

## The Unity of the Spirit

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It seems that the current topic in Christian or religious circles revolves around an attempt to create Christian unity. Meetings and councils of various denominations are held promoting the idea of unity. Doctrinal ideas are what has separated the various sects. However, the doctrinal differences which separate them are very seldom understood by the mass of their adherents. These doctrinal differences will never be resolved into a common doctrine and any unity which might be attained will be at the cost of the surrender of what fragments of Scriptural truth the denominations possess. The drive for unity only highlights the total disregard which religion has for the Scriptures.

It is apparent that there is a wide departure from faith in Christ Jesus based upon Scriptural truth. Instead of faith in the Word of God, religion has substituted a philosophy vaguely based on Scripture. Those who are striving for a religious unity evidently are unaware that the Lord has created a unity, a unity of the Spirit which believers are instructed to keep.

Religious unity is based on the idea that the special interpretations and methods of the great denominations can now be dispensed within the light of modern thought. Doctrine is at a discount. Fundamentalism is really little more than traditionalism, based largely on creeds and the theology of hymn writers.

The moment man makes a unity he breaks the one which was established for this dispensation. The unity of the Spirit is the only unity that is to be kept. It is our sacred duty to do so. But in order to keep the unity, it is essential that we understand what it is. This study, by God's grace, hopefully can be used to bring believers to a better understanding of the unity of the Spirit, which is the bond of peace.

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Eph. 4:1-6)

These verses begin the practical section of the Ephesian Epistle. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 are the doctrinal section of the epistle. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are the practical section.

After the Apostle Paul explains the grand and glorious doctrinal truths of the Mystery (Chapters 1-3), he opens the fourth chapter with, "I therefore". That is to say, in view of all that had been said in the doctrinal section, he therefore beseeches the saints to "walk worthy of the vocation" wherewith they had been called.

The word "vocation" carries with it the idea of employment and calling. The life's work (i.e. employment) of the member of the Church which is His Body is that of walking worthy. The ones who have been membered into the Body have as their full-time responsibility a life that is equivalent to the call of grace.

In Scripture the word "walk" has the meaning, "to live, to act, or behave" (Webster's 1828). The actions, conduct or behavior of the believer is to be worthy or equivalent of the calling.

The Bible refers to this "worthy walk" as the believer's "vocation". Vocation is certainly in contrast to the word "avocation". Avocation is generally used for the smaller affairs of life, or occasional calls which summons a person to leave his ordinary or principal business (Webster's 1828).

Therefore the principal business of the believer is to "walk worthy". It is not his avocation but rather his vocation. The believer's full time responsibility is to conduct his life in harmony with his calling. What follows in Ephesians 4:2-6 is the principal characteristics of the worthy walk for the member of the Church over which Christ Jesus is the Head. This is three-fold:

1. With lowliness and meekness
2. Forbearing one another in love
3. Keeping the unity of the Spirit

#### LOWLINESS AND MEEKNESS

This study is to be devoted to the unity of the Spirit. However, it should be pointed out that in order to keep the unity of the Spirit", the believer should not display arrogance or haughtiness of mind. This would not be in keeping with the worthy walk. Spiritual graciousness is necessary before it is possible to keep the unity of the Spirit.

"With all lowliness and meekness," (Eph. 4:2)

There is the ever-present danger for those who have had the "eyes of their understanding enlightened" to become proud or perhaps even boastful because of their inclusion into the calling of the Mystery. The member of the Church is beseeched to manifest the virtues of lowliness and meekness. This comes first. The idea of lowliness and meekness can be traced out in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul.

Matthew 11:29 is noted, for there the Lord says, "I am meek, and lowly in heart". Paul says in Philippians 2 as he speaks of the humility of Christ, that He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and "humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8).

Acts 20:19 informs us that Paul served the Lord "with all humility of mind". In fact, a study of Paul's life reveals humility personified.

#### LONGSUFFERING - FORBEARING

The lowliness and meekness is to be adorned with "longsuffering" and "forbearance". Members of the Body are to be longsuffering with "fellow members of the same body". That is to say, they are to "bear injury or provocation for a long time, to be patient; not easily provoked" (Webster's 1828). The definition

of "forbearing" is closely akin to that of "longsuffering" but it carries with it the additional ingredient of "restraining from action".

Therefore, it behooves the believer to be gracious enough to not be provoked to an extent that retaliatory action is taken to "get back" at someone who has wronged them. Ephesians 4:2 says:

"Forbearing one another in love;"

Forbearance is to be done in love. 1 Corinthians 13 speaks of charity and states:

"Charity suffereth long,...is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;... Beareth all things,..." (1 Cor. 13:4-5, 7)

True longsuffering and forbearing is accompanied with love. In a parallel passage we notice that longsuffering is accompanied with joyfulness.

"Unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness" (Col. 1:11)

## THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

The unity of the Spirit is the third feature in the three-fold "worthy walk". Paul states:

"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:3)

The exhortation to the saints at Ephesus and the faithful in Christ Jesus is to "endeavour to keep".

"Endeavour" is "probably from the French word 'devoir', which is to owe or be indebted, and hence, it primarily signifies duty, from the sense of binding, pressure, urgency-an effort, and attempt; an exercise of physical strength, or mental powers, towards the attainment of a goal" (Webster's 1828). Therefore it appears that the believer's duty is to make a very serious effort or attempt towards the attaining of the goal, and that is--"to keep the unity of the Spirit". The duty of the believer is not to be taken lightly. It is as if the believer is indebted to keep the unity. In fact, there is an urgency for him to keep this unity, so much so that he should exercise his mental powers towards the attainment of this goal.

