

September - October 2016

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ONE BODY

2016: Discipleship



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A publication of the

Church of God (Seventh Day)

This magazine is published to advocate the Bible, represent the Church, and glorify the God of grace and truth.

Volume 150 • Number 5

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The BIBLE ADVOCATE (ISSN 0746-0104) is published bimonthly by Bible Advocate Press, 330 W. 152nd Ave., Broomfield, CO 80023. Periodicals postage is paid at Broomfield, CO, and at additional offices. Subscription is free to any who ask. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Bible Advocate Press, Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233-0677.

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Subscriptions and Orders

Bible Advocate Press
P.O. Box 33677
Denver, CO 80233-0677
phone: 303/452-7973
fax: 303/452-0657
e-mail: bibleadvocate@cog7.org
orders: bap.orders@cog7.org

Notice: Send all address changes and other correspondence to the address above.

Publications Agreement No. 40042428

Cover photo: © Maddy007—Dreamstime.com

The Bible Advocate Online appears at baonline.org.

Disciples in Formation

I've been anticipating our "One Body" issue since this time last year when "Equip for Discipleship" was conceived as our 2016 theme. The year is almost done now, as is my first year in the editor's chair, and I'm excited to finally present "One Body" to the church I love.

I write this "First Word" with a sense of urgency, not unlike Paul when he wrote to the church at Ephesus. Of his thirteen epistles, only lengthy 1 Corinthians has more references to *church* than little Ephesians. When Paul wrote to the saints in rich, pagan Ephesus, it's clear what was on his mind. He wrote *to* the church *about* the church, and his oft-repeated metaphor for her is "the body" — not any old body, but Christ's (1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30). This key image conveys the organic intimacy, unity, and connectivity essential to Jesus and His followers.

Paul loved the church too. In fact, though we ordered them differently in 2016, he began his list of "ones" in Ephesians 4 with "one body." It is obvious from the entire chapter that his main focus is the goal of equipping, edifying, building, growing, joining, knitting, and perfecting this body fully: "till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (v. 13).

God has great expectations for His church, and so should we. But realizing this deep fullness that Paul teaches (1:10, 23; 3:19) requires that we begin to see ourselves as a church *together*, fitted to Jesus Christ by the Spirit and distinct from the world: "No longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind" (4:17).

I write with urgency because we live in increasingly pagan cultures, no less futile in their mind than in Paul's time. This world is not static; it seeks to make disciples too — and with alarming success. Is the world discipling us more effectively than we are discipling it? Paul's urgency to the Romans is vital today: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed . . ." (12:2). Formation *will* happen, but to what are our minds being shaped?

Discipleship does not occur in a vacuum. Formation to the image of Christ takes place within the body. Let's be resilient, restorative, counter-cultural communities resisting world conformity and reflecting Christ for the sake of the world.

— Jason Overman



Called Out, Sent Out



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The body of Christ and its
role in the world.

by Israel Steinmetz

What is the nature and mission of the church? This is a huge question, but we can start to answer it by envisioning the church in two ways: as a people who are called out and sent out. Sadly, our focus is often exclusively on being called out, with little attention paid to being sent out. But Christ both calls and sends the church. In order to truly embrace our identity in Christ, we must also embrace His mission.

Called out

The English word *church* is translated from the Greek *ecclesia*, which literally means “called out.” In the Greek version of the Old Testament, *ecclesia* was translated from the Hebrew *qahal* — those called *out of* the world and *into* covenant with God. In the New Testament, *ecclesia* refers to believers in Christ as a unique people and their local assembling together.

In Ephesians 4, Paul highlights various aspects of Christ’s calling out of the church, imploring the Ephesians to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (v. 1). First, this calling consists of being members of one body, enlivened by one Spirit, sharing one hope, serving one Lord, holding one faith, experiencing one baptism, and being fathered by one God. Second, this calling demands a pursuit of unity with those

who share the call in humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, and love (vv. 2-6). Third, walking worthy includes each member utilizing Christ's gifts so the church grows up to be like Christ (vv. 7-16). Finally, walking worthy means casting off the futile thinking of the world, being renewed in mind, and putting on the new self, modeled on God's love in Christ (vv. 17-32–5:20). Thus, Christ's call brings forth *new* life, identity, attitudes, and actions.

Sent out

However, "called out" does not encompass Christ's entire word to the church. Rather, He calls the church *out* of the world to redeem her, and sends her back *into* the world with the message of redemption. God is on mission to redeem and re-create all things and has co-missioned the church to join Him. In order to truly "walk worthy" of the calling, we must embrace the call to be sent out.¹

With striking clarity, Christopher Wright notes, "It is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world, as that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission — God's mission."²

We can see God on mission: calling Abram (Genesis 12:1-3), commissioning the Israelites to be a light to the Gentiles (Psalm 67; Isaiah 49), and, chiefly, sending the incarnated Christ (John 1:1-13) and forming the church (Acts 2:7, 8). So integral to Scripture is God's mission that Darrell Guder says the New Testament's primary purpose "was the continuing formation of already

missional communities for faithful and obedient witness."³ As the church, our mission derives from God's mission as "God's incarnational action in history provides the church the content of its witness and defines how it is to be carried out."⁴ What God has done through Christ on earth provides the template for what Christ is doing through the church on earth.

A concentration on only being *called* out results in a view

creation in answer to sin and death.

Ambassadors for Christ

A careful reading of 2 Corinthians 5 illustrates what it means to be sent out by Christ. Paul envisions Christ sending His citizens as ambassadors back to the dark kingdom from which they were redeemed (vv. 14-21; cf. Colossians 1:13, 14). As Christ's ambassadors, our motivation is love, our evidence is new cre-

“Walking worthy means casting off the futile thinking of the world . . . and embracing the call to be sent out.”

of salvation focused exclusively on the "savedness of the saved." However, by acknowledging that Christ also *sends* out, we avoid this self-centered emphasis on the attaining and maintaining of individual salvation and "the benefits the person receives from the gospel." Instead we embrace our apostolic mission.

The Greek word *apostolos* literally means "sent ones." It refers not only to the twelve apostles but also to all those who would follow Christ and receive His co-missioning to take the gospel into the world, making disciples for Him until the end of the age (Matthew 28:18-20). As the Father sent Jesus, so Jesus sends His disciples (John 20:21). This sending is to complete God's mission of redemption and re-

ation, and our message is reconciliation.

The love that compels mission is not ours but Christ's (2 Corinthians 5:14). Thus the church is placed in the world *on* a mission and as a mission, rather than simply being called away from the world as a refuge. Reggie McNeal highlights the contrast:

A *refuge* approach to ministry involves . . . an approach to culture that attempts to insulate against it, to withdraw, to adopt a sectarian mentality. . . . mission, on the other hand, seeks to interface with culture, to build bridges to the culture for the sake of sharing the heart of God with the people of that culture.⁵

Those who choose a "withdrawal-reactionary" refuge

mentality see God as angry and withdrawn from non-Christians and believe they should be angry and withdrawn as well.⁶ But Christ's compelling love transforms us from refuge to mission mentality. We realize God truly loves the world, having already reconciled Himself to the world. All that remains is for them to be reconciled to Him (2 Corinthians 5:18-20; cf. John 3:16).

If love motivates mission, new creation verifies it (2 Corinthians 5:16, 17). "People want to see spiritual power demonstrated by transformed lives expressed in community. . . . Love expressed through community still transforms people and creates an attractive and compelling invitation for others to join up."⁷ Thus the new creation community of the church is inherently missional. In a pluralist and relativist world, the gospel at work in the church is compelling evidence where modernistic apologetics are inadequate. In Jesus' words, the world will know we are His disciples by our love and unity (John 13:35; 17:23).

