

# God's Glory Plan

## Introduction

Jesus taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Notice that he said, “on earth.” He was talking about the here and now! And if he told us to pray for it, did he not intend to supply it? Is it indeed possible to see God’s kingdom here and now? But do we even know what the kingdom of God on earth is supposed to look like? Some say that when we are saved, that is the kingdom of God. But Jesus coupled this with, “your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” It seems clear that his definition was: his saved people living out his will (being like Jesus) here on earth, now. We do see some of this in some places at some times, but what would it look like if all of God’s people in a particular city (such as St. Louis) were to live like Jesus all of the time. Would not a transforming revival take place? What would it look like if the whole city were to respond to that revival and start living out the kingdom of God?

Not long ago while praying and meditating about this, an astounding scene came to mind. I saw strangers from all walks of life, lovingly greeting each other on the streets, praying for each other in the grocery stores, doing things for each other, sharing material things, groups gathering to discuss the Lord and his word, and even singing groups developing spontaneously on busses. There was no crime to speak of, just joy everywhere. Everyone worked diligently at their jobs, and the financial burden of crime, drunkenness, addictions, and laziness did not exist, so there was incredible prosperity; no homelessness, and no poverty.

“Nice thought,” you say, “but utterly naïve to think it could ever actually happen.” Have you never heard of the Welsh revival, or Duncan Campbell and what happened in the Outer Hebrides islands, or the “Great Awakening” in America? It has happened many times in the past and is happening elsewhere in the world right now.

But it requires God’s people (the Church) humbling themselves to do God’s will his way. That is what this little booklet is all about:

God’s Glory Plan.

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*All scripture quotations are from the ESV translation.*

# God's Glory Plan

## The Purpose and the Problem

God is the ultimate planner/designer. Everywhere we look, we see amazing design. Science is actually the study of God's designs. From the order of the incredibly large universe to the inconceivably small realm of sub-atomic particles, and everywhere in between, we see the workings of His incredibly precise and beautiful plan and design. He has built into physical existence a master plan and many sub-plans that produce mind boggling variety, yet it all works together in perfect harmony. But wait. It doesn't really work in perfect harmony. Something is wrong. Yes, we see incredible perfection, yet there is also decay, and accidents, and death, and war, and an almost infinite variety of other problems. Of course, all Bible believers know that the problem is sin. Man, although made in the image of God, chose to use that free-willed, creative part of God's image to go another way and thus corrupted God's perfect plan. Not surprisingly, however, God's master plan also included a system for dealing with this problem. In fact, in God's plans, there is always provision for every contingency, and in His word He tells us what they are. The big question is, will we trust God enough to do what He says, or will we use that free-willed, creative part of God's image to go another way? It turns out that this question must be answered again and again all of our earthly lives.

At this juncture, the basic mission of mankind is to fill the earth with the glory of God; that is, to make His invisible character and nature evident by living them out in our everyday activities. This is called "obedience." The Old Testament is full of instructions concerning this, as well as examples of God's blessings when people obeyed, and the horrible consequences of disobedience (sin). In the New Testament, Jesus translated the requirements of keeping the law into a matter of changed hearts that delight in doing what is right (love). John 13:34-35 : "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

This is the glory of God in a nutshell.

## The Provision

The Gospels and the epistles give us explanations of how this is to be done. All of this is expressed in relationships; our relationship to God, and our relationships with each other. As Jesus revealed it in the above passage, how we relate to (love) one another is the thing that will make His nature visible to the world; in other words, it is our obedience that will fill the earth with His glory. In the infinite wisdom of God, He also gave us instructions about the physical mechanics to be used in expressing this love. He also gave us the Church\*, a focal point, where believers are to join in common purpose to worship, and build each other up in love. He even gave us instructions about how this organism is to be composed and how it is to operate; what will happen if we obey these instructions, and examples of what happens when we try and do it our own way. This is part of our relationship to God (obedience).

But isn't rigid obedience just another form of Old Testament legalism? It certainly can be. The difference is in our heart attitude. If I only do it because I have to, that's legalism. But the way Jesus put it is entirely different. In John 14: 20 – 24 He says: ***“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”*** . . . ***“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.”***

Jesus made it quite clear that keeping His commands is not a matter of legalism, but of love. If we love Him, we will delight to do His will. If we are reluctant to obey Him, it is because we don't know Him well enough to trust Him and appreciate His love for us. If we love ourselves more than we love Him, we will find some excuse to not obey those things we don't like. If we love Him, we will revel in doing whatever He wants because we trust (know) that His will is the very best thing possible.

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\* Throughout this booklet, references to local church congregations are distinguished by using a lower case “c”, and references to the city-wide Churches and the Church Universal are distinguished by an upper case “C”.

