

# Operation: *Divine Impact!*

In warfare, specific code names are often given to designated military campaigns. Some, if not most, of you would be familiar with such well-known endeavors as Operation *Overlord* of World War II fame, or Operation *Desert Storm* from the 1991 Gulf War, or certainly the very recent Operation *Enduring Freedom* and Operation *Anaconda* given to the retaliatory attacks against the Taliban and Al Qaeda networks in Afghanistan.

Well, I would submit to you that we believers and followers of Yahweh are indeed in a time of warfare! Accordingly, therefore, I propose a code word by which the fighting force of the Almighty might go forth into battle, and that code word is: **OPERATION: DIVINE IMPACT!**

Given the gravity of the world condition today, what is to be said for the condition of the *ekklesia*. It would seem, as mankind continues in its downward moral spiral, and as one prophetic scenario after another

leaps off the pages of our newspapers and from our television screens, that the Body of true believers in this world would be coming together more and more, resolving their differences and healing their divisions, uniting together to withstand the onslaught of evil in the world and giving powerful testimony of the truth to a dying human race! But I am not fully persuaded that this is actually what is transpiring.

Today, it seems that the various parts of the Body are going off in every conceivable direction. Since the Bible itself utilizes this analogy, let's think of a human body for a moment. For it to perform as it is designed, every single part, large or small, seen or unseen, must be healthy, actively involved, doing its designated part. That kind of body is focused and unified, not divided asunder. It has the most powerful leader in the form of the human brain and mind, and every member is directly connected to that head. Each body part has its proper arena of operation, knows it well, and performs it perfectly. That body is strong, efficient, in harmony, able, aware,

courageous, active, and involved. And it gets the job done! It produces good fruit, and that fruit is not hidden!

I have always found it very compelling that Yahweh saw fit to record the experiences of only that initial generation of believers, from say around 30 A.D. until about the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.—an incredible 40-year span during which the New Testament Church sprang to life and the endeavor to preach the gospel to the world commenced. In order to discover the facts concerning other eras of Church history, one has to consult non-Biblical sources.

Unfortunately, the modern-day Church has, to a great extent, followed the patterns of the world, which means that instead of going back to that first-century, divinely inspired model recorded in the Bible, most have simply adhered to their own ideas or those of other equally fallible men. The secret to the success of the earliest believers is contained within the New Testament record, and if we are to

be successful in this generation, then that is precisely where we must go, and where we will find the formula that we are going to have to adopt.

I know that many of you have heard the plea to return to our first-century roots. Maybe we've heard it too much, but we still haven't done it yet. The early assembly started out with a bang, and their initial work was outstanding. But we know that the good qualities so prevalent among that first band of brethren was later found lacking and in need of being revived. By the time of the apostle Jude, writing in the mid-60's A.D., things had gotten well off-track, compelling him to write:

**“Beloved, my whole concern was to write to you in regard to our common salvation, but I find it necessary and indeed am compelled to urgently appeal to you to contend for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. For certain men have crept in stealthily...ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into lawlessness, and deny our sole Master, Yahshua the Messiah...These men revile anything they do not happen to understand...Woe to them!...It is these who are SETTING UP DISTINCTIONS AND CAUSING DIVISIONS” (Jude).**

I don't know about you, but this passage sounds as though it was written this morning!! And please notice carefully the cure that Jude promotes to heal this

condition in the Body. He states, and I will repeat it for your consideration:

**“It is necessary that I write you, and exhort that you should EARNESTLY CONTEND FOR THE FAITH ONCE DELIVERED UNTO THE SAINTS” (Jude 3).**

He is telling these latter first-century believers to GO BACK TO THEIR ROOTS, back to the faith that was first delivered unto the original saints. In other words, in today's terms, he would be saying, **“Go back to the beginning, to Acts 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, etc.”** I frankly cannot imagine a more pertinent passage of Scripture for our time today.

Now when I say go back to the first-century model, I am not necessarily referring to adopting a so-called *Jewish* approach. I am not speaking of style, but substance. I am talking about at least 7 major areas in which the early Church excelled, and which set the gold standard for the Body of Messiah for all ages. These 7 special attributes of the early disciples, interestingly enough, are all mentioned in one very short passage of Scripture in Acts 2:42-47.

Beginning with Acts 2:42, let's take a look at these 7 crucial elements of the early New Testament Church model. After Peter's famous sermon, it is said that 3,000 believers were baptized that very day, and of them we read in verse 42:

**“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship.”**

1. First of all, they all continued

faithfully in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles. The earliest believers made a point to fellowship with the original apostles. This was extremely important, because of the special calling, experience, and gifting of these exemplary leaders, and spending time with them, listening to their teaching, knowing that it came directly from the mouth of the Messiah, knowing that they knew Him intimately, added immeasurably to the strengthening of the early Church. And it is for this very reason that we must be compelled to GO BACK and, as Jude once said, CONTEND for the faith once delivered unto the saints—that pure teaching communicated by Yahshua to His earliest devoted followers. We must insist on this being done, and accept no substitutes, ridding ourselves of the trappings of religion and the regulations, controls, and agendas of men—all of which have been added to the original doctrine of the apostles, and that teaching has no need for any additions or alterations whatsoever!

