

## Achieving Apostolic Community

### **Achieving Apostolic Community**

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#### **Published by:**

Peace Publishing

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First Published, April 2014.

Second Published October 2014

All scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®.

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## **Introduction:**

This booklet is a discussion about how to find community in a local church, and in a local region between believers in Christ. By community of course, I mean the giving of the heart, unity of mind and purpose. I refer to the type of thing we see in scripture in the early church. Such a thing seems almost unattainable for us, and yet this booklet will show it to be within reach.

The major points of this book were drawn after analysis of search engine query statistics, which highlighted particular questions that are being asked online. In answering these questions, the majority of information has been drawn from John Kingsley Alley's "Holy Community." This short book can be considered in part to be a summary of John's book and this is done with his permission.

The purpose of this book is to help with the advance of the Kingdom of God and written with several types of people in mind. Firstly for the pastor or leader with little time, but needing concise and accurate information. This book can be read in under an hour.

Secondly for many pastors in Asia and Africa, a regular book of 200 pages, worth about \$20, is beyond their means, and is too big a file to easily download in a small Internet café. Hence this summary of information. Being quick to download, it is accessible by all, and also free of charge on our ministry website [www.peace.org.au](http://www.peace.org.au)

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May you find this message inspiring and discover the Holy Spirit at work in you as you read.

Many Regards  
David Alley

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## 1. It's How We Relate That Counts.

Everything we have learned about what it means for believers to be an apostolic people (which just means like the New Testament church) can be summed up in *how we relate to God*, and *how we relate to each other* – and the latter is equally as important as the former, especially if we are to mature as children of God. If a people has no understanding of how to walk with their leaders and their brethren, this is not an apostolic people, no matter how many people they raise from the dead or how much they prophesy.

Speaking in tongues, healing, and prophecy are great gifts to the Church, but they are in no way proofs of apostolic grace. In the past, we have mistakenly assumed that if you had apostolic grace, then you would have miracles, signs and wonders, and gifts; but we missed something very important. Having miracles or gifts of the Spirit is an external manifestation of the Spirit, but it is not proof of what is on the inside. True apostolic grace produces an inner life.

Did the apostle Paul have an inner life by which he not only knew the Lord, but loved the churches? Did Peter also have this inner life by which he loved the brethren? Were those men not willing to lay down their lives for the brethren? The answer, of course, to all these questions, is 'yes.' That is the proof of apostolic grace. Unless we ourselves have the heart that genuinely walks in relationship with others, we are not really living in apostolic grace.

It is not merely a matter of deciding to receive apostles and then changing the structure of the Church to give them a place. Rather, at the heart of true apostolic Christianity are specific attitudes, values, and heart relationships. These values are what determine whether a group of people are apostolic (think New Testament) or not.

We look forward to the day when the Church is so filled with apostolic grace that we no longer need to use the term. Meanwhile, when we do use the term 'apostolic,' we are referring to a certain type of Christianity which is the genuine, New Testament, Christ-given article. This is the type of Christianity that produces a life in the people of God that does not depend on institutions or programmes; the people are knit together as one holy people. This is the life that the early apostles gave to the Church. Today, the Church needs to find that life in a fresh way.

In other words, whilst we may and should do many great things for Christ, it's how we relate that counts.

## 2. Why Church Unity is Essential.

Why is there so little power in the Church today? Pastors and other church leaders spend all nights in prayer, working hard trying to build their congregations, with small success and few results. The same men sometimes burn out. They may quit the ministry, go into business, and go on to make a lot of money and have success in other ways. There was no problem with their effort, so what was wrong?

One significant factor that is lacking nearly everywhere is that the people of God are not in unity. They don't have one heart and one mind. This means that power is missing from the church. Here are a few reasons why the unity of God's people is essential.

**Matt 18:19** says that if *“two of you agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.”* (NIV) It's clear, that when we are in agreement, it gives power to our prayers. But if we are in disagreement it robs power from our prayers.