Does that mean that we must constantly labor over the scriptures to determine every little detail of how we should think and live? Well, in a sense, yes. We are indeed commanded to study deeply, and search the scriptures for answers. It only becomes legalism when we fail to understand the difference between a principle and an example. For instance, the fact that the early Church installed seven deacons to oversee the distribution of food to the widows, does not mean that any valid church must have exactly seven deacons. That was just the specific application of a much larger principle in a specific situation. The principle concerned the proper way to see that the will of God was accomplished. In this case, there was work to be done and people to do it, but some tasks required gifts and talents that other tasks did not. The lesson is that the kingdom of God requires a variety of functions and God has provided and equipped various people to do some of them, but not others. It is the working together of all of these functions that makes the body of Christ work the way He told us it should.

### **The Prayer**

Now, let's look at one of the things God told us about the nature and workings of His Church, and see how well we are living up to it. In John 17 we find what is commonly called Jesus' "high priestly prayer." This prayer was uttered as Jesus was on His way from the last supper to the garden of Gethsemane, where He knew that He would be arrested and sent to the cross. This had to have been a very important prayer. What He asks for here must be given maximum weight.

**John 17:1** *When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. 6 "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now*

*they know that everything that you have given me is from you. 8 For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. 9 I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. 11 And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.*

*12 While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. 13 But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. 14 I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 15 I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.*

*20 "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. 24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. 26 I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have*

**loved me may be in them, and I in them.”**

In this most important of prayers, Jesus asked the Father to make the believers “one.” He asked it four times! Why is it so important that He asks it four times? Jesus tells us: “. . . ***so that the world may believe that you have sent me. . . so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.***” It seems that in order for the world to know Jesus for who He is, for His glory to fill the earth, Christians must be “one.” There is much disagreement in the Church over just what Jesus had in mind when He prayed this.

Eph. 4:1-7 lets us know that there are many facets to this “one” requirement: “***1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. 7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.***”

But this passage does not really explain what this “one” is or how to achieve it. Some claim that since Jesus died for us all, we are one in Him and that is all it takes. Others claim that it is the common body of beliefs that makes us one, and that is enough. These explanations are not stated as such in the scriptures, but seem to be excuses for our failures to obey God's instructions.

### **The Particulars**

Then what do the scriptures specifically say about this oneness? There is one admonition after another to love and respect one another, (***Romans 12:10 - Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.***), agree with one another (***I Cor. 1: 10 I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.***), count others more important than ourselves (***Phil. 2:3-4 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in***

*humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*), and many similar descriptions of unity. It is a unity of mind, and purpose, that flows from love and respect for one another, that results in working together in harmony.

The scriptures use two metaphors that shed much light on the subject. In one we are referred to as a temple: *Ephesians 2:19-22* . . . *you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

Three things stand out in this metaphor: 1) Christ Jesus is the cornerstone. He is the only way we can get it right. If our relationship with Him is not right, the building will never be right. Conversely, we may conclude that if the building is not right, it is because our relationship with Jesus is not right. 2) It is the apostles and prophets that form the foundation: it is the Bible that tells us how to build. If we try to build it our way instead of His, we can expect strife and failure. 3) We must humble ourselves and be sure we are doing it His way, first in our relation to Him, then in our personal relationships with others, then in the way we are joined together in our corporate relationships as the temple of the Lord. It is when all these things are properly in place that everything works and we grow.

## **The Parts**

The second metaphor is that of a body. While the building metaphor alludes mostly to the proper relationship to God, the body metaphor describes how He wants the inner operations (corporate relationships) to be structured. This must be of special importance since He has described it in such detail. Taking all of the scattered references together, we get the picture of a perfectly designed entity that is a single, living organism, where all of the parts are joined and working together harmoniously to accomplish the will of the head: Jesus. Surely this is a significant part of the “one” that Jesus asked



for. II Cor. 12:4-30 is the defining scripture for understanding this concept. In verses 12-14 we find:

***For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many.***

This is where we see a big disconnect among believers. Many conclude that because the larger context is that of spiritual gifts, that this is all it is talking about. The proper handling of spiritual gifts is indeed the context, but God solves the root problem by referring to the higher principle of unity. He compares His design for our relationships with others in the Church, to that seen in His design of the human body. God is telling us that the Church must operate just like the human body works, with various parts working together as one organism. The context may have been spiritual gifts, but the content goes far, far beyond that, and describes what the “one” that Jesus prayed for is to look like and how it is to be achieved. Let's look at the whole passage in detail

***4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.***

Notice that He not only refers to “gifts,” but to “varieties of service,” and “varieties of activities” as well. He is talking about the entire operation of the Church.