The reader's attention should be called to the word "keep". The definitions are as follows:

- "1. To hold; to retain in one's power or possession: not to lose or part with.
2. To have in custody for security or preservation;
3. To preserve from falling or from danger; to protect; to guard or sustain.
4. To tend; to have care of." (Webster's 1828)

It is obvious that we are told to "keep", not to "make". We are told to "keep the unity of the Spirit", not to "endeavor to make a unity". The very idea of "to keep" is to hold or retain, not to lose or part with. Thus, the unity has been established by the Spirit. The believer is told that a worthy walk calls for him to "keep the unity of the Spirit".

The member of the Church over which Christ is the Head has had delivered into his custody "the unity of the Spirit". The exhortation is for him to KEEP IT. The Church is to guard, protect and sustain, that is, to preserve it from danger. The Church which is His Body is the caretaker, guardian and custodian of the unity of the Spirit. This custodianship is to be the believer's serious business as part of his vocation. When the unity of the Spirit is analyzed, it becomes apparent that the churches which name the Name of Christ have taken the unity of the Spirit and thrown it back in God's Face as if it were mud. They are not endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit. They are attempting to make their own unity which others should keep. In fact, many churches have completely ignored the unity of the Spirit. Some are not even aware that one exists. We will not belabor the point that the vast majority of churches which are steeped in denominational tradition are woefully ignorant of the unity of the Spirit. Rather, we will look at what it is that the member of the Body is to keep.

In order to truly safe-guard the unity we must know what it really is. The believer is not to keep the unity with an attitude of flippancy. For the treasure, which is "the bond of peace", has been entrusted to those who are membered in the Church. When the saint understands the unity of the Spirit, then his whole attitude changes concerning his guardianship of it. He understands the seriousness of his responsibility. He comprehends that his full time job is that of preserving the unity of the Spirit.

Failure to "keep the unity of the Spirit" is the reason for Christendom being splintered into so many denominations. The unity of the Spirit is the "bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). "Bond" is "cause of union; cement which unites; link of connection; as the bonds of affection. Charity is the bond of perfectness" Col. 3" (Webster's 1828).

The unity of the Spirit was the cause of union, it was the cement which united the two factions coming out of the Acts period. The Jewish and Gentile believers who lived through the dispensational change were to acknowledge the unity established by the Spirit of God after Acts 28:28. This acknowledgement was the "bond of peace" between those who had been "far off" and those who had been "nigh". The "bond of peace" is the peace made by Christ, Himself, Who made the two conflicting parties one when He destroyed the enmity between the two; when He broke down the middle wall of partition; when Christ made of the twain in Himself one new man "so making peace".

The things which were to be set aside at Acts 28:28 were not to be carried over into the new dispensation. Concerning the unity of the Spirit, Charles Welch has said in his book "Heavenly Places", In exercising our diligence over this, we shall see at once the attempt of this one to import some doctrine, or of that one to bring in some practice that belongs to the time before the middle wall was broken down. Nip all such things in the bud. Let them not get a foothold. Be willing to be called narrow, proud, anything, however untrue and unmerited. But endeavor to keep the sacred unity as you would defend your life.

We write this because of the laxity of many, because of the confusion which exists in the minds of many, as to the difference between humility of mind and resolution, of meekness and strength. We cannot be charitable with the goods of another. Stewardship, though exercised with all lowliness, meekness,

longsuffering and forbearance, must nevertheless be above all things exercised faithfully" ("Heavenly Places" p. 338).

The unity which has been established by the Spirit is seven-fold. The unity deals with oneness. The believer must of necessity know what each feature of the unity is in order for him to keep it.

The seven-fold oneness of the unity of the Spirit is as follows:

1. One Body
2. One Spirit
3. One Hope
4. One Lord
5. One Faith
6. One Baptism
7. One God and Father of all

#### ONE BODY

The first feature we meet in the unity of the Spirit is that of the One Body. This is a reference to the "Church, which is His Body". This does not liken the Church to the human body. Many mistakenly think the One Body, which is the Church of this dispensation, is likened to the human body because Ephesians and Colossians speaks of Christ as being the Head of the body. They derive the idea from 1 Corinthians 12 where the Apostle Paul likens the Church of God to a human body.

In fact, 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 do liken the Church of God to a figure of a "body". The figure is that of human anatomy. These truths belong to the Pentecostal dispensation which ended at Acts 28:28.

The One Body of the present dispensation is a reference to a body of believers. The word "body" carries with it the thought of "a number of individuals united" (Webster's 1828). We would refer to the students in a high school as -The student body furthermore, we would refer to the main part of an army as -The main body of the army

It is in this sense that the Church is referred to as the Body. It is these individuals who make up the company which is the Church of this dispensation. The Church is a body of believers who have embraced the truth of the Mystery.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ONE BODY AT THE TIME OF THE REVELATION

Keep in mind that the truth of the One Body was not revealed until the hope of Israel was placed in abeyance. After the Apostle Paul pronounced official and judicial blindness upon Israel (Acts 28:25-28),

he subsequently received a special revelation of the Mystery. The revelation of the Mystery given to Paul completely altered a situation which had existed between believers during the Acts period.

During the Acts period the Jewish believer had many dispensational advantages over the Gentile believer. There were great distinctions between the Jewish Christian and the Gentile Christian.

The Jew had the advantage - "much in every way: chiefly, because unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:1-2). Paul enumerates other advantages the Jew had during the Acts of the Apostles. To the Israelites pertained:

- a. The adoption
- b. The glory
- c. The covenants
- d. The law
- e. The service of God
- f. The promises
- g. The fathers
- h. Concerning the flesh Christ came (Rom. 9:4-5)

Gentiles during the Acts period were dispensationally disadvantaged. In fact, they were being saved for the express purpose of provoking Israel to jealousy (Rom. 11:11). There was a difference between the Jew and the Gentile.

Galatians 2 even informs the student the distinction was so pronounced that the Gentiles had one gospel and the Jews had another.

The Gospel of the Circumcision ☐ The Jew

The Gospel of the Uncircumcision ☐ The Gentile

There were churches of the Jews as well as churches of the Gentiles.

