

**One in Christ
BUT
Scattered**

By David A. DePra

Introduction

In this day and age, as God continues to reveal His Son in His people, many have found that they are no longer able to continue with their church. They want fellowship with other believers -- but cannot walk in the error of those other believers. They have searched, visited churches, and prayed that God would lead them to a healthy church. But regardless, many find themselves alone. Some feel as if this means they are out of God's will. Some are even condemned by others for not, "being in church."

As is so often the case with many of these perplexities encountered in the Christian walk, the Word of God addresses this possibility. We are told in the Bible that it is possible – within the will of God – that a believer be isolated and alone. We are encouraged that God can nevertheless use all of His people for His great purpose.

This booklet is not a comprehensive study of the Body of Christ, or even of this limited subject. But it is hoped that it will serve to point the readers to Jesus Christ and put to rest many of the worries and fears that believers have with regards to fellowship and God's purpose in their lives.

One in Christ, But Scattered

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. (I Peter 1:1)

Peter is writing this epistle to people who are IN CHRIST -- the body of Christ -- but he is writing to those, who despite being spiritually ONE IN CHRIST, are geographically scattered.

I want to address the fact that even though Christians may be scattered here and there throughout the world, that nevertheless we are all ONE in Jesus Christ. I also want to address the fact that even though you and I may not have fellowship on a consistent basis -- we may not have a church we can attend-- that nevertheless we are all ONE in Christ. And just as importantly, whether we go to church or whether we don't, God is able to bring us into an inward realization of His Son. God is not limited by geography. He is not limited by our circumstances.

One In Christ

A born again believer is a person in whom Christ dwells. If we begin with that fact as a starting point, it ought to be clear that fellowship with Christ, and God's purpose in Him, could not be any closer to us. We don't have to go to church, or interact with other believers, to become one with Christ -- or MORE at one with Christ. By definition, believers ARE one with Christ -- Christ is IN US -- that is Christianity.

Now, along side of this Truth that all believers are one with Christ, it is likewise a fact that all believers are one with each other THROUGH Christ. This is something spoken of at length by the apostle Paul:

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

Paul is stating that, yes, EACH believer is a partaker of Christ – personally and individually. But he is likewise stating that because EACH believer is a partaker of Christ, then indirectly through Christ, ALL believers are spiritually ONE in Christ – and members of one another.

Paul uses the picture of BAPTISM. He says that believers are all BAPTIZED into one body – the body of Christ. Also, in Romans 6, Paul says that believers have been baptized INTO Christ. This is exactly the same Truth. Both places are, of course, talking about SPIRITUAL baptism -- not water baptism. Spiritual baptism means to be IMMERSED, not into water, but into Christ by His spirit.

Spiritual immersion means, “to be swallowed up in; to become one with.” In I Cor. 6:17, Paul affirms this meaning by saying, “We are joined to Him and made one spirit with Him.” In other words, when a person comes to Christ, they are spiritually, “joined,” to Him; made one with Him in spirit; baptized INTO Him. But if that happens to EACH believer as an individual, then ALL believers are IN CHRIST – ALL have Him in common – He is our common LIFE.

That is, “communion.” EACH believer has communion WITH Christ -- but indirectly through Christ – EACH has communion IN CHRIST with each other -- believers are members one of another through Christ.

It is important to see the priority on this matter. It is only THROUGH Christ that individual believers are one spirit with each other. I am not one with you, nor are you

one with me, through any other means than the Person of Jesus Christ. Christ in us individually is the foundation of Christianity – but believers all one in Christ is the basis of Christian communion.

So, by the very nature of Christianity, when we come to the Lord, we are EACH made one spirit with HIM. All of us are individually and personally made one with Christ. But then indirectly this means that we are one in spirit with each other. Now, that doesn't yet speak to the functionality of anything. The fact that we are all one in Christ does not yet mean we function like it or even realize what that means. No. But the Truth is there: Believers are all one spirit in Christ. Functionality needs to be built upon that as believers grow to know and love Christ.

The Eternal Body

The body of Christ consists of all who are IN CHRIST. But that being the case, let's ask: Where IS the body of Christ?

You won't find the body of Christ on a map. Neither will you find the entire body of Christ in any one geographical location. In fact, if every Christian who is presently alive attended church in one location, and in one building, you would still not find the entire body of Christ on a map or in one location.

Why? Because the body of Christ consists of -- not just Christians who are alive in the world today – but includes everyone who has ever been in Christ – presently alive or dead physically. Everyone who has ever been in Christ, or will be in Christ, is the body of Christ.

All believers are spiritually one with Christ. Death does not sever that oneness between the individual believer and Christ. If I died today, I am still one with Christ in spirit. But if that is the case, then neither does death sever my

spiritual oneness through Christ with all others who are one with Christ – whether they are physically alive or dead. Again, death cannot sever the fact that the body is all one with Christ Jesus.

Now, of course, the dead in Christ are, as Paul says, “asleep in Christ.” So we cannot have any active fellowship with them. We do not and must not communicate with the dead. But spiritually, since they remain in Christ, and we are in Christ, we are one in spirit with them. That core spiritual union remains.

So the body of Christ consists of all those who have ever been IN CHRIST – alive or dead. All believers, alive or dead, are one spiritually with Christ, and consequently, one in spirit with each other. Geography has no impact upon this. Indeed, physical death cannot sever it.

Spiritual Oneness and Communion

Christianity, at the core, is CHRIST IN YOU. We have already seen HOW Jesus Christ dwells in the believer: We are joined to the Lord and made one spirit with Him. (I Cor. 6:17) We are BAPTIZED into Christ. But if Christ is IN YOU -- if you are joined to Him in spirit – then it is possible for you to come into an inward realization of Him. It is possible for you to come into the fullness of Christ. Indeed, it is God’s will that you do exactly that.

How does God accomplish this in the believer? God puts us under the work of the personal cross so that we might, “lose our lives,” into His hands. To, “lose your life,” is not limited to losing THINGS or SITUATIONS. No. To, “lose your life,” means to lose YOURSELF. It means to relinquish self-ownership. And if we do lose ourselves to Jesus Christ then we will find Him as our life. And along with that we will grow to know Him; come into a realization of Him.

Now, how many see that you could attend church every week – attend even a great church – but that you are still going to have to personally and individually pick up your cross and lose your life. No one can do that for you. It cannot be done by proxy. Now, if you are in a great church, you will be taught this Truth. You will be supported by others; encouraged. But again – YOU must do this. Faith is a personal choice.

Yet despite the necessity of personal faith, there are people today who absolutely insist that God CANNOT bring us into the fullness of Christ unless we are attending a church, or are part of some fellowship group. This is error. And frankly, it is from out of a blindness to the reality of Christ within us.

If you and I, as individuals, cannot come into the fullness of Jesus Christ -- except it be by relying upon and feeding upon others -- then the number one goal of the Christian life ought to be to find these people who will supposedly provide us with the life in Christ that will meet our need. And there are always plenty of folks around who like to make other reliant upon themselves, "in the name of Jesus."

But you never once, in the entire NT, read even a hint that believers are to make finding fellowship their goal. Rather, believers are encouraged to walk with the Christ who dwells in them personally. Indeed, all true ministry – all ministry that is of God – is going to seek to bring people to where they are NOT reliant upon others, but are able to know and walk with Christ for themselves. And if we only understood it, THIS is exactly what makes a STRONG body of believers.

God is able to bring Christians together for fellowship. He is able to birth congregations. But that, in and of itself, is never stated as the goal of God. Rather, God wants to form Christ in the individual. And we should

trust Him, and allow the possibilities of fellowship to take shape as God opens those possibilities.