In **John 13:35** it says, *“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”* And in **John 17:22-24** Jesus is praying and asked the Father saying, *“I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to **complete unity**. Then the world will know you sent me...”* (NIV) When we are in unity, and we love one another, then the world will finally understand the gospel message, and believe.

In **1 Corinthians 11:29** it says that *“those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgement on themselves.”* (ESV) In other words, when we fail to recognise the other believers (the Body of Christ) and give proper place in our heart and mind, we eat and drink judgement. And the inverse is also true. Honouring and accepting God's people (the Body of Christ) bring blessing.

In **Psalms 133:3** it talks about how wonderful it is when God's people are in unity and it says, *“For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life evermore.”* (NIV) When God's people are in unity, God can't help but pour out a blessing.

In answering this question, I have hardly been exhaustive, and yet 4 points have emerged as to why God's people must be in unity because...

1. God answers their prayers.
2. It makes the Gospel convincing and gives the Gospel power.
3. Without it we actually are under judgement.
4. God commands His blessing on His people when they are in unity.

Without the people of God being of one heart and one mind, we are no different to any other association of people in the world. It is our brotherly love (the nature of God) which differentiates us from all other things. So being in unity is essential for God's holy people as that is the nature of God Himself.

### **3. Why Church Unity Movements Don't Work.**

As Jesus was walking down the road with his apostles, they argued among themselves as to who was the greatest. Jesus listened. It was later that he questioned them regarding what they were talking about. It was not a question to extract an answer, but to help them see. His question was supposed to make them think.

I have often thought about the 12 apostles. They were the main members of "Jesus' church." I think back to when I had a small church of about 20 people and how often there were little subtle differences between them. My experience was similar to that of Jesus.

After 3 years of quality teaching, effort and much prayer, Jesus had a church of about 120 people who didn't easily get along with each other. I had found the same thing in my own church. Quality teaching, hard work, and prayer, are not all of the ingredients required to build unity, and that is why church unity movements on their own don't work.

In our sinful condition each person considers himself better than others, we put ourselves first, and think our way of thinking and acting is right. There can never be unity of the spirit when this exists. What is required is a move of God in the midst of the people, and the giving of the heart to one another.

Around the world today there are many movements of ecumenism. The idea is good. However, they don't ever really capture what is meant to be obtained, because it needs more than what is able to be given or offered. What is needed is the giving of the heart between people. And that can only be done through the help and the power of the Holy Spirit. Something spiritual has to happen between people for there to be unity between them.

The kind of relationship we see in the Scriptures between Jonathan and David is not natural. Even husbands and wives all over the globe struggle to serve and love each other as instructed. In fact the best marriages can take a lifetime to build.

As a Church – that is God's people – the mix of relationships, people, cultures, beliefs, attitudes, and values is complex. To try to work hard to build people together with ecumenical strategies, and church unity movements will never be enough. More is needed, and that is something that is given by the Holy Spirit. We can never become of one heart and mind without something extra being added.

We shouldn't despise Church Unity movements and ecumenism. It is good when we see the desire for unity, and people who love Christ attempting to bring it about. We don't do away with that, but we add to it and see what becomes of our prayers and faith and love.

#### 4. What is Community?

The word *community* is not one that everyone relates to. For some it has unwanted associated ideas and can be confusing to people as to exactly what it means. To avoid misunderstanding, let us clear up one common misconception.

Community is not about living in a commune, or the church sharing in some kind of vegetable pool, or well-off believers putting tyres on the cars of those poorer. You can do these things if you wish, but it won't give you community in the New Testament sense of what God wants.

Community is not life in a monastery, nor is it having a church made of cell groups. Neither is community necessarily living together with other like-minded people, as do the Amish. Community in terms of how God sees it, cannot be defined by any physical or concrete thing you do, think, or say.

Community is a heart thing.