When the passage says that these early believers continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, it really means more than the fact that they remained faithful to the original teaching. This was the beginning of equipping the original disciples to become teachers themselves! That the followers were expected to become teachers is made crystal clear by Paul in Hebrews 5:12, where he admonishes the believers, saying:

**“For even though by this time you ought to be teachers, you actually need someone to teach you over again the very first principles of God’s Word. You have come to need milk, not solid food. For everyone who continues to feed on milk is obviously inexperienced and unskilled in the doctrine of righteousness, for he is a mere infant, not even able to talk yet! But solid food is for those who are full-grown, for those whose senses are trained by practice to distinguish between what is good and what is evil” (Heb. 5:12-14).**

Am I saying that *all* of us need to become teachers of the Word? Yes, absolutely! Now you may say, “But aren’t just some to be teachers and others are to perform some other function?” That is correct, but that is not the issue to which I’m referring. Being specially gifted as a teacher by the Holy Spirit is not the same as becoming a teacher through, as Hebrews 5:14 says, having one’s senses thoroughly trained by practice to discern between good and evil. You see, this is a responsibility and opportunity afforded to all members of the Body. Does that mean that every single believer will be conducting formal classes or speaking to casts of thousands? Of course not! But we all should fully realize that the knowledge we have received carries with it a responsibility to share that knowledge with someone else, be it one, a few, or many. We teach in numerous ways, and certainly not the least is

in how we comport ourselves before others. Our actions will always speak louder than our words.

Ideally, we teach through the channel of the spiritual gift or gifts that we have been given. Unfortunately, many believers equate spiritual gifts with the ability to speak, and thus they tend to exclude themselves. But take a look at the list of gifts. Most of them are not even primarily speaking gifts. Rather they involve doing, showing forth the goodness of God in serving others. This kind of conduct is not generally thought of as teaching, but it surely is. The important thing, of course, is do you truly know how you have been gifted by God, based upon the description and definition found in the Scriptures? If not, then it is likely that you are being hindered in how you fit and function as a part of the Body, and this therefore ought to become a priority for you.

Why specify fellowship? Because this was one of the necessary ingredients to their success. The times of fellowship, which appear to have been many and often, were among the greatest sources of encouragement, exhortation, strengthening, comfort, and peace those early believers had at their disposal. In fact, given the arduous task confronting them, this kind of positive fellowship was absolutely indispensable—and so must it be for us today.

Fellowship, however, was by no means limited to that of the apostles; but also with one another. And, in discussing this subject, let us not think of fellowship so much in

terms of just joking around, making small talk, or enjoying only a physical situation for physical purposes. Those things have their rightful place, and are of value; but we already are experts on such things. Considering fellowship in terms of our helping one another in our various struggles, of lifting burdens, of praying for one another, of answering each other’s questions and concerns, of witnessing to one another of the good things God has done, of sharing real insight into our calling and into the Word, of lifting up and building up each other, of keeping in close contact, of spurring one another on to righteousness and good works, puts an entirely different and far more profitable light on the subject of fellowship. It should have a genuine purpose, a focus. Hebrews 10:24-25 encourages us in this regard, by saying:

**“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some; but encouraging one another: and so much the more, as you see the day of Messiah approaching.”**

And certainly the importance of this issue was emphasized by Paul numerous times in his writings as well. For instance, in I Corinthians 14, we read:

**“Follow after love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy...For he that prophesies speaks unto people for their EDIFICATION, and**

**exhortation, and comfort...Forasmuch as you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that you may EXCEL to the EDIFYING of the Church...What then, brethren, is the right course? When you meet together, one of you has a hymn, another a teaching, or a revelation, or a tongue, or an interpretation. But let everything be constructive and EDIFYING for the good of all” (I Cor. 14:1, 3, 12, 26).**

Note the word *edification*. We derive the word *edifice* from it. As you know, an *edifice* is a *building, especially a large one of imposing appearance and structure*. To *edify*, therefore, means to *build up*. Every generation of believers should be adding toward the full completion and perfecting of God’s building. One of the most effective ways of contributing to the quality of the Body of Christ is to use the time we have together to *build up or edify* one another. This is an oft-neglected aspect, yet it is perhaps the most valuable of all the potential fruits of fellowship.

Fellowship is also for the purpose of truly getting to know one another. It is so common to see a brother or sister on the Sabbath, and have absolutely no contact with them after that until the next time you should happen to be together. Think of fellowship as providing God’s opportunity for members of the Body to become **FRIENDS**, not simply remain acquaintances, whom we might see from week to

week, but whom we really don’t *know*. The more each part of the Body becomes familiar and friendly with the other parts, it creates a tremendous spiritual synergy that greatly enhances the local assembly and the Church as a whole.

And fellowship should also be a catalyst for the development of common goals—common goals with regard to what and how the local assembly intends to function internally and operate externally. Each separate congregation ought to be developing and setting specific objectives with respect to how and where God is leading them in the Spirit. If we do not come together and put this into practice, the chances of our even surviving, much less being very effective as an instrument in the Messiah’s hands are slim indeed, because the work just will not ever get done!