While love provides the motivation and new creation the evidence, the message of reconciliation still requires skill to communicate in post-Christian culture. "Come-and-get-it evangelism and marketing strategies" are no longer effective in a world disinterested in what is happening at church.⁸ Missional ministry is not about developing an evangelism program but cultivating an evangelistic heart. From the place of evangelistic love, the message of reconciliation can be effectively shared in both word and deed. Scott Jones reminds us, "To evangelize non-Christian persons without loving them fully

is not to evangelize them well. To love non-Christian persons without evangelizing them is not to love them well. Loving God well means loving one's non-Christian neighbor evangelistically and evangelizing one's non-Christian neighbor lovingly."⁹

Loving in word and deed is a biblically based evangelism model (Matthew 5:14-16; Romans 12; Colossians 4:5, 6; Titus 2; 1 Peter 2:11, 12). Our post-Christendom context calls us back to loving in word and deed as we reenter a world in which

**“Christ's
compelling love
transforms us from
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mentality.”**

Christianity no longer dictates culture. New and varied methods, grounded in Scripture, are needed to connect with our culture. McNeal reminds us that "It was the religious elite who were out of touch with the people. . . . The Pharisees exegeted texts; Jesus exegeted life."¹⁰ We too are called to exegete life in culturally sensitive ways for our postmodern world.

Redemptive mission

The church is both "called out" and "sent out." We may

not claim one without the other; the gospel of Christ demands both. McNeal puts it bluntly, "God is on a redemptive mission, and those who do not join him disqualify themselves as his true followers. . . . People enter the kingdom of God when their hearts are captured by the heart of God. Then, transformed from the inside out, they become salt and light to help the world taste and see that God is good."¹¹

As we embrace our identity as the "one body" of Christ, let us remember that Christ not only calls us out of the world but also sends us back in on mission. **BA**

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1. Darrell L. Guder, "Walking Worthily: Missional Leadership After Christendom," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* Vol. 28, No. 3 (2007), 251-291.
2. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downer's Grove: IVP, 2007), 62.
3. Darrell L. Guder, "The Church as Missional Community," *The Community of the Word: Toward An Evangelical Ecclesiology*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downer's Grove: IVP Academic, 2005), 117.
4. Guder, *Missional Community*, 126.
5. Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2000), 89. Italics mine.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 86.
8. McNeal, 87.
9. Scott J. Jones, *The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 21.
10. McNeal, 79.
11. Ibid., 69.

Giftedness



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by Patricia Archer

My first Lord's Supper is blazed in my mind. I was nine years old, newly baptized, and nervous. I would finally partake in the great mystery I'd heard so much about.

When the plates were passed, I grabbed the largest piece of matzah because I loved crackers. I took the thimble of juice with the smallest amount, as I couldn't stand purple grape juice. This led to an awkward partaking as I struggled to wash the dry matzah down with the meager portion of juice.

In so doing, however childishly, I proclaimed my faith in our Savior.

It wasn't until nearly a decade later that I discovered my place in the body of Christ. After many summers at youth camps and a year at Spring Vale Academy, I finally found my true spiritual giftedness.

God has equipped each one of us with gifts, personalities, and uniqueness "differing according to the grace that is given to us" (Romans 12:6). Each of us has a specific, important role to play within the church; we are not all meant to be the same. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. . . . the body is one and has many members. . . ." (1 Corinthians 12:4, 12). Though we are all gifted differently, we are part of the one body of Christ: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Ephesians 4:4-6).

I will never have the gift of administration. The art of hospitality does not come easily to me. But do

you need encouragement or someone to pray with you? I'm your girl! God has placed me among *this* church family to pray for you, to encourage you to reach out and grasp your Savior tight, to help you discover what gifts He has given you, to find out where you fit in the body and how you can serve it.

Once we discover our gifts, we are freed to serve the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and to serve the world through the church in our unique way.

Dig deep into your Bible, pray, and reflect on who God has made you to be. Ask those in your congregation who have wisdom and discernment to point you in the right direction if you feel confused, lost, or useless. Seek prayer with another. Then allow yourself to embrace the gifts God has given you. When you have uncovered those treasures, you can serve joyfully and to the fullest of what God has planned for you.

Your local church is your body, your family, and your mission field. You have a role to play, a service to do; you are important. I need you, the church needs you, and the Lord needs you.

Without you, we are not whole. Without your gifts, the whole body suffers. With you, we can be healthy and strong. With you, we can fulfill the plans God has for all of us, together to impact the world for Christ. **BA**

Patricia Archer lives in the Silicon Valley, CA, with her husband, Garrett, and their four children. She has been part of the Lodi CoG7 congregation her entire life.

The Dead Church

... and why I'm proud to be part of it.
by Wesley Walker

I think if a survey were taken, I'd not find much support for my title. Everyone wants to be a part of a living, vibrant, growing church. So why am I proud to be a part of a dead church? When we stop and consider the matter, before the church or any of us can be living, vibrant, and growing, we must first be *dead*.

But dead to what?

Dead to sin

I am proud to be a part of a church that teaches we ought to die to sin. Paul explained this in Romans 6:2, 4: "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? . . . Therefore we

are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

Before there is new life, death must occur. Only when we are united with Christ in His death can we rise up, truly alive, vibrant, and growing in Christ. This is the gift of life that God grants us each day. We must value and appreciate it.

If we have died to sin, then we already know that sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). We serve a God who wants us to know how we can avoid displeasing Him. If we've experienced this death, then we can rejoice that we are no longer sinners; God regards us as saints (Romans 8:27, 29; 1 Corinthians 6:2, 11).

This is explained clearly in Romans 6:17, 18: "But God be thanked, that ye were [note the

word were] the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness."

God wants us to know how He regards us, His feelings toward us. We have been bought at a price (1 Corinthians 6:20); we are valuable to Him. So He calls us His saints — saints of God. That should give us a feeling of great worth. Praise God!

Dead to self

I am also proud to be part of a church that teaches we ought to die to self.

As we go through life, some choices we alone can make. Whom we will serve — God or ourselves — is one of them. This is one choice God cannot make for us. Joshua posed this decision to Israel: "choose you this day whom ye will serve . . . but as for me and my house, we will

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serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15). Joshua was well aware that this is a personal decision that cannot be avoided. There was no hesitation on his part: "Whatever you decide, I will serve the Lord."

The choice to serve God is no small decision. Paul says that if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, but because of righteousness, the Spirit is life (Romans 8:10). You see, we have to die to *self* – our desires, our plans, our hopes; Christ is first. Our desires, plans, and hopes are secondary, and they must not conflict with serving and representing Christ in our life.

This is so important: "we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (vv. 12, 13). Some feel that the most important thing is to accept Christ as Savior. This is most important, but remember what that means: being united in Christ's death and, through the Spirit, crucifying *self*. "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (6:6).

Jesus gave a good analogy of this as He taught the people in John 12:24: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." So it was with Christ and so it is with us. We bury the old man in baptism, and new life comes forth. Miraculous! Not the death but the new life. From that moment, it is not we who live but Christ who lives in us.

We cannot please God unless by faith we are willing to put to death the old man (Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9). Paul says the carnal mind is hostile toward God. It cannot, and will not, submit to God's law (Romans 8:7). That is why so many say, "Man cannot keep the law of God." True. But by being born again, with Christ living within us, we can (v. 4). This is the new covenant. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John

“The choice to serve God is no small decision.”

14:15). He does not ask us to do something impossible.

Dead with Christ

Finally, I am proud to be part of a church that teaches we are dead with Christ. Normally in death and burial humans are alone. But in the spiritual death and burial, we share our death with someone else. Paul explains it in Galatians 2:20: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of

the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

We should never feel that we are alone or forgotten. Christ is in us and we in Him. Because of this, we need never fear what Satan can, or will, throw at us. John assures us "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

We've been given a promise: "Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him" (Romans 6:8). This is a promise for our future. Just think, Paul says if we are dead with Christ now, we can be sure that we will live with Him throughout *eternity*.

Sadly, this is hard for some to believe. Some say, "I have repented, been baptized, but I am not sure whether I'll be saved or not." If you feel this way, read 1 John 5:13: "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life. . . ." Cast away every doubt. We do not have to wonder or be unsure. Be assured, if you are dead with Christ, you have a home with Him in the kingdom.

Dead to sin, dead to self, and dead with Christ: This is why I am blessed and proud to be part of a dead church. **BA**

Wesley Walker is a CoG7 pastor and author of *Answers To Your Bible Questions* (available in English and Spanish; e-mail wwalker1@cox.net to order). Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.





