

# 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)

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## **LOOK OUT FOR THE INTERESTS OF OTHERS**

In previous issues, I have been making the point that the true body of Christ, the spiritual body joined to its spiritual Head, Christ Jesus our Lord, should guard itself from being distracted with *isms*, which are defined as “systems or theories.” They are organized systems, movements, and ways of thinking developed by mankind, not by God. There are many *isms* in the world today, but we need to be reminded that we are in the world but not of it. We do not have to join forces with or embrace the many *isms* over which mankind divides. We have a very wonderful and glorious message for the world, and we need not dilute it with the *isms* of man. Besides, the church of our day has enough division within it over doctrine and various emphases that we don’t need to further divide ourselves over man-created issues. Christ has been parted! Let’s turn back to the oneness that we have in Christ! There is only **one body, one Spirit, one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all** (Ephesians 4.4-6).

Now, previous issues touched upon environmentalism, political conservatism and liberalism, humanism, and multiculturalism. I thought I was finished with the matter of culture and the ecclesia, but I still have a few more thoughts to share. Why does *multiculturalism* appeal to some churches? It appeals because the body of Christ is often divided along cultural or racial lines, and they rightfully sense that this is not the way it ought to be. After all, it appears that the Lord’s people are as divided as the world is, perhaps even more so. Recognizing the differences between cultures is fine as long as it does not lead to a breakdown of the unity or the oneness that we are to maintain in Christ. We must do all that we can to prevent division amongst the Lord’s people along any line, no matter how good it is or how much value might be in the line.

**Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** (Ephesians 4.1-3 NASB)

However, I have a caution whenever we embrace a concept from the world, even a good concept. The word *culture* is defined as “the concepts, habits, skills, arts, instruments, institutions, etc. of a given people in a given period.” Adding the prefix *multi* to *culture* simply means that many cultures co-exist alongside each other in a given area and period. Often, we think of cultural differences along the lines of how people dress, along with the colors that they commonly employ, the food they eat, the type of buildings they live in, and the customs, habits, or practices that are common among the people. I must admit that when we first encounter new cultures, we can get caught up in their way, especially the more colorful and outgoing ones that love bright clothes and love to sing and dance. The ecclesia most assuredly can embrace such differences, even enjoy them. The caution that I have is related to the habits or practices that vary considerably amongst various people groups. Frankly, every culture has some good and some bad practices. I am reminded of Paul’s epistle to Titus in which he declared: **“Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons”** (Titus 1.12 NASB). In some cultures, lying is quite acceptable, if not required to survive. In other cultures, bribery, and what could be called extortion, is a very common practice, even amongst Christians. So once we peel away what could be called the color of the culture, we need to be mindful that there are practices of the old humanity that we must not embrace. Some practices stand against love.

For example, some cultures treat women, even wives, as slaves. But how are Christian husbands to view wives? Paul sets the standard for us.

**But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. ... For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. (1 Corinthians 11.3, 7 NASB)**

**For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. ... Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.... (Ephesians 5.23, 25 NASB)**

In some cultures, extortion of money is a common practice amongst government officials, even those who are Christians. I recall a time in a very remote village that bordered two countries when the border guards, many of whom were Christians, enquired of me whether they should be taking extra (extorted) money from people since it was the only way they could get enough money to live on. But what did Jesus say to the tax collectors: **“Collect no more than what you have been ordered to”** (Luke 3.13 NASB). It may have been an accepted practice, but it is not to our Lord.

On one of our trips to this same remote village, we saw another example of an accepted norm of this culture. We were to travel from the capital of this country to this remote village, which was a 13-14 hour drive on very challenging roads. It was not an easy trip. A time had been set for us to depart with some brothers who were going with us as part of the Lord's work. On this particular day, one of the brothers had not arrived at the designated time of departure. Rather than wait for this brother to arrive, the brother driving the van was going to leave without him, as if it were no big deal to leave him behind. However, it was a big deal because, to us, it would have been a hardship to the brother to take public transportation to catch up with us. We insisted that we wait for him; he showed up shortly after, and we were on our way. This incident bothered us until we realized that it was an acceptable norm of the culture. Simply, it was not considered unloving to leave the brother behind, for after all, in their way of thinking, he could take the public transportation. To us, the public transportation was a great hardship as we observed as many people as possible cram into a small van without air conditioning. I would get car sick within ten minutes if the claustrophobia did not get me first. Of course, they are accustomed to this, and we are not. However, does this make it acceptable for a Christian to treat another this way? Love is our norm, and any behavior that tears down love or does not exemplify the love of Christ must be rejected. Paul set the standard for us that transcends culture.

**Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2.3-4 NASB)**

**Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. (Romans 13.8 NASB)**

**Saints, you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord (Ephesians 5.8-10 NASB). Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma (Ephesians 5.1-2 NASB).**

Let us not embrace *multiculturalism* or any other *ism*; let us embrace **love**. Out of the love of Christ, let us consider the interests of others as more important than our interests.