Rather than tell us that fullness in Christ depends upon our relationship with OTHERS, Paul directly stated, “There is one Mediator between God and man, that man Christ Jesus.” (1 Timothy 2:5) A mediator is a person who connects us to another. Christ is not only our sole Mediator because of what He has done, but more importantly, by His very presence IN US He is our Mediator unto God. Jesus is one with the Father, and we are one with Christ. That makes us one with the Father. Thus, by virtue of the very presence of Christ in us, there is all the potential to come into a realization of Him, and into His fullness. God can use the gifts of others to minister Christ to us. But even if He does, it is going to come down to God’s personal revelation of Christ in us. God will always bring us back to the fact that despite help for others, Jesus Christ, and He alone, is our Mediator unto God.

Our Christianity is not limited to a couple of hours on Sunday morning, or to a few hours every week, when we are in contact with other Christians. Even if that fellowship is edifying, our Christianity is lived out and experienced IN LIFE – family, job, finances, health, and all relationships.

If you read John, chapters 14 through 16, you will read what Jesus said would be the work of the Holy Spirit. All of the things He said would be the work of the spirit add up to the same thing: Reveal Jesus Christ TO people, IN people, and THROUGH people. And not once does Jesus Christ mention any essential that the Spirit of God must work in you through OTHERS. For even if the Spirit of God does work in you through OTHERS it is so that you might personally and individually come into the fullness of Christ. In short, the spirit of God will NEVER make you dependent upon OTHERS. The spirit of God will always make you dependent upon Christ.

The Unity of the Faith

There is no question that God has put gifts in the body of Christ for the edification of the believer. There is also no question that there is spiritual value in a group of believers who are walking together in communion in Christ. But all of that being said, what is the GOAL of God in all of it? Paul tells us in Ephesians:

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:11-13)

Notice these goals: First, the unity of the faith. But notice the wording: “Until we ALL COME to the unity of the faith.” Note that ALL must COME to this unity. How? By mindlessly agreeing with one another? No. All must come to the unity of the faith by individually seeing and embracing the Truth.

The, “unity of the faith,” is the outcome of EACH individual coming to know Jesus. Thus, even if I am in a wonderful church that is teaching the Truth, the goal must never be to IMPOSE unity. Rather, the goal will be to establish EACH individual in Christ. Then, and only then, will each individual come into the unity of the faith – for all will have the same faith of Jesus Christ.

The other goals mentioned in this verse are really HOW believers come to the unity of the faith. It is through, “the knowledge of the Son of God unto a mature believer, unto the fullness of Christ.” If EACH believer is realizing Christ for themselves, then the unity of the faith will

emerge. It won't be forced or man-made. It will be the fruit of knowing Christ.

Again – all ministry that is of God is going to focus on the individual believer. For if individuals are coming into the fullness of Christ – this is what makes for a strong body of Christ. But if our focus is the group – making a group, finding a group, finding the right technique for operating a group, imposing unity, making sure the group holds together, etc., there will be no spiritual growth in Christ.

Do I Have to, “Go to Church?”

The answer to this question is NO. The moment I turn attending church into a law that I must keep in order to keep right with God, or come into the fullness of Christ, I am no longer walking in freedom, but in darkness. You will not find a single command in the entire NT to attend church – not even Hebrews 10:25 -- which will be discussed later. Assembling together with other believers, in the NT, was done freely, and because people wanted to celebrate the Lord. There was no pressure or demand. Nothing was forced. It was all voluntary and done in freedom.

Now, it is here that we must all ask ourselves a question: What is our idea of fellowship with other believers? There are many people who have become so brainwashed by traditional church thinking that unless they are in a church building, sitting in a pew, they do not believe their fellowship is valid. We have forgotten that Jesus Christ said, “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there will I be in their midst.”

So how many believers are necessary for fellowship? Two. What this means is that if you have fellowship with even one other person then, in the mind of Christ, you have, “gone to church.” And in this day and age, there are many ways to do that – other than having face-to-face

contact. It is still fellowship – because despite geographical separation, all believers are one in Christ.

If we would simply believe what Jesus said and realize the Truth on this matter, it would completely reprogram our thinking about what we call, “church.” We tend to think of church as a place to go, where a hired minister holds services for us. There may be additions such as Sunday school, choir, or bible study. To us, all of this is, “church.” Yet in the NT, there is no such thing as, “going to church,” or, “attending church.” No. Believers ARE the church. And their fellowship is with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ – and each other. There is no, “how to,” or mandate, or religious pattern. There was preaching and teaching and sharing of Christ. It was a living dynamic.

There are many believers today who cannot find spiritual fellowship in Christ with other believers. Sometimes the problem may be geographical. But many times they simply cannot make themselves part of a church that is teaching error, or is walking in an earthy Christianity. Many try, but reach an impasse. And so they have little or no fellowship. So if this is the case with a person, “What are they to do about it? Fret over it? Fear that they are missing out on God’s will? Feel guilty?” As a solution, are you supposed to launch out and join any old church just so you can say you have, “gone to church?” Are you supposed to create a group, force fellowship, or embark on a campaign to start a church?

I would submit that it is not possible for us to care about this matter more than God cares about it. I would also submit that since each believer belongs to Jesus Christ that it would be nothing for God to bring believers together. Yet He does not always do this. In fact, I think it is more correct to say that in this day He OFTEN does not do this. I need to leave the matter in His hands.

It is possible that God has shut me up to Himself for an extended season. It is possible that it is only in isolation that He can do a work in me that will bring me into the fullness of Christ. Either way, this is God's business. I should always be willing and available to Him for whatever He wants. But I should make sure that what I make myself part of is birthed of God and His will for me.

This is so simple and so basic – but notice what it means: It means that no matter where you live, and no matter whether you are able to attend church or not, you remain in Christ, and Christ remains in you – and that being the case – God is not limited in His desire and work to bring you into the fullness of Christ.

God absolutely CAN bring you and I into the fullness of Christ – even if we are not able to attend church. This is the Truth. But if it were NOT the Truth, we have seen that there is only one other conclusion: It would mean that we cannot come into the fullness of Christ unless we are having face-to-face fellowship with other believers. Your life in Christ would be dependent upon OTHERS.

But if that is the case, then the question becomes, “WHAT other believers must you depend upon? Who are these people? Where are these people? Where are these other believers who I need to depend upon for my spiritual growth?”

How many see that we are on dangerous ground once we make God's purpose in our lives dependent upon any other group or person? That is the stuff of which cults are made. The moment we suggest that God cannot work in our lives as individuals – but will only work through a church, group, leader, or the spiritual authority of another person – we are in error and are on the road to great deception.

Note what the apostle John had to say on this matter:

These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which ye have received of him abides in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teaches you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him. (1 John 2:26-27)

These words of warning were written by an apostle – by one who was a teacher and a minister of God. Yet he is telling us that there is no need for any PERSON to teach us, for CHRIST HIMSELF dwells in us. Yet John was neither against congregations nor against fellowship. No. God wants congregations who are one in Christ, and who are alive in Him. But God does NOT want believers to place their faith in their church, or place their faith in their minister. No. In fact, any church that is teaching the Truth is going to teach exactly what John is teaching – that each believer needs to personally know Christ. The very purpose of all ministry that is of the spirit of Christ is to edify EACH believer in Christ so that if they are in a congregation they can edify others – and if they are not in a congregation they can stand alone and walk by faith.