2. Aspect number 2 from the early New Testament Church model is found in the very next phrase of Acts 2:42, where we read:

**“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in BREAKING OF BREAD.”**

It is rather interesting and even intriguing that the *breaking of bread*, which was obviously a common practice among these early disciples, should be mentioned in context with these other seemingly more important characteristics. I mean, after all, everyone eats food. Well, in many respects, this would almost surely include shared communal meals in the various

meeting places, usually homes, and most of us are fully acquainted with the joy and value to this practice, for it adds immeasurably to the atmosphere most conducive to fellowship, interaction, and sharing of the truth among ourselves.

There are, however, an increasing number of believers who, in seeking to return to the Jewish roots of the faith, are coming to believe that this particular phrase is connected, not only to eating regular meals, but also to partaking of bread and wine. There is an abundance of evidence certainly from the second century onward, that this practice was in vogue very, very early on, and I would submit to you that it is quite possible that this phrase is indeed making a reference to such occurrences.

Now, before we go any farther, I already am well aware that, for many people in the faith today, the partaking of bread and wine at any time other than the annual Passover is just anathema, and they simply will not hear of it. Frankly, I am personally persuaded that the practice of taking bread and wine in honor of the Messiah’s death on a basis more often than merely once a year is something that ought to be carefully considered by believers today. Of course, this in no way, shape, or form has anything whatsoever to do with either abrogating or lessening the importance and meaning of the Passover celebration.

In our own local assembly, we have studied this issue openly,



and, even though a number of the brethren were opposed to the idea at first, by the time we were through, everyone had come to an agreement that the Bible simply does not prohibit such a practice, and may very well encourage it. This is particularly true with respect to Paul's statement in I Corinthians 11, where he says:

**“For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you do show the Lord’s death till He come” (I Cor. 11:26).**

For literally millennia of time, the practice of consuming bread and wine has been practiced. It may well go back to the incident when Melchizedek met Abraham after his spectacular victory, and brought forth bread and wine. The Jewish custom known as the *kiddush* incorporates these very two items, and is often partaken of at the beginning of the Sabbath or a holyday. So, my personal sense is that this subject probably deserves more consideration from people of our background than it has received in the past. There may be more to it than meets the eye, and, if so, it cannot help but be of relevance and importance to believers today.

3. Point number 3 in our discussion is also found in the last short phrase of Acts 2:42, and reads as follows:

**“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in PRAYERS.”**

The early saints were a praying, worshiping people, and they did it **TOGETHER!** We know, of course, that both prayer and worship can and should be done on a personal level as well, but, here again, there is something significant to be said for doing these things together. Praying and worshiping together was a hallmark of the early Church. In many of our past affiliations, the average person did not really get much, if any, opportunity to speak in any venue whatsoever, whether it be prayer (unless designated by the hierarchy), sharing testimony, teaching, encouraging, admonishing, correcting, even asking questions, or virtually anything else we find lying idly on the pages of our Bibles!! There was little or no spontaneity, almost no room or tolerance for new ideas or input, even worship itself was relegated to a truly *back burner* status! Is it any wonder that we see such a disparity between what we read of the early New Testament Church and our own day?

Dropping down to verse 46, we see that the early believers continued to meet daily at the Temple. Why do such a thing as convene at a Jewish temple, when they were supposed to be New Testament Christians? I think the main reason, although not the only one, is shown in Acts 3:1. Note what it says:

**“Now Peter and John went up together into the Temple at the hour of PRAYER, being the ninth hour.”**

The Temple was a place of prayer, no, it was **THE** place of prayer. Praying together as believers was a big, big deal at that time, and,

frankly, it needs to become a really big deal with God’s people today. As we continue to remove ourselves from the old structure of things, the atmosphere and opportunity to learn how to pray collectively as an assembly ought to emerge more and more. This approach to prayer has great significance, and it has the ability to be extremely productive.

The early Church was not only a praying Church, and we see that fact clearly demonstrated over and over again in a number of instances in the opening chapters of Acts (i.e., Acts 1:14, 2:42, 3:1, 4:24, 6:4, 12:5, 12, 13:3, etc.), but also a worshiping Church. Note in Acts 2:47, the words *praising God* are included, and this certainly pertains to worshiping the Creator. Group worship should not be heavily regulated, because it almost always has a stifling effect upon what ought to be inspired, spontaneous praising of God. Of course, we must always keep in mind that doing all things in order and for spiritual edification must be maintained, but that being said, there are probably not a lot of rules that ought to be laid down. The traditional churches of God would profit greatly if they all would go back to the Bible and really discern how the righteous servants of old worshiped and praised the Almighty. As you may know, there are numerous passages which detail a form of worship quite different from that to which we have generally been exposed. And I firmly believe that this is a missing dynamic in many assemblies throughout the world, and very well

may be a definite factor in the disparity between the earliest disciples and ourselves.