***7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.***

Here He points out that all of the various resources He has put into the members of His Church are manifestations of His Spirit. He has designed and ordered an entire system, where each part is specifically designed to serve the “common good.” The Church members are individually equipped to serve each other and the whole: the “common good.”

***8 For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.***

Here He names nine body parts and points out that they are all different, and that He has distributed them among many, rather than giving them all to just one or two people. Other scriptures list even more functions that He has also given us in order to make the Church body operate as a complete organism.

It should be obvious that there are many more talents, skills and abilities that were left unnamed but are also necessary to complete the smooth operation of the body.

***11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. 12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. 14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many.***

It is very important to note that “the Spirit” is mentioned repeatedly in this passage. This is to make sure that we understand that this is not just a minor aspect, but a major feature of God's design for His Church. The phrase “each one” tells us that He has equipped every single member of His Church to have a special part in the functioning of the body.

***15 If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the***

***body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."***

God not only created and equipped the various members of the body (the Church), but "arranged" these individual members "as He chose." We as humans don't always like where God wants us to serve, and to the extent we ignore His design, we weaken His Church and prevent His glory from filling the earth. If we as leaders want to rearrange the parts to fit our ideas of how His Church should work, we do even more damage to God's glory plan.

***22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.***

God is pointing out that we have an obligation to honor each part appropriately. If not, we can expect to see "division in the body," which is the opposite of the unity Christ prayed for. But do we even know what body part each member represents? And what does it mean to "honor" an "unpresentable" part? Perhaps we should look at it this way: If God has given someone a very limited ability, it seems obvious that the first honor would be to be sure that that person is not overlooked, but is included; to help them discover what ability God has given them and find a way to develop it and use it for the common good. The next honor would be to make sure that they were supplied with what they need to succeed in that job, with excellence. The third honor would be to thank and encourage them. It seems only logical that the same thing should be done for every member of God's body, "that the members may have the same

care for one another.” Otherwise we “all suffer together;” that is, the Church becomes sick and unproductive.

Next, God interprets and extends the metaphor to show how it applies to the Church and the individuals in it.

***27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? 29 Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?***

In Ephesians 4, God spells out some of the mechanics, purposes and blessings of His marvelous design.

***11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,***

We can see here that there are certain organs that are responsible for “equipping” the other organs for their jobs in “building up the body.” This would include such things as seeing to it that every part has the training, the opportunity, the encouragement, the connections, the support, and whatever else it takes to succeed with excellence.

This next verse is critical.

***13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,***

All of the leadership responsibility, its function in the body, is encapsulated here. Note that it starts with “until we all attain to the unity,” which is only completed when we have matured “to the measure of the fullness of Christ.”

***14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human***

*cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

### **The Primary Ingredient: Love**

Now God points out some of the dangers of failing to follow His plans, and the essential means of achieving a whole, mature body: “speaking the truth in love.” I believe that this refers to much more than just not lying to each other; it surely refers to the whole body of God's truth that we are to focus on in our relationships with one another. And since He adds “in love,” He is recognizing that there will be differences of understanding, and tells us how to handle them: in love. When we handle these differences God's way, we not only avoid splits, we weld friendships. If, instead of seeking to defend our own egos, we strive together to understand God's will, there is unity, and growth into Christ, the head. It is Him; it is following His instructions, it is when each part is working properly, joined and held together by the joints that God has supplied, that makes the body grow and build itself up in love.

***Col.2:19 . . . the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.***

Nowhere in scripture does it define what the joints and ligaments are. But as we look at the human body, which God chose to use as a metaphor, we see that joints and ligaments are what hold us together and enable us to move. If the hand is not joined to the body in the right place, it will not serve the body well. If it were attached to the middle of the back, it would be mostly useless, or even a hindrance. It must be attached to the arm as God designed it, be supplied by the muscles, and be connected by tendons that God made for that purpose, to be of much use. “Joints and ligaments” are our connections to others and their gifts that enable each of us to do the job the Spirit has set us in place to do.

But do we even know what our gifting and calling are? Do you

know who your joints are? What is your function in the body? Who are you supplying with the gifting God has given you? Who (what joint) is supplying what is needed for you to do your job effectively? Without these things in place the body cannot function, and God's plan cannot go forward. All of the individual, utterly different parts (Church members) must be joined together (unity) the right way, and working according to the different giftings and callings God has designed into them, in order for the body (Church) to grow. Otherwise, they are just a barrel of body parts (pew sitters).