Stop Gossip!



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by Cathy Mogus

Rampant gossip is an equal opportunity experience in any environment. You might even say, “Where two or three are together, the temptation to gossip is in the midst of them.”

Gossip is destructive. It ruins individuals, friendships, families, and churches. Stopping gossip may seem like an insurmountable challenge, but it is possible to change in an environment where tongue-wagging abounds.

Get to know the gossipers. Low self-esteem, fear, jealousy, and negative attitudes and thinking are personality traits of those who tend toward gossip. If you know why others indulge in gossip, you may help by boosting a wounded ego, eliminating a fear, or showing acceptance.

If indulging in gossip is a personal weakness, ask God for forgiveness and help to overcome. Pray daily, “May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight . . .” (Psalm 19:14).

Keep positive. Nothing stymies gossip more than an upbeat attitude. Think of positive conversation starters before fellowshiping. Use Philippians 4:8 to guide you: “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things.”

Arguing or walking away will not solve the problem. The apostle Paul wrote, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21). An excellent way to turn the tide of harmful conversation is to insert positive comments.

Pay attention. Never underestimate the power of words. Keep alert as to where conversation is heading. If you discern a put-down or unnecessary negative information about someone is coming, cut it off at the pass.

Sometimes keeping quiet is the best policy, but

silence can also be interpreted as agreement. If you disagree, courageously speak up for the victims of gossip — especially if they would be embarrassed. Follow Paul’s advice: “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” (Romans 14:19).

Protect yourself. A Spanish proverb says, “Whoever gossips to you will gossip about you.” Gossipers are often insecure, so be their friend but not their bosom buddy. Steer conversation with them away from people and onto things. Talk about your flowers instead of your family. Talk about your house instead of your spouse. Talk about the news instead of your neighbors.

Endeavor to share your problems only with your closest friends. If you work with your best pal, save the personal stuff for outside the workplace. By opening up to your co-workers, you can easily become the victim of their gossip. The less they know about your personal life, the less ammunition they will have to talk about you.

Pray. I once worked with an extremely negative young woman who liked to gossip. I often wanted to put her in her place, but the Holy Spirit prompted me to pray for her instead. It wasn’t easy. I started by using my drive to work to pray for her and our day together. This made an amazing difference in my attitude and in her. God even opened the door for a meaningful conversation with her about her behavior.

You are Christ’s ambassador everywhere. Ask yourself what Jesus would say or do if He were in your shoes. Then help defuse gossip by adhering to Paul’s advice: “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs . . .” (Ephesians 4:29). **BA**

Cathy Mogus writes from Richmond, British Columbia. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



Questions & Answers



I don't go to church anymore. I've been hurt too many times. Is church necessary?

Yes, it is — and not just for the many reasons explored in this issue. It's also necessary *because* church hurts. Many suffer in church from judgment, hypocrisy, and abuse. People experience physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and relational damage. I've heard the stories and witnessed — even caused — some of the pain.

Why does church hurt so much? Three main reasons come to mind. First, because church challenges our faulty thinking, convicts us of our comfortable sins, and requires us to die to self — and that hurt can be good for us. People do suffer unnecessary pain in church, but sometimes we hurt because our flesh is dying. We cannot learn to love and be loved in isolation from Christ's body. Second, church is made up of humans, subject to sin and death. Christians, while redeemed and growing, are still imperfect and prone to wound one another. Third, church is intimate. It would be one thing if it were just a social club or a business. But it's not; the body is relational. Our congregation becomes family, and we become vulnerable. We risk ourselves, and sometimes we get burned.

Thankfully, the church's capacity to hurt is directly related to its capacity to heal. The church hurts and heals because it is a place of real-life ministry. We were made to mature within Christ's community, not alone. The church is also a place to recover from sin. Experiencing pain from others' sins is inevitable in life. You can't escape sin and death, but you can find God's remedy for it in Christ's body.

Finally, the church is a place of deep relationships. Intimacy is both high risk and high reward. The vulnerability we show within the church will open us to not only great pain but also great health.

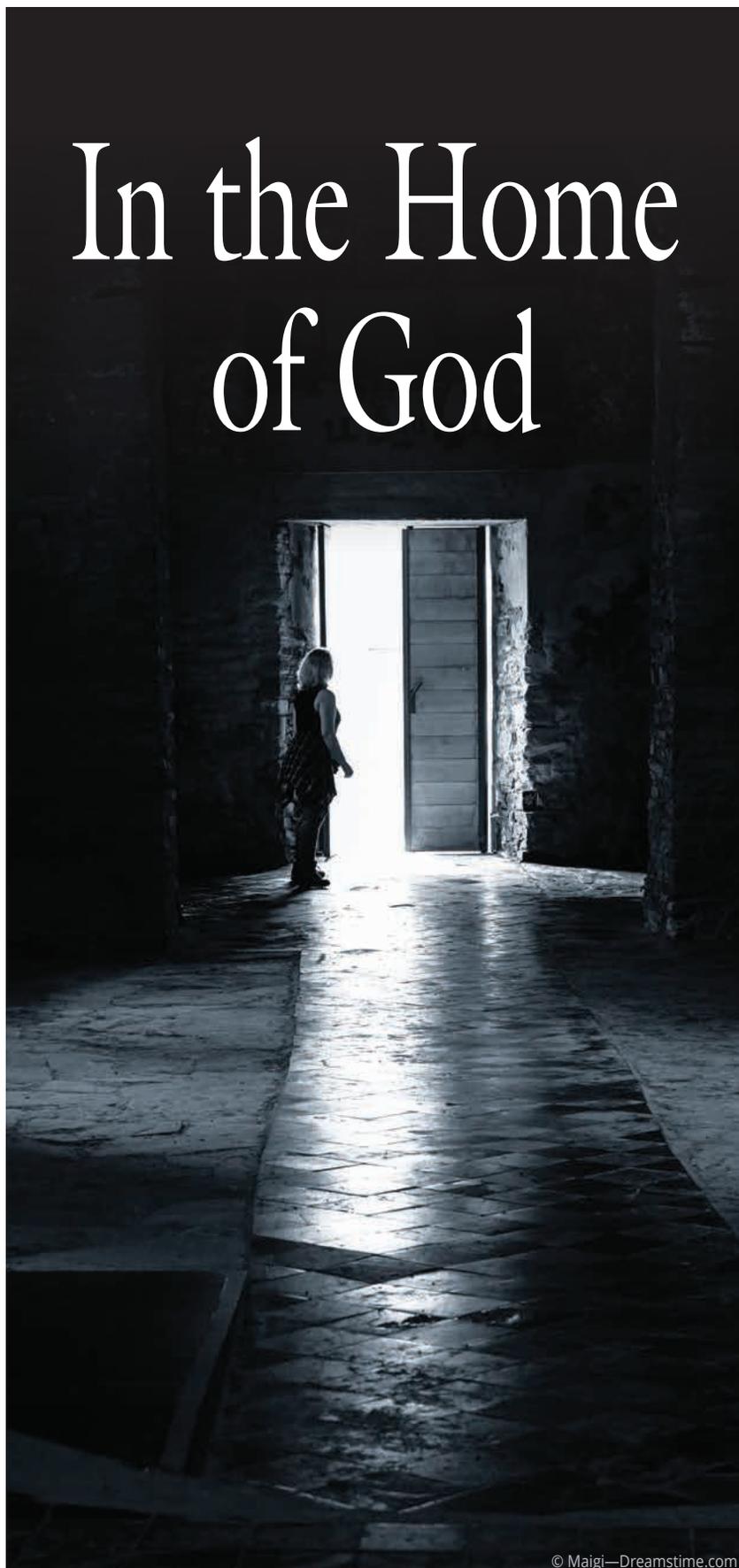
How can the body of Christ be a place of great healing? First, believe that God is redeeming all that was damaged by sin and death, bringing restoration and peace. Trust Him as you await Christ's return when everything will be made right. Second, press in rather than pull away — the natural inclination when we're hurt. By pressing into God and the church, we find what is needed to heal. Pain experienced in church is multiplied when we leave and isolate ourselves from God and His people. Third, be willing to make difficult changes. Sometimes this means thinking new thoughts about God, yourself, and others. In other situations it means creating new boundaries in life and relationships. Other times it means building stronger relationships with those at church rather than settling for superficial friendships.