Remember that Yahshua said, **“Where two or three are gathered in My name, there I will be in the midst of them.”** I tell you, there is something very powerful and effective about the saints being together and doing things together, and certainly prayer and worship would come right at the top of the list in this regard, and it was unquestionably one of the keys to the stunning success of the early disciples.

4. Point number 4 is found in the next verse of Acts 2, where we read:

**“And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles” (Acts 2:43).**

Perhaps on first reading, this verse may not seem to convey a substantive aspect of the early Church model, but it's there. Note that it speaks of signs and wonders that were performed. The point in question is the fact that these earliest believers were absolutely convinced the Holy Spirit could and would work through each of them personally and individually to achieve the will of the Eternal. It is remarkable and ever so sad how greatly this quality has been lost through the succeeding centuries of time. It was not all that long before the idea of being personally empowered by the Spirit became a relic of the past. As time went on, it became

increasingly the fashion to attribute the Biblical statements with regard to the individual believer's spiritual empowerment to an elite few who set themselves up as rulers over the household of God. This, as much as any other single thing, precipitated the demise of the early Church, as well as those who came after them, who continued and even increased the wrong focus on this issue of truth.

If we just stop for a moment and consider what the difference would be between a people who genuinely believed that God could and would work directly through each of them, and those who felt that something like that was really the province of the *ministry*, not themselves. I tell you it would make all the difference in the world. I direct your attention back to the last few verses of Luke's gospel. Speaking to those early disciples, Christ charged them, saying:

**“You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I will send forth upon you what My Father has promised; but remain in the city of Jerusalem until you are CLOTHED WITH POWER FROM ON HIGH” (Lk. 24:48-49).**

Then to the companion passage in the first chapter of Acts, where, beginning in verse 4, we read of Yahshua:

**“And while being in their company and eating at the table with them, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, of which, He said, you have heard Me speak. For John baptized with water, but not**

**many days from now you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit...And you shall receive POWER, ABILITY, AND MIGHT when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the very bounds of the whole earth” (Acts 1:4-5, 8).**

These early believers were convinced that they were to receive something powerful, something mighty, something that would enable them to be and to do what they could not otherwise accomplish—a genuine power that was not their own! And remember Paul told Timothy that we have not received the spirit of fear, but rather what? The Spirit, first, of **POWER!**

Now we know for a fact that the early disciples did indeed receive power from on high. The 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Acts tells us all about it. These new believers were transformed on that day of Pentecost, and did and said things they would not have dreamed of achieving. They were, in fact, first compelled and consequently propelled into their divine calling.

And this power did not leave them after that day of Pentecost. They believed it was still available, that it would genuinely work and produce through them words and acts that they simply were not humanly able to accomplish. We know this is true, because we read precisely their state of mind in Acts 4. When Peter and John had been set free

from prison, we are told that they immediately returned unto the company of believers. Now let's pick up the story beginning in Acts 4:23:

**“After they were permitted to go, the apostles returned to their own company, and told all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. And they (the whole group) heard it, lifted up their voices together with ONE UNITED MIND to God and said, O Sovereign Lord, You are He who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them...And now, Lord, observe their threats, and grant to your bond servants full freedom to declare Your message fearlessly, while You stretch out Your hand to heal, and to perform signs and wonders through the authority and by the power of the name of Your holy child Yahshua. And when they had prayed, the place in which they were assembled was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they continued to speak the Word of God with freedom, boldness, and courage” (Acts 4:23-24, 29-31).**

I know that perhaps you have heard many words about this powerful incident in the Scriptures. Maybe those words have encouraged you and maybe not, I don't know. But I ask you to put yourselves in the place of these early converts. Consider their state of mind when, upon hearing Peter and John's testimony, they immediately

started praying together with one mind and heart, and not just for anything—they didn't ask for money or possessions or things; they really didn't even ask for something like protection or deliverance. No, they dared to ask the unspeakable, the unbelievable, the impossible. Right then, right there, they asked for direct Spirit power to be openly manifested, healings, signs, and wonders performed in the name of Yahshua, so that, I repeat, **SO THAT**, the gospel could be preached boldly and without fear or restriction!! And there wasn't just silence when they finished praying. They didn't go their separate ways until they could meet again. They didn't form a committee to discuss it all and draw up a statement of beliefs. No, the whole room was shaken, and the very thing they asked for actually happened, and, just as they had prayed, the Word was successfully preached with boldness and power!

I have become convinced that this episode cannot and should not remain simply some isolated event that we, as believers, cannot connect to and profit from. I think that this has happened, perhaps not by actual design, but has happened nevertheless. We seem to always have the tendency to take the manifestations of the Spirit that we read about in the Bible and either apply them and their significance to someone else, or assume that they just don't apply at all! Because we don't fully understand such things, and may not have experienced what we read about in the Scriptures, we fear what the Bible terms *manifestations of the Spirit*, and we therefore tend to rationalize our way around them.

After all, we have to cope somehow with the fact that there is a clear and present disparity between some of the events, attitudes, approaches, patterns, promises, and accomplishments that are in the Word contrasted with what we actually see transpiring in our own personal lives. And, in doing so, we become less and less able to perceive ourselves as truly empowered servants of an all-powerful God! It works against us.