What we are speaking of is the change, through grace, that God can make in the heart of a people that will totally shift the way they *see* each other – and in a single act God the Holy Spirit can do this for a local church corporately. There can be no guarantee that every last individual can become the beneficiary of this, but a church as a whole certainly can when God moves like this.

The kind of community we are talking about here is about a change in the heart between people. It is something that can be hard to explain and see, until it happens to you, and then it is very real. It is something that takes a group of people and makes them one. From this time on, these people are a community. They love each other, work together, serve one another, and do it all from a cheerful heart and with consideration of each other with love for Christ. They don't have to live together in the same place to be of one heart. They will have various differences in their lives, occupations, work hours, habits, and even culture and language, and yet there is a sense of community between them. That community is difficult to define as it very experiential.

If you try to inspect it and explain it in practical terms, it becomes law to the people, loses its life and ceases to be community. In the Bible, such an experience of community is described in Acts 4 when it says all the people had everything in common. However trying to make everyone be like the description in Acts will fail unless there is life from the Holy Spirit given to help.

It can be difficult in getting people to see that this is real – or that it might be different to what they already have. This requires eyes to be opened to see something not visible; and often eyes don't want to be open. However the community being described here is precisely what happened to the believers on the Day of Pentecost. This is the community we are preaching and have experienced ourselves.

## 5. The Key to Community.

In the middle of June 1998, our church had been going through some problems with division and disagreement, mostly over the “apostolic message.” It was during this time that John Alley, the Senior Minister, spent a month in prayer from 6am to 6pm each day seeking God. On the 23rd of the month John had an experience he recounts in his own words.

*“While it was still dark and cold outside, I felt drawn to Psalm 32. I opened my Bible and read the Psalm. Verse 9 says 'Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.' As I sat wondering why God was speaking to me about horses and mules, suddenly and instantaneously I received an amazing download of information all based on that word 'understanding'. In just a few moments I was flooded with knowledge of something God was saying, and these were things I could see and feel deeply.”*

The Lord told John that He was looking for a people on whom he could put understanding. The size of the group wasn't important. He said that if He could do this, it would totally transform their life as a people. They would become a people of one heart and one mind and they would rise as one man to do the work of God in the world.

After the experience was over, John began to question whether such a thing was too idealistic. He had never seen anything in his Christian experience and concluded that such a thing, if it was real, would surely be referenced in the Scriptures.

When he began a search of the Scriptures, he did find examples of people who had become one in heart and mind after the Lord enabled it to happen. The first example was in 2 Chronicles 30:12 where it says, “*the hand of God was on the people to give them unity of mind to carry out what the king and his officials had ordered, following the word of the Lord.*” This was an astounding event in the history of the nation of Judah.

Also in the New Testament, it says in Acts 4:32 that “*All the people were one in heart and mind.*” And in verse 33 it says “*... and much grace was upon them all.*” When John Alley realised there were biblical examples, he was convinced that being of one heart and mind was not only possible but realistic. God had spoken because it was something He was wanting.

It is not about horses or mules, that God is concerned, but about His people. He wants to be able to place understanding on His people and He wants them to be willing to receive it. When this happens, it is the key to community because it brings unity of heart and mind. This understanding is an anointing – and also one of the seven spirits that rested on Jesus in Isaiah 11, and which if it rests on us, will change us completely.



## 6. The Anointing for Building Community.

In September 2002, John Alley had a dream. When he woke he was compelled to seek the Lord to understand its meaning. As he sat with the Lord, he heard something he was not expecting, and that word caused many things to change.

***“There is an anointing by which community is built.”***

As John heard the Lord say this, he realised that if this was true, then it was apparent that whatever anointing it was, we did not have it. Nothing could have been more obvious – if we had tried persistently, as we had, to build community, but without results, and if at the same time there exists an anointing for building community, it can only mean one thing – we did not have that anointing!

Then he said ***“And there is another anointing by which leaders perceive community.”*** And John realised we didn't have that either.