In all of this we find healing for others and ourselves. Church can be a place of great pain, but it can also be a place of great healing. It certainly has been for me. As I've faced the hurt of a traumatic childhood and dysfunctional home, the church has become my home and family. In financial hardship and desperation, the church has supported me. When I've dealt with health problems, the church has provided compassionate care. The church introduced me to Christ and gave me the opportunity to minister. It has walked alongside me as I've grown in my relationship with Christ, helping me overcome sin and live righteously.

As much as I'm disturbed at times by the church's capacity to hurt, I'm continually overwhelmed by the church's capacity to bring help, healing, and hope. My deepest relationships are in the church, my highest hopes are tied to its success, and my identity is found in its fellowship. Thank You, Jesus, for Your church!

— Pastor Israel Steinmetz

In the Home of God



The journey from Hinduism to new life in the church.
by **Krpasha Govindasamy**

I was not always a Christian. I grew up in a Hindu home. My mom took us to the temple on Thursday evenings. It was somber and orderly, with the men sitting on one side of the room and the women on the other side. The children and young adults sat cross-legged on thin mats on the floor, in front of rows of chairs set out for the older people.

We were all barefoot. We sang songs facing a large, imposing shrine of deities. It was a rather frivolous exercise for me because all the words of the songs were in Tamil or Hindi, and I didn't understand those languages at all. I had no idea what we were saying to the gods. Afterward, we ate sweet meats — the only things that made it worthwhile.

I first went to a Christian church when I was twenty-one, two weeks after making the pivotal decision to surrender my life and will to Jesus Christ. It was such a shock to my system that I began to cry, horrified that people would have such loud music — drums and electric guitars — and sit with men, women, and children all mixed together. *How disorderly and irreverent!* I thought. *It must make God so upset.* I could not understand how God enjoyed such “worship.”

Now when I look back on those first few months of my Christian life, I cannot believe that I nearly ran away from

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church altogether because of music and unsegregated people. Indeed, these days I find myself being carried into the throne room of God on the melodies of the multitude of instruments and voices of worship. When I look back, I wonder how I managed to change from the Christian I was when I first stepped into a church, to who I am now. How did I turn into a disciple of Christ, loving the church as His bride?

The answer is peculiar, yet exactly what the Bible says. I was equipped to love the church as the beloved body of Christ himself through the church itself. It worked exactly as Ephesians 4:11-13 says:

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Three things have worked together to change me and grow me as a Christian: God himself through His Holy Spirit; the Bible, a physical source of the revelation of who God is and what His will is; and the church made up of God-fearing and God-loving people.

Worship and sermons

On a typical weekend, going to church is like going on a date with Jesus. It's His time to tell me what's on His mind and show me what He has been busy with. I sing to Him and He sings to me during the worship. Often I get

emotional because I can feel His love for me and for people. What a vast difference from repeating words I did not understand when I was a Hindu.

The sermon is the most awaited moment of my week. This is when Jesus confirms what He has been teaching me during the week through my own meditations and Bible studies. It's when He challenges my current position and belief. I listen carefully, always discerning if the message

delivered from the pulpits of churches have an eternal sweet taste and have become a permanent part of my spirit.

Activities

Activities of the church are always so exciting because this is where Jesus is busy. Usually I select one ministry to connect with, and it becomes a learning curve for me – an experience where I can hear people's stories

“Three things have worked together to change me and grow me as a Christian: the Holy Spirit, the Bible, and the church made up of God-fearing and God-loving people.”

is aligning with what I know of Scripture.

But in the back of my mind, I am so grateful that a pastor speaks in a language I can understand and that he has made himself available to listen to God and speak God's instruction to us. I cannot count the number of sermons that have challenged me and taught me new things about Jesus, Father God, and the Holy Spirit. Pastors and teachers of the Word are far better than sweet meats. Those sweet meats I ate as a kid tasted good for a few seconds and were digested and forgotten. But the messages

and an environment where I can grow and share the fruits of His Spirit.

These ministries range from soup kitchens to street work to visiting orphans to praying at hospitals to reaching out to street kids. Somehow being involved in these outreaches gives me perspective. I realize how small my own life is, how it is just one piece in a much larger picture. I see how much grace God has given me and how great and wide His heart is to hold the stories of all these different people.

Being part of a church community that is serving the wider

community is like being on an adventure with friends. We experience the pain and joy of others together. We pray and intercede for others together, fueling each other's passions and stretching into the vision of God's love for this world.

Discipline, accountability

The time of tithes and offerings is my weekly reminder that I have to be disciplined with the salary God has blessed me with. It is His money, and I must be a good steward of it.

Being a part of a church is be-

to persevere and be patient because of the art of biblical discipline and accountability.

Fellowship

After the service there is coffee and fellowship — another vital moment of church because people connect with me for a few minutes. Friendships are born and renewed, prophecies flow, words of knowledge and Scripture filter between individuals. Warmth and courage for the week happen with a coffee cup, in the presence of another Christian.

done to make decisions with no counsel. It was a time when I felt distant and unlovable, a time of not belonging on this great, wide earth.

Now, at least once a week, I am in a room full of people I know I will be with for the rest of eternity. It is a people who need not fear to have vision and purpose because of the knowledge of the grace of God in their lives. It is a people who need not fear to express the thoughts and will of God to one another because of the Bible we all read. It is a people who share the gift of their relationship with God with one another because of the courage found in a community that holds onto one faith, one belief, and one God. It is a people who are not ashamed to declare their love and thankfulness to God because of the power found within the presence of each other.

At least once a week, I catch a glimpse of a people God has called His bride, His own body — a people He is not ashamed to be the Head of. At least once a week, I catch a glimpse of His greatest work after the Cross.

Now I am a Christian. I have grown up in the church that has been my home and is my home all the days of my life on earth. **BA**

“Being a part of a church is being a part of a structure that encourages discipline in all areas of life.”

ing a part of a structure that encourages discipline in all areas of life. Because people love me and follow my story closely, because they have taken it upon themselves to pray for me, I am always challenged to live my life in such a way that I will not be ashamed if a spotlight had to shine on any one area. Discipline and accountability are other bonuses of being a part of a church. They have strengthened me, made me bold in my denial of sin and brave in my adoption of holiness in my day-to-day life. I have learned

These meetings are often the forerunner of the cell group or Bible study group held during the week. Arrangements are made and numbers exchanged — living tendons knitting together.

Forever family

For me, the concept and reality of church has always been something of a miracle: People can actually talk to God in their own home tongue.

Life without church is a real memory — a memory of isolation, a time when I was aban-

Krpasha Govindasamy writes from Pretoria, South Africa.





Sing a Hymn about the Church

by Whaid Rose

So far, the hymns featured in this series have followed the annual seasons. This installment, therefore, calls for a fall-related hymn.

But the theme of this BA issue compels deviation, providing an opportunity to highlight Samuel Stone's classic "The Church's One Foundation." It is one of twelve hymns published by the English clergyman in 1866, aimed at capturing rich doctrinal truths in simple devotional language. Of the twelve, it is by far the most widely sung. A bishop once noted that he could always count on two things when dedicating a new church: fried chicken and "The Church's One Foundation."

A version of it even made it into our CoG7 *Worship in Song* hymnal (#7). Pause and read it. What wondrous love this is!

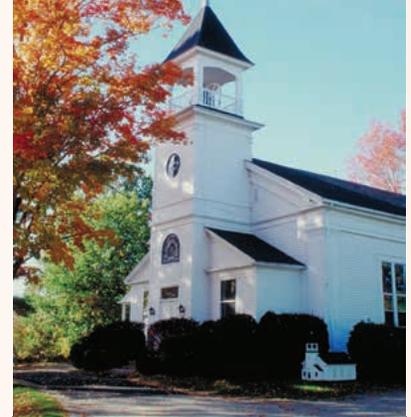
The observation that there's nothing a man will not do for his bride when his heart is captured by her love, finds its ultimate expression in Christ's love for His bride, the church. Stone writes, "With His own blood He bought her/And for her life He died." No groom has ever paid so high a dowry!