For His Body's Sake

Each individual believer is ONE in spirit with Jesus Christ. That is the case whether we attend a church. And because we are ONE in spirit with Christ, God is able to do a work in us to bring us into the fullness of the Christ who dwells in us. Likewise, because we are one in spirit with Christ, each individual believer is likewise ONE in spirit with other believers – regardless of whether we attend church. These are basics.

But there is another Truth regarding the body of Christ that is found all through the New Testament. And that Truth is that, yes, God is doing a work in you and I

personally and individually. But that work that is being done in us is NOT JUST FOR US. No. God is creating in EACH believer something that will contribute to the spiritual life of all other believers. And again, this is not merely for here, in this age – but more so for the eternal ages.

Obviously, what God does in the individual is for His purpose in that individual. That is primary. But we are members of one another. And so what God does is going to INDIRECTLY be a contribution to the rest of the body of Christ. It will be a contribution to the body whether we attend church or not; whether that contribution is presently seen or not in this age.

Whether you are in a church or not, God wants to work in you. And if God does work in you, then whether you are in a church or not, He will make what He does in you a contribution to the body of Christ. Is this not ministry – perhaps unseen – but nevertheless a ministry of life? And what really makes it of great value is that most of what God is doing in His people is not for this age, but for the next age.

I'm not suggesting that whatever God does in you and I will automatically impact others. I'm not saying that because those others would still have to embrace the Truth; they would have to bear their own cross; they would have to come into understanding, and lose their own life for the sake of Jesus Christ. Nobody can do that for another person. But I'm simply saying that God is doing a work in individuals that will contribute to the greater life of the body. To the extent that the individual allows God to have His way in them, there is a release of life to the entire body – even if it cannot presently be seen. It is a fact because all believers are ONE in Christ.

Now, notice what I just stated about the eternal purposes of God: What God is doing in individuals is going to impact His body – but the greatest manifestation of this

is not going to be seen in THIS age. No. Much of it is for the NEXT age.

We have already seen that the body of Christ is comprised of ALL who have even been in Christ – those who are alive and dead in Jesus are ALL ONE in Him. But only a small part of His body is physically alive at any one time. Consequently, if the entire body is to benefit from the life of Christ in one member then it will have to be, not in this age, but in the age to come, that the fullness of what God is doing can be manifested. In short, all that God is doing in individuals will only be realized when the entire body is gathered up and assembled together in Christ at His second coming.

This explains much about what God is doing in this age. For example, suppose I am going through a trial and I lose my life for the sake of Jesus Christ, such that I find Him as my life to a greater degree. But what if I never have an opportunity to minister to others? What if I remain isolated? Does that negate what God has done?

There are those today who are completely brainwashed by the religious system that has become what we call, “church.” Many cannot accept that if a person knows Jesus Christ, and would be able to teach others, that God would not use them in a big way. Thus, whether a person has a big following, or has a big impact, or has much fellowship – these THINGS become a sign that God is with someone. Likewise, if a person has little to show for the Truth they have discovered in Christ, they are considered to be out of God’s will. Indeed, some people completely bypass the Truth altogether and judge everything by success in ministry.

Have you ever been discouraged because God has not used you? Have you wondered whether this is because you are out of His will, or deceived? Well, that may not be the reason why God has not used you. In fact, if God has

isolated you, it may be because you can be trusted with isolation. It may be because isolation is what is required in order for Him to bring you into His fullness. And if that is the case, then what God is doing IS ministry – it is a contribution to His body. And it will find full release in the eternal ages.

Often the question is this: Can I bear the Cross of isolation? Can I bear the Cross of NOT being used of God? Am I willing to have my life wasted – as would be suggested by natural thinking – so that God may have His will in and through me in the ages yet to come.

The notion that whatever is of God must garner a big following or impact in this age, and that what is not of God will be insignificant, is folly. Have we read the history of the church? The biggest movements and biggest churches have been the most Satanic. Indeed, you cannot find in the written history of the Christian church much evidence of the life of Christ in His people. But it was there – it just wasn't part of WRITTEN history. It wasn't in the limelight. It wasn't reflected in the writings of most who wrote books and became famous in the outward history of the church. No. But God was getting His way in folks whose name we will never know in this age. He was contributing life to the body of Christ through those who suffered for Christ, and lived for Christ – but who are not even a footnote in written history. But in the end, it is going to be as Jesus said: "Many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first." The bottom line is that we need to STOP judging as men judge and need to allow God to renew our minds on these matters. For when Christ returns, everything is going to be revealed for exactly what it is – and by the time God is finished, only that which is of Christ will remain.

God can bring people into the fullness of Christ without the fanfare of a great movement or a big church. He can do so in the lives of people who simply give themselves to

Him – even if no one else knows about it. History has proven that even most of what were considered big revivals had diminishing effects. That is because only that which is of Christ is eternal and can remain. All else, no matter how religious – no matter how sincere – will either fade away, or, in some cases, eventually grow into something all the more contrary to the spirit of Christ. Yet it too, will be burnt up when Christ returns.

The bottom line is this: Christianity is CHRIST IN US. The Christian life is a continual discover of Christ; a growing realization of Christ. That is accomplished, not by being in a movement or attending church. It is accomplished by losing our lives under the Cross by faith.

If you are part of a living church THAT ought to be what you are taught -- and it ought to be the purpose of it's ministry. If you are not part of a church then it remains the will of God. What matters is not numbers, not movements, and not whether I feel useful to God. What matter is the life of Jesus Christ in His people.

Ministry to the Body

If a person allows God to have His way with them, then the LIFE of Christ that is released to the rest of the body of Christ IS TRUE MINISTRY. It is often HIDDEN ministry. And the fruits of it may not be seen much in this age. But it is ministry none the less. The real fruitage and real value will be realized in the next age.

When Christ returns at the end of the age, what God has accomplished in an individual is not going to be erased. No. It will be released to fullness. And because I am joined to other Christians in spirit, then what God has wrought of Christ is a contribution to the spiritual life of the body as a whole.

Paul talks about that in many different places in the New Testament. He talks about the fact that if one member suffers that all suffer; if one member is benefiting then all benefit. Remember that? Thus, what God is accomplishing in you contributes to the greater body, but what God is working in other Christians likewise contributes to you. And as I said before, we may not see HOW that is happening, or presently see the effects, but that is because we are talking about a living organism; talking about the body of Christ. We are not talking about academia or theology. We are talking about life in Jesus Christ.

Paul spoke of himself as suffering for the sake of the body of Christ. But as I said before, that suffering must first do a primarily work in Paul, or whoever we might be talking about, because unless God gets a work done in that individual there can be no contribution to the body THROUGH them. So the suffering was not merely for Paul. Rather, it was for Christ's sake – indeed, Paul says it was for the sake of the body of Christ; for the sake of Christ's purpose in His body:

Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church. (Col. 1:24)

Paul is saying that yes, Christ finished all the work that needs to be done for the believer. But now the individual believer, and by extension, the body of Christ, must grow to experience Christ. The finished work of Christ must be worked out in His people. That begins personally, as Christ possesses and does a work in the individual. But then, because all individual believers are members of the same body – Paul says that this is also is a work that benefits the entire body.

Paul says to the Colossians that, “my sufferings are for YOU.” He says that these sufferings do a work that, “fills

up that which is behind” – that is, they bring to fullness in Christ that which has not yet been brought into fullness.” He says that his sufferings are for – not merely his OWN sake – but for, “His body’s sake, the church.”

And so here we see that what the individual experiences in this age is not merely for that individual’s personal growth. Rather, what Jesus Christ forms of Himself in the individual has an impact of life for the entire body of Christ. Indeed, this impact is not limited only to this age. What Christ is doing in the individuals in His body during this age is going to contribute to the manifestation of His life through His body in the next age. We may not see much of that here. But when Christ gathers together His body at His coming, then the fullness of Christ will be manifested through His body.

