

How Scripture Can Guide Christians to Unity in the Twenty-first Century

**ARE WE
MISSING
SOMETHING?**

*Discovering God's House, God's Church, and
True Worship*

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Are We Missing Something?

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Conclusion

What Are We Missing?

We have now come to the end of our study. It is therefore time to try to draw together the various strands of what we have been looking at to draw some overall conclusions.

We began by exploring the glorious subject of God wanting to have a house on Earth among men and women, and that today it is intended to consist of people themselves and not physical structures. It is a spiritual house and it enjoys marvellous privileges, but there are also some important conditions attached. We saw that we should not assume, because we are believers in Christ and therefore eternally members of the church that is Christ's Body, that we are automatically in the house of God or that we can share in these privileges. There is more to it than that.

Then we saw that the practical requirement was for an identifiable people to be gathered together on Earth, and we examined God's prescription for this. We explored God's churches, beginning with the first ones in New Testament times, looking for the underlying pattern that He laid down for us to apply today. We saw that they were of God's own design and saints were in them because of His calling, not theirs. We saw again that there are great privileges and important requirements, and that the Lord is quite specific in His Word about how He wants these things done. We should not just assume therefore that any gathering of believers is automatically a church of God, or is part of His spiritual house.

Then we explored the supreme act of service to God, which is true worship. And we asked the questions: "What worship does God consider acceptable?" and "What can we offer that pleases Him?" We saw that more was involved than individual acts of worship, and we delved into the wonder of being allowed to worship together in spirit and truth in heaven itself as the holy priesthood.

Unity and the truth

In all this, we saw an emphasis on togetherness and collectivity. This does not downplay in any way the importance of our individual devotion and service to the Lord, but it shows the framework within which they should be applied. God is a God of unity. The godhead itself is united, three distinct persons in complete harmony. God always joins things that are alike, and

separates things that are different, just as He did at creation. He is not a God of mixtures or of compromise. Independence and isolation are not divine characteristics. He desires all of us as believers, with all our inherent diversity, to be harmonized through the work of His Spirit to become a complete reflection of His own Son, because He is the One in whom His Father gets His full delight.

But God is also a God of truth. He will not compromise His truth for the sake of unity. It must be “*the unity of the faith*.” Otherwise it would be a false unity, a facade. Believers who differ on fundamental teachings of Scripture, or who operate in isolation from each other, cannot function as one. They cannot worship collectively. This unity is much more than an aggregation of individuals, such as separate body parts. It is like a complete body which is operating with all its faculties fully coordinated.

This all has to do with our identity, who we are for God. It is all about our particular relationships with Him, and the spiritual position that we have been given. The privileges and the obligations flow from the position.²⁷ Neglecting either our spiritual condition or our position results in a relationship that is sadly lacking. We must be concerned with both.

We have seen and enjoyed the fact that each believer is eternally a member of the church the Body of Christ, an indissoluble union that can never be taken away or spoiled. In that spiritual reality, we are one, but we have also seen that becoming a member of it is not the end of our spiritual journey but rather a necessary starting point. The essential point for us is that this oneness needs to be reflected in practice in the way that God has prescribed.

We have discovered that God intends disciples of the Lord Jesus in these days to be gathered together in a community, linked place by place, in full adherence to all of the Lord’s teaching for us, as revealed through His Word by the Holy Spirit. He calls those gatherings “churches of God.” It was to disciples gathered in this way that the New Testament epistles were written and to whom they applied. It would be presumptuous of us to say that what was written to them also applies to us today if we are not similarly

²⁷ Marriage illustrates this point. God has provided the relationship of marriage for men and women, in which He intends love and intimacy to be expressed. When a husband and wife enter into the position of being a married couple, God joins them, but the ongoing quality of that marriage depends on the love they show within it. Neither intimacy without the commitment of marriage, nor a loveless marriage, fulfills what God designed.

gathered together by God.

How the Body grows up

The practical implication of us being members of the Body of Christ on Earth is that we are inter-dependent – dependent on Christ our Head, and on one another. We are each intended to serve a particular purpose, and we have been equipped by Him to do it. We need each other, and we need to be properly connected to each other, in order to fulfill this purpose. If any Body part is missing, disjointed, or not fulfilling its assigned part, the whole is weakened.

