

# THE EXTENT OF God's UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

*God's Intrinsic Love for Us*

(PART 2)

In John 15:9 the Lord says, "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love." Just stay in His love. Do not leave it. Remain there. We are not just hoping that God will feel a certain way. God intrinsically feels a certain way toward us. And His intrinsic feeling of love is eternally flowing because of the finality of the cross. Because of the finality of what happened on our behalf at Calvary with the shedding of the Lord's blood, the Father has once and for all received us fallen, sinful people. God so intrinsically loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). And He demonstrated that love, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8).

Because of Christ, God betrothed us to Himself "in righteousness and justice" (Hosea 2:19). He entered into a love relationship in righteousness, making Christ our imputed, legal righteousness, and taking us out of our own standing. Now we are clothed with Christ Himself as our righteousness imputed to us. So our love relationship with the Lord

is based upon Him being our righteousness. God has betrothed us in justice. He judged our sins once and for all. On the cross, all our sins — past, present, and future — were laid on Christ. So, the sin question has been answered conclusively at Calvary. This is all tied in to God's unconditional love. This is how I am related to Him. My relationship is characterized by that love based upon blood — based upon God's righteousness and justice.

God betrothed us not only in righteousness and in justice, but also "in lovingkindness and mercy." Now God's intrinsic feeling toward us can only be love, because of Jesus, because of blood. Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! How glorious! How marvelous! Now our whole relationship with Him is characterized by this — "God loves me."

## *God's Demonstrated Love*

God's unconditional love in the book of Hosea is unveiled to us as we spend time looking at all the

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verses describing the negative conditions of God's people, as well as all the verses on God's love. Now let us dwell on more of the revelation of His love. As we previously pointed out, this love is demonstrated love. God's love was demonstrated, in type, with Hosea's taking Gomer as his wife. In the New Testament, God's love was demonstrated to us on the cross. Thus, His love has been proved in an absolute way. This is the kind of love we have — it is demonstrated love.

### *God's Shocking Love*

The love of God is also shocking love. Hosea 1:10 says, "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, You are not My people, there it shall be said to them, You are the sons of the living God."

The book of Hosea is full of paradoxes. On one hand, God says, "You are not My people." And then He immediately says, "In the place where it was said to them, You are not My people, there it shall be said to them, You are the sons of the living God." Praise the Lord. This is a kind of shocking love, because we had just concluded that there was no way for us to be His people. We were not His people. The decision had been made. We thought we were left without God. But in the place where we felt we were left without God, there it shall be said, "You are the sons of the living God." Praise the Lord. We are His sons because He imparted His life into us. The unique design of God's love is not only to forgive us and reconcile us to Himself, but also to make us sons, and that means to fill us with life. Where we were not His people, it does not say that we became His people. It actually says something higher and greater. It says, "You are the sons of the living God." This means we have received divine life.

### *Love That Makes Us Alive in Christ*

Ephesians 2:1-3 are verses describing Gomer. When you read these verses you see failure, a mass of

corruption, spoiled humanity — living in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh, and being by nature the children of wrath, even as the rest of mankind. But what immediately follows this description are verses 4 and 5: <sup>4</sup> "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." Do you see what the real salvation is here? The real salvation is to be made alive together with Christ, that is, to receive life and be joined to life. The real salvation is to be one spirit with the Lord, who is a life-giving Spirit in our spirit.

So, to this mass of corruption, the love of God comes with mercy. And what the love and mercy do is make us alive together with Christ, bringing us out of the realm of death into the realm of life. Thus, first God loves us, and then He makes us alive together with Christ. Following this it says, "By grace you have been saved." We may think of salvation as merely escaping hell and going to heaven. Although we know this is a fact — we have eternal life — the real nature of this salvation is that we are made alive together with Christ; we are sons of the living God. The Lord's desire today is that through His love and the enjoyment of His love, He would make us people enjoying His life, living by His life, and expressing His life as sons.