The Messiah spoke plainly when He told the disciples that after He ascended to heaven, He would send the Spirit. Now, when you read that promise, do you believe that it applies to you as a child of God today? Sure you do, and you should! Do you believe that the Spirit given to the early Church is the same Spirit that was promised to all true saints? Sure you do and you should! Do you believe that the apostle Paul when he tells us in detail how the Spirit manifests itself in and through the various members of the Body, and that this graphic description applies across the board in all ages of time, not just the first century? I'm sure that you do and you should!

Those first-century believers gathered in that room, when confronted with the challenge of preaching the gospel, did something that should give us a strong clue as to this particular secret to their success. Instead of praying for more money, more radio stations, more buildings and furnishings, they asked the Almighty for His direct divine power to be manifested through

each of them that they might speak the Word with boldness. And what they received in return was not what we have and utilize. They received the power of God, not the technical marvels of man. When they went out to witness, they were doing things and saying things that no one else was accomplishing. They were unique, not just another religious group vying for exposure on television!! The very fact that they prayed for the supernatural power of Yahweh to be displayed has to be directly connected to their successful and bold preaching of the gospel. There's no getting a round it! I submit to you that it is high time that we believers today began to give serious thought as to how such examples are applicable to us and the work that lies ahead. Are we going to literally go back to the New Testament model and believe what we read, and practice what is preached, or are we going to continue the *hit & miss* approach of men? After all, we've seen the other methods tried, but have we really gotten into how the early Church functioned when they were at their best? It would seem to me that the future of preaching the fullness of the gospel and doing so effectively is going to have to have its origins in the personal empowerment of Yahweh's servants upon the earth, in the manifestation and demonstration of the Spirit. And yes, I know that we have been conditioned not to think in such terms, but we do so at the peril of violating the Scriptures and rendering ourselves weak and devoid of real fruitful impact upon

this world.

5. Point number 5 is certainly one of the most important to the success of the early believers, and that was their willingness to **SACRIFICE**. In fact, some of their actions in this regard might even appear to be rather extreme! For instance, we read in the latter portion of Acts 2 a somewhat strange occurrence. After some 3000 believers were baptized on that auspicious day of Pentecost, beginning in verse 44, we read the following:

**“And all that believed were together, and had ALL THINGS IN COMMON. And SOLD their POSSESSIONS and goods, and parted them to all men, as everyone had need” (Acts 2:44-45).**

This kind of behavior probably seems a little bizarre to us today. But should it really? As far as I know, this practice was not a custom common to that era, so to blame it on a vast difference in time does not hold water. This was, in fact, simply a demonstration of the Holy Spirit affecting a **GROUP** of believers. We tend to think primarily in terms of the individual being led of the Spirit, but the New Testament presents to us the case of a people banded and bonded together by the indwelling power and presence of the Spirit, and I can tell you with authority that this kind of thing is indeed one of the missing dynamics in today's Church.

The point, lest anyone get the wrong idea, is not that every believer of all time is supposed to sell everything he has and live in a commune somewhere. What these

early saints did was the result of a supreme spirit of sacrifice for the cause. It shows conclusively where their hearts were, what was most important to them, and it certainly was not in acquiring more and more and doing everything possible to hold on to it! They believed in and practiced spontaneous giving. They actually did not consider what they had as being solely their own, but for the best possible use according to the will of God.

This practice was not confined to the day of Pentecost either, for we read at the conclusion of Acts 4 the following:

**“Neither was there a ny among them that lacked: for as man as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas (which is, being interpreted, *The son of consolation*), a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet” (Acts 4:34-37).**

Now it is very instructive to notice something in both of these episodes we just read. In each instance, please remember that there is not one hint that just because the funds were brought to the apostles, that they in any way, shape, or form, took it for themselves, or even took a substantial portion of it. Instead,



every single individual's needs were considered and provided for, so that no one lacked anything. I'll leave it to you to your own imagination as to how different this practice was compared to the experience you and I have had in organized religion, where the love of money and its misuse have been so prevalent. Indeed, from the latter first century on, this wrong practice has flourished, and the true faith turned into the *business* of religion, where the bottom line is everything, and I mean everything!

Even before the Acts 2-4 period, we see how the original apostles approached the issue of physical money and possessions. When they were called by the Messiah, in most instances, they left their jobs and businesses behind. Remember that Peter even said to Yahshua:

**“Lo, we have left ALL, and have followed You” (Mk. 10:28).**

And Peter was only falling in line with what the Savior had already taught when He said:

**“So likewise, whosoever he be of you that FORSAKES NOT ALL that he has, he cannot be My disciple” (Lk. 14:33).**

Is it possible that we modern-day believers have forgotten what the Bible actually says about sacrifice. We tend to think in terms of having a willingness to sacrifice, but the Scriptures don't even speak in such language. They talk not

about just being willing or saying you're willing, but genuinely **DOING IT!** Recall how many of the early disciples gave not only their fortunes, such as they may have been, but their comfort, security, freedom, and even their very lives! And I tell you that, it has nothing to do with the times in which they lived, as some would have you believe, that their era was just more dangerous, or that there were different purposes then than now. The reason they gave up so much was simply because they were convinced and convicted that this was **“IT”!!** That what they had suddenly become involved in was not just the most important thing transpiring on the earth—brethren, for them, it was the **ONLY THING GOING ON!!** And, frankly, I don't possess the words to express to you adequately enough just how significant this kind of attitude was to the success of those first believers who blazed a trail for us to follow!