***Eph.4:17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.***

This might seem to be a shift to a new topic, but it is not. This is a contrast to God's method of fulfilling His plan, and explains why we don't see the success we all want to see in the Church. God is pointing out that it is when our worldly inclinations drive our relationships that unity and growth are impossible. Of course, none of us would admit to being guilty of such blatant ungodliness, but this admonition is given to Christians, in a well gifted church. God sees our sins much more clearly than we do, and what we think might be minor, He sees as grotesque. We must take His word for it and not substitute our ideas for His.

***25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil. 28 Let the***

***thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. 29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.***

Here He points out once again that we are not just individuals, doing our own thing, but “members of one another.” This takes the concept of “joints” to a whole new level. Instead of only being members of the body, we are also members of each other. It is with this in mind that God gives another lesson in unity: you cannot serve someone you can’t get along with. Bad attitudes have no place in such an arrangement. Could it be that if there is no cooperative oneness among us that one or more of these Godless attitudes is to blame? Again, we must ask God to show us what our true motives and attitudes are, because, like the Pharisee in the parable of the publican and the Pharisee, and like the church in Laodicea, we are probably blind to our faults.

In Romans 12 we find even more details.

***1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.***

Here again is an exhortation to resist doing things according to our own ideas and desires, and to not give in to popular ways and means. Instead, we are to fix our focus of God's revelation, His ways, and by doing so we will prove that it is the perfect way to fulfill God's glory plan.

***3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to***

***think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.***

It seems that pride and presumption are the main things that keep us from doing things God's way. The next statement makes it clear that no one person has all the abilities needed, and that we are to defer to those whom God has gifted in ways we are not (humility).

***4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.***

Although this part of the admonition includes some “how to” instructions, it's main thrust is the fact that we are to recognize that we are only part of the picture and that we must rely on the other members of the body. I may think I know how everyone else should do their jobs, but God tells us here that He is the one who equips each of us to do what He has given us to do, and that we are to acknowledge that He has called and equipped others to do other things.

It is instructive to ask why God puts certain passages next to each other. This next section seems to start a new topic, but it is actually a continuation of the opening passage about being transformed by the renewing of our minds. It tells us how this is to be worked out. Then why did God put the section about gifts in the middle? Could it be that the interconnected working of the body parts is one of the most powerful aspects of the Church, and that the devil will do everything he can to disrupt this part of God's plan, and that humble love is the only way to achieve the unity that Christ prayed for?

***9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one***



*another in showing honor. 11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." 20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

The "oneness" we find in the scriptures is that of many quite different people, having quite different giftings, performing quite different functions, working together, supporting one another with sacrificial love, and supplying each others needs, to accomplish whatever the head (Jesus) wants. It is when this happens that the growth occurs and the earth becomes filled with His glory.

### **Pride**

Since the scriptures deal with many different problems of disharmony in the Church, it is wise to look at some of them in light of the forgoing study. I think we will find, that in almost every case of disunity throughout scripture, pride is the problem, and humble love is the answer.

*1 Cor. 1:2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— 6 even as the testimony about*

***Christ was confirmed among you so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.***

Please note that “in every way you were enriched in Him in all speech and knowledge.” And “you are not lacking in any gift.” This had to be a well equipped church. But it requires more than abundant abilities to fulfill God's glory plan. This church had problems.

***11 For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling (disunity) among you, my brothers. 12 What I mean is that each one of you says, “I follow Paul,” (I am a Presbyterian) or “I follow Apollos,” (I am a Baptist) or “I follow Cephas,” (I am a Charismatic) or “I follow Christ” (I am Jesus Only). 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. 16 (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.***

It must be a very serious thing if it can empty the cross of Christ of it's power. Yes, this statement was referring to “words of eloquent wisdom,” but that is just another example of the same pride principle that causes us to separate over our doctrinal preferences.

***1 Corinthians 3:1 But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, 3 for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? 4 For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human? 5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7 So***

*neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 8 He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.*

Notice that Paul and Apollos were doing different things, “as the Lord assigned to each,” yet they were called “one.” God's plan uses differences to produce a perfectly functioning “one.” The body would not work properly without those differences. It is when we set our focus on the importance our own views, functions, groups, congregations, denominations, etc., that we disdain and deny the functions that God has given to others. And when we do this, we thereby cut ourselves off from the “water,” and other essentials that God has put in others, and that we need in order to be a complete, healthy body.

### **Perfecting**

*1 Cor. 3:10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. 11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13 each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.*

It is clear that God is the designer and perfecter of His Church, and that we are only parts of it. At this point He is especially admonishing leaders to follow His plan, otherwise the work will be worthless, and in the end, will be burned up. Of course, the same goes for individual members as well.