Many times in Scripture we read that the saints suffer for, “the sake of Jesus.” In other words, despite the fact that through sufferings we personally come into an inward realization of Jesus Christ, and begin to experience all that God has given to us in Him, the greater purpose is that Jesus Christ HAS US. WE are HIS inheritance just as HE is our inheritance. Christ wants individual believers through whom He can live and move. And if He gets individuals, then He will have a corporate body. Thus, all of the sufferings of the saints are ultimately FOR THE SAKE OF CHRIST – for the sake of His purpose in individuals, and for the sake of His purpose in His body. In other words, what is for the sake of Christ is indirectly for the sake of His body.

Jesus said, “You must lose your life for My sake.” What does he mean by that? That somehow we can ADD to Christ? No. When we suffer for Jesus’ sake we are giving Him -- if I can use this term -- material to work with. We are giving Him ourselves so that he can glorify Himself in and through us -- and so that he can bring us

into a knowledge of Himself. And then because of that as a foundation, His life can flow through us and impact others.

Jesus Christ obviously does not need any of us. But He has ordained that He wants a body through which He can live and move. This will benefit those through whom He lives and moves. And it will be part of an eternal purpose.

God's Ultimate Purpose

Each believer is individually IN Christ. But it is because EACH believer is individually in Christ that Christ is our COMMON life – He is our, “communion.” And likewise, because EACH believer is in Christ, ALL believers are ONE in Christ, and members of each others. This is a fact regarding believers who are alive in this age at any point in time. But it is also a fact regarding all believers – both those physically alive and those who are asleep in Christ.

The purpose of Christ begins in the individual. God wants to bring the individual into an inward realization of His Son. He wants Jesus to be the LIFE of the individual – not just in fact, but through a practical faith. The body of Christ is supposed to minister one to another unto this purpose. But for most of this age, the body of Christ has been blind to this purpose. But God is not thereby limited. He is able to accomplish that purpose in one who surrenders to Him even if that individual lives alone in a cave. He can do a work in an individual so that Jesus Christ may live and minister through that individual – if not here in a church – then throughout the eternal ages. The point is, Jesus Christ dwells in each individual. He does not dwell only, or more, in a group. Thus, despite the great value of a living body of believers, God is not limited to that – for His Son dwells in each believer.

Consider the gifts of the spirit. God gives these gifts to His people. They are NOT just for the person to whom the gift is given. No. They are given to individuals for the sake of the body of Christ. If you and I allow Jesus Christ to have his way in us, then whatever that gift is; whatever that revelation is, is now a part of the body because we are part of the body. And God would like to use that gift to minister to His body through us. But note: If that individual never had the opportunity to minister to the body of Christ; never had the opportunity to preach and teach – and in the church as it functions today, that is so often the case – it is nevertheless a fact that Christ can have His way in that individual to whom the spiritual gift is given. And there can be a spiritual release of life FOR the body – even if it is unseen.

Is the ONLY way to function in a spiritual gift during a church service? Is the only way in which Christ lives through us, and ministers through us, within a body of believers? You and I encounter needy people every day. We live among both believers and unbelievers. If Christ is in us we can minister – it may not be in some recognized way. We may not garner any attention at all. No one may see what we are doing. Our scope of ministry may be no bigger than our family, friends, or workplace. Does that make it of any less value to God? Jesus said, “the last shall be first and the first shall be last.” Maybe we ought to stop thinking in terms of results we can see, or that others can see, and start thinking about the interests of God instead of the interests of man.

We tend to think that the pastor or the person who seems to be doing much for God are the ones God is using the most, or are the ones that are having the greatest impact for Christ. Indeed, there are many believers who feel that if God is not using them -- in what they would call a bigger way – they feel that this is evidence that they are out of the will of God. For surely, they reason, God would

also use those in whom He is getting His way. That is nonsense. Virtually every saint, in both the OT and NT, had to pass through extended seasons of being isolated and shut up to God – where it seemed as if God was doing nothing in their lives. But even that isolation was part of the work of the Cross that God was doing in them. The FRUITS of that work, in some cases, were seen in this age. But in other cases, the fruits were not seen – especially in the outward. Natural thinking would suggest that what they endured was for nothing.

But no. If such ones had given themselves to Jesus Christ, and He was being formed in them, then despite what seemed to be a lack of ministry, or a purposeless life, God was making them a vessel for His life – and that will eventually be released into its fullness when Jesus returns. The contribution of life that God has in such ones is never lost. It contributes to the life of Christ in His body. What did not minister here, will minister throughout the eternal ages.

There is a rather stereotypical example of a little old lady who is a shut-in. Does she miss out on God's purpose because she cannot attend church and minister to the body on that level? Is she in the least of less value to God? No. She is of just as much value as someone who has a obvious impact for God in His church. Nothing can keep her from losing her life to Christ, and from walking with Him by faith within the circumstances of her life. Jesus said, "Whoever is faithful over little will be faithful over much." Do we believe Him? Or do we despise, "the little?" The little may well be what God is using in a life – for the purpose of making it possible for us to be faithful over the much of the eternal ages. In short, what matters is NOT the little or the much. What matters is the faithfulness in Christ that is built.

People demand, "You've got to be in a church; you've got to be in fellowship. You must have some kind of a body

life in order for your Christianity to be real or worth something.” The answer to that is, “No. That is not the Truth.” If God provides fellowship with other believers who are alive in Christ that is great. But often He does not, and we should not fret over it. We should simply be open and available to what God wants – for HIS purposes.

The problem with the church today is the same as it has always been – and that problem is NOT with God – NOT with God’s desire to have living congregations. No. Rather, the problem is with believers themselves. God would want many churches with unity in Christ. But the church is always going to be a reflection of the spiritual condition of the people that comprise it. And today there is little real unity in Christ. There is little real spiritual life in Christ. There is just religious flesh and the interests of man. There is a religious system called, “church” – and the primary goal is to grow that system. Most believers are so locked into the religious system that they call CHURCH that they don’t question it. Most are blind to the Person of Christ. That is why God does not and cannot birth many fellowships. He is not going to affirm and promote that which, in the end, is little more than a religious substitute for living reality in Christ.

There are believers today who have seen the Truth, and because they have, despite their best efforts, and despite their desire for fellowship with others, cannot make themselves part of most places. Many try again and again, visiting churches, joining churches, and seeking out possibilities. But usually they wind up back in the same place – unable to walk in empty religion. They cannot. This is not because they think that they are better than others. It is because if you know the Truth and try to make yourself part of these things you will eventually reach an impasse. It is inevitable.

In this day and age, it appears that God has completely bypassed the organized church and is dealing with

believers on an individual basis. This is not always the case, of course, and we must be careful about this – for there have always been those who, having seen the emptiness of organized Christianity, make separation from it a THING or an IT – they separate themselves from other believers and imagine that such a separation, in and of itself, gives them greater access to God. It does not. Being part of a church cannot give you greater access to God. But refusing to be part of a church cannot give you greater access to God. It can be as empty as being in a church – because if you are not walking in Christ -- YOU are empty. Our access to God is Jesus Christ. And the moment my faith is no longer in Him I am out of God's will whether I am in a church or not.