Churches of God in Judea -Jewish- 1 Thess. 2:14

Churches of the Gentiles- Rom. 16:4

The Gentile Christians were said to have been without a Christ of their own, aliens from Israel's commonwealth, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope of their own, and having no God of their own (Eph. 2:12).

These distinctions which existed during the Acts economy certainly indicates there were two companies of believers. That is to say, there were two bodies of believers, the Jew and the Gentile.

However, with the ushering in of the Mystery, all the Jewish privilege and advantage was done away with. Prior to Acts 28:28, the Gentile believer positionally was far off". After Acts 28:28, there was a radical change, for Paul announces that they were made "nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13).

The "middle wall of partition" stood between the two parties of believers during the Acts period. The middle wall was a wall of separation. In fact, it was an enmity" between the Jews and Gentiles. As long as the middle wall stood, the Jew had a place of privilege which was superior to that of the Gentile.

The announcement from prison that Christ was now among the Gentiles and was there hope of glory (Col. 1:27) was indeed a "hard saying" for the Jewish saints to receive. For many of them who had lived under the Old Testament economy had to leave behind much when the New Testament truth was superimposed over the Old. Christ was the end of the Law for righteousness (Rom.10:3-4). It was hard for them to accept the fact that Gentiles, from Acts 10 to 28:28 could be saved and be made a partaker of the gifts of the Spirit without observing the Law or being circumcised (see Acts 15). The Jewish Christians believed that Paul taught contrary to the Law of Moses, it was even believed that Paul taught the Jews, "which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not circumcise their children, neither to walk after their customs" (Acts 21:21). This of course was untrue. What was true was that the Gentile had no obligation to Moses or to circumcision.

The Jewish saint was still to observe the Law but not for righteousness sake.

After the announcement of Acts 28:28 the Jewish saint was told that everything he had held near and dear concerning covenant truth was done away with. Every barrier which had separated the two parties during the Acts period had been done away with. There was now no privilege or advantage in being Jewish. This, naturally, would have been a "bitter pill" to swallow. However, Paul rejoiced that the twain were now one. For the Lord has made "in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace" (Eph. 2:15).

The One New Man was a new creation. It was made of the twain (i.e. both Jew and Gentile) coming out of the Acts period. As such, the two were "fellowheirs, and (members) of the same body" (Eph. 3:6). The "same body" is in reference to the Body of believers over which Christ Jesus is the Head. The two factions which existed during the Acts period were reconciled to God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby (Eph. 2:16).

The One New Man, the One Body, did not exist during the Acts of the Apostles. It was imperative for the saints coming out of the Acts period to see there was now one body of believers. Within this new calling every believer stood on equal ground with others. Absolute equality exists within the One Body. Whereas previously there had been inequality between the twain, hence two bodies of believers--the Jewish body with its ascendancy— the Gentile body with its dispensational disadvantage.

The overwhelming truth for the twain coming out from the Pentecostal Dispensation was that there now existed ONE BODY. The bond of peace for the saints was to recognize the unity created by the Spirit in the Dispensation of the Mystery, no longer two, but One Body with the Lord Jesus Christ as Its Head.

In the last page on the Unity of the Spirit we noted the significance of the One Body truth at the time of its revelation. For at the time of the revelation of the Mystery great numbers of Jews were believers on Christ. A very high percentage of the Christians were in fact Jewish. When the dispensation changed at Acts 28:28 and the Mystery was brought to light, there was indeed a radical change in God's administration. Paul informs the saints that every vestige of Jewish ascendancy has been done away with. In fact, he carries everyone back to the Cross and shows that more happened on the Cross than Christ just dying "for our sins". The truth embodied in the Mystery shows that on the cross the work of Christ was so sufficient that:

1. The Gentiles were made nigh by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2)
2. He made both (Jew and Gentile believers) one (Eph. 2)
3. The middle wall of partition was broken down (Eph. 2)
4. The enmity was abolished in His flesh (Eph. 2)
5. Both parties were reconciled unto God in one body, by the Cross (Eph. 2)
6. The handwriting of ordinances which were contrary to the Gentiles were blotted out and nailed to the Cross (Col. 2)
7. Believers circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by the circumcision of Christ (Col. 2)
8. Believers baptized in Christ's death baptism (Col. 2)
9. Raised with Him through the faith of the operation of God (Col. 2)

These nine features are truths contained in the testimony of the Lord's prisoner. This marked a radical departure from Pentecostal truth. Salvation had been of the Jews (Jn. 4:22) but at Acts 28:28 it was sent to the Gentiles. Consequently, Christ was now among the Gentiles and was their hope of glory (Col. 1:27).

From that point onward, Jewish Christians began to have lesser influence among believers. The farther away from 61 A.D. (Acts 28:28) you get, the fewer Jews you find who are members of the One Body.

So by the time you get to the Twentieth Century you find very few Jews who have embraced Christianity. All of this was said to say this-believers today are not confronted with the problem of Jewish privilege and ascendancy that believers experienced shortly after the announcement of present truth. On the other hand believers are confronted with another situation as it relates to the One Body.



## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ONE BODY TODAY,

### 1900 YEARS LATER

Today believers confuse the Church of God with the Church over which Christ Jesus is the Head. The Church of God was composed of two bodies of believers, the Jew and the Gentile, which the present calling is one body with Christ being its Head. The Church of God was the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27) and it was the Body that was to be edified (Eph. 4:12) by the Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers which the Lord raised up at the beginning of this dispensation. The Body of Christ came out of the Acts period and was to be directed into the truth of the Mystery by the gifts of the Ascended Christ. Some of the Body of Christ embraced present truth, many did not.

The Body of Christ did not have Christ Jesus as its Head. A basic fundamental mistake made today, over 1900 years after the revelation of the Mystery, is to refer to the Church of this dispensation as the Body of Christ. To do so gives grounds for enemies of "right division" to accuse us of believing in "two bodies", which they do.