Jesus is therefore the church's one foundation — her most important understructure (Ephesians 1:22; 5:23). The church is His "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17) by the "washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:26).

The operative word in the church's charter is *one*: "one Lord, one faith, one birth" (see Ephesians 4:5). So even when she isn't acting like it, when "By schisms rent asunder/By heresies distressed," the church is one. The call to oneness is thus a call to become what the church already is, to match belief and behavior, position and practice.

United, she is strengthened for the "toil and tribulation" that mark her history, fortified against those who would silence her voice, put out her light. The darker the night, the brighter her light shines, for "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

Stone's core message is Jesus' passion for His bride; she means everything to Him. Soon He will "present her to Himself, a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle . . ." (5:27). Meanwhile, awaiting her consummation, we protect her purity, preserve her beauty. She's pure and beautiful when we are one.



**The Church's one
foundation/Is Jesus Christ
her Lord;/She is His new
creation/By water and the
word:/With all His heart
He sought her/To be His
holy bride;/With His own
blood He bought her/AND
for her life He died.**

**Elect from every nation,/
Yet one o'er all the earth,/
Her charter of salvation,/
One Lord, one faith, one
birth;/One holy name she
blesses,/Partakes one
holy food,/And to one
hope she presses,/With
every grace ended.**

**Though with a scornful
wonder/Men see her sore
oppressed,/By schisms
rent asunder,/By heresies
distressed:/Yet saints
their watch are keeping,/
Their cry goes up, "How
long?"/And soon the night
of weeping/Shall be the
morn of song!**

**'Mid toil and tribulation,/
And tumult of her
war,/She waits the
consummation/Of peace
forevermore;/Till, with
the vision glorious,/Her
longing eyes are blest,
And the great Church
victorious/Shall be the
Church at rest.**



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His

We did not create ourselves
He hath made us; He is our Creator
We are not the center of our own world

From ourselves will they arise
Perverse;
They speak to pull away from Him

The wolves enter, not sparing us
Even young David cannot defend us
His flock

He hath made us and gives us all we have
We give to others as He gave to us
When it is taken from us and destroyed
We still have Him

One body
Heart

We are His as we did not create ourselves

David Noordzy





You Feed Them

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Living beyond the logical to become the generosity of Jesus.

by Martha Muffley

Never in human history has there existed a more loving, compassionate, and hospitable man than our beloved Master, Jesus Christ. A special story in the Gospel of Matthew illustrates this:

When Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick. When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they

may go into the villages and buy themselves food" (Matthew 14:14, 15).

Humanly speaking, what the disciples said sounds logical: "Send them away." After all, no one was prepared to meet such a great need, or at least that's what they thought. But Jesus had other plans.

"They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat" (v. 16).

I can only imagine the disciples looking at Jesus in disbelief, mystified at what their Master had just said. They knew Jesus was serious. But what were they going to do to feed such a crowd?

And they said to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish." He said, "Bring them here to Me" (vv. 17, 18).

Though the easiest thing would have been to dismiss the people and solve the problem, Jesus, because of His love and kindness, wanted to feed them.

Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes. So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained. Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children (vv. 19-21).

We must take the teaching and ministry of Jesus seriously. Seeing that crowd, tired, thirsty and hungry, He compassionately

met their needs. Some were sick and He healed them. Some were tired and He gave them rest. Some were hungry and He fed them until they were satisfied.

This is what I call first-class hospitality!

Our calling

What a wonderful lesson Jesus taught His disciples, and us, on the ministry of hospitality.

We normally think of sharing hospitality within the body of Christ, as the apostle Peter mentions: “Be hospitable toward one another without grumbling” (1 Peter 4:9). Without complaining! How we need to do this, because what we live inside reflects in our attitudes and actions toward other believers. The truth is, sharing hospitality is a blessing and a joy — not just for the one who receives but also for the one who gives.

But hospitality should go well beyond the four walls that limit our small homes and churches.

“Do you see all these people?” Jesus says to us. “They are sick, tired, thirsty, and hungry. Go and help them!”

“Us? Me?” we reply.

“Yes, you! Stop looking around to see if anyone else is going to do it. *You* go ahead and feed them!”

“But Lord, there are so many of them, and we do not have enough. . . .”

This is where we must pay close attention to what Matthew’s story teaches us: *We have exactly what people need!* The five loaves and two fish the disciples offered to the Lord were just enough.

As in Jesus’ time, many people

today are sick, tired, hungry, and thirsty. And many of us say, as the disciples did, “Lord, let them go home. They can meet their own needs.”

The voice of Jesus still sounds as firm and as strong as it did back then: “You feed them! You give them a place to rest, and give them something to drink.” We know that when Jesus speaks, we cannot ignore it, because we Christians are the ones who can impact the world in the name of Christ.

Sharing Jesus

This world is hungry — hungry to know the truth that finds its fullness only in the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ: “And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger . . .” (John 6:35).

This world needs rest for its weary and hopeless souls: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

This world is thirsty. It’s a thirst that can only be quenched by the Living Water: “Whoever drinks of the water that I shall

give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14).

You and I have exactly what this world needs: Jesus! He is the *only* Bread that can satisfy their hunger. He is the *only* source of Living Water that can quench their thirst. And *only* He is the Refuge where souls find rest and healing.

Hospitality needs only two things: someone in need and someone willing to meet that need. We cannot ignore the hurting crowds gathering outside our comfortable homes and churches. Let us heed Jesus’ command.

BA

Martha Muffley

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“Hospitality should go well beyond the four walls that limit our small homes and churches.”



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Grace Incarnate

Christ's community is God's
earthly kindness.
by Michael Flores

I do not want to make that
phone call.

As part of a local recovery support group, I have committed to be accountable to its members. We agree to make at least one phone call to one member every day. These phone conversations, for me at least, always start uncomfortably. Usually I end up having some serious conversations about life, kids, marriage, addiction. Who wants to give up an hour of binge-watching Netflix for the inevitable downer that these conversations become? So when the time comes to make those

phone calls, I always find reasons to avoid them.

On this day I sit in my chair, looking at the phone number of one of my group members. All I have to do is tap it to place the call. Staring at the phone, I feel that seductive pull to check my Facebook status, but I tap the number instead. Thankfully, I get away with leaving a standard voice message.

Whew! I did my duty, with almost no work, no discomfort, no time off my hands.

Then I look down and see another name on my screen — another member I have not called yet. OK, I figure. *Maybe another voice mail. If not, I'll just say "hi," then be on my way.* I hit the name. One ring, two, three. Voice mail time. . . .

"Hello?"

Man! He answered! Now I need to talk to this guy. So we

talk. I share the gist of my story. He shares his story.

He then tells me, "You know, right before you called, I was wanting to act out. I don't think I want to anymore. I'm gonna head out to a meeting right now instead."

I encourage him to stay the course. I pray over him. He prays over me. We hang up. I stare at the black screen awhile, continuing to pray.

Then, my phone rings — it's that first guy I called.

I did not want to make that phone call. But the experience did teach me a lot about grace.

Grace defined

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth. . . . And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace (John 1:14, 16).

We have all received the fullness of God's grace through Jesus Christ, but what do we mean when we use that term?

Grace is rightfully thought of as the free love from God, given to an undeserving people. Some definitions follow:

"Grace is . . . love to the ill-deserving." — *B. B. Warfield*

"Grace is love that cares and stoops and rescues." — *John Stott*

"Grace is one-way love" that reaches out to the undeserving person. — *Paul Zahl*

Many times, when we think about this topic, we think about the grace God shows to us: forgiveness of sins, help when we're distressed, rescue when we were dying.

While these are good, thinking only this way is not a right way to think about what it means to be graceful.

Jesus: grace incarnate

For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him . . . (Colossians 2:9, 10a).

Jesus is the fullness of the Godhead. All the grace God could lavish on His creation is filled with and fulfilled by the person of Jesus. He is the incarnate expression of the fullness of God's grace.

In Jesus we see a human who reunites families, stoops down to bring up those who are beaten down, feeds the hungry, heals the sick, talks to outcasts, speaks in love.