### *What the Church Is*

This is what the church is — a group of sons filled with God's life and living by that life day by day. First of all, we enjoy the life. We enjoy the riches, the surplus, and the capital of the life that we have in the Godhead. All the riches of God the Father in the Son flowing as the Spirit are now available for us to enjoy. And then, out of this enjoyment, we are brought into the realm of living by that life, passing through death and coming up in resurrection.

For example, in your relationship with your husband, you experience many cycles of death and resurrection. In your relationship to your anxieties, you experience death and resurrection. In your relationship to your feelings of bitterness and lingering

sorrow, you experience more death and resurrection. By saying, “O Lord Jesus,” from your spirit, you are, by the Spirit, putting to death the practices of your body (Rom. 8:13). All those outbreaks of your autonomous, independent self-life are being put to death. Whatever form the self may take, you say, “O Jesus, You are my life. Hallelujah, Lord. Thank You for death and resurrection.” Sometimes there is immediate resurrection, other times delayed resurrection. You may be there in death for a period of time. You have no sensation, no feeling, no inspiration, but you are still saying, “Amen, Lord. I am one with You, just one with You.” And then you enjoy resurrection in the next days. This is how the church comes forth — by all of us enjoying God’s life in this way in all the details of our daily living.

The purpose of God’s love is to bring us into a life of sonship, to make us “sons of the living God” (Hosea 1:10). This is shocking love — that we “children of wrath” could be reached by God’s rich mercy and made alive together with Christ. Here is this rebellious, sinful person who has been captured by the love of God, joined together with Christ, and is now living by His life and being saved in His life. So here in Hosea and in Ephesians God’s economy is clearly unveiled. This economy shows us that God’s love has one thing in mind — to bring us into the enjoyment of His life.

So, you come to a meeting of the church and there is something flowing. It is something enjoyable, something you can drink of in the singing, something you can participate in. Where does that something come from? It is coming from the life supply of the Spirit in the spirits of the saints. And in any church, in any assembly of believers, for that life supply to be present in the atmosphere of the meetings, it only requires a small handful of saints who will live by God’s life in their daily living — who will live in death and resurrection all day long, experiencing Christ. This makes a solid supply for the whole church that we can all drink of and benefit from.

You cannot just come together and “work up” this life supply in a meeting. This genuine flow of God’s life in the meetings comes from you and I experiencing Christ during the week — at our desk at

work, in our schedule at school, in our relationships at home — with all our problems and anxieties. In our daily living we are learning to meet everything with Christ, with His life, by applying our spirit. We are living by another life. Then when we come together, there is a spontaneous life supply.

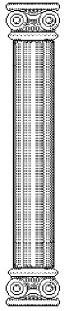
### *Love and Life*

God’s love leads us to this life, and this life always leads us to the love. It is a constant reciprocal relationship — love and life and life and love. We are simply enjoying this cycle in a continuous way. You may not have lived by His life so much, but, hallelujah, you can be brought to His love, quieted in His love, and wooed and won until you find yourself saying, “What have I to do anymore with idols?” This is how the book of Hosea ends. After being joined to idols, left to himself, without hope, stubborn and rebellious — after all of this — at the end of the book, Ephraim now says, “What have I to do anymore with idols?” How did Ephraim get from one point to the other? It was by enjoying God’s love, and then being infused by that love with God’s life. God’s life spontaneously does not care for idols. The not caring for idols is in the life. It is in the life supply. How marvelous this love is.

### *Gathering Love*

The issue of this life supply, of this enjoyment of life, is described in Hosea 1:11: “Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and appoint for themselves one head; and they shall come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel!” Then Hosea 2:1 says, “Say to your brethren, My people, and to your sisters, Mercy is shown.” The greatest manifestation of mercy to us is this — He gathers us together and becomes our unique living Head. Of course, we know that this word certainly applies to the future of the nation of Israel. On the other hand, the apostles, such as Peter and Paul, applied these kinds of verses, especially verse 10, directly to the church, the Body of Christ.