Some years ago as the writer was coming into the knowledge of right division, the pastor of a local "Bible Church" learned that our position of when the Church began had shifted from Acts 9 to Acts 28:28. In order to prevent us from having any influence over any members of his congregation he delivered a very heated sermon against "Acts 28 Brethren". He said he knew of no Acts 28 brethren who had ever graduated from an accredited Bible School or Seminary. Assuming the Acts 28:28 position, he said, leads to "soul sleep", "no hell", "universal reconciliation", and "two bodies". These scare tactics worked to a great degree. Thus we were labeled no-hellers, soul-sleepers, and two-body people before we ever really knew what they meant.

The charge of "two body people" could not be farther from the truth. For we are Bible believers and as such we insist that there is but "One Body". But if this One Body is the Body of Christ then there is a basis for the charge of being "two body people" (for more information on the Body of Christ, see the study, "The Body of Christ" on this web site. Paul states very plainly in 1 Corinthians 12:27 that the Church of God is the Body of Christ.

"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."

The Body of Christ was endowed with spiritual gifts. Also, "God hath set some in the church (i.e. the Body of Christ), first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues"(1 Cor. 12:28).

The One Body is void of these offices. Note carefully that the Body of Christ was endowed with miracle workers as well as diversities of tongues. These went along with the Pentecostal program.

Failure to distinguish between the Body of Christ and the One Body with Christ as the Head leads to confusion. If Paul's two ministries were recognized much of this confusion would vanish.

Simple arithmetic is one plus one equals two. Not one plus one equals one. The Body during the Acts period is different from the Body after Acts 28:28. To insist that the two are the same is to say that one plus one equals one.

Our sacred responsibility is to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is ONE BODY". To confuse the Body of Christ with the Body over which Christ Jesus is the Head is to manifest an unworthy walk.

## 2. ONE SPIRIT

In James 2:26 we read that the body without the spirit is dead. Therefore it is certainly correct in the Unity of the Spirit that which follows the One Body is the One Spirit.

In Ephesians 2 we notice how closely connected the One Spirit is with the One Body.

"And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby;" (v. 16)

"For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." (v. 18)

We can look closer at the One Spirit and notice there are two references to the sealing by the One Spirit.

"ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise." (Eph. 1:13)

"And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." (Eph. 4:30)

It should be pointed out that the members of the One Body form a habitation for God to dwell in by means of the Spirit.

"In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:22)

The One Spirit strengthens the believer's inner man.

"That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16)

The One Spirit's office work in the present dispensation is to minister Christ to the believer. This is not along Pentecostal lines, however.

Between Acts 2 and Acts 28:28 the Spirit ministered the Pentecostal "spiritual gifts" to believers. These were in harmony with the Pentecostal economy. 1 Corinthians 12 informs the student that every believer in the Church of God received a gift from the Spirit.

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man (i.e. believer) to profit withal. "(v. 7)

"But all these (i.e. spiritual gifts) worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man (i.e. believer) severally as He will." (v. 11)

The Holy Spirit imparted one or more spiritual gifts to every believer during the Acts economy. That is not the case in the economy of the Mystery. The contrast is found in Ephesians 4:7, where we note that:

"...unto every one of us is given GRACE (not spiritual gifts) according to the measure of the gift of Christ."

On the other side of Acts 28:28 the Spirit ministered spiritual gifts to "every man",, on this side of Acts 28:28 the Spirit ministers grace "unto every one of us".

During the Acts period the Spirit of God identified the believer with the body of believers by imparting to them spiritual gifts, which were nine in number. This identification and impartation of the gifts of the Spirit is referred to in 1 Corinthians 12:13.

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."

The occurrence of "one Spirit" and "one body" in the preceding verse has led many to believe it refers to the "One Body" and "One Spirit" in Ephesians 4:4. We must try the things that differ, for being baptized into one body by the Spirit is not the work of the Holy Spirit in this dispensation. The "one baptism" for this economy is found in Colossians 2:12 and is entirely apart from spiritual gifts. More will be said about the One Baptism when we come to that feature in the seven-fold Unity of the Spirit.

The expression of the "one Spirit" in 1 Corinthians 12:13 is intimately associated with the supernatural gifts of the Spirit. To say that the "One Spirit" in the Unity of the Spirit refers back to the Corinthian Epistle is to treat lightly the charge to "keep the unity of the Spirit".

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ONE SPIRIT AT THE TIME OF ITS REVELATION

The saints who lived through the dispensational change at Acts 28:28 had been accustomed to the manifestation of the Spirit as the common place and normal occurrence among the Christian assemblies.

However, they too witnessed the Counterfeit Spirit working within their midst. For during the Pentecostal era there were false spirits at work attempting to counterfeit the work of the Holy Spirit. Some satanic spirits even energized believers to say that Christ was accursed. This was done by the satanic spirit causing the believer to speak in "tongues" (see 1 Cor. 12:3). The evidence of the satanic spirits at work in the Corinthian church was apparent by their disorderly conduct when they assembled together. Paul admonished the saints at Corinth and reminds them that, "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace as in all churches of the saints" (1 Cor. 12:33). Part of the confusion and disorder in the assembly at Corinth was the fact that women were speaking and the Apostle Paul said that it was a shame for them to speak in the church (1 Cor. 14:35). He further warns them--"let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40).

The disorder was the result of the satanic spirits at work among the Christian assembly. This operation of satanic spirits was so deceptive John says:

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of anti-christ, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world"(1 Jn. 4:1-3)

Therefore we see that the believers during the Acts period were told to differentiate between the Spirit of God and the spirit of anti-christ.

Paul speaks concerning this satanic phenomenon in 2 Thessalonians:

"Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders," (2:9)

During the Acts period there was abundant manifestation of spiritual activity-both by the Holy Spirit and by the satanic spirit. Some saints could not distinguish between the two, hence a real problem existed at the time.