That is a picture of being graceful. "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16).

This world severely lacks

grace. Neighbors speak ill of and to each other. Children go to bed without parents. Kids are bullied, women are brutalized, people go hungry. An Internet search reveals that

- Well over 13 million children are orphaned (lost both parents) worldwide.¹

- On average, nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States.²

- 795 million people in the world lack food to be healthy.³

- One in five (about 21.5 percent) children are bullied.⁴

“We should be the incarnate expression of grace that turns eyes, hearts, and lives around toward the beauty of a life with God through Jesus Christ.”

Our world needs graceful people. We need Jesus, the fullness of the Godhead, to fill it.

The body: grace incarnate

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

way (Ephesians 1:22, 23, NIV).

Maybe one of the best ways to turn people away from the picture of a grace-less world is to show them what a *graceful* world looks like. We — the body of Christ, the community of believers, the communion of saints — are “the fullness of him [Jesus] who fills everything in every way.” So this community — with all our actions, thoughts, and love for each other — becomes the incarnate expression of the fullness of God's grace through Jesus Christ.

I did not want to make that phone call because I did not want to stoop down to rescue my neighbor. I was choosing to be grace-less despite my commitment to be a graceful Christ follower who is part of a community of believers.

Paul writes, “We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us” (2 Corinthians 5:20a, NIV). This grace-less world is supposed to look to Christ's body on earth. They are supposed to turn to this vibrant, eclectic, hodgepodge fellowship of Jesus followers.

We should therefore be the incarnate expression of grace that turns eyes, hearts, and lives around toward the beauty of a life with God through Jesus Christ. We are the medium God chooses to appeal to this world. So maybe we should make sure our life together actually looks appealing.

Gracefully present

When we in the church pray

continued on page 27



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One Body, One Mind

The Word shows what it means for the body of Christ to work with a single purpose.

by R. Herbert

Just as the Bible makes it clear that the church is to be one body – the body of Christ – so the Scriptures show we are to have one mind – the mind of Christ. But what does that really mean in everyday life?

Body and mind

Being of one mind is a biblical concept we are all aware of, but it means far more than simply being in agreement with other members of the body. The concept of the church as the body of Christ is found several times in the writings of Paul (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, et al.). The apostle extends the

analogy by stating that just as the church is the body of Christ, so Christ himself is the head of the body (Ephesians 1:22, 23; Colossians 1:18).

Paul extends even further the metaphor of Christ as head of the church body by urging, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus . . .” (Philippians 2:5, NKJV). Just as the physical body has no direction, guidance, meaning, or purpose without the mind, so, Paul argues, the spiritual body lacks these things without the head – the mind – of Christ himself.

So what does it look like when the church truly has the mind of Christ? Seven New Testament

scriptures show us specifically and help us see that one mind should be expressed in our daily lives (see inset box).

Many qualities, one mind

In these seven “one mind” scriptures, we see qualities ranging from outward expressions of sharing and praise to inner attitudes of humility and peace. Each passage bears meditation on how we might apply it. When we read Acts 4:32, for example, we understand that the circumstances of the first Christians in Jerusalem were different from those of today’s church. But the principle of being of one mind in giving, helping, sharing, and supporting clearly applies to us.

In the same way, 2 Corinthians 13:11 might seem at first to involve multiple qualities, but it stresses peace (twice). Paul’s point, which deserves our meditation, is that living lives of restoration and encouragement can help us achieve the peace that is part of the mind of Christ (John 14:27).

Romans 15:5 exemplifies all seven scriptures by showing that being of one mind means having “the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had.” If we are truly of one mind, it will be Christ’s.

This is why Paul tells us that we must be “transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2) and “made new in the attitude of your minds” (Ephesians 4:23). The process goes well beyond that of our initial conversion: It is a daily, ongoing seeking after and following Christ’s purpose.

Infinite variety in one

But does being of one mind mean mindless assimilation to the same opinions and thoughts? Not at all. We need only look at the different approaches and thoughts of the various New Testament writers to see the individuality expressed in their writings. The unity is still apparent, still shines through, in what they say. Being of one mind maintains just as much of the rich intellectual variety God intended as we see physical variety in the one body of the church.

The seven scriptures show us that being of one mind means many things, but they are all aspects of the mind of Christ working throughout the body of Christ. ^{BA}

R. Herbert (a pen name) writes for a number of Christian venues, as well as for his websites at *LivingWithFaith.org* and *TacticalChristianity.org*. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted.

Seven Expressions of One Mind

If we are of one mind, we will be . . .

One in giving. Acts 4:32: “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.”

One in doctrine. First Corinthians 1:10: “I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.”

One in praise. Romans 15:5, 6: “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

One in faith. Philippians 1:27: “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ . . . that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (NKJV).

One in love. Philippians 2:2: “make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.”

One in humility. First Peter 3:8: “all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.”

One in peace. Second Corinthians 13:11: “Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.”



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Finding our identity as the church in the wilderness.

by Jason Overman

Once upon a time, we were not a people, but now we are the people of God. Once we were without mercy, but now we have mercy. That's what Apostle Peter says: *God's mercy has made us God's people* (1 Peter 2:10). Amen!

Paul speaks about this people-forming mercy too, even more vividly: God's church was purchased by God's own blood (Acts 20:28). It's extraordinary! What a costly, generous gift to be called and claimed as His own.

But what does it mean to be *His*? In our conflicted, confused post-Christian culture, it is more vital than ever that we know our true identity as God's people — and regardless of nationality, sex,

race, or any other identification that the world elevates as essential (Galatians 3:28).

So who in the world are we, and why does it matter?

Word choice

The answer is not easily grasped in one word. Peter and Paul were inclined to speak about the people of God, this church of God, by metaphor — each one, in its own way, a nametag that pinpoints who we are in relation to God, the world, and each other.

We are called *body* and *bride*, *flock* and *family*, *virgins* and *vineyard*, *house*, *temple*, *building*, and by Jesus himself, a *city on a hill*. Back in 1 Peter 2, we find four metaphors strung together: “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people . . .” (2:9; Exodus 19:5, 6). Notably, these are all rooted in the story of Israel.

Each of these could be profitably explored to help locate our

true character as a distinctive community, resistant and resilient, witnessing and welcoming, in the face of mounting worldly pressures eager to conform all to its fallen image. But we focus here on just one word.

The best word is the one the New Testament uses most often, a word we've already noted and the one Jesus first called us: *My church*.

Peter is in the middle of that story too. It was to Peter, after confessing Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” that the Master spoke: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:16-18).

His *ekklesia*

It's not accidental that the first mention of the church in the New Testament included opposition. Jesus didn't say that hades would not *try* to prevail — it has

and it is — but that hell would not succeed! This tells a basic truth about being the church: *We are hopeful but never simply at home in the world.*

A chief reason for asking the “Who are we?” question is that after many generations of false comfort, the church, particularly in North America and Europe, is waking up to a world culture she does not recognize and in which she is not at home. This is good, I think. It’s the opportunity to recover all it means to be church.

But this raises a critical question: Is our present identity as the church robust enough to withstand a steamrolling culture such as ours? The church in the West is so vulnerable precisely because she has accommodated, and is now largely assimilated into, a politic of individualism, rights, and consumption that dissolves the very virtues necessary to sustain the church in our world. Many fall asleep or fall away. We need a fuller view of what church is.

It is easy to take the common word *church* for granted. It is not a place we go to, but who we are; not a building to assemble in, but the embodiment of Christ; not just voluntary association, but God’s elect. We see this in the word itself. *Church* is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*, meaning “called out.” God’s new community finds its identity shaped by a required departure.

This definition orients us. But called out of what? Again 1 Peter, after his list of metaphors: “called . . . out of darkness into His marvelous light” (2:9). Can Israel be Israel in Egypt? Exodus must occur. This is a start. As we dig deeper into the word *ekklesia*, we see why Jesus chose it

and how it further informs our identity as the assembled covenant people of God.

