v 7, 2 v 13, Rom. 3 v 25, 5 v 9, Col. 1 v 14, 1 v 20, 1 Pet. 1 v 2, 1 v 19, 1 John. 1 v 7, Rev. 1 v 5, 5 v 9, 12 v 11, and 19 v 13. These all speak of “New Covenant”.

Rev. 7 v 14 says:

“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

And as well these there are all the references in the book of Hebrews, reminding us of our link between the Old and New Testaments, and that only “Blood” could expiate our sins.

Christ was theologically correct when He said: *“This cup is the new covenant in My blood.”*

The bread speaks of His broken body, but the wine doesn’t. The wine at the Last Supper certainly refers to Jesus’ blood, but unlike the bread, **it does not refer to His martyrdom on the cross**. It refers to His covenant with His people.

The awfulness of the crucifixion (His broken body and spit blood) is commemorated by “the bread”.

- But the wine commemorates “The New Covenant”,

I'm sure that most Christians fail to understand this most important distinction when they celebrate communion together.

In every Biblical covenant, blood is shed and shared between **two** participants only. On the cross (which took place after the Lord's Supper) Christ shed and shared His blood to create a “New Covenant” between God and His newly adopted people.

– There were two participants only! – God and a single people.

Personal Reconciliation First with God or Our Brothers and Sisters?

Sometimes, due to our strained relationship with God because of to sin we feel we need to approach the Lord's Supper on bended knees and ask for personal forgiveness first before we can genuinely participate in the sacrament. Sometimes in our obstinacy we can sometimes ignore it during the worship time and prayer preceding this, but then when we come to the highest pinnacle of the church service – the “Remembrance” Feast – we feel unclean and rotten by comparison with His sinlessness, and we can't go on any further. We know we simply cannot enter into communion until we humble ourselves and swallow our pride. It's like a husband and wife holding a difference and perhaps no longer communicating. But then comes the opportunity of the marriage act, and tearful reconciliation must first replace stored-up pride!

In the same way, at the very thought of communion, if we realise we have something against our brother or sister or against God Himself, the realisation of His love for us on that cross, and that we are out of fellowship as a result, convicts us. We can't go on pretending.

In theory, the time of communal celebration should not be the time for personal reconciliation with Him. But if we feel that we first need to ask for forgiveness and seek reconciliation from Him and from our brothers and sisters, then so we must. That is the very time we need to repent of wrong attitudes and reconcile with our Christian brothers and sisters. How can we celebrate as a participant and beneficiary, the birth of The New Covenant, when we are not at peace with our covenanting partner, God, or our fellow covenanting members of His Body? It's the same principle as when Jesus tells us that we cannot give into the offering bag in church if we have something against our brother. (Matt. 5 v 23 – 24) If Jesus said we can't bring a gift to the altar, how much more then before participating, in remembrance; in the solemn covenant meal!

But a quick prayer of forgiveness should never never become a norm before taking communion, as if to ritually cleanse our relationship with Him before we take part in the two-way sacrament of remembrance. You see, to pray for forgiveness before that very act of “covenant” is in fact a denial of the meaning of the power of The Cross. Through the New Covenant, established at the cross by His Son's death, you have been permanently restored into fellowship with Him in the same way as Adam and Eve had fellowship with Him before “the fall”. Christ has permanently “justified” you and I. He has covered you with a “robe of righteousness”, hiding forever the sin that you see in yourself.

Many people find it hard to accept that they have been permanently forgiven. They can't believe that God has forgiven them for all time. Why then do they celebrate communion? *“As far as the East is from the West, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”* Ps. 103 v 12

In fact, why don't you read the whole of Psalm 103 if this is a problem to you. Then accept

God's word as a step of personal faith. You will find that nowhere in Scripture does it say that you have to be continually seeking God's forgiveness in order to be reconciled to Him. Would you ever renounce your relationship to your children if they did something wrong? If you who are human still regard them as yours in the same way as before and love them just as much, how much more, God His children! You need to be liberated and realise that you are and always will be God's child.

I know that some people worry over whether they have committed "an unpardonable sin" by grieving the Holy Spirit. Knowing God as I do I can tell you that if you are sufficiently concerned to worry like that, then God loves you heaps, just as you are. The father loved the prodigal son just as much before he turned and repented, as he did afterwards. God can't help it. His nature is love.

Sure, that father's heart was breaking. But the son was still his son. **And so are you.**

I have come to realise that all of us grieve the Holy Spirit. I do it. You do it. We all do in so many ways.

How do I know? – Because He has let me feel a little of that grief as I have touched upon some of the examples in these books. If you've ever been a parent you will understand this a little. If you had a parent who couldn't show emotion, was a stern disciplinarian, unloving, rejecting etc., then read His word and realise that your father or mother were nothing like what God is like. Yes, you have had it hard, but isn't that even more reason why you simply have to put the past behind you and discover God's true nature as David did in Ps. 103.

"As far as the East is from the West, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."

To repeat Paul's words again:

A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgement on himself.

If we take part as a member of the body in remembrance of the New Covenant, while having a difference with a member of that body, we are dishonouring the very principle that Christ holds so dearly – our "oneness".

Christ counts it as a very personal "remembrance", in memory of when He gave His life in order to win a people for Himself; such was the extent of His love for us.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

A Proud People

I used to read in the Old Testament of the nationalistic fervour, the proud almost arrogant attitude of the Israelites that they alone were God's chosen people. I used to think: "what a self-centred sanctimonious race they were".