However, when the "hope of Israel" was set aside at Acts 28:28 and the calling of the Church of God was placed in abeyance, the work of the Holy Spirit ceased to manifest Himself as He did prior to Acts 28:28. Whatever spirit manifestations remained after Acts 28:28 were the work of satanic spirits. For with the setting aside of Israel the spiritual gifts imparted by the Holy Spirit were withdrawn.

The only explanation for the withdrawal of spiritual gifts is found in the truth embodied in the Mystery. As long as God was dealing with Israel the Jews required signs (1 Cor. 1:22), but when He set them aside, salvation was sent to the Gentiles. The Mystery was truth for Gentiles.

"If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward (i.e. Gentile-ward)" (Eph. 3:2)

The Holy Spirit no longer makes Himself manifest as He did during the Pentecostal dispensation. Instead of imparting spiritual gifts He imparts GRACE to every member of the Church over which Christ Jesus is the Head.

"But unto every one of us is given GRACE according to the measure of the gift of Christ." (Eph. 4:7)

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ONE SPIRIT TODAY - 1900 YEARS LATER

Today as members of the One Body endeavor to keep the Unity of the Spirit they are not plagued with the problem of trying the spirits to see whether they are of God. In order to keep the unity as it regards the One Spirit the believer must rightly divide the Word of God; by so doing it enables him to see just what the work of the Holy Spirit is in this dispensation. The One Spirit ministers Christ and His Word to the believer.

"Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day,... and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God:" (Eph. 6:13, 17)

The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. Hence, the Spirit ministers the Word. Notice Colossians 3:16 further emphasizes this point:

"Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts."

A parallel passage is found in Ephesians 5:18-19. However, many Christians take the eighteenth verse out of its context and consequently do much damage to what Paul is teaching. Notice verses 18 and 19:

"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit: Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;"

There are those who wrest the Scriptures bringing in heresy in this dispensation. They amplify "be filled with the Spirit" and apply this portion of Ephesians 5:18 to an experience they have had. The experience which they refer to is that of being "baptized with the Holy Ghost". The result of this "baptism" is what they refer to as "speaking in tongues". Hence, they think the exhortation Paul makes in Ephesians 5:18 of being filled with the Spirit leads to tongues speaking. However, the context plainly states you speak to yourself in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. This leads to singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.

There is no mention in Ephesians 5:18-19 or Colossians 3:16 of tongues speaking", so called. The One Spirit does not minister along Pentecostal lines, but rather in harmony with the prison epistles. To insist Ephesians 5:18 refers to the Pentecostal experience is nothing less than self-deception. To claim Pentecostal spiritual gifts for this dispensation is to violate the Unity of the Spirit. The Unity of the Spirit forbids addition or subtraction.

☐There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;☐(Eph.4:4)

In our two previous studies on ☐The Unity of the Spirit☐ we have examined the first two features of the seven-fold Unity of the Spirit. The next item which we are to look at is that of the hope of the Church over which Christ Jesus is the Head.

### 3. THE ONE HOPE

Before we look at the One Hope we suggest that a definition of the word "hope" is in order.

"1. A desire of some good, accompanied with at least a slight expectation of obtaining it, or a belief that it is obtainable. Hope differs from 'wish' and 'desire' in this, that it implies some expectation of obtaining the good desired, or the probability of possessing it. Hope therefore always gives pleasure or joy; whereas ☐wish☐or☐desire☐may produce or be accompanied with pain and anxiety.

2. Confidence in a future event; the highest degree of well founded expectation of good; as a ☐hope☐ founded on God's gracious promises" (Webster's 1828).

A reference to the One Hope is found in Ephesians 1:18, where the Apostle Paul prays that the believer may be given the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God "that ye may know what is

the hope of His calling". There is no doubt at all that Paul has in mind no other calling than that of the Mystery. There is One Hope for the One Body. In order for believers to see the One Hope they must have the One Spirit enlighten the "eyes of their understanding". The hope of the present calling is not readily seen or understood. To emphasize the point, Paul's prayer will be placed before the reader:

"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him:

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened;

THAT YOU MAY KNOW WHAT IS THE HOPE OF HIS CALLING ..." (Eph. 1:17-18)

In order to understand the well-founded expectation of the present calling, the One Spirit must shed light on the One Hope. For when the Spirit of God sheds light on truth, it then becomes revelation to the heart of the believer. Revelation is necessary to comprehend the One Hope of the One Body. We, too, pray that every reader might be granted the spiritual insight so he may know what is the One Hope of this present calling.

In order to know what it is, it is good to know what it is not. The One Hope of the One Body is not related to the Kingdom or the promised land; neither is it associated with the heavenly City which comes down from God out of heaven. Rather, the One Hope of the Mystery is related to the appearing of the Lord in glory.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ONE HOPE AT THE TIME OF ITS REVELATION

The Acts period believers, that is those who made up the Church of God, were awaiting the literal return of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Acts 1, the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven. Throughout the years covered by the Acts of the Apostles, He was in heaven awaiting Israel's repentance.

Peter proclaimed in Acts 3:19-26 that the men of Israel should repent and be converted, that their sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord:

And ...HE SHALL SEND JESUS CHRIST, which before was preached unto you: Whom the HEAVEN MUST RECEIVE UNTIL THE TIMES OF RESTITUTION of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began."

There was an urgent need for Israel's repentance. If they repented they would be delivered from great and notable (i.e., terrible) Day of the Lord (2:29, Joel 2:31). Peter, in no uncertain terms, declared that his hearers in Acts 2 could save (themselves) from this untoward generation (v. 40) upon whom God's wrath was about to be poured out. The "untoward generation" of Acts 2 was the same as "this generation" which had been spoken of in Matt. 24:34. It was the same generation -- that "wicked and adulterous generation", that was warned by John the Baptist to flee from the coming wrath. It was the same generation that had the privilege of seeing and hearing the Son of Man Himself which was filling up the measure of its iniquities, and over which judgement was at the time impending.