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# The House of God



## Part 2

### The General Landscape of the New Testament

Just as the tabernacle, the temple, Jerusalem, and Zion (as God’s house) permeated the fabric of the Old Testament, so does the church (as God’s house) permeate the New. God’s desire for His house does not change or even wane as we move from one Testament to the next. This was made obvious during the earthly ministry of the Lord when He declared, “I will build My church.” It is continued in the epistles where the apostles speak of the church as God’s habitation. Consider the following passages in which various designations are used to describe the church as God’s house (*italics added*).

#### *God’s Building*

“You are God’s farm, *God’s building*. According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, but another builds upon it. But let each one take heed how he builds upon it. For other foundation no one is able to lay besides that which is being laid, which is Jesus Christ. But if anyone builds on the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble . . .” (1 Cor. 3:9-12).

“Being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in Whom all the *building*, being fitted together . . .” (Eph. 2:20-21).

#### *The Temple of God*

“Do you not know that you are a *temple of God*, and the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16).

“And what agreement has the *temple of God* with idols? For we are the *temple of the living God*; even as God said, I will dwell in them and walk in them and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (2 Cor. 6:16).

“In Whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a *holy temple* in the Lord” (Eph. 2:21).

#### *The Dwelling Place of God*

“In Whom you also are being built together into a *dwelling place of God* in spirit” (Eph. 2:22).

#### *The House of God*

“But if I delay, that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the *house of God*, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15).

“But Christ, as a Son over *His house*, whose *house* we are . . .” (Heb. 3:6).

“Coming to Him, a living stone, rejected by men but with God chosen and precious, you also as living stones, are being built up as a *spiritual house* . . .” (1 Pet. 2:4-5).

These verses clearly demonstrate that the church is God’s house. Obviously, this is not a minor item in the Bible. Indeed, we could say that this is what God is after on the earth. This is His eternal purpose. From the types seen in the Old Testament to their fulfillment in the New Testament, nothing is more clear than God’s desire to have His dwelling place in the church.

We also know from these verses that the building of God’s house is a process. It is not a once-and-for-all matter. The Lord declared, “I will build My church.” Even the word “build” implies a process. Then after the Lord’s death and resurrection, the apostles revealed that the church was *being* built, *being* fit together, and *growing* into a holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Pet. 2:5). These verbs are in the present tense in the original Greek text, which is a tense showing continuous action. Paul told the Corinthians that he was a co-worker with God on this building. He was a wise master builder, laying the foundation of the church as he went from city to city, and that other believers were building upon that foundation (1 Cor. 3:9-12). All of this shows us that the building of the church is something ongoing. And we must realize that the same building process has continued until this day. In fact, we are co-working with the Lord on the same building that the apostles were working on during the first century. We are not working on something different. Nor is the Lord Jesus. For almost two thousand years, the Lord Jesus has been working on one grand universal project — the building of His church. And at His return, that building process

will be complete. In the new heaven and new earth, there will be the New Jerusalem, which is the habitation of God among men (Rev. 21 and 22). That city, comprised of all His redeemed, is the consummation of all God's building work. It is the church, in her consummate glorious state, not only as a Bride, but also as the eternal dwelling place of God. At that time, the Lord's prophecy, "I will build My church," will be completely fulfilled.

### **The Spiritual Principles of God's House**

We have seen thus far the centrality of God's house throughout the whole Bible. However, we must ask ourselves, what are the spiritual principles of God's house? In other words, what makes God's house God's house? Let us consider two basic matters.

#### *It Is Where He Is Living*

First, God's house is where God settles down, moves, and expresses Himself. God lives there! It is not a place where He visits periodically, or shows up sporadically. It is not merely a hotel for God, nor His temporary quarters. The church is God's permanent residence. We all know what it is like to spend a few days with some friends or relatives in their home. Although our hosts may insist that we make ourselves at home, and that we feel free to help ourselves to the food in the kitchen, we never feel completely at ease to oblige. We always have that hesitating consciousness that we are in someone else's home and that we are but visitors. We do not have the same kind of freedom of movement and boldness of action that we so naturally possess when we are in our own home. This is why we always have that underlying desire to get back to the comfort and ease of home. Home is where we can live and move and carry on our daily activities with complete ease. Do we realize that this is what the church is to God? The church is where God dwells. It is where He is comfortable. It is where He has freedom of movement to do as He pleases.