John felt as if he was onto something and went in search of that anointing in the Scriptures. It didn't take long to find Pentecost all over again – and find it with new eyes. When God poured out the Holy Spirit, he poured out many anointings – in fact, in the coming of the Holy Spirit, He came with every grace and gift that are in Christ – and these are all available. With this light, John discovered from Acts 2 to 12, the community anointing was at work among the people. Much of the way the Church operated in the Acts of the Apostles could only be because of that anointing.

Now we at Peace were not without anointings. We had many anointings – for worship, for finance, for healing, for teaching, for mission, for leadership, for prayer, for pastoral care, for preaching the Gospel, and so on. But we did not have what was described to me as “the anointing by which community is built.” That one was missing, and now that John had this word from God, he knew what we had to do.

The following Sunday John preached what the Lord has said and showed the Church the things found in Acts 2-12. Then he prayed over the congregation, and with a simple prayer of faith, brought the anointing down from the throne of grace, and released it into the hearts of the believers.

There was no immediate effect to be seen – and nobody was expecting one. The service ended, everyone had coffee and went home. The next Sunday there was nothing different to see, nor the next week, nor the next.

But after 6 weeks, at the weekly leaders' fellowship at John's house, one of the pastors, Tony, came in with a story. He dropped into a lounge chair, and very remarked that for many years he had tried his best in every way he knew, to get our cells to work, but no matter what he did, he could not seem to make them work. So he gave up trying. “But a very strange thing has happened,” he remarked. “About six weeks ago, all those cells started working all on their own.” The mention of six weeks caused John to sit up and take notice; He knew it had been six weeks since he had released the anointing.

Tony had said the cells “started working *all on their own.*” This meant grace, 'the anointing by which community is built,' was at work in the hearts of the people.

That anointing made an astounding difference in our church. Without fanfare, and without change being obvious at the time, everything did change after that anointing was released. What resulted was a quiet but completely sovereign work of the Holy Spirit which changed the *hearts* of our people.

Two primary things changed in our hearts. The first is that our people seemed to see each other with a different set of eyes. Of course the truth is, they saw each other with a different heart. The other wonderful change was that inter-personal striving was removed from Church life, along with selfish agendas. There was no more competition, or people trying to get their own way. Talk about a peaceful life!

## **7. More to Pentecost Than Tongues.**

Say the word “Pentecostal” and you immediately think of a certain type of Christian who speaks in tongues. Think of Pentecost and the outpouring of the gifts is what comes to mind, especially the gift of tongues. However there is a whole lot more to Pentecost than what seems to meet the eye.

For two thousand years, believers have sought the gift of the Holy Spirit as instructed by the Lord in the Scriptures. For the majority of this time, the gift of tongues was not even on the radar of these seeking people. John Wesley would tell his Methodist followers to seek the Holy Spirit. In doing so, what they were seeking was “*power*” from God to enable them to live holy lives and to be godly. They had an expectation that the Holy Spirit would help them to overcome temptation and to walk in godliness. And to these seeking souls, that is what they would receive. Great revivals occurred through the Great Awakening, Second Great Awakening, Welsh Revival and other great moves of God. During all of these great moves, the gift of tongues did not feature. People were still filled with the Holy Spirit and God was working in them even though they had no understanding of spiritual gifts.

After this, William Booth, the founder of The Salvation Army encouraged his people to seek for the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire. He told his people that if they would do this, that God would give them the power to witness and bring souls to Christ. As his followers sought for this baptism, they became the fastest growing movement in Christianity, spreading to over 100 nations in just 20 years.

Both of these men had different ideas of what the Baptism of the Holy Spirit would bring, and they both received what they sought for. Then in the early 1900's the gift of tongues became prominent, and as people sought for that, they received that too.