*16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.*

Here, the admonition seems to shift to the members, reminding them that they are God's temple. But the use of the word “anyone,” in verse 17, may still refer mostly to the leaders who are doing the building, but is broadened to include others who might also use their influence to try to remodel the church in their own image.

***18 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness,” 20 and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.” 21 So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, 23 and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.***

It looks like God expects, not only His leaders, but everyone else in His Church to be very sure that they do not allow themselves to become big-headed and substitute their imaginations for God's revelations. Some worthwhile insights were uncovered when we substituted “Presbyterian,” “Baptist,” and “Charismatic,” for Paul, Apollos, and Cephas in a previous portion. When we do that here, we realize that all of them (and much much more) are ours! Does this mean that other denominations and ministries are ours? Yes! But only if we accept it. This plan of God is only possible in Christ.

**Pushback:** Can't you just feel the resentment rising as many try, but are unable, to deal with this. For some, the automatic first thought is. “But what about this heresy, or that totally unbiblical practice?” Yes, there are many things that must not be tolerated in the Church. But focusing exclusively on the difficulties, keeps us from seeing the possibilities: the blessings God has for us in the other parts of His design. This is a misdirection tactic of Satan that worked quite well for him in the garden; and he is still using it to blind and cripple the Church today. When we fall for this ploy, we are helping him do his job of stealing, killing, and destroying the unity God has designed into His plan. God knows all about the difficulties, and He has all of the answers. But if we never look for them, because we are convinced that the *status-quo* is the only solution, (or worse yet,

if I will consider working together, but only if I get to be the leader) we will forever suffer from our own inadequate efforts (or lack thereof). Alas, many will adamantly refuse to ever even think about reconsidering their stance on unity, never realizing that it is only God's definitions and methods that can fulfill His plans; ours will only steal, kill, and destroy the unity Jesus prayed for.

The scriptures are full of warnings about thinking we are so wise that we can solve the problems our way and don't have to search out His ways.

***1 Cor. 1:18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written,***

***“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,***

***and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”***

***20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.***

***26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts,***

***boast in the Lord.”***

This passage could be misconstrued to mean that God doesn't want us to be wise or use our brains at all. However, the first chapters of Proverbs makes it clear that we are to diligently seek wisdom and understanding. This passage does not disdain wisdom and scholarship, instead, it refers to two kinds of wisdom: that which is of man and that which is of God. Instead of trusting our own abilities, we must use every tool of understanding that God has given us to study and understand His ways. They are so much better than ours, that the wisest thing we can do with our wisdom, is not to come up with answers and programs, but to seek His. Concerning the last phrase of this passage, it helps if we understand that the word “boast” does not mean the same thing as “brag,” but something more like “revel in” or “rejoice over.” Some translations use the word “glory” If we see it as meaning: “to speak in glowing terms,” we can see this passage as an admonishment to realize and appreciate that God's ways, His glory plan, is what we should be getting excited about.

***Philippians 1:27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel . . .***

Here God tells us that the unity He wants is a “manner of life.” It is much more than just following a set of principles: it is mindset, an entire way of living, a transformed set of desires and purposes, one that is “worthy of the gospel of Christ.” It might also be said that anything less than God's unity, will not fulfill His plan to fill the earth with His glory; our way is not “worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

In conclusion, just in case someone missed it, the body of Christ is much bigger than any local congregation, and all of the parts must work together for the good of all, to fill the earth with God's glory. It may take extraordinary shaking of our current paradigms before we are willing to ask God how we are supposed to serve the other body parts (the other churches in our city). But, to be worthy of Christ, we must diligently seek His will and not allow our preconceived notions to get in the way.

## CONCRETE EXPERIENCE

But how does this body/joints/ligaments concept work in practice? To answer that question I talked to Pastor Phil Stern.

When I first met Phil, he was pastoring Destiny Church in western St. Louis county, Missouri. I was impressed with his character, his enthusiasm for the kingdom of God, and for the fact that he and his beautiful wife had ten wonderful children. Pastor Phil was born in Kenya, Africa, to missionary parents and has been pastoring, planting and revitalizing churches since the age of 18: nearly 50 years. He is an avid reader of good books and careful observer of what is going on in the Church. I found that he takes the body analogy quite seriously, and works hard to see that it is properly implemented in the churches he pastors. The following is part of what he told me.

### *Why this model?*

“I have seen models that were bad,” he said, “but one of the greatest teachers we have, is by seeing it done wrong (and there are a lot of things that are done wrong in the Church today). But if it is being done wrong, then what's the right way? The common thing that we saw over the years was that people come into the church, and they say, 'Where would you like me to serve?' They are asking us as leaders to find them a place to serve. We found that the question that needs to be asked from our end, was, 'What is it that God has put in your heart?’”