The church is also where God carries on a lot of divine activity. In fact, the first mention of the house of God is recorded in Genesis 28 when Jacob slept on a rock as his pillow as he was fleeing from his brother,

Esau. As he slept, he dreamed of a ladder that stretched from earth to heaven, and upon the ladder were angels ascending and descending. When he awoke, he exclaimed, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." He then said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" (Gen. 28:16-17). Notice the phrase, "*house of God*." Why did Jacob call that place the house of God? Why did he name it "Bethel" (which means "house of God")? Simply because there was a current of divine activity in that place. There was a heavenly traffic going from God to earth and back again. And wherever the ladder touched down upon earth — that was the house of God! Of course, we know that the Lord Jesus told us that He Himself was the reality of the ladder (John 1:51). In other words, He is the mediator that has been set up between God and man, bringing man to God and God to man (1 Tim. 2:5). And today the Holy Spirit is being transmitted from the throne of God to us and back again based on the finished work of Christ. There is a current of the Spirit in this universe that is flowing from heaven to earth. And the church is where that current touches down upon earth! It is where there exists a wonderful flow, direct from the throne of God. It is also where that current of the Spirit flows back through us to the throne in worship, praise, prayer, intercession, and thanksgiving. All this divine traffic is what makes the house of God the house of God. What a glorious reality this is!

The apostle Paul refers to this same reality when he tells Timothy that his purpose in writing to him is that he "may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). Oh, it is the church of the *living* God! The church is His house because it is where He is so active, flowing, and living. It is where the truth, the very reality of God, is found on earth. The reality of God and the flowing of the Spirit is not found at the sports events, nor in the TV or radio. No. The world is not God's house. The reality of God is found in the church. The church is the pillar and base of the truth for mankind. Apart from the church, who or what would uphold the reality of God on earth? Only the church can do this. It is where the great mystery of godliness — which is God manifested in man — is testified on earth (1 Tim. 3:16). Two thousand years

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The children of Judah and the children of Israel were divided. Israel was in the north and Judah was in the south — ten tribes in the north, two tribes in the south. There was the God-ordained worship center in Jerusalem in the south, and then the northern tribes set up two independent centers, Bethel and Dan, in the north. To this divided condition God said, “You are not My people.” The whole situation was negative; but “in the place where it was said to them, You are not My people, there it shall be said to them, You are the sons of the living God.” They are sons by God Himself becoming their life. Then they will be gathered together and appoint for themselves one head. This means that out of God’s life flows a church life, a Body life, a corporate life — a life in which we are gathered together, enjoying the one Head dispensing all His riches to every member. The riches of His dispensing include both life supply and function — many and various kinds of function. This is all the Lord’s mercy to us! What a mercy that He would take us divided, separated peoples and gather us together to one living Head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus, we see flowing out of God’s love is God’s life and God’s building. God’s economy in the New Testament issues out of a people enjoying the unconditional love of God. By enjoying this love, we are filled with life and we gather and have fellowship. It is wonderful that we can have fellowship with all believers that have the enjoyment of this life. And the more we enjoy this life, the more there will be the same response in us that was found in Ephraim: “What have I to do anymore with idols?” We also as believers will say, “What have I to do with my background and my division and my name — what have I to do with these things?” Because of love and life, we spontaneously have the inward sense, What have I to do with that?

#### *Vertical and Horizontal Love*

Between us as believers, we have the enjoyment of God’s life with His unconditional love. We have received His life, and our relationship with Him is based on His love. The more we enjoy His life and love, the more secure we are in it. We know how His

love works toward us. We are wretched, corrupt, sinful failures, yet God loves us because of Jesus. Individually, you and I know our relationship with God in this way, and together we can know this same love with each other. We can receive one another regardless of our condition or the things we are passing through. There is a love of God flowing between us horizontally, as well as between God and us vertically. There is horizontal love — forgiving love, forbearing love, merciful love, love that allows the Spirit to work in one another, love that receives one another unconditionally, while we are all in the process of being transformed.

