

# THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;  
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,  
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God*

**IN CHRIST JESUS.**

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

#02-0809

FEBRUARY 5, 2008

## ***THAT THE WORLD MAY KNOW ... LOVE***

**“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even 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 sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.” (John 17.20-23 NASB)**

A previous issue, *That They May Be One* (#02-0808 February 1, 2008), briefly presented the Lord's heart for oneness of all the ones the Father gives to Him. We could say that oneness and the unity of the Spirit are to be the watermark of the ecclesia of Christ. Jesus' prayer to His Father was that they may be one as We are one, and they may be perfected in unity. It is unity that perfects the saints and builds up the body in love. Love and unity go hand in hand. Where there is true unity in spirit, there is love; and where there is the love of God, there is true unity. God is love and God is spirit, and there is no division at all in the realm of God. All who belong to the Lord Jesus have been brought into this realm in Christ, and this realm is in spirit. His people are in Him and He is in them, and it is in this realm that the body of Christ is to dwell in unity. It is a unity not based on outward things of this earth, such as the many things that the visible church of our day embraces, but based on the spiritual reality of being hidden with Christ in God. The teaching of men, the names of men, buildings, organizations, institutions, programs, even forms of worship do not give us our oneness. Only in Christ and by the spirit of God do we have unity.

It is safe to say that all disunity amongst God's people is of man; it is not of God or of Christ. Division is man's way; unity is God's way. Wherever the spirit of God has sway in hearts, there is always unity, oneness of heart, mind, and action. Dear brethren, if we seek unity on any ground other than in spirit and in Christ, we will ultimately fail and become divided. If we try to unite around a man, perhaps a gifted pastor-teacher, or a teaching (doctrine), or a particular emphasis, we might succeed in gathering a few or perhaps many into our camp, but it will ultimately lead to separation from others in the body of Christ. As soon you identify yourself with any name other than Christ Jesus our Lord, you are moving onto the ground of sectarianism, and this same principle applies to the myriad of other things that many seem to identify with in our day.

It does not take much observation to realize the disunity of what could be called the visible church of our day. We see it wherever we travel, either in our own country or in other countries. For example, we have traveled several times to Africa and attended Sunday services at which time I was called upon to speak. Oftentimes, the meeting place was a school room where perhaps 20-50 brethren met. But what amazed us was the fact that as we met with one group, there were several other groups holding services in other rooms in the same school building or complex, and there was no connection between these different Christian groups that were meeting in close proximity to one another. This would be unheard of in many religions of the world, and yet it is common practice amongst believers in Jesus Christ. It is no different in the United States, except the meetings are not in school rooms but in buildings in close proximity to each other, each with a different name of emphasis on their sign. Christ has been divided!

In his assessment of the condition of the Corinthian ecclesia, Paul asked: **Has Christ been divided?** (1 Corinthians 1.13). The brethren had divided along the line of men. “I am of Paul.” “I am of Apollos.”

“I am of Cephas.” As if to be more spiritual, some declared: “I am of Christ.” Little did they know that they too were dividing Christ, for they had a sectarian attitude. Paul knew what was going on amongst the Corinthians, and he labored that they would see the error of their way. Division along sectarian lines is not of God; it is of man. All division is the result of either man or the devil. God is not divided nor is Christ divided. Unfortunately, that which takes the title of Christ in our day is grossly divided along so many lines that it is nearly impossible to list all of them. Outwardly, religions of the world seem more united as one than Christians are one. Our division as the Lord’s people is not due to diversity of the many members of the body of Christ; it is a direct result of the hand of the fallen nature of man that knows only division. Christianity has become a matter of emphasis on many things rather than a unity in the one thing—Christ Jesus our Lord and His Headship.

One of our experiences will serve to illustrate the point. The first time we visited a local assembly that is independently aligned with a major denomination, we were greeted by an elderly brother. Knowing this particular denomination’s emphasis on “getting people saved,” I shook hands with this brother in Christ and told him that we were the Lord’s and that we are all one in the body of Christ. Almost without hesitation, this brother responded: “Well, we pray that the Holy Spirit will touch you to walk the aisle today.” This is all he said to us; there was no acknowledgement that we are one in Christ. I did not say anything to this brother, but I found it difficult to believe what I had heard. Did this man not hear me? What did he mean by walking the aisle? Did he mean to walk it to “get saved” or to “join the church?” Needless to say, we never walked the aisle at that place, although we did visit quite frequently over a two-year period as we felt it was the Lord’s heart that we were to express His oneness by meeting with these dear brethren who truly love Jesus and are looking for His return. I won’t, as we say, throw the baby out with the bath water, for this group of saints has much that is commendable. However, a day came when it became apparent that we had to move on, and so we did.

Although I have some doctrinal differences with what came forth from the pulpit, this was not the reason for us moving on. The Lord had given us grace to remain for a season until we realized that we simply were not accepted as part of this group because we never walked the aisle to become a “member.” Very few made any attempt to speak to us or have fellowship with us in a meaningful way. Few ever even asked us our names. But if we missed a Sunday or two, the pastor, who has a true pastor’s heart of love, would send us a letter telling us he missed us. Unfortunately, this was a huge disconnect from our experience with them. As I see it, the problem was a true lack of understanding of the oneness of the body of Christ, which we never heard expressed from the pulpit. The starting point for this group was on walking the aisle either to get saved (from hell to heaven), join the church (align oneself with a denominational emphasis), or kneel at the altar in response to the pastor’s message. We could never join such an organization because, to us, it is a statement that we are dividing ourselves from other brothers and sisters in Christ who meet down the street or, for that matter, throughout our city. Perhaps if more of the Lord’s people began to refuse to move onto sectarian ground in the name of Jesus, there would be far less division amongst His people, and the world would begin to see the love of God in us and through us.

The world is to see the love of God as expressed through the unity or the oneness of the body of Christ. Carefully consider Jesus’ words: **That they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.** Being perfected in unity has a grand purpose in relation to the world. Why must the world know that the Father sent His Son? So that the world will know that the Father loves His people just as the Father loves His Son. **So that the world may know that You love them as You love Me.** I place love in the present tense because God’s love does not change; it is past, present, and future. **Love transcends time!** Our God not only loves us, but He loves the world as well, and He wants all to know and experience His love. **For thus God loves the world, so that He gives His only-begotten Son** (John 3.16 CV). God is the Giver, and His giving comes forth from His very essence of love, and this love has been poured out in the heart of His people. Isn’t it time for the world to see and to know the love of God through us? May it be so, all to the glory of God!