The way of escape from the coming wrath for the men of Israel was to repent and God would send His Son, Jesus Christ, and deliver them from the impending judgement. The Apostle Paul also announced this to the Gentiles in Acts 17:30-31:

"But now (God) commandeth all men everywhere to repent: Because He hath appointed a day, in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead."

The deliverance of believers (both Jew and Gentile) from the wrath which was prophesied would be effected by the coming of the Lord. He was to come from heaven and rescue them.

Paul tells of this deliverance in I Thessalonians and he ties it in with the Lord's coming.

"And how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son (to come) from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus. which delivered us from the wrath to come" (I Thess. 1:9-10). They were waiting because the promise was that Jesus Christ would come from heaven. Paul gives further revelation on the coming of the Lord in the fourth chapter of I Thessalonians.

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself SHALL DESCEND FROM HEAVEN with a shout with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air:" (I Thess. 4:14-17)

This passage amplifies Matthew 24:30-31, "And then", that is after the tribulation (v. 29), "shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other".

This was the Word of the Lord. This was the promise that had been made. Paul had taken it to the Thessalonians and Acts 17 tells us how he went, and what he said.

The return of the Lord was "Israel's hope" (Acts 28:20). Gentile believers during the Acts period had no hope of their own but they were getting-in on Israel's hope. They, too, looked and waited for God's Son to come from heaven. For at the Lord's departure from heaven, the dead saints would be raised and those in that generation who were alive at His coming would be changed "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye", that is to say, they would put on immortality, thus not having to die (I Cor. 15:51-54).

The hope of the Lord coming from heaven is so evidently associated with Israel and the Kingdom that we have no need to go into further details of it.

Those saints who were alive at the time of Israel's dismissal at Acts 28:28 lived to learn that the return of the Lord Jesus Christ was postponed. All that they had hoped for had been suspended.

A new and fresh revelation had been given to the Apostle Paul and it concerned a new dispensation which was ushered in with Israel's blindness. With the new dispensation, the Mystery, comes a new hope. It is not associated with Israel, the Kingdom, the last trump, the archangel or the Lord's departure from heaven. Rather, it is associated with the Lord's manifestation in the highest heavens.

The changing dispensation finds that those who had considered themselves as part of the number who would be alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, were told that the Lord's return was postponed for an extended period. The Lord Jesus Christ was not going to return in their life-time. This came as quite a shock to them. Thousands of Jewish believers had sold all their possessions (see Acts 4:31, 5:11), and were awaiting the Lord's return to establish the Kingdom. After selling all, as well as enduring intense persecution, to be told that the Lord had set their hope in abeyance came as quite a blow to them. If this wasn't enough to disappoint them, the following certainly did: Jewish privilege and ascendancy was done away with and their Christ was "among the Gentiles" and was the Gentiles' hope of glory.

Of course, those who embraced the new truth of the Mystery were not disappointed but rather rejoiced as did Paul who exclaimed:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3)

Those who believed the latest report realized that they lost nothing, but instead gained so very much more. The change of their hope from that of Israel's to that of the Mystery opened up a sphere of blessing at the very right hand of the Father' "far above all heavens"(Eph. 4:10).

With the ushering in of the new dispensation, it became apparent to the saints living at the time that they would have to die, and through means of resurrection realize the new hope which was brought in with the Mystery. The classic example of this is the Apostle Paul, himself. When he wrote I Thessalonians, he expected to be one of those who would be "alive and remain" until the Lord Jesus Christ returned(I Thess. 4:15). However, when he wrote Philippians he realized that he would have to die (Phil. 1:20-24). Therefore, between the writing of the Thessalonians' letter and the Philippians' letter, there was a change in the hope.

With Israel's hope being set aside, so were the attendant blessings that went along with it. Saints who embraced the truth of the new revelation were enlightened to the fact that the One Hope of the Mystery was to be associated with the Lord's appearing not His coming.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ONE HOPE TODAY 1900 YEARS LATER

Today most all orthodox Christians believe that Christ will return. Some recognize that He will come again to the Mount of Olives. Of course, this is true for He will (Acts 1:11, Zech. 14:14). Many believe that this is their Hope. Others see an added facet of His coming, that is, His coming into the regions of the lower atmosphere at which time some saints will be "caught up ... to meet the Lord in the air".



While many Christians attempt to differentiate between these two aspects of His coming, in reality most all cling to the fanciful idea that they will "die and go to heaven". We will not take up the subject of the necessity for resurrection, but will confine ourselves to the One Hope of the Church over which Christ Jesus is the Head and its contrast to the Hope of Israel which was in view during the Acts period.

Today most orthodox fundamentalists teach that the "rapture" is for the Church of this dispensation. Their proof texts are found in I Thessalonians 4:14-18 and I Corinthians 15:51-55. They teach that this event is prior to the great tribulation and that it is a "secret rapture" where the saints who are alive at the time silently disappear from the earth and meet the Lord in the air. They fail to notice that Scripturally this event:

1. takes place at the end of the tribulation, that is, at the last trump (see I Thess. 4:16, I Cor. 15:52, Rev. 11:14),
2. it is intimately associated with the Kingdom, 1Thess.2:12, 2Thess. 1:15, 1 Cor. 15:50),
3. it is not a secret-silent event, but rather a loud, clattering, noisy event (vis-a-vis, a shout, a voice and a trumpet blast, etc.).

This "rapture" carries the believer no farther into air than the lower atmosphere, that is, in the air and in the clouds. Whereas, the Hope of the Church revealed in the prison epistles takes the believer "far above all heavens" (Eph. 4:10) to the tip-top of the universe where the heavens are stretched out like a curtain across the vast heavenly expanse. Up above the firmament of Genesis 1:6 in the uncreated realm, the believer will appear there with Christ. The place where the Church of the One Body will appear is called:

1. Heavenly places
2. Glory
3. Light
4. Far Above All Heavens

It is suggested that the student search the Scriptures written after Acts 28:28 and notice that there is absolutely no mention of the Lord "coming" back. When describing the One Hope of the Mystery, the Apostle Paul does not choose to use the words "come" or "coming". Rather, he chooses, under inspiration of God, to use the words "appear" and "appearing".