His assembly

Two key contexts, common and theological, unpack the meaning of *ekklesia*. In common first-century use “*ekklesia* connoted an assembly, the citizens of a given community called together to tend the city affairs.”¹ Behind this, its theological shape was given by its link to Israel. In the Greek Scriptures that the apostles read, *ekklesia* rendered

“*We are hopeful but never simply at home in the world.*”

the Hebrew word *qahal*, or “assembly,” as the gathered congregation of the Lord (Numbers 20:4-12; Ezra 10:1-14).

We glimpse these contexts in Stephen’s reference to Israel after the Exodus as the “church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38, KJV). So the church shares in that ongoing story of God’s covenant people: His earthly representatives, unique citizens amid competing identities and citizenships (Philippians 3:20).

Jonathan Leeman discusses the big implications of this

choice of words in his new book, *Political Church*:

In calling itself *ekklesia*, the church was identifying itself as fully public, refusing the available language for private associations (*koinon* or *collegium*). The church was not gathered like a *koinon* around particular interests, but was concerned with the interests of the whole city, because it was the witness of God’s activity in history. At the same time, the church was not simply another polis; instead, it was an anticipation of the heavenly city on earth. . . .²

“Jesus’ salvation does not have social and political implications . . . but it is a politics that is meant as an alternative to all social life that does not reflect God’s glory.”³

The church does not just *have* a social ethic . . . but the church *is* a social ethic. And this ethic, this politics, witnesses to the kind of social life possible for those who have been formed by the story of Christ. The church’s challenge has always been “to be a ‘contrast model’ for all polities that know not God.”⁴

Our challenge

We see how the metaphors for the church mentioned above are linked to her identity as a visible, public people in continuity with Israel and in covenant with God. It is at once an alternative politics to the ordinary politics of the world, while an unceasing witness to the ultimate political reality that is the soon-coming kingdom of God.

Jesus drew on Zion imagery, calling His church “a city [*polis*] . . . on a hill” (Matthew 5:14;

Psalm 2:6). Paul used prophetic imagery of new covenant Israel, calling the church a “flock” (Acts 20:28; Jeremiah 31:10-12). Peter echoed the Exodus generation, delivered and instructed, calling the church a “holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9; Exodus 19:6). The clear and unavoidable conclusion is that by God’s call in Christ, we represent a new citizenship, a polity that is *in* all and yet *transcends* all national borders or human identities that would define or divide us.

We also see how the politics of the church is utterly defined by her relation to God in Christ. Our political reality begins and ends with “Jesus is Lord!” This is why the well-meaning but filtered political activism of Christians in secular societies is so ineffectual: The source of our *polis* is neutralized. We play politics by other rules on someone else’s turf and wonder why society does not look Christian. Can we expect otherwise when Jesus is deemed irrelevant?

Most of us reading today belong to a cultural dominion that has taught us to think that there are only two political options: to either participate or abstain from the politics offered by our resident nations. But our Christ-given name begs to differ. *Church* means that by definition, we are God’s political reality and resident aliens, a diverse and distinct public pointing to His kingdom within the fallen kingdoms of this world.

Wilderness church

Being God’s alternative to the way the world works cannot help but make us feel like the church in the wilderness, in between this

world and the world to come. Like Israel of old, that “Exodus out,” however it comes, is difficult and sometimes tempts us to complain. Or it can even make us mistake the land of milk and honey for the land in our rear-view mirror, rather than the one we journey to (Exodus 15:24; Numbers 16:13, 14).

Being the church in the wilderness means being a people on a journey with our merciful God, ordered around He who redeems and commands. Such a people and journey as this can-

“Church is not a place we go to, but who we are.”

not help but be “sojourners and pilgrims” in this world, as Peter said, praising Him who called us out, living honorably among the very nations who speak against us as evildoers (1 Peter 2:9-12).

In the United States another political season is upon us, and many Christians are struggling to make sense of what they are seeing, not only in the political sphere of the nation but also in nearly every other facet of culture and life. We now suspect more than ever before that there is no “political” solution to the ills

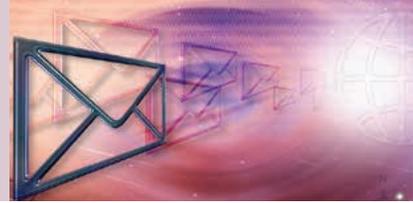
that face the world. But it is just at times like these that we recall who we are — *His church*, a politics of another kind.

Whatever the choices offered or made in presidential elections, the real hope of the world lies elsewhere. I cannot say it better than Leeman at the conclusion of his book:

The political hopes of the world should rest upon the local church — in its life together. Here the pardoning word of the gospel is spoken, and the obedience — giving power of the Spirit is applied. The warfare of the nations begins to end here. It’s a different kind of politics, to be sure. It is the politics of aliens, strangers and unwelcomed immigrants. It is a politics that expects, even embraces, persecution (Mt. 5:10-12). Still, the hope of the nations is to be placed here — in this society gathered around a King who has laid down his life for the world. It is those who have submitted themselves to this crucified King who, in turn, lay down their lives for one another and beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.⁵

This is the church in the wilderness — a mercy-formed people for the world’s sake. **BA**

1. Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Eerdmans, 1994) 465.
2. Jonathan Leeman, quoting William T. Cavanaugh, *Political Church: The Local Assembly as Embassy of Christ’s Rule* (IVP Academic, 2016), 36-37.
3. *Ibid.*, quoting Stanley Hauerwas, 37.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, 392.



Grace Incarnate

continued from page 21

for each other, feed each other, eat with each other, laugh with each other, cry in each other's arms, teach each other, understand each other, look forward to seeing each other, defend each other, correct each other, worry about each other, sing to each other, make time for each other, love each other, we let the fullness of Christ fill us and overflow to others, even grace for grace. That is when we are graceful.

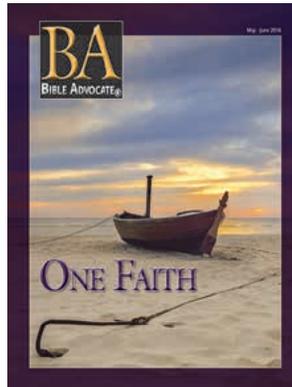
I pray we stay the course. Make the phone calls. Make the time. Feed the hungry. Care for the widows. Foster the orphans. Love each other. Give our last ounce of energy, pouring our lives out. We can be that picture.

BA

Michael Flores is a CoG7 educator who lives in San Antonio, TX, with his wife, Victoria, and two children. Scripture quotations are from the King James Version, except where noted.



1. "Orphans," Unicef, last updated June 15, 2015, www.unicef.org/media/media_45279.html. Web accessed 7-15-16.
2. Statistics, National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, www.ncadv.org/learn/statistics. Web accessed 7-15-16.
3. Hunger Statistics, World Food Programme, www.wfp.org/hunger/stats. Web accessed 7-15-16.
4. Deborah Lessne and Melissa Cidade, "Student Reports of Bullying and Cyber-Bullying: Results From the 2013 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey, Web Tables: US Department of Education (April 2015), <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015056.pdf>. Web accessed 7-15-16.



Of Darkness and Life

Well said [Caitlin Meadows, p. 20, May-June 2016]. May we all keep our arms open to the women in need and let Jesus save them. They can then save their babies.

V. L.

BA Online comments

Bringing peace

One day in this month I visited one of our brothers in the Lord in their house. Upon arrival, I found they were in conflict in their words between a man and a woman. This talking went on while I was silent. Then a woman stood up, leaving the sitting room to the bedroom.

In the sitting room, there was also a woman who was their close relative. After some few minutes, I asked the close relative woman to go and call the woman, which she did. The woman came back again to the sitting room.

I started to talk with them all, the man and wife. At that time I had the *Bible Advocate* of May-June 2016 in my bag. I thought of the point in "Kingdom Loyalties" [p. 4], where our brother Israel Steinmetz mentioned or quoted some points from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

I asked the woman to read herself. After reading, she took the pen and made a note. The

husband also asked me to see that point. After looking, he used his mobile phone and took the photo of that area and the area of page 2 concerning Facebook, etc.

May glory be to Him above all who is the Father in heaven for His work that you continue to doing there.