The fact is, God can and does shut people up to Himself for His purposes in them. This is not because they are better than others. Indeed, if God has shut someone up to Himself, it is ultimately not only for their personal growth, but it is for His body's sake. We may not see the impact of that HERE, in this age. But that impact will be released THERE – in the age yet to come. Thus, if you and I are shut up and separated unto God -- then this is God's business. The alternative is that we go out and make a fellowship; force things so that we can, "be IN something." We could actually turn, "being in church," into a law to keep. That would be disaster. What would emerge from that would NOT be, "special," or, "highly spiritual." In the end, it would be just another product of religious flesh.

Jesus said of people, "That which is born of the flesh IS flesh, and that which is born of the spirit IS spirit." Such is the case with congregations and fellowships. Anyone can start a group or a church, hand it to God, and expect Him to bless it. People can do this with the best of intentions. But only if God births a congregation – either from scratch, or by birthing an existing one in Christ -- will it have any possibility of being a manifestation of His Son. And even then, as is proven by the churches in the NT, must those

congregations keep walking in the life of Christ. A congregation can only be the sum total of who Christ is in the individuals that comprise it. Look around the church landscape – you will see that this is a fact. And this starts with the leadership.

God has an eternal purpose in Christ for individual believers. Unless He gets that purpose in individuals, He cannot have that purpose in the body. And that purpose is that individuals be brought into an inward realization of Jesus Christ -- and as a result, manifest Him, and become an extension of Him. If this is being accomplished in individuals, then God will have His purpose in the collection of individuals, which is the body of Christ. And make no question about it, God is going to have His purpose. We will not see the fullness of it in this age – God never promised that, and indeed, said otherwise. But God is nevertheless building His body – He is building it by the building of the individuals who comprise it – and today much of this is being done through the hidden work of the spirit of God. God can do this work whether a person is in a church or isolated and shut up to Himself. And when Christ returns and He assembles together the entire body, then what could not be seen before, will then be released into fullness.

True Ministry

Once we catch a glimpse of the Truth of the body of Christ – and see the purpose of God in the individuals that comprise it, we will likewise see that we suffer not only for the sake of what God is doing in us personally -- but we also suffer for Jesus' sake; for His purpose in HIS BODY. In fact, I would boldly proclaim that it is not possible to suffer simply for yourself. It just it doesn't work that way. If we are suffering, it IS for Jesus' sake – He is getting His will in us. And we are likewise suffering or His purpose in His body -- we are members of one another – that is what the body of Christ IS -- by

definition. Therefore, whatever you do; whatever you become in Christ -- that is either adding to or subtracting to what God wants to do in His body.

II Corinthians 4 is another place where Paul describes this dynamic. There he explains how the suffering of one Christian can contribute to the life of Christ being ministered to others. He starts that chapter by saying, "We have this ministry." So in this chapter, Paul is going to talk about ministry that is of God. Indeed, he talks about what ministry is, and how it works.

He says in verse 7: "But we have this Treasure (Jesus Christ) in an earthen vessel. The earthen vessel is US -- our natural man. The Truth behind this is that when you and I come to the Lord and are joined to Him in spirit -- this joining is the new birth; this spiritual union with Christ is the new creation in Christ Jesus. But note that we are NOT joined to Him with our natural man or earthen vessel -- not with our soul life; the psychic realm. In other words, the soul part of man's makeup, as well as our physical body, is NOT joined to the Lord in this age. These are the earthen vessel -- Christ is united with our human spirit IN that earthen vessel. Jesus Christ will never be the earthen vessel and we will never be the treasure. The two are distinct. That is the separation of soul and spirit in each believer. We each have those two natures.

The new nature is our spiritual union with Christ and the old nature which remains is all that is outside of that union. Of course we get into a lot of trouble when we try to live out Christianity in the earthly nature, or try to put our faith in how our earthly nature is behaving. No. We have to have that crucified and learn to live on the basis of the Treasure -- Christ in us.

Paul's going to get to that here in verses 8 and 9. He talks about all the trials that he is undergoing. And we know that in Paul's case, it produced a ton of suffering for

him in his life. Elsewhere he said that he suffered the loss of all things. And here, in II Cor. 4, he goes on to say, "WE are troubled on every side." So it wasn't just him who was suffering. It is ALL who are in Christ who will suffer.

In I Peter 2:21, it says that we are, "called to suffer." So if you are called to Jesus Christ you are called to suffer. This is not because God arbitrarily made some law that you must suffer. No. It is because of the nature of things. You are being called TO Christ FROM out of yourself, and FROM out of this world – and that is going to produce suffering, one way or the other.

Well, in this passage from II Cor. 4, Paul rehearses possibilities that cause suffering. And in II Cor. 4:10, Paul states the effect of this suffering upon the earthen vessel or natural man. Paul says, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus." So in other words, this is a matter of being crucified with Christ. This is a matter of losing our life for His sake. So, "always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus" -- but notice WHY: That the life also of the Lord Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

Here we see the principle of LIFE from DEATH. If we are, as Paul said, "Crucified with Christ," then we can say, with Paul, "nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me." (Gal. 2:20) If we bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus we will find true life in Him. There will be a greater lease of His life in us. Christ will be manifested through us.

As an aside for a moment, you will notice that there isn't any suggestion here that you and I will ever, "look like Jesus." No. All of these teachings today that tell people they need to, "look like Jesus," are error. Likewise, teachings that suggest that we have a wonderful, beautiful specimen, or gem inside of each of us – which is the real us -- and that God wants to peel off the layers to reveal this

magnificent creature that we really are – this also is error. These lies are absolutely contrary to the Truth of God in Jesus Christ. Rather, all that is of US needs to come under the cross. We must bear in those dimensions of our make up the dying of the Lord Jesus, so that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest. In other words, we must decrease that He might increase. So rather than look like Jesus we are being told that Jesus Christ Himself wants to manifest Himself through us. The result will be that, yes, other people will see him, but we will see him as well, in an inward way.

Paul says in verse 11, “For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus may be manifest in our mortal flesh.” In other words, through the ongoing work of the Cross, the Jesus with whom we are united in spirit, comes to be manifested through us.

Paul is talking about how ministry is created in a person and operates -- about how ministry comes to flow through you and I. It is only if Jesus Christ is formed in us. Ministry is nothing more than HIS LIFE – first formed in the individual, but then flowing out to others in ministry. Ministry is the manifestation of Jesus Christ in the individual along a certain line that edifies others in Christ.

Paul then gathers all of this up in verse 12. He says, “So this death is working in us, but life in you.” That, in a nutshell, is ministry is Christ. True ministry is the result of the work of the Cross in the individual such that that individual is crucified with Christ – but all unto the purpose that Christ live and move in that individual. And then as that is being accomplished, that same life of Christ is able to work life and edification unto others.

There is no other source of ministry that is of God. Ministry is not learned in a book, in a college, or the product of study. Ministry is Christ – and the life of Christ

produced in one, and then flowing out to others. Paul said, "Death works in us, but it results in life in you."

Now, right there we see a direct statement to the effect that if we suffer it is not just for us personally. No. Whatever God is doing in the individual is ultimately for ALL the body. But since we are limited here, in this age, by time and space, and since there is never more than just a small percentage of the body of Christ physically alive at any one time in this age, what God is working in His body NOW is intended for the greater purpose He has for His body in the eternal ages. "Death works in us NOW – but unto LIFE in the body both NOW and THEN."

God is Not Limited

HOW life is contributed to the body in this age can vary. It can be through preaching and teaching -- or simply throw fellowship of one believer to another. It can be through the various spiritual gifts or the fruits of the spirit being manifested. Or, as I said before, the contribution of life to the body may be an UNSEEN thing in this age. That does not make it any less real. If it is LIFE in Christ then it doesn't matter if it's presently seen or not.