Phil feels that when the scripture says that God will give you the desire of your heart, He is talking about a longing, a passion in your heart that will not go away, because God put it there.

“But when we asked people, 'What is it that's in your heart?’” he said, “People would look at us like a cow looks at a new gate, and say, 'No one has ever asked us that before. What do you mean, what's in my heart?’”

He has found that with a little coaching, they can usually identify what that is, and that's where they need to be serving.

“Now, why would someone be serving in the nursery, when they have a desire to reach people out on the street? So let's find out what's in their hearts, and get them channeled there,” he said.

If the church does not have a program that fits their longing, then he tells them, “Well, maybe that's why God brought you here, in order for you to start that.”

He went on to say, “Every member of the body of Christ is called to minister, everybody! Not just somebody that does it as an occupation; everybody has a call of God on their life. That's why it amuses me when somebody tells me, 'That person really has a call of God on their life.' I'm like: 'Well, so does that one, and so does that one, and you know, that guy at the bar, he does too.' God calls all of us into His ministry.”

Phil is sure that there are a lot of churches that recognize the necessity of helping people develop and minister in the call of God on their lives. “But what I see that is not biblical,” he says, “is that everybody has to fit into a singular, one-person vision. I think that's why people move around churches so much, because they are trying to fit into some other man's vision, instead of what God's vision is for them. And if they can't line up with that, well, they have to go. There is something in man that is searching for the identity that God has put inside of them, and pastors need to realize that it's not about their agendas, it's about what God wants to build as His Church. And that includes 'what every joint supplies.' We are all one, even what the Bible calls the 'less comely' members.”

### ***Why this is so easy to miss?***

“It's a religious mentality that is wanting.” Phil says. “Religion kills. I just hate religion. It just kills, it stifles, it suffocates, and just holds people down. But it's a subliminal mentality, and it comes out in everything we talk about.”

He talked about how this mindset is counter to the pattern of humility called for in the scriptures. “Everybody has worth and value. My dad was in the ministry for years, and he never thought he was better than anybody else in the church,” he said. “I feel honored that I've done this as a livelihood, but I don't think I'm a better person because that person over there works in a factory.”

He pointed out that those attitudes are bound to come out, and that people can just feel when your heart is not right.

“Every pastor has quoted the Ephesians five-fold ministries scriptures: Apostles, Prophets, Pastors, Teachers, Evangelists,” he said, “But we have misinterpreted that scripture so much that it has



become almost like, 'Well, if you are one of these, then you're up here.' That's why I hate titles. I see people who always put titles on their names, like Pastor, or Evangelist, or Teacher. Well I'm a teacher, and I'm an evangelist, and I think we need to know what we are, but there are no job titles in the kingdom. I don't think we are going to use job titles in heaven. I hope not. 'Look who made it to heaven, Evangelist so-and-so.' I don't think that's going to matter.”

Phil feels that when we read that Ephesians scripture, we must realize that, one way or another, every one of us fits into one of the five-fold categories. An evangelist is just somebody who has a passion to preach the gospel to the lost.

“Well, why would it be only someone up here who has that?” he asks. “If anything, that guy is here because he's supposed to teach everybody who has that same passion, how to do it. So his full time occupation should be raising up and sending out evangelists. Instead of doing the work of an evangelist, train others to go and do the work of an evangelist. It's the same with pastors, and with teachers, and prophets. It's the same thing! Our job, if we are really living up to a five-fold calling, is to reproduce who we are.”

He believes that everyone in the body of Christ fits into one of those flavors of ministry. “That's why you know those that have a pastor's heart,” he said, “they just want to help people. You see an evangelist: they're always leading somebody to Christ. You see a prophet: they're always saying, 'Hey, the Lord told me to tell you this.' Everyone in the body fits into one of these categories.”

### ***Isn't sending people out working against the goal of building a big church?***

Phil shared some insights that magnificently illustrate where we go wrong on this issue. He said, “Man says that if he gives you a hundred dollars, he just lost a hundred dollars. But if I give you a hundred dollars, I just sowed a seed. I've never lost money when I gave it away the right way. I've never lost anything in the church when we gave away people. People are one of the most precious commodities we could ever send out and give away. It's no different than sowing and reaping. When you give people away, God brings people back to you. If somebody comes to me and says, 'I just feel I'm supposed to go to this church next to you,' I'm like, 'Well, let's

just pray, and if God is in it, He will bless you.' Now if I learn to sow correctly, and if they come and do that correctly, they'll be blessed as they go, because He said, 'I'm going to bless you coming in and going out.' And then, what's cool is that, whatever fruit they bear, the Bible says it's also part of your account. My spiritual 401-K account multiplies because I've poured into that person, that person, that person, and that person, and now they're out there pouring into that person, that person and that person. It's the greatest multiplication factor you can ever imagine. I can't even imagine how many people are on my account, because I have been so willing to give.”