Now as I read the Old Testament I read "Church" in place of the name "Israel", and I cry in frustration that we, His chosen people, don't thank God that He has chosen us in the same way that the Old Testament Jews did. To quote the words of Paul, God has "grafted us, the wild olive, into the nourishing sap from the olive root." (Rom. 11 v 17) Why can't we, His covenant chosen people, have the same pride, the same recognition that "we are His people", and rejoice together as one chosen people. Indeed, not only was this Jesus' prayer in John 17 v 22 – 23, but it was also His new command in John 13 v 34 – given to "My children" – a term

of special endearment to His chosen ones.

Instead of recognising this gift, we have accepted this modern culture's sense of individualism, and largely ignored our privileged covenant relationship as God's chosen people. Yet this Old Testament principle of corporate identity is a principle that is "in our face" throughout the entire Bible. This principle didn't change one iota when Christ brought the New Covenant in replacement of the Old.

Christ came expressly to redeem as "righteous" a new people, chosen by God by His grace, to carry out His commission and grow together into maturity until our final consummation as a single body with the returned Christ, (as Paul explains it).

But How?

But what will change us? What will stimulate us to adopt God's vision of one distinct people, when we so much want to avoid being different from the rest of our society? We want unity with our fellow Christians - But we also want unity with "the world".

Can we have both? – In John 17 v 14 Jesus said in His prayer to His father,

"I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world."

Earlier, in John 15 v 19 He said, ***"As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you."***

According to Jesus there will be a price to pay if we "are not of the world". Are you and I prepared to pay that price?

Possibly the last word on the subject was again from Jesus – in Rev. 3 v 15:

"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are luke-warm – nether hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth."

(Notice that Jesus says He knows them by their deeds, or rather by a lack of them. It's not beliefs and doctrine that will judge us, but our tendency to follow after the world's practices - our failure to be different in deed.)

It's the same issue faced by Joshua in his challenge: "Choose ye this day who you will serve". It's the same challenge thundered by a host of prophets throughout the Old and New Testaments.

God calls His People to unite as "one" and to live by noticeably different principles to those who live around us. How can we be "a light unto the world" if we are not recognisably different? We are like salt that has lost its distinctive flavour. As Jesus said, we are then no good for anything.

O how I long to see The Church as described in the early chapters of Acts, in fulfilment of Jesus' prayer in John 17 v 22 – 23:

"I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one even as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

What will it take to change us? - And make no mistake – if the gates of Hell shall not prevail against the onslaught of The Church, then our tendency to "go with the flow" and adopt the standards and practices of society at large including materialistic easy lifestyles, worldly values and permanent debt, is going to have to change radically before we can see the triumphal Church prevail against "the gates of Hell".

“BOUNDARIES”

I was standing worshipping in a church service in Auckland recently. The congregation was largely composed of students from what it seemed was every race and colour. I love Auckland churches for their colour and racial challenges they are facing and overcoming. This church was only months old, worshipping in what had been an industrial building in the heart of Penrose. Throughout the week it ran classes in business studies and English, and became a Bible College in the evenings. At the end of the service we would move out the side doors into the student canteen for coffee and refreshments while an African congregation began their service in the auditorium we had just vacated. The tempo and energy of their singing would be something else again. Later that morning Kathleen and I would cross the city to present Liberty Trust to another church, this time largely Indian. Again its morning service would be followed by a further ethnic congregation.

- How I love the atmosphere and dynamism of Auckland's churches.

But as I stood with them in worship God began speaking to me: -

He said:

“No body of people can effectively function as a community if it doesn't have boundaries.”

As He spoke it I could again feel His heart aching in love for these people.

He said, “in order to form as a community, we have to decide whether we are in or out of a local congregation. Many feel they want to be free to flow in and out, reasoning that if they aren't a member of any community they can more easily relate and win their friends who don't know Christ as their Lord and Saviour.” “In reality”, He said, “they don't want to be “tied and bound” to any church community.”

He said, **“That is a lie of Satan. It is whispered by Him in order to water-down the strength and integrity of the community of God's people.”**

- I was surprised at the vehemence of His words.

Then He went on to speak of Christians who have a foot in each camp, of the world and the church, or a foot in each Christian community, or who “float” unconnected between communities of His people.

“They reason”, He said, “that they **are** connected because The Church is one big community, made up of all the local churches together with those who are members of none, but this is not the community that I am seeking”.

Then He said: **“How can they say that they love me and are a part of My Church when they will not function as a part of my community? How can they stand before me and affirm the covenant between Me and My people when they will not be a part of My people?”**

As He spoke I could feel His heart aching.

As He spoke He showed me a picture of a circle of people, all reverently holding hands, facing

inwards towards one another. **“This is the church I want”,** He said. **“They are each standing on the boundary. They are not intentionally standing with their backs to the world. Their attention is to each other because they love each other so much that their hearts are filled with joy. No-one is in the centre because all are equal. They are all on the boundary. They are on the boundary because each is touching the world around their circle, ready to receive and introduce others to Me.”**

Then he drew to my memory the words of Acts 5 v 12 – 14.

“All the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Colonnade. No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.”

He said: **“These Jerusalem people were not deliberately being different from the world by facing inwards. They were different from those outside because they intensely shared My joy together. Together they were a witness to the world around them. Together they represented that I was alive, because they were a living witness to My resurrection. And the world feared them because they represented Me as My body.”**

He then spoke of being the good shepherd who gives up His life for His sheep. **“I have appointed shepherds for each flock, but you will not heed them. How can they be a shepherd when their flock has no boundary, and wanders where it will? How can they shepherd when they do not know who are the sheep I have given them?”**

– And together we cried for His sheep as tears streamed down my face.

Let’s close with God’s word on the subject of community:

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!
It is like the precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron’s beard, down upon the collar of his robes.
It is as if the dew of (Mount) Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the Lord bestows His blessing”. Ps.133

Contributed by KELVIN DEAL C.A.
WHAKATANE