There is so much more to Pentecost than just tongues. When we read the Bible account of Pentecost, tongues does appear to figure prominently until you read it with new eyes. What was really the prominent feature was the way that the disciples and apostles were changed in regards to how they loved, how they felt about each other, and how that worked to build the Church. This is the anointing of understanding that builds community. The Holy Spirit was at work in this producing powerful change. It is something we should seek for too.

## 8. What the Spirit of Understanding Produces

In the section titled “The Anointing for Building Community” I described the discovery by John Alley and our fellowship of the Spirit of Understanding, and how we saw it bring changes among our people. In this section I will describe in more detail exactly what we experienced, and what we expect would be the same or similar to you or any other group who also receives the same anointing.

There were 2 major and obvious changes. These were changes in our hearts which produced outward changes. They were not outward changes of themselves, because the things that visibly changed only did so because of how we now felt and thought about things. The two primary and obvious changes were that our people seemed to see each other with a different set of eyes, and the other was that inter-personal striving was removed from our church life.

One sister testified, sometime after these events had occurred, that there was another woman in the church that she couldn't stand, didn't want to sit anywhere near, and always felt “rubbed up the wrong way” by her. But she found her heart had completely changed. She no longer felt uncomfortable, but instead appreciated her very much. Since the time the grace was released, she felt great love, admiration, and acceptance of that person. It was a total change of feeling and outlook with no human explanation. This is what I mean by saying that the people now saw each other through different eyes.

With inter-personal striving now removed we also found a new freedom in being able to work together without needing to compete with each other. The “spirit of competition” was no longer there. It meant that the Senior Minister (John Alley) could appoint someone to a job, and the other qualified (or people who thought they were qualified) people didn't get offended and in fact were happy for that person. Personal self promotion seemed to have gone. It made it easier to work as a team and do many things together.

There were practical outcomes too. For one, people stopped leaving the church. Previously we would work hard to keep everybody together, yet even so from time to time people would leave for no good reason. We had had a series of unfortunate “losses” even in the years after the nasty time of division was over and calm had returned. But from the time the community grace was received, virtually all abnormal movement out ceased.

Tony Ponicke (out pastor in charge of pastoral care) has said that the amount of counselling or serious pastoral care required by our own people dropped to a fraction of what it was before. It has remained this way for many years since.

As a people, we have come to the place where we simply belonged to each other. The atmosphere within the church changed, and this has made a huge difference. John Alley describes it from the Senior Minister's point of view. *“Up until that time I had needed to work hard as the pastor, but when that grace came in, I relaxed completely. Previously, I would set the alarm to get up extra early on Sunday morning to pray at length, before preparing carefully, dressing well, and arriving at the church early. I would make sure I said hello to everybody before the service started. I would work hard, and feel under pressure, to make sure we had a great programme, great worship, great announcements, great preaching and great ministry times, and then when finished I would go around and try to greet everybody again.”*

John Alley continues, *“Why was it so important to operate like that? Because we had to keep our 'customers' happy. If we didn't keep them happy, they might go down the road and shop in another pastor's shopping centre. Much of the church is like this; striving, competitive, and performance-*

oriented.”

The coming of the grace for community changed all that. It made us feel that we belonged to each other. Something shifted in the hearts of the people, and things **felt** different because they **were** different. John describes more, *“Now when I turn up on Sunday, I have come home. I walk into that building and I am with family who love me. I walk in and relax like the rest of the people. I belong, not just organisationally, but in their hearts. By the way people greet me it is obvious they feel they belong to me, and I belong to them. We have all come home. There is no more sense of threat or dread in the house. When I get up to speak, God begins to speak and there is no more need to 'perform', and no more spirit of competition. There is rest in the hearts of the people. And I don't even set the alarm anymore.”*

The church was good before, and the people were good people. But this was a remarkable miracle we received and it took place in the heart of all the people as a whole at the same time. We are an ordinary people, with our share of faults and weaknesses, but we are really happy in appreciating and giving grace to each other.