Because we are enjoying this kind of love, we are not trying to mold or change each other according to our own expectations or views. We are just receiving one another in this life and enjoying this life together, and the issue is a love that is expressed in the church. It is the very divine nature embodied in us and among us. The Lord said, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). This love is not our conditional love, but the unconditional flow of God’s love between us.

This is why it is so utterly important for us to know the vertical love relationship with the Lord that dispenses life into our being. It is because this vertical love relationship ushers us into the horizontal relationship in which we are gathered together under one Head. Then He and we just say, “My people” and “mercy.” Hallelujah. It is all mercy. Praise the Lord. Oh, may the Lord grant us to see the extent of this marvelous unconditional love that reaches every kind of condition and brings us first to His life, and then to the church. We love to say “church life,” because Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her!

Christ loved the church when she was a Gomer. He gave Himself up for her. When He loved her and died for her, she was not a perfected bride. She was a harlot, a Gomer, but He loved her. He loved her, with all her blemishes and all her spots and all of her corruption. He loved her and gave Himself for her. That is the love of God. We are the church. He loves the church. He took a “mass of corruption” and He loved her, and gave Himself up for her, that “He

might sanctify and cleanse [her] with the washing of water by the word, that He might present [her] to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that [she] should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:26-27). So, by a lot of speaking — a lot of washing of water in the word — by a lot of cleansing, the spots are being removed. There are many things being washed continuously among us. The glorious church is based upon Christ’s work and His righteousness and all that He has done. Amen. Praise the Lord for this wonderful love. This love issues in life and the building of the church. God’s economy takes place in this unconditional love.\*

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\* The above article, “The Extent of God’s Unconditional Love,” is from the third chapter of a new book entitled *God’s Unconditional Love*, by Bill Freeman. The book is available for \$5.00, postpaid. You may order by writing to **Ministry Publications**, P.O. Box 12222, Scottsdale, AZ 85267, or by calling (602) 948-4050.

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ago, Jesus Christ was God manifested in the flesh as He walked throughout the land of Israel. But today, though He is not here in the flesh, yet His Body, His house, His church, is manifesting God in the flesh. And that manifestation of God is godliness. It is where the very reality of God is encountered and enjoyed. Indeed, it is where men, when coming to the meetings of the church, fall down and declare that surely God is among you (1 Cor. 14:25).

How awesome is the church. Jacob exclaimed, “How awesome is this place!” By reading the account in Genesis, you realize that he was absolutely awestruck by the house of God. It is an awesome thing to have God flowing in and through a group of men and women. Paul sensed the same thing. When he was dealing with the church, it was almost like he was on holy ground. He would not touch the church in a light or cursory manner. That is why he instructed Timothy regarding his conduct in the church. It was not a small thing how a person conducted himself in the church of the living God. To Paul, it was serious business. In fact, he warned the Corinthians that whoever destroyed the church would

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be destroyed by God (1 Cor. 3:16-17; Acts 5:1-10). In other words, we should not do, say, initiate, or propose things in the church out of a fleshly, soulish source. We should not treat the church in a common way — the way you treat your job or school or any other entity. Why? Because this is God’s house! And in God’s house, we should conduct ourselves in a sober way, not because of a set of strict rules, but because the holy presence of the living God is there.

The church is awesome. Today, most believers do not think of the church as awesome. It is an adjective that is not often associated with the church. It is used to describe many things, but not the church. In fact, if believers today were asked to list those items in the Bible that are awesome, from the most awesome to the least, I am sure that the church would, in most instances, be far down the list. But not so with God. Nor with the apostles. Nor with the early church. The book of Acts tells us that in the church life there was a sense of awe and godly fear among all the saints (Acts 2:43; 5:11). This is as it should be. The church, as the house of the living God — the place where God lives, moves, and expresses Himself — is an awesome thing.