Most of the time, we simply have too many things going on in our lives that are merely part and parcel with being human. Now obviously we are human, and, of course, there will always be certain things that must be a part of our physical lives. But it is so natural and easy for our time and energy and resources to be eaten up by the busyness of everyday life, and in many instances, these things that occupy such a high priority in our lives end up being *much ado about nothing!* How important are they really when it comes right down to it? I mean, that has to have been what the early disciples asked themselves. What is most important? What comes first? Does Yahweh have something in mind for me to fulfil, and, if so,

what and when and where and how? Am I walking in the footsteps of the Messiah? If so, then you will be walking both **AS HE WALKED & WHERE HE WALKED!**

Speaking of the sacrifice of the early believers, I am reminded of what is said in the latter part of Hebrews 10. In this passage, it is obvious that the brethren to whom this was written had begun to slip into a kind of spiritual drift, a taking for granted of their high calling, and they clearly needed a strong reminder of their origins, of how they felt, believed, sacrificed, and functioned early on, and the need to recapture that special quality in their lives. Beginning in verse 19, we read:

**“ N o w C A L L T O R E M E M B R A N C E T H E F O R M E R D A Y S, in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, while you were made a gazing stock, both by reproaches and afflictions, and you became companions of them that were so used. For you had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your own goods, knowing in yourselves that you have in heaven a better and enduring substance” (Heb. 10:32-34).**

Notice that the solution to the problem facing these believers is captured perfectly in the admonition to look back to where they came from, to recall the former days, when that entire initial effort to preach the gospel and lay the

foundation for the New Testament Church was undertaken. This is what we all have to do. Notice the teaching was that they should remember how that in those early days, they believed so strongly and were so single-mindedly focused that they willingly sacrificed everything they had. That was a hallmark of the earliest disciples, and it is something that we today must re-capture if we are duplicate their success.

6. The 6<sup>th</sup> characteristic of the early Church in Acts 2 is recorded for us in verse 46:

**“And they, continuing daily with ONE ACCORD.”**

I’ll stop right there, because if I don’t, it would be the easiest thing in the world to simply read right over point number 6! Notice the two words **ONE ACCORD.** This is the key.

The early *ekklesia* was without question or doubt—**UNIFIED!!** We know this to be a fact, because the New Testament record goes to great lengths to establish the absolute togetherness of those earliest adherents to the faith. Even before the day of Pentecost, we read in Acts 1 of the disciples:

**“And when they had entered the city, they went to the upper room...ALL of these with THEIR MINDS IN FULL AGREEMENT devote themselves steadfastly to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Yahshua,**

**and His brothers” (Acts 1:13-14).**

This testimony is followed by several other passages clearly stating the fact that these early believers were of one accord. In fact, Acts 2 begins precisely in this manner, saying:

**“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were ALL with ONE ACCORD in one place.”**

I would submit to you that among the earliest of saints, there was no division, such as occurred later, and such as we are witnessing today. In fact, the very act of separating either into opposing camps or simply individual believers going off on their own, is *prima facie* evidence that something is awry. Somewhere along the line, there has been a departure from the high standard set by the early Church with respect to unity.

Does that mean, therefore, that every single one of those disciples were in complete agreement in their understanding of every nuance of doctrine, or that all were growing at exactly the same rate—Were they merely robots or automatons? Of course not. We know for a fact that the thinking of every individual believer in that day wasn’t always precisely the same. They were human. They had their share of problems. At first, Paul clearly was not even accepted by the original apostles. They harbored suspicions and doubts about him.

Clearly, in Acts 6, we read of a certain set of negative circumstances. It is stated:

**“And in those days, when the**

**number of the disciples were multiplied, there arose a MURMURING of the Greeks against the Hebrews, because their women were being neglected in the daily administration of relief” (Acts 6:1).**

What about the instance when Peter came to Antioch, recorded in Galatians 2. And I suppose we could also cite the time when Paul and Barnabas clashed over the issue of whether to take John Mark with them on their second evangelistic journey; or the situation with Ananias and Sapphira, of the arguments over circumcision that arose during Paul’s ministry, and that a ctually precipitated a conference in Jerusalem.

I could probably come up with a few more examples, but these should suffice to prove the point that, in spite of difficulties, attitude problems, and certain differences in understanding, the unity and accord of these earliest believers remained intact. They were able either to resolve their problems, or, in other cases, to overlook them, or relegate them to a lesser position of importance. Whatever the situation, their desire for one another, their respect for one another, and their need for one another was clearly recognized, and they simply would not permit pettiness and personal differences to come between them, divide them, or conquer them. The calling was just too important, the common goals were just too significant, the work was just too demanding and

imperative, for them to allow anything or anyone to interfere with the unity they needed as members of the Body of Messiah to operate fully in the power of the Spirit!! And if we are to regain what has been lost; if we are to recapture what they had in the beginning, then we are going to have to come to this state of mind and heart with respect to believers in today's Church.