M. W.
Kenya

Prison ministry

Brethren, I thank God for the opportunity of meeting you and to know more about the magazine, advocating the Word of God. I would love to be able to participate in correspondence Bible studies and to read more about the kingdom of God.

I want you to know that it is such a pleasure to know what it means to advocate the Word of God. Nowadays, there are many deceiving religions. Here in this prison, there are men who are having Bible studies with ten different groups, but I have noticed that they wrote a lot of questions that are not in the Bible, and they are deceiving to a lot of our brethren through those studies.

I would like to know if I can be a part of a Bible study from the BA.

I am sorry to bother you, but I have been a little astray from the gospel. I want to submit myself to God's commandments and I want to be transformed. I don't know how to explain it, but I don't want to go back to what I was in the past. I love my Lord Jesus Christ, and I don't want to fail Him this time.

I hope you and the Church of God can understand me.

O. C.
Richmond, TX



CoG7 In Action



Fourth Quarter Curriculum

Adult: *Jesus Moments*. Author Ken Lawson writes, "The last verse of John says that if we had the record of all Jesus did, the world might not be able to hold all the books (John 21:25). This quarterly does not attempt to study all Jesus' teachings but selects thirteen special moments in the life of Jesus where His teaching is found in the story itself. In these events, Jesus taught more by actions and interactions than by words. All 'Jesus moments' are learning moments."

Winter Children's Curriculum

Intermediate: *Jesus' Ministry* focuses on what Jesus taught and did when He was on earth. Students will learn why He came, how He cared for people, and why it is important to accept Him as Savior. They will also learn that we must have faith to accept Jesus and His teaching as a way of life. Finally, they will learn that we can be fully confident that Jesus' promise of eternal life will be fulfilled.

Primary: *Kings and Prophets*. The stories in 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings cover from David bringing the ark to Jerusalem to Elisha healing Naaman of leprosy. Students will witness what happens when people follow and obey God and what happens when the same people turn away from God and disobey Him.

Most important, students will learn that God loves, is eager to forgive our sins, and empowers us to do His will.

Preschool/Kindergarten: *God - Always in Control, Always with a Plan* starts with Noah and the Flood and ends with Joseph saving his family from the famine. Through these lessons students will see that God is always in control, that He always keeps His promises, and that He always has a plan to bring good out of the worst situations. They will also see that God can be trusted and that if we truly trust Him, we will obey Him.

Order these studies from the Bible Advocate Press, P. O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233; 303-452-7973; bap.orders@cog7.org.

NAMC in North Carolina

Ten Reasons to Attend the North American Ministerial Council
September 12-17

1. Holy Spirit refreshment
2. Fellowship with colleagues
3. Husband-wife ministry bonding
4. Preaching from the Word of God
5. Participating in business discussion
6. Music and worship to the Father
7. Heart-stirring Bible devotions
8. Entertainment at The Cove
9. Blue Ridge Mountains
10. Firsthand witness of what God has in store for your church

Pray for our ministers as they gather this year.

LifeSpring Grads

Congratulations to Germaine Reece (Acworth, Georgia), for graduating with a Certificate of Biblical Studies in Winter 2016.

Also, congratulations to the Winter 2016 Dean's List Recipients*: Francisco Garcia Gonzalez, Brownsville, Texas; Germaine Reece, Acworth, Georgia; Samuel Santos Preza, Laval, Quebec; Adam Slawson, Owosso, Michigan; Esther Winchell, Saginaw, Michigan.

* These students took courses half time and earned a minimum 3.5 GPA.

Calendar

September 2-4 - West Coast

District SWORD Retreat, Evergreen Conference Center, Oakhurst, CA

September 12-17 - North American Ministerial Council, near Asheville, NC

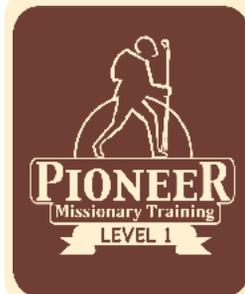
September 14-18 - West Coast District Senior Adult Retreat, Sis-Q Meadows Camp, Cave Junction, OR

October 8-10 - Southwest District Marriage Conference, Hilton Dallas/Rockwall, TX

October 10-15 - International Ministerial Congress, Buenos Aires, Argentina

October 14-16 - Octoberfest Family Camp, hosted by Jasper, AR CoG7

For a more complete list of events, including contact information, please visit cog7.org/churchright.



Don't miss Pioneer Missionary Training (PMT Level 1), December 18-28, in Mexico City, Mexico. Application deadline: November 1. E-mail gcmisions@cog7.org or call Lorena Manso (915-630-4196) to learn more about this missions training opportunity.

A photograph of railroad tracks receding into the distance under a warm, golden sunset sky. The tracks are flanked by utility poles and power lines, creating a sense of depth and perspective.

Start out on the right track

District Ministries encourages your participation.

**Your district may include the following ministries:
Youth, Young Adult, Men, Women, Couples, and Seniors.**

Contact your district leaders and get on board!

Thank you for your gifts of support.



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Central America, Caribbean, and Mission in Cuba

Zone 2 of the International Ministerial Congress is geographically made up of Mexico, the countries in Central America, and the Spanish-speaking nations in the Caribbean. In this zone, the Church of God (Seventh Day) has experienced significant numerical growth and good biblico-theological progress.

The Church is well established in Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. It is incorporated in every one of these countries and benefits from well-defined bylaws and ecclesiastical administrations.

We have a mission in Cuba, where the government has authorized the Church to hold services in homes but not to be incorporated. After several years, the Church in Mexico still sponsors it as a mission in progress, due to political and religious challenges. Since the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the government has not granted incorporation to any denomination of a religious group. In recent years, a greater openness and better



*IMC Zone 2 Leadership Meeting,
San Jose, Costa Rica*

conditions for evangelistic work have been seen. A recent change — the United States lifting the Cuban embargo — will undoubtedly benefit many, including religious institutions.

In Puerto Rico, no work has been done. This island is therefore a mission field for the congress.

In the Dominican Republic, some contacts have been established by Church brethren in Lanham, Maryland, and some baptisms have been performed. We need to consolidate this work.

Let's pray for our brothers and sisters in this zone so that, filled with the Holy Spirit, they will continue being faithful to God in everything He requires from us.

— Ramon Ruiz



Mission in Havana, Cuba



Out of Many, One

As I write “Last Word” for this issue of the *Bible Advocate*, it is July 4 – Independence Day in the United States of America. The Great Seal of my country includes the phrase *E pluribus unum* – “Out of many, one.” This motto is a reminder that many colonies became states united to form one nation. In the context of this issue, however, *E pluribus unum* reminds me of the one true church: the body of Christ.

There is in the mind of God a universal though invisible body of people from every place and time – past, present, and future – who are children of God by His grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul describes them as individual members of Christ’s body: “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27, NIV). Upon receiving Jesus as Savior and Lord, each believer is placed by the Holy Spirit into Christ’s body. “For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Corinthians 12:13, NIV). In Christ, we are called to work together, each of us fulfilling the role given us by Christ, using the gifts given by the Holy Spirit to mature and grow the body of Christ: “speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:15, 16, NIV).

The unity of Christ’s body, therefore, is of great importance: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called

in one body; and be thankful” (Colossians 3:15, NASB). Though we are given different locations and roles in which to serve Christ, our unity with Christ unites all of us with one another: “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Romans 12:4, 5, NIV). *E pluribus unum* – “Out of many, one.”

Paul’s use of the body of Christ concept, and its related principles, is instructive. Sometimes he uses them to speak of the universal body of all believers. Sometimes he uses them to address relationships within one congregation. What is true of the universal body of Christ provides a template and standard for each member, for each congregation, and for each denomination.

The General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day) recognizes that membership in the body of Christ is not a matter of organizational affiliation. Rather, it is based solely on an individual’s saved relationship with God in Christ. We describe ourselves as “Distinct, Yet Inclusive.” We are a subset of the members of the universal body of Christ, linked by certain distinct understandings of God’s Word and will – but fully aware that we are not the whole of the body of Christ. Each person who is saved by God’s grace through faith in Christ is our brother or our sister. *E pluribus unum*.

– Loren Stacy



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