### ***Many don't see it***

Phil pointed out that the people he connects with are all of a similar heart and mind, but that today's pastors are taught differently. They are taught: “Here's how you build your church, here's how you bring them in and keep them there.” The goal is to keep adding and adding and adding.

“Now I don't have anything against the larger churches,” he said. “I think that can be a great testimony to the Lord. But is a larger church better than a smaller church? Is a larger family better than a smaller family? It's the same thing. How do you evaluate that? My family has ten kids, but my family is no better than somebody who has two children.

“We've just got our thinking wrong. And it's part of the system of religion that we've created and follow today. The New Testament Church in the Bible looked a lot different than the typical Church in America today. The generation that I was birthed into is different from what my kids or my grandkids are in. I think we do need to change, and I think that God has given grace appropriate to every Church era. He wants us to become relevant to society. But one thing that God never changes is the heartbeat of what the Church is supposed to be.”

### ***Implementing the Body model***

If we are going to follow the scriptural model of the body being a complex organism, made up of many utterly different parts, where do we start? Phil starts with the principle that serving, in and of itself, is an excellent tool for this. He says, “I've seen people that

if you ask them. 'What's in your heart?' they just say, 'Well, I just want to do whatever I can do to help.' Then we are to say, 'Start serving somewhere.' Because when I serve, all of a sudden I begin to realize who I am. The more I serve, the more I work, the more I am involved in the body, the more I realize what my strengths are, and all of the sudden it will just start to come out. The one that will not serve, will never realize that. That's why God wants every member to be involved somewhere; every joint doing their part, every part giving service. I may start by serving in a place like, 'Well, I am just going to usher,' so I just start to usher. Or I may go direct traffic, or someone may want to work in the nursery, they may want to be a greeter, they may want to pray for people, to be a part of the prayer team. Whatever it might be, out of that serving they will discover who they are. And if they are engaged in good Bible study, if they are really connected with people, . . . you know you can't come to a service on a week end where there are five or six hundred people and feel connected. You have to be connected one-on-one, you have to be in a small group. You have to have those times when you are learning, and growing, with someone sharpening your ax blade, Then all that will be discovered. I've never seen one person who was connected that didn't discover who they were.”

### ***Joints and ligaments***

“I think there are some people who are connectors in the body,” he added. “This arm has to be connected to this bone here, where there is an elbow. The name of my personal ministry is called ‘Link Ministries,’ because I think God has called me to link people together. I get great joy when I find this person over here and say, 'You know, you need to meet this person over here because I think the two of you could do something together. That's why God wants to connect you.' I love doing that with pastors, and ministers. I just love connecting people together. In a sense, I guess you could call me an elbow. I am connecting this to this, and if it's connected, now all of a sudden you have an arm. And then you can get the next piece going.”

He pointed out that we are all called to some function in the body, and it is when we all love one another, embrace one another and work together, that we become a functioning organism. “God

orchestrates this in a way that we can't," he said. "God will put you with the right people. I've never seen anybody who is connected not find out who they are, but I see people all of the time who are not connected, who are still wondering. They don't know what their purpose is because they are out there all by themselves. So the key is that you have to get them connected in the body, whatever that level is."

He also pointed out that some people just know what their passions are. "If we go by the word of the Lord, He will lead and guide us," he said.

### ***Each joint supplying***

"It's relationship," he said. "I have to have people in my life that will challenge me. Promise Keepers taught this for a while: you have to have the Barnabas, and you have to have the Paul, and you have to have the Timothy in your life. I have people in my life who challenge me all of the time. I want people in my life who are really going to challenge me. To move forward, I need those people in my life. But I also will grow if I am challenging somebody else. I will also grow if someone is teaching me. So I have to have those who will sharpen my ax blade. You have to have those people in your life that are not impressed with you, but will help you get where you are going. We have to have that In the Church."

He also pointed out that if all of the churches practiced this, not just within each church, but between churches and between denominations as well, we would be in revival. "Disunity is one of the biggest things that stops the Church from being effective, because of what it says to the unbeliever," he said. "They will know what you are by your love for one another. What would happen if everybody laid down their personal agendas? Oh my gosh!"

### ***Hindrances***

"I think that there are cases where pride is definitely in it," he said. "And, sometimes people are just subversive! They have their own agendas. I also think the devil keeps leaders so busy in the church that we don't see what can be. One of my great passions has always been to gather pastors together. They are the hardest group of people to get together because they are so busy that I don't think they see the value of it. When I was a pastor in Tulsa the first time,

I had a passion to gather pastors together.”