How many understand that at the end of this age when Jesus Christ comes back that all of the preaching, and all of the teaching, and all the serving, and all of the things we've done for God -- all the works that we have performed -- everything that is part of the Christian life that we have done – ALL of that is going to pass into history? All that will remain is what is of resurrection life in Jesus Christ. NOTHING else will remain. (Read I Corinthians 3) It is a great thing that when Jesus Christ is done only that which is of God will remain.

So whether we have a ministry that can be seen right now, or whether we don't, what matters is what is of

Christ. How many realize that God can produce the life of His Son in our little old lady – even if she never attends church? That He can produce the life in Christ under any circumstances? We need to realize that by and large the life of Christ is NOT produced in people merely during a Sunday church service. No. In a church that is alive in Christ it is during fellowship time that prayer, teaching, preaching, and edification should happen. But the life of Christ is produced through the work of the Cross -- as we walk with Christ at ALL TIMES.

God is not limited in your life. He can still produce life. Don't you have trials every day? Don't you encounter things wherein you have to lose your life to Christ? Those situations may not LOOK like ministry – but God will use them to form Christ in you – and His life in you IS the only source of ministry that matters.

Baptized For the Dead?

I Corinthians 15 is a passage that also speaks to the Truth that what God does in one member of the body contributes to the entire body – not only here, in this age, but for the eternal ages. As mentioned earlier, the body of Christ is not comprised only of those who are alive now, but includes all who have ever been in Christ – both physically alive and dead. Thus, what God is doing in the life of the individually contributes to the life of that entire body of Christ.

Those who are dead in Christ remain joined to the Lord -- because physical death can't sever resurrection union with Jesus Christ. They are likewise spiritually joined to us through Christ – although there is no communication with them – they are asleep in Christ. This is why what God does in ONE – or DID DO in them – has an impact upon the body as a whole.

How many realize that what God did in the first apostles still benefits us today? Paul said directly that the church is built the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ himself being the cornerstone. Yes, we have the Bible that includes the writings God inspired through them. But I think more than that there was LIFE produced in them. That LIFE, which is HIS LIFE, is the real foundation – their WORDS were an outcome of that LIFE. The body of Christ continues to benefit from that life today. I'm not sure that there has been anything close since – which is why they are called the foundation. The life of Christ that God formed in those first apostles is part of the life of the body of Christ because they are part of the body of Christ. What God did abides forever – FOR ALL.

I Corinthians 15 is an extensive passage on resurrection. Paul tells us that there is going to be a resurrection from the dead of all Christians at the return of Christ. And he tells us that when this happens, that God will move forward with the body of Christ in His great purpose. Let's start reading in verse 26.

The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all. Otherwise, what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead? And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die.

It says that DEATH, the last enemy, shall be destroyed. Then Paul goes on to say, "For the Father has put all things under the feet of Jesus Christ. But when it says that all things are put under Jesus Christ, it is clear that the Father is excepted from that because He is the one that did put all things under Christ -- and all things shall be subdued unto Christ." Paul continues, "Then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto the Father Who put all things under the Son -- that God may be all in all."

I've quoted all of that to get to verse 29 -- because you can see that up to that point Paul is talking about the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose through Jesus Christ-- the full establishment of His kingdom for the eternal ages. All of this comes together once the dead in Christ are raised at His coming. But in verse 29 -- he adds, "OTHERWISE why are the saints, "baptized for the dead?" If we take this rhetorical question and simply state it plainly, Paul is saying, "It is because of this great purpose of God in Christ for the eternal ages that the saints are being baptized for the dead. Otherwise, there would be no purpose for it."

Ok. So the question is, "What is Paul talking about when he speaks of being baptized for the DEAD?" There have always been religious groups and cults that have grabbed that phrase and turned it into nonsense, and even into practices that border on the occult. But the context of this passage, along with the other verses we have been reading, make it clear what Paul is talking about. He is talking about the same Truth that we saw in II Corinthians 4, and that we saw in Colossians 1 -- he is talking about the fact that you and I have to undergo a baptism -- not into water -- but into the death of Christ -- so that we may experience a greater release of the life of Christ. And if we do then our baptism into death produces LIFE that is also a contribution to the entire body of Christ -- including to those who are dead in Christ; asleep in Jesus.

There are numerous other places in scripture that liken the work of the cross to a baptism into death. In fact, Paul says that if we are joined to Christ in spirit that we have been, “baptized into His death” – He makes baptism into Christ and baptism into the death of Christ synonymous. In other words, if you have been joined to the Lord and are one spirit with Him, you are planted or baptized into His death. You will bear about in your body the dying of the Lord Jesus. The death of Christ is a finished work, but once we are baptized into Him, that finished work has to be worked out IN US. We must lose our lives for Jesus’ sake. This will be a lifelong journey. But it will all be unto LIFE – for if we have been planted together with Christ in His death, we shall also be planted together with Him in His life. And according to Paul, to the extent that that the individual believer comes into the realization of Christ, that individual will contribute to the greater body – because all are ONE in Christ Jesus.

This becomes all the more clear if we read verse 29 again along with the rest of the passage. Paul lays out God’s great purpose in Christ. Then he asks, “Otherwise, what shall they do, which are baptized for the dead? If the dead rise not, then why are they baptized for the dead?” In other words, if there is no resurrection from the dead, then there is no contribution of life that we can make to those who are dead in Christ – so why be baptized for them? – Why suffer in this life if it is all unto no eternal purpose?

But no. Paul is saying that there IS a great eternal purpose in Christ. Most of the chapter leading up to this passage describes it. And he is saying that there IS a resurrection of the dead – including a resurrection of all those who have died in Christ. And because there is, the suffering in this age that produces LIFE does have a great purpose and a great contribution to the body of Christ. What God is doing in you is for you, and for those alive in Christ, but also for those dead in Christ. We will not see this clearly in this age. But when the dead are raised

we will see it – indeed we will experience the fruitage of what has been doing through Christ in His people.

If we read on in this passage we can see that this interpretation is certain. Paul asks, “If there is no resurrection, or if there is no purpose of God once He raises the dead in Christ, then why should we be baptized for the dead in Christ? What purpose would it serve?” But then he goes on to ask, “Why stand we in jeopardy every hour?” Can we see that he is relating this baptism into death to the fact that he is in jeopardy? And that this jeopardy – which produces suffering -- is in fact going to spiritually benefit those who are yet to be raised from the dead?

There is more. Paul says in verse 31, “I die daily.” This gathers up what he is talking about in this passage. He is not talking about some strange rite that is performed for the dead. No. He is talking about a spiritual work the God is doing in those who are alive – a work of the Cross that he calls being, “baptized for the dead.” We might even call it, “a baptism into the death of Christ FOR the body of Christ – including those asleep in Jesus.” Paul is bearing about in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus – but this is not just for him. It is, “death in us, but life in you,” that is, “a baptism into death,” but unto life for all who are in Christ -- including all those who are dead or asleep in Jesus.

Paul continues in verse 32. He says, “If, after the manner of men -- in other words, “If, simply in the natural realm for natural purposes” –“I fought with beasts at Ephesus, what does it advantage me if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.” His teaching is clear: It was NOT, “after the manner of men,” that he fought with beasts at Ephesus. Rather, it was a spiritual warfare for spiritual purposes.