How then are we to mature towards this “measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ?” The prescription for this is given, as we have seen, in chapter 4 of Ephesians, verses 11 to 16:

- Each of us is to carefully avoid all wrong teaching, and instead speak the truth of God to each other in love.
- We are to apply this truth to ourselves, and so grow up in Christ.
- As each one of us receives the enabling grace from Christ, we should minister to those we have contact with, also in love.
- We should all aspire to continue this process until we reach a mutual and correct understanding and application of the teaching of the Lord in our lives, and a full enjoyment of every aspect of our relationship with Him.

For us as living members of the Body of Christ to truly aspire to this goal, it is necessary to learn and put into practice the truths from Scripture that we have been discovering.

Knowledge and information about the things of God requires diligent study of the Scriptures these days, usually aided by competent teachers, which God supplies. But what is also needed is a deep heart conviction about these things, which gives rise to a passion to apply them fully in our lives. Even after we have acquired the knowledge, and all our questions have been answered, that conviction and passion can only come from God Himself. If we are sincerely seeking after God’s truth, we will earnestly ask for it (Hebrews 11:6).

The obligation of revelation

When God shows us a truth from Scripture, it puts us under two obligations. Firstly, it obligates us to live it, to put it into practice ourselves. Otherwise it will be nothing more than a theory. God does not entrust us with a

revelation of His truth just so that we might know about it, or to satisfy our curiosity. Secondly, it obligates us to share it with others as we have opportunity, since that is the means that God normally uses to spread His truth.

If what has been covered in the pages of this book is indeed according to the mind of God, then it leaves each one of us with certain inescapable conclusions:

- If the church I am associated with does not adhere faithfully to the full teaching of the Lord, in active fellowship with all other such churches, it cannot be a scriptural “church of God.”
- If I am not in a church of God, I cannot be part of God’s house on Earth, nor in the kingdom of God.
- If I am not in the house of God, I cannot participate in the collective heavenly sanctuary worship of the holy priesthood, which is the pinnacle of human experience and service today.
- If I am not in God’s church, not in God’s house, and not able to engage in this true worship, I am obviously missing something very vital in my Christian experience, no matter what else of value I may be doing.

If this is in fact the case, the answer to the overriding question of this book, “Am I Missing Something?” would have to be a resounding “yes!” This may sound distressing, and yet it can be the starting point for wonderful advancement in the things of God.

If God does in fact have a particular way that He wants disciples to gather, why would I want to be anywhere else, regardless of whatever natural attraction other places may have? We all have our own personal preferences about things and our comfort zones. And we can so easily make implicit assumptions about things in Scripture, without checking them out to be sure. One purpose of this book has been to challenge some of those assumptions, as they have been challenged in my own life, to force us to examine what the Scriptures really say and really mean. The test of our faith, then, will be our willingness to act on what is revealed to us.

Our natural tendency may be to accept things that are familiar to us, until they are challenged, or until an issue affects us personally. Even then, we can tend to change our beliefs and convictions only grudgingly. We don’t normally do it just because someone else tells us to, or because a different point of view is presented. We do it because we have discovered it for ourselves, at a time in our life when it is important to us, when the answers matter to us. Discovering these answers for ourselves can be hard work. There

is no shortcut.

Does it matter?

It is important to keep in mind that these are not just fine points of difference between Christians, debatable points of theology, things that are of secondary importance. These are fundamental issues about who we are and what we do as followers of Jesus Christ. They are of supreme importance to the Lord Himself. We know how He feels about these things. For example, we know about His zeal for God's house, by how He reacted to the money-changers in the temple when they were abusing it. We know how He feels about the church of God, because of how He took Saul's persecution of it so personally. And we know how He feels about true worship, because He died in order to make it possible for us to be a priesthood to His God and Father. The whole subject is at the very heart of the things of God. Paul told the elders of Ephesus that the church of God is something "...*which He purchased with His own blood*" – literally, "the blood of His own" (Acts 20:28).

This book is sent out as an appeal to my fellow members of the Body of Christ out of a deep conviction that many believers today may be unaware of these vital truths, even though they may be greatly pleasing to the Lord in their devotion to the truths that have been shown to them. It is when we are obedient to what we already know that God tends to show us more. There are disciples today who are putting into practice these glorious truths, and who long to share them with others.

If this book causes any believer to examine these things from God's Word, openly and humbly, it will have served its purpose. To that end, I pray:

"...that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever" (1 Peter 4:11).

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