There is too much animosity, distrust, frustration, dissension, and division in the modern-day Body. And, from the latter first-century until this very moment, there has been far too much adoration of and dependence upon human leadership within the Body. Paul once asked the Corinthians the question: **"Is Christ divided?"** His reason for posing such a question? Simple. By the mid 50's A.D., the *ekklesia* was already beginning to show definitive signs of its own demise, for by that time the spirit of division had wormed its way into what was once a band of brothers that could not and would not be broken! Indeed, by the time Paul wrote I Corinthians, instead of believers rallying round Yahshua the Messiah, as had their earlier counterparts in Jerusalem, there were splits and schisms in the Body, with one group following a certain man, and another going after someone else. Paul put it like this in chapter 1:

**"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Yahshua Messiah, that you all speak the same thing, and that**

**there be NO DIVISIONS among you; but that you be perfectly JOINED TOGETHER in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are CONTENTIONS among you. Now this I say, that every one of you says, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas (Peter); and I of Messiah. IS CHRIST DIVIDED? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (I Cor. 1:10-13).**

He then picks up on this very same theme in chapter 3 by saying:

**"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto you were not able to bear it, neither yet now are you able. For you are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and DIVISIONS, are you not carnal, and walk according to MEN? For while one says, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are you not carnal?"** (I Cor. 3:1-4).

Can you see Paul's distinctly different approach. He was of the *old school*, so to speak. He recalled those earlier days when there was no such divisions as were being witnessed in the Church of that present day. He saw the deterioration that had occurred since those more pristine times when the Body was first formed. In those days, none of the believers were thinking in terms of which one of the apostles should they should follow. Such a spirit, common 25

years later in Corinth and some 1950 years later in the world of today, would have been deemed *anathema* in the early days. Then, the focus was on the Savior, his life, death, and resurrection. The bond forged among those brethren was strong and kept them together, not going off in all possible directions, and thus weakening the Body. It is simply a fact that as long as believers remain divided, unable to trust one another, in various opposing camps, or just drifting off on their own, the Church as we know it will never have the impact and fruit of the early disciples. For some, perhaps many, this will be acceptable. There may be others, however, who desire to walk in the footsteps of those righteous servants who have gone on before us, whose lives and work are chronicled in the pages of the New Testament. If you are one of those, then hopefully you are hearing what I want to convey.

Before leaving this 6<sup>th</sup> point of unity among the believers, let's bring to mind how clearly Paul understood that the most meaningless and trivial of things can often be the dividing point among fellow saints. In his instruction to Timothy, he states:

**"As I besought you to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that you might charge some that they teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which only engender QUESTIONS, rather than Godly edifying, which is in faith. Now the end of the commandment is**

love out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of unfeigned faith: from which some having swerved are turned aside unto vain jangling; desiring to be TEACHERS OF THE LAW; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (I Tim. 1:3-7).

And in his second letter to Timothy, he says:

**“Follow righteousness, faith, love, and peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But FOOLISH AND UNLEARNED QUESTIONS avoid, knowing that they only produce STRIFE” (II Tim. 2:22-23).**

And finally, to Titus, Paul writes:

**“This is a faithful saying...that they who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works, for these things are profitable unto men. But avoid FOOLISH QUESTIONS, and GENEALOGIES, and CONTENTIONS, and STRIVINGS ABOUT THE LAW, for they are UNPROFITABLE AND VAIN” (Titus 3:8-9).**

Frankly, I suppose it would be almost impossible to calculate how many of our current problems with regard to unity could be solved and put to rest if only these three passages were truly obeyed.

7. And finally, point number 7. Please note that in Acts 2:47, it is said of the very earliest brothers and sisters that they were:

**“Praising God, and having FAVOR WITH ALL THE PEOPLE.”**

I’ll bet most of us have overlooked those few words most of the times we have ever read or heard that verse quoted. What would this phrase mean? Well, we know that it did not include having favor in every situation with the enemies of the faith, although even this happened at times, and still should today. It would seem that these words are meant to indicate that the early disciples did not live in a vacuum. They were not recluses, hidden away for fear of sharing the truth with others, and, and this is a big *and*, and they were very much involved in extending themselves to others in service. Living the life of Messiah among non-believers should result in the right kind of healthy interaction that produces the right kind of good fruit in the lives of others. These early believers gained favor in the sight of all the people for the very same reasons and in the very same as Yahshua Himself grew in grace and in favor with God and man.