He and another pastor started doing it. “We had seven pastors come together,” he said. “It was a start. We kept doing it and kept doing it, and eventually we had 300 to 400 pastors on a monthly basis. Then Oral Roberts started to come, and Richard Roberts started to come.” The results of this bit of unity were measurable. “We ended up seeing crime change in that city,” he said.

### ***Unity and Revival***

“And it's more than just the Pastors,” he asserted. “I think Church people are ready for it; people want it to happen, but pastors sometimes feel uncomfortable. 'Well, what if they end up going to somebody else's church?' Well, what's wrong with that? Is that the worst thing in the book that can happen? Paul always referred to the Church at Corinth. There was more than just one church in that city. The churches at Ephesus he referred to as the city Church. And I think that today, God looks at St. Louis as the Church of St. Louis. Where is the Church in St. Louis? It's beyond the churches in St. Louis. It is all of us who profess Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

“I think that in the end days, for revival to really hit a city, there has to be a coming together of the Church: the Church that's in that city. I think we will see it, and I think it will be a huge move of God that takes place. I think there are other people talking the same thing, but every part has to do it's part, then this thing will come together. Unfortunately, the Church usually doesn't come together unless there is persecution, so I say, 'Bring it on! Bring on persecution in St. Louis!' We are in America, and if America doesn't wake up pretty soon, it's going to get persecution. We re definitely living in an interesting day.”

Amen, Phil.

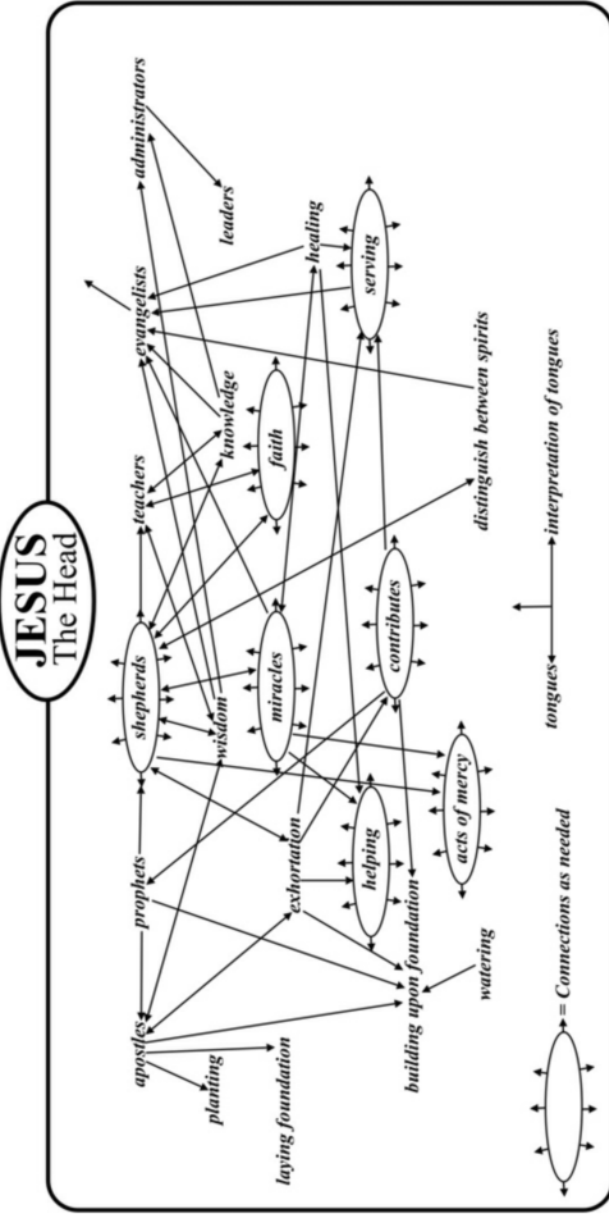
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Now the question for the rest of us is: Are we going to build the Church our way, or God's way? Are we going to kill, steal, and destroy (critize, condemn and disassociate), or are we going to be the body He designed us to be (serving Jesus, the head, by serving one another in humble love). If we do what He told us to do, will He not then do what He said He would do: bring amazing revival? I want to see God's glory fill the whole earth; don't you?

Let's do it!

# CHURCH BODY PARTS and JOINTS

(A partial representation)



This chart is based on all of the gifts and ministries mentioned by name in the New Testament. The "Joints (arrows)" are speculative. What connections would you make?

*Eph. 4:15-16 . . . we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

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