When he speaks of these, “beasts at Ephesus,” he is referring to people who opposed him in the flesh – they were like beasts, operating from out of natural instinct and their own desires -- but behind those people were evil spirits. He saying if all that he did was have a battle or a debate or a struggle with these people in the flesh -- if the weapons of his warfare were merely carnal for the natural purposes of winning an argument and coming out on top – if THAT is why he suffering all of these things at the hands of these people – “then what advantage is that to him unless the dead rise in Christ?” In other words, if all of this is not producing something for Jesus Christ in His body, then there is NO advantage or value in it at all. We might as well eat and drink and get out of this life all we can before we die.

Over and over the NT reveals that yes, the life of Jesus Christ does have a great purpose and a great impact during this age. We must grow personally in Christ, and as God gives the opportunity, we can minister to others. But is that IT? Is all of this for no eternal purpose? When the age ends will God take a big eraser and wipe it all away? No, says Paul. All of this is important NOW. But the ultimate fruitage of what God is doing in His people is NOT for now – it is for the eternal ages. Otherwise, there would be little value in suffering for the sake of Christ or His body. It is all going to evaporate anyways.

The focal point of this passage is the RESURRECTION – and more specifically – the resurrection of those who have died in Christ. Paul rehearses God’s great purpose in Christ for His people, and he wants to make sure that ALL believers understand that they do have a part in it – that if they are walking in faith that God is both making them part of His body but also using them as a part of His ministry to the overall body. No one is excepted.

People Who Cannot Find a Church

This Truth about the body of Christ ought to be of great encouragement to a lot of people – although it might be an admonishment to some others. It might even offend some that cannot see beyond tradition and the church system. But it is the Truth. It reveals that God is no respecter of persons – and reveals that God is NOT limited in your life if you are shut up to God and cannot find fellowship. You are not a second-class citizen in the kingdom of God. You have not missed the will of God, or His purpose in your life. It doesn't mean that God has no value of Christ in you. Even if you are shut up to God and cannot find much fellowship with other believers, that Christ is nevertheless IN YOU – and God is able to do in you every bit of what he might do in someone who is in church every week. Your spiritual growth does NOT depend on church attendance. It depends on your faith in Christ.

There a lot of people that I know that cannot find fellowship. Some of those folks cannot find fellowship because of geographical reasons. But the vast majority of people who cannot find fellowship cannot find it spiritually. They have caught a glimpse of Jesus Christ. They know the Truth. They know that we are to be walking in HIS life -- and many folks -- once they catch a glimpse of Christ -- can no longer be part of the earthly Christianity that you find in most churches. They visit churches. They try to hook on to a church or group but they find out that to them it is an empty thing. And eventually they end up finding it impossible to continue walking in that because they would be compromising with the Truth that God has shown them. They do NOT think that they are superior or think that they are better than other Christians. It's just that once you see Jesus, and have tasted of the Lord Jesus, you cannot go back to that other, "diet." You can be available to people for ministry. But you can't walk with them in the way that they are walking because it is not the Truth. Indeed, you desire that others would see Jesus Christ as you have seen Him – so that they can experience true freedom in Him.

Hebrews 10:25

Now, somebody is going to say, "Wait a minute. There is a verse in Hebrews that COMMANDS that we meet together with other Christians; that COMMANDS that we attend church!" That verse that is usually brought front and center on this matter is Hebrews 10:25. In fact, this is a verse that has often been turned into a law. It's a verse that has been used as a club to pound people over the head in order to get them to come to church. But as we are going to see, Hebrews 10:25 isn't even talking about attending church. It is talking about something else altogether.

Hebrews 10:25 says,

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner (or custom) of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as you see the day approaching.

Now, that does sound like we are being commanded to attend church, doesn't it? And as I noted, you will find it interpreted as that 99.9% of the time – despite the fact that such an interpretation does not comfortably fit the context of the passage. But for the sake of argument, let us assume for a moment that this verse IS a command by God to believers to attend church. If it were – and it is NOT – but if it were such a command, can we see that there would certainly be an assumption behind this verse that the place God is commanding us to assemble must be a place that's teaching the Truth? That the place where we are commanded to assemble must be one that is in true communion with the living Christ?

What do we think that God is saying? Is He saying, "I hereby command you to attend a church -- any old church."? Is God commanding us to make ourselves part

of even a group that practices great error – because what matters to Him is that we assemble together – it does NOT matter what happens when we assemble? Is this what God is saying? – Is it what He would EVER say?

Does God have a heavenly attendance chart? I'm being a little bit sarcastic but I think I've made my point. If this verse were commanding us to attend church, then certainly the intent of God would be fellowship with those who know Jesus, and who are at least open to the Truth. God's will would be communion in Christ. I don't believe for one moment that God would ever exhort us, let alone command us, to attend just any old gathering of Christians that teaches or practices error. No. He would want us to steer clear of such ones – and if we are already in such a church – He would want us to LEAVE; get out of there, get nowhere near that place. God does not want us to make ourselves part of what He cannot make Himself part of – He does not want us to have communion with doctrines of demons or error.

If attending church is the only way in which believers can grow – which is the argument of many – then how does one grow if they passively join themselves to believers who are blind to Christ and who are walking in error? In that case there is NO growth. There is only a joining of oneself to what is not of Christ. Indeed, there can be much spiritual damage.

So if this verse was talking about gathering together for church services – and it is NOT – then God would certainly mean an assembly that He would approve of – one that is centered in Christ. But this verse is NOT talking about attending church.

I am aware that most of us are absolutely blinded by religious tradition. We are taught how to read INTO the Bible our traditional interpretations. And Hebrews 10:25 is a verse that has fallen prey to this tendency as much as

any other. It's not only taken out of context, but the translation isn't the greatest as well -- which merely feeds the confusion. So in order to get the full meaning of this passage I must start reading all the way back in verse 19:

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.

Does that say, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into CHURCH by the blood of Jesus?" No, this is talking about personal communion with God, and the fact that it is only in Christ that the individual believer has communion with God. Christianity is, "CHRIST IN YOU," the individual. This is the very definition of Christianity. Christ is IN YOU even if you do not go to church. You ARE the church.

So this passage begins with this great Truth. It says, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." It goes on to say:

By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh. And having a high priest over the house of God.

So Christ is our high priest both personally and collectively. But because He is our high priest – and because IN HIM we have entered into the holiest – the passage continues:

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Now stop there for a moment. So far in this passage God is speaking to our personal communion with Him through the Person of Jesus Christ, who dwells in us. As High Priest, Jesus is the one mediator between the individual Christian and God. And this is not based merely

upon what he did. Of course what He did is a MUST. But Jesus is our mediator by His very presence in us. We are joined to Him and made one spirit with Him. But He is one spirit with the Father. Thus, we are one with God through him – which is what is pictured by the HOLIEST place that we enter through His Blood.

And so that's the context here in the initial part of this passage -- the personal relationship and access to God given to each believer God through Jesus Christ, our High Priest and Mediator. Now to verse 23:

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith.

The KJV translates the last word of this sentence as FAITH. But the word really ought to be translated HOPE. There are specific Greek words that mean FAITH or HOPE, and this is the word that means HOPE. And so this verse really says, "Let us hold fast the profession – or confession -- of our hope.

But what HOPE is this verse talking about? This is important to understand because we are told to hold fast to the profession of this HOPE. We dare not forget it, or let it slip.

We need to turn only to Colossians 1:27:

Christ in you, the HOPE of glory.

Christ in us during this age is our great HOPE – yes, for salvation – but He is our great hope of glory – He is our great hope that we might experience the glory of God in the eternal ages. Can we see that the word HOPE points towards the future? Sure. Christ is in us right now -- and because He is in us, we have everything IN HIM that God has to give us. God has wrapped up everything He is, and everything He has, in the Person of Jesus Christ. And Christ is in us right now. But we are not going to have time

or occasion to experience much of the eternal riches that God has given us in Christ during this age. We cannot fully experience all that Christ is as long as we live in this mortal body. Thus, Christ in us is our great HOPE for the next age. Christ in us points to the resurrection of the dead – points to that DAY when we will either be changed, or raised from the dead, and be able to fully realize Him.