We know for a fact that the Messiah was not afraid or ashamed to be seen in the company of people outside the faith, even rank sinners, in fact, often the lowest echelons of Jewish society, and being roundly and openly criticized for it. From my experience, many from our religious background have had a real aversion to the kind of openness so clearly evidenced in the life of the Savior. Remember that if we are to walk in

the footsteps of the Messiah, we must not only walk as He walked, but also *where* He walked. Yahshua went a bout do ing good, and encouraging others to do good. Yahshua busied Himself with helping others. He once posed a question to His followers, asking:

**“Who is greater, he that sits at the table, or he who waits on the table? Surely it is he who sits at dinner. But I am among you as one who serves.”**

And in His famous *Sermon on the Mount*, Christ stated:

**“You have heard that it has been said, You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy. But I say unto you, Love you enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you, and persecute you: that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven: for He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love them which love you, what reward have you? Do not even the publicans so? And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more than others? Do not even the publicans so? Therefore, become you perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:43-48).**

Clearly, one of the very identifying signs of true believers would have to be their inspired involvement in serving others, not just those of the household of faith.



It is said of Messiah that He became servant of all, and Paul wrote of Him in this fashion:

**“Let this same attitude and humble mind be in you which was in Messiah Yahshua. Let Him be your example, Who, although being essentially one with God, did not think this kind of equality was a thing to be eagerly grasped and retained; but rather stripped Himself of all privileges and rightful dignity so as to assume the guise of a slave, in that He became like men. And after He had appeared in human form He abased and humbled Himself still further, and carried His obedience to the extreme of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:5-8).**

The initial chapters of the book of Acts present a group of believers that was quite unique. It goes without question or doubt that the New Testament Church got off to a tremendous start. These early disciples followed directly in the footsteps of the Messiah. He was the original pace-setter, but they also should rightly be seen as trail-blazers in their own right. That initial gathering of saints was a true Body--together, unified, of one spirit, and of one accord.

In like manner as Yahshua, the first disciples were people who lived a life of sacrifice, whether in terms of time, energy, resources, and gifts, or whether we are talking about issues of suffering and setback. Peter said that they had given up

all for the cause of Messiah.

The original converts to Messiah were focused as perhaps no other group of individuals ever in history. They were close to the flame, and their lives and labor demonstrated it. They were alive, awake, aware, and actively involved in what they believed was the greatest possible calling they could receive as human beings!

Was, therefore, their calling greater than yours or mine? If you think it was, you are short-changing yourself, and the antidote to such a mind-set is to start **RIGHT NOW** viewing the early Church situation, not as interesting history or something to sort of hold up on a pedestal, but rather as **THE** definitive Divinely-inspired model for our calling and service today.

Perhaps above all, the early disciples were not filled with all kinds of misconceptions regarding their own spiritual empowerment. More than any other single element, these men and women believed that the Spirit of God was alive and well, and it could and would work through them directly to accomplish the prescribed will of the Father. They believed it had the power to perform miracles, signs, and wonders, and they prayed that such power would be displayed in their realm of service. They believed that each of the brethren was supernaturally equipped for the work he or she was ordained to achieve, and they labored together, not off on their own somewhere.

Every generation of true believers has set before them their

Divinely-given opportunity to go after everything that God has in store for them. He has already made all the preparations, but each era of saints must come to see the will of Yahweh for them in their time--and they must pursue that with all their beings. The choice is always left up to us.

We all have been through much experience, some of it good, a lot of it bitter and disappointing. We have seen the demise of many corporate churches, and the division and dissolution of countless smaller independent groups. Frankly, I, for one, do not want to see this generation of believers pass on without some kind of true awakening to the cause for which we have been called. Sure, we all must continue to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. That will always be the case. But what about that part of our calling that requires us to come together, to unite, to labor as a fighting unit, to move outside ourselves, and to allow the Spirit to achieve a genuine Divine impact upon this world? This is where those of us who desire to go on with God from here must look.

In closing, let's read the passage from Acts 2 that we have covered today, and then note the final portion which we have not yet quoted. Beginning in verse 42, we read:

**“And they continued steadfastly in the 1) apostles' teaching and fellowship, and 2) in breaking of bread, and 3) in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and 4)**

**many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and 5) had all things in common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as everyone had need. And they, continuing daily 6) with one accord in the Temple...praising God and 7) having favor with all the people. AND The Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:42-47).**

Not only are we given the precise model to follow, the formula that actually works; we are also told what the results will be: **“And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.”** The early disciples were doers of the Word. They actually practiced these 7 points, and as they did, Yahweh Himself responded to their efforts, and multiplied their numbers daily. And just like them, brethren, you and I will never know how and to what degree God will react to our own devotion and labor until we get in the game and truly **DO IT!!**

Yahweh is just as real as He ever was, just as powerful and present. All that was available in the times of the Biblical record is available to believers today. His arm is not shortened that it cannot save. He hasn't changed one iota. Yahshua is the same yesterday, today, and forever. It is a fact that no matter how much of God's power and presence is available, however, you and I will experience only the precise amount in our lives that we can

believe for and thus receive. Instead, therefore, of accepting the status quo, we must ask ourselves the hard questions and find out from the Eternal what it is in our individual situations that inhibits or prohibits us from walking more and more in the might of the Spirit. In closing, I say to you in the words of the apostle Paul:

**“I do not consider, brethren, that I have captured that perfect ideal of Messiah yet and made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the supreme prize to which God in Messiah Yahshua is calling us onward. So let those of us who are spiritually mature have this mind and hold these convictions” (Phil. 3:13-15).**