### *It Is Where There Is Building*

What makes the house of God the house of God? It is, secondly, where there is building. For a house to properly exist, two things are needed. You need a built-up structure and you need an inhabitant. We have already seen that God is the inhabitant of this house. But what about the building itself? God needs a built-up structure in which to dwell. And what is that structure? It is the church. Not as a physical church building. No, the church is a *spiritual* house (1 Pet. 2:5). It is a dwelling place of God *in spirit* (Eph. 2:22). And the materials for this building consist of us, the believers. As Peter states, “you yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house” (1 Pet. 2:5). That is, our identity in relation to the house of God is that of a stone. Hence, the church as God’s house consists of many stones, many believers, being built up as a spiritual house for God to dwell in.

What does all this really mean? In our experience of the Lord, what does it mean to be built up in the church? To answer this question, we must first under-

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stand that although each of us is an individual stone, our value to God is only when we are built up together with other stones. In relation to God's building, I have little value to God when I exist as an isolated stone apart from other stones. Stones that are scattered and individualistic do not serve much purpose. But stones that are built up with other stones have very much purpose. In other words, God's house is a corporate matter, not an individual matter. Yes, I may be a genuine Christian, saved by the blood of Christ. But if I live as an isolated individual who has no relationships with other believers, I will experience very little of God's building, and I will not participate in the fulfilling of God's purpose to have a corporate habitation. I need to apply the cross to my individualism and independence in order to practically be built into the church. Indeed, individualism is a great enemy of God's building. Each of us has many "rough edges" that must be chiseled and cut off in order to be fitly framed into God's house. But regrettably, we are often unwilling to be touched by the Lord and prefer to maintain our independent will and ways. But when I present myself to the church life to be related to others and to be trimmed of all my rough edges, then God's building will proceed in my experience.

But this is not all. We need to see one more point. Perhaps we have gathered together with other believers. But we must ask, is there a building up of the church in that gathering? Gathering is one thing; building up is another thing. Having a pile of rocks is one thing; the building up of those rocks into a building is another thing. Mere gathering does not guarantee building. It only affords the opportunity and possibility for building. How is it then that the gathering of believers translates into the building up of the church? That is dependent on one thing: *how we relate to one another*. It is possible for believers to gather together and then relate to each other in a natural way. So often, we relate to each other in the realm of the soul. We like each other. We are friends. We have common interests. Outwardly, this seems quite nice. Yet, in relation to God's building, it is useless. Why? Because God's building is in the Spirit. It is not in the realm of the soul. God's house is a spiritual house, not a soulish, natural, fleshly house.

Therefore, how we are related to each other means everything in God's building. And what is the basis for relationships that build up God's house? Christ! And

only Christ. He must be the foundation stone — that is, the only basis upon which we relate (1 Cor. 3:11). He must be the cornerstone — the One who connects us to one another (Eph. 2:20). He must be the living stone — the life supply we need to be organically built up (1 Pet. 2:4). He must be the essence of our relationships. If we gather with other believers, but do not relate to one another in Christ, then we have gathering, but not building. But if we gather together and relate in Christ, then we have the reality of God's building. The building of the church takes place only in Christ (Eph. 2:21-22). He Himself is our peace. He is our love. He is our oneness. He is our patience and long-suffering. He is our meekness and forgiveness. In other words, Christ is the essence of our relationships. This is why Paul told the Romans that the reality of the kingdom of God in the church life is not based on outward matters (eating and drinking) but on righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). We must have Christ between us. We must have the reality of the Spirit between us. Then we have the building.

Where does God dwell? God dwells where believers have gathered and relate to one another in Christ. He dwells right there! There is where He is comfortable and at ease. There is where a lot of divine traffic occurs. There is where He is in the midst. His presence is not an accidental matter. He lives in this spiritual house comprised of many believers who are not scattered but gathered; and not just gathered, but relating to each other in the love of Christ, keeping the peace of Christ between them. Right there is where He loves to dwell! And when God gets a group of people who meet as the church in such a reality, how awesome that is!

— Kirk Eland

## *the Christian*

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