Another way to express this is as follows: In this age, Christ is in us, and is our hope of glory. But when Christ returns and all in Christ are changed, Christ will then no longer be our hope of glory, but we will fully realize His glory.

This is the great HOPE of the believer – that we will realize the fullness of all that Jesus Christ is. That we will experience the redemption, not only of our human spirit -- but also of our soul and body. This will happen in the resurrection at the return of Christ, when all who have ever been in Christ will be caught up with Him.

John, the apostle, wrote of this great event in his first epistle:

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)

The verse could be paraphrased, "It has never yet been made manifest what we shall be, but we know that when what we are in Christ is manifested, that it will be out of His likeness, and that this will enable us to see Him as He is." This is based on the original Greek (per M.R. Vincent). It is an awesome thought. If you think about this, it means that at the resurrection Christ will be FULLY manifested through us -- without the limits of the natural. This is what does not appear now, but it is what

we shall ultimately be through Him – a vessel for HIS GLORY.

This is the same Truth as given in I Cor. 13:12: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." And, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (I Cor. 2:9) These are tremendous promises that are spoken of throughout the NT. They speak of God's eternal purposes for the ages yet to come – this is what He is preparing for His saints. It is supposed to be our HOPE – Christ in us NOW is the great HOPE that we will experience His glory THEN.

Well, back to Hebrews 10. It says there, "Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He is faithful that promised." This is talking about, yes, the fact that Christ is in us now -- but it is also telling us to hold fast to the confession of our great HOPE based upon CHRIST IN US – the hope that we will be caught up in the air with all of the saints and begin to fully experience the glory of the Person of Jesus Christ. That is the confession – that is the hope to which we are to hold fast.

Now we are ready to read Hebrews 10:25 in context:

Let us hold fast the profession of our HOPE without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see THE DAY approaching.

Now, this is where we misunderstand. This passage is not saying that we should not, "forsake or neglect going to church." No. Rather, it is saying that we must not forsake the HOPE – we must not forsake the hope of our

assembling together – of being gathered together in resurrection -- at the return of Jesus.

This is THE great hope. And this passage is telling us in verse 23 to HOLD FAST to that hope, and it is likewise telling us in verse 25 not to FORSAKE that hope. It is the same thought on the same issue. It is saying, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope -- for He is faithful that has promised – do not forsake the hope that Jesus is going to gather us up together and assemble us together with him at His coming. Don't forsake that great hope -- because it has now become the manner of many to forsake that hope.” We do read elsewhere in the New Testament that some believers were either doubting the return of the Lord, or were saying that Jesus had already come. Indeed, Jesus Himself spoke of those who would forsake that hope and instead become entangled in their personal lives.

So, the writer of Hebrews is saying to hold fast to the profession of your hope of His return – hold fast to the HOPE that is given through the indwelling of the Person of Jesus Christ -- our HOPE of glory. Hold fast to Him as your hope; do not forsake the hope of His gathering us up together with Him. Hold fast to the hope that Jesus Christ is going to assemble His body together at His return.

Now, if the passage ended there it would be clear what the writer of Hebrews is talking about. But it does not end there. The writer, after he exhorts us to HOLD FAST to the hope of Christ's return, and after he reiterates by telling us to not forsake that hope that we will be assembled together in resurrection, goes on to add:

***But exhorting one another: and so much the more,
as you see THE DAY approaching.***

Notice that: As you see THE DAY approaching. What day? Well, the day of HIS RETURN; the day in which the great hope that we are not to forsake will come to

pass. Rather, than forsake that hope, exhort one another -- so much the more as you see the day of that hope approaching."

This is the point to which the entire passage is pointing: The day in which the great H HOPE will no longer be a hope, but a reality. It is the day where, "Christ in you, the HOPE of glory," will become, "Christ in you, the realization of His glory."

This ought to put to rest all of the misinterpretation of this passage, and clear out all of the condemnation that comes upon people because of it. This verse is not talking about attending church. It is not a mandate to find fellowship. It is talking about the great HOPE of His coming to gather us together in Himself.

The God of All Grace

Do we realize the utter folly of thinking that the God of all grace would mandate as a law the very fellowship that is supposed to be IN His grace? Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is FREEDOM. There is NO condemnation. To take a verse like Hebrews 10:25 and turn it into a law that I put myself under is contrary to everything that God is, and contrary to everything that God does. Fellowship with other believers is to be of grace and freedom. I fellowship because I love God and want to fellowship. It would not be true fellowship otherwise.

Yet there are thousands of Christians that feel condemned because they can't find fellowship. They feel as if there is something wrong with them, or that they are missing out on God's will. Often this kind of thinking is affirmed by those who pastor churches – they tell folks that their eternal destiny is dependent upon church attendance. But this is all nothing more than dead religion at best, and pure error at worst. If you are saved, Christ is IN YOU. Personally and individually. You share His life

with Him. Thus, even if you do not have person to person fellowship with other Christians, you can have fellowship with HIM. Ask: Does that leave you lacking?

This does not eliminate or dismiss the value of fellowship. To walk and fellowship with other like-minded believers who have only the interests of God in mind – well, that would be wonderful. To be able to find edification through teaching, and relationships, is certainly God's will. But in this day and age, where heresy, error, and earthly Christianity reigns, such fellowship is not often found in big groups. It is more one-on-one. Or God shuts folks up to Himself.

Some folks act as if God simply needs to press a button and create fellowship groups that we can attend. The problem here is not God. The lack of healthy churches, and groups, is nothing more than evidence of how far individual believers have strayed from Jesus Christ as their life. Instead, the church is often their life. And where that is the case, God cannot simply create fellowship. He would have to completely demolish the existing earthly tent. Most folks could not take that. So God usually leaves things alone. He draws certain ones out of earthly Christianity and seeks to do a work in them, even if it means shutting them up to Himself.

The Eternal Ages

There are a couple of other passages where Paul speaks of God's purpose now working towards the eternal ages. For example, there is Ephesians 2:5:

Even when we were dead in sins, God has quickened us together with Christ. By grace you are saved. And He has raised us up together and made us to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

But there is a purpose for this – a purpose in the next age towards which God is working in this age:

That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

If we get nothing else out of this passage we ought to see that we are going to be spending the eternal ages seeing and receiving the exceeding riches of God's grace through Christ Jesus. Jesus Christ is eternal -- and so there will never be an end to what we will experience of Him. God is setting the stage for all of that HERE. It is essential and it's vital. But it is THERE that the fullness of it will be released.

Some other verses that speak of the same hope:

Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him. (1 Cor. 2:9)

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed IN US. (Rom. 8:18)

As noted earlier, the great HOPE of the believer is HIS GLORY. We must not forsake the hope that all of this is going to pass and that we can fully experience Jesus Christ. God wants to reveal the glory of Christ, not only TO US, but IN US.

Jesus Christ is going to return to this earth and when He does all the saints will be gathered up to meet Him. And all that God has accomplished in His people through Christ will then be fully released and experienced. It is only then that we will realize that what God accomplished in secret – in people who were isolated – was for the body as a whole. It is then that the FRUIT of

Jesus Christ – fruit that may have never been seen in this age -- will be fully manifested in His body during the next age.

www.goodnewsarticles.com

www.goodnewsaudio.com

The Good News Fellowship Facebook group