If the words the Holy Spirit uses to teach with mean anything, then there is much the student can learn by the contrast in the COMING OF THE LORD and THE APPEARING OF THE LORD. Perhaps a key verse which relates to the Lord's appearing is found in Col. 3:3-4:

"For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, Who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory."

In plainer words, when the Lord Jesus Christ appears in heavenly places, we as members of the One Body will appear with Him there. Presently He is hid in the blaze of God's glory far above all. But when He is made manifest there, then the One Body will be manifested with Him in that sphere. Not in the lower atmosphere nor in the clouds but "far above all" (Eph. 1:21), "far above all heavens" (Eph. 4:10).

"That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing (not His coming) of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Tim. 6:14)

"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, Who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:1)

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8)

"Looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the Great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13)

These verses which are related to the "appearing" need to be differentiated from those which relate to the Lord's "coming". Today most Bible students take the verses which relate to the "appearing" and read them back into the Acts epistles. By so doing they interpret two hopes as one. This robs Israel of its hope and diminishes the glory of the One Hope of the One Body. Truth that belongs to the present must not be read into the past. Those who fail to see difference between the two hopes can never "keep the Unity of the Spirit". The truth of the One Hope must of necessity be rightly divided from the hope of the dispensation which ended at Acts 28:28.

"One Lord, one faith, one baptism," (Eph. 4:5)

The fourth feature which now comes before us in the seven-fold Unity of the Spirit is that of the One Lord. Previously, we have considered the One Body, the One Hope, and the One Spirit.

#### 4. ONE LORD

Before we look at the "One Lord" as He is associated with the truth of the Mystery, it might be good to give the definition of the word, "lord":

- "1. A master; a person possessing supreme power and authority; a ruler; a governor.
2. A tyrant; an oppressive ruler.
3. A husband.
4. A baron; the proprietor of a manor.
5. A nobleman; a title of honor in Great Britain given to those who are noble by birth or creation; a peer of the realm.
6. An honor bestowed on certain official characters.

7. In Scripture, the Supreme Being; Jehovah. The word is applied to Christ, Ps. 110; Col. 3. As a title of respect the word is applied to kings, Gen. 40; 2 Sam. 19. To a husband, Gen. 18. To a prophet, 1 Kings 18. To a respectable person, Gen. 24." (Webster's 1828)

The word "lord" therefore indicates one who is the master; the one who has rule or authority over others. It is fitting that the feature of "One Lord" is found in the practical section of the Ephesian Epistle. The Unity of the Spirit is located in the practical section which begins in Ephesians four and runs through the end of chapter six. It was previously pointed out that the first three chapters comprise the doctrinal section and the last three chapters deal with the believer's practical response to the doctrinal section. Thus, the occurrence of the "One Lord" denotes the place Jesus Christ holds in the life of a member of the One Body, that is, as the One Lord. Christ is the One Lord, the One Master, the One who holds the place as being supreme; the One who holds all authority over the believer. The believer is subject only to Christ, for He is the One Lord. This is

in harmony with the fact that Christ is the Head of the Church. In fact, He is "to be Head over all things to the church" (Eph. 1:22). His Headship over the Church denotes His absolute supremacy and pre-eminence. The Church is subject to Christ.

The feature of "One Lord" denotes that the believer has but one master and only One who has power and authority over him. All of that was said to say this: there was a time when believers were subject to Christ as well as others. For during the Pentecostal dispensation certain individuals exercised power and authority over believers.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ONE LORD AT THE TIME OF THE REVELATION

In order to fully appreciate the impact the revelation of the Mystery had upon the believers who were living at the time Paul received the revelation, the student should understand the economy of the Acts' period. - Before the crucifixion the Lord Jesus Christ said to Peter:

"And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." (Matt. 16:19)

Stronger words were never spoken. No greater authority was ever conferred upon any human being than that which were conferred upon Peter by these words.

"The keys to the kingdom" was a figure of speech used by the Lord denoting the authority Peter was to have in relation to the Kingdom. His acts upon earth were to be ratified in heaven. He was to have the super-authority to admit people into the Kingdom or reject them from it. That's not all. In resurrection, the Lord Jesus conferred upon Peter and the other Apostles the highest possible authority, even that of remitting and retaining sin.

"And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." (John 20:22-23)

This was indeed spiritual authority which was to be exercised over the Church of God, the Acts' period Church. On the Day of Pentecost, the true believers in Israel were publicly constituted and set forth as "the Israel of God" by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Church of God was so arranged by Him that it had God-appointed spiritual leaders who were endowed with supernatural power enabling them to rule over the Church of God. God gave these men great authority, and He gave them the wisdom needed to use it. They never abused their power.

The "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16) was to comprise the new nation of Israel that was going to rule and reign with the Lord Jesus Christ during the millennial Kingdom, and as such the "Israel of God" (or Church of God) was to be orderly arranged. Certain human beings would exercise leadership over this new nation. These human beings would be "endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49) which would supernaturally enable them to be the administrators of the Kingdom which was to be established upon this earth.

An example of the administrators of the Kingdom would be the Twelve Apostles who would "sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). There would be an orderly, God-ordained arrangement under the Twelve Apostles made up of individuals who were "the Israel of God". These would be the kings and priests. John mentions this in Revelation 1:5-6:

"...Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood. And hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father;"

The administrators would rule as kings, and as such they would also be referred to as "lords". In fact, during the Pentecostal Dispensation, this Divinely-ordained arrangement was in progress as it would be in the Kingdom, though only on a miniature scale.

The believers during the Acts' period were to be submissive to those who "are over you in the Lord" (I Thess. 5:12), and "to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake" (I Thess. 5:13). This is not truth for today. Failure to rightly divide the Word causes many to think that present day ministers are "over" the believers, and that we should think very highly of them "for their work's sake". That pertained to those during the Acts' economy, and they were selected and ordained by God. The spiritual leaders during that time had their authority given to them by God. Therefore, the believers were "to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly for their work's sake".

Paul, in his concluding statements in Hebrews, has more to say on the subject of rule and submission:

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account..." (Heb. 13:17)

The spiritual leaders during the Pentecostal Dispensation ruled over the believers and as such they were "lords". The believers were to be submissive to their rule.

In Romans 12 Paul mentions "gifts" and one of them is that of ruling:

"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith: or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity: HE THAT RULETH, with diligence... " (Rom. 12:6-8)

There were "rulers" in the Church of God and they were to be obeyed. He that ruled was to do it with diligence. Another reference to the gift of ruling is found in I Corinthians:

"And God hath set some in the church (i.e. the Church of God), first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, GOVERNMENTS..." (I Cor. 12:28)

The "governments" are a reference to the God-ordained administrative set-up by which the Kingdom was going to be governed by rulers, that is to say, by "lords". These rulers were on the scene during the Acts of the Apostles.

Those, such as the Apostles, ruled over the Church of God. They ruled as "lords". The definition of the word "lord" was set forth at the beginning of this paper. Remember that the primary definition of the word was, "a master; a person possessing supreme power and authority; a ruler, a governor". With this in mind we can now understand better what Paul meant when he said there are "lords many" (I Cor. 8:5).

With this background we can now look at a most misunderstood section of Scripture which clearly sets forth the ministry of the spiritual lords who ruled over the Church of God.

#### THE TRUE CONTEXT OF ROMANS 13

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers (i.e. the rulers or lords). For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." (Rom. 13:1)

The "higher powers" do not refer to civil authorities as believed by most. This is a direct reference to those who ruled over the Church of God, which was to be the new nation of Israel. These "higher powers" were the "lords" of the Divinely-arranged Pentecostal economy. These were "ordained of God", hence the believers were to be "subject" to them.

"Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." (Rom. 13:2)

Those believers who resisted the "lords" of the Acts' economy were in fact resisting the Divine arrangement by which God was ruling through the "lords" He had selected. To resist would bring about damnation. The word "damnation" refers to "judgment which leads on to condemnation" (see Bullinger's Lexicon and Concordance).

"For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:" (Rom. 13:3)

Again it is obvious that "rulers" does not refer to civil authorities. For the rulers of this world have heaped their honors upon the workers of evil, while at the same time they have debased the workers of

good. Civil authorities have not been inclined to heap praise upon those who do good works in light of God's Word.

The rulers of Romans 13 were not a terror to the believers "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1). But to walk after the flesh during the Pentecostal Dispensation led to condemnation. Those who walked after the flesh would be terrified by the rulers' power, for it was awesome.

Verse three indicates some saints complained about the power and authority the lords of the Acts' period had. Paul tells them there is no need to fear the power - walk in harmony of the Kingdom calling and the lords will praise you. There would be no reason to fear as long as they did good.

"For he (i.e. the ruler) is a minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon them that doeth evil." (Rom. 13:4)

Twice in verse four Paul refers to the ruler as "the minister of God". As God's appointed minister in the Divinely-arranged economy, he was supernaturally endowed to make judgments according to the will and purpose of God as it related to the Kingdom calling. "For he beareth not the sword in vain"; bearing the sword is a figure of speech which means having the power to exact or inflict the extreme penalty. The penalties to be inflicted upon evil-doing believers would be determined by the "ministers of God". -

"Where fore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake" (Rom. 13:5)

Again it is noted that the believers were to be subject to the "higher powers" "for wrath" and "for conscience sake". These superior powers ruled as lords over the Church of God during the Acts' period.

In Acts 3:6 we note Peter using his great authority to heal a crippled man. In Acts 5 we notice Peter wielding his authority as he "beareth not the sword in vain" pronouncing a sentence of death upon Ananias and Sapphira. The sentence was executed at his word. He was God's minister to them for good, and those who did evil certainly had reason to be afraid. The death of Ananias and Sapphira made such an impact upon others due to the power wielded by Peter, that no man dared join himself to them (Acts 5:13).

In Acts 8 Peter pronounced the death sentence upon Simon the sorcerer. His words were, "thy money perish with thee" (Acts 8:20). However, the sentence was held in abeyance while repentance was held out to Simon, who fully recognized the seriousness of Peter's words.

Acts 13 gives the details of Paul using his authority upon Elymas the sorcerer, who hindered his work in the gospel. Paul pronounced the sentence of blindness upon Elymas which came to pass even as Paul spoke the words (Acts 13:11).

Paul gave specific instructions in I Corinthians 5 concerning the judgment of one who was walking after the flesh and not after the Spirit.

The Scriptures indicate that others had the superior power as well as the Apostles. Peter advises the elders to be examples to the "flock of God" and not to just simply "lord it over them" as lords.

"The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly: not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage but being ensamples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:1-3)

The elders were lords, but as such, Peter says it would be better for them to be examples to the flock.

In summary, it should be said that the Church of God was the new nation of Israel which was to exercise governmental rule when the Lord Jesus Christ would return and sit up on David's Throne. The Church of God, as "the Israel of God", was governed by God-ordained rulers; they were lords. When the Lord Jesus Christ returned He would be ...

"KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:16)

The Acts' period believers understood that there were "lords" over them. However, with the Kingdom being placed in abeyance at Acts 28:28, the spiritual authority given to the "lords" was rescinded. All "gifts of the Spirit" were withdrawn when the new dispensation was ushered in.

The announcement from the "prisoner of the Lord" was that Israel was being set-aside and there were no longer any "lords". For the "new creation", the "one new man", that is the Church over which Christ Jesus is the Head, had no "lords" but One. The One Lord is the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Head of the Church which is the One Body, the fullness of Him (Eph. 1:23).