There are a few conclusions we can draw here. Being of one heart and one mind as we experienced at “Peace” is the intended normal state of the Church. This is supposed to be normal and should be everywhere. We should believe for it and pray for it and seek to understand, and seek the spirit of understanding. The power and grace available is the same as that which was released on the Day of Pentecost, and I know a lot of believers and churches want that.

## **9. The Apostles Before and After.**

For many years I pastored a small rural congregation in a tiny town. I used to wonder if I was a failure as a pastor because despite much effort and evangelism, my congregation had grown no bigger than 40 people. In comparison to the town population of 2500, it was in reality a successful congregation both numerically and as a percentage of the town.

In reading the gospels one day, I felt much better knowing that even the quality teaching, and quality attention of Jesus had not produced a large group of people, and the small group it had produced were not unified in purpose and didn't seem to like each other.

What the disciples had received was 3 years of quality teaching, and they each loved Christ and had a desire to serve Him, however they lacked love and value for each other that came from the heart.

Two significant things then happened. The resurrection of Christ gave them a sense of wonder and fresh focus. Then the Day of Pentecost gave them power. However this power was not just for speaking in tongues, it was power to love one another. It was community anointing. It was the spirit of understanding which changes hearts.

Now the teaching of Christ had an effect in their lives and they had grace to change. Now they found that they loved each other, they valued each other from the heart, they prayed sincerely, they even died for each other. The church grew rapidly... things were. And during all of this, Jesus wasn't even physically present.

From before to after was as different as chalk and cheese. It is an example of what happens when a people receive the spirit of understanding.

## **10. The Necessity of Teaching Values – the Way to Change**

We learned some lessons the hard way. In 1988 we started out as a Baptist Church on the road to reform and today we are a non-denominational (but not independent) church with apostolic values and with relationships and connections all over the world. We have many connections to people of both similar and different backgrounds and we love a lot of people and are loved by a lot of people.

We started out as a church who hadn't as yet embraced much of the Charismatic movement, other than a few catchy choruses during worship time. Many things changed along the way, not least the embracing of apostles, prophets, and a huge change in the way we saw each other, saw other believers and the Body of Christ. And along with these changes we have learned about the necessity of teaching values.

Jesus spent 3 years teaching values to His disciples and apostles, and initially this didn't seem to have had an effect on them. Even after all of this teaching they still were unable to love each other, or practice the kind of Christian lifestyle which we consider right and correct. They were self-interested and were quick to flee Christ at the sign of trouble.

However, on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out, there was dramatic change in the apostles and disciples. The Church was formed. And this was when the power of the Holy Spirit was added to the years of teaching of Christ and produced tremendous change which lasted.

Some people think that teaching is needed and emphasise the quality of good doctrine. However, as evidenced by the disciples themselves, good teaching (even from Jesus) is not enough to produce change that is powerful and long lasting. If you have been a preacher in church any length of time you will know this to be true.

The other side is that some believers emphasise just the moving of the Holy Spirit only as the requisite for change, but this is also not completely accurate. If this were true, Jesus would not have spent 3 years teaching His disciples.

If the work of God is to be long-lasting (that is permanent) and rooted in genuine power that changes lives, it must be based on both the teaching of the right values and also a move of the Holy Spirit. Both are important and church leaders should be involved in both teaching and prayer.

Good leaders know that to make changes in their churches. Change comes easily and best to most people when they are informed about it, there is a good explanation of why it's needed, and it happens slowly and consistently, giving people time to think and adjust. That was why Christ taught for 3 years.

Values must also be modelled. A pastor cannot say how important something is without doing it himself. Prayer will never be important in a church (no matter how many good sermons) if the leaders of the church are not prayerful people. Values are seen, but must be explained too. This is why some children growing up in the home of believers leave the faith. They know the facts about God, but see the "real values" of their parents who apart from going to church once a week, do not live lives with any real regard for Christ. They learned the values.

For there to be a genuine move of God, there must be the proper teaching (and modelling) of the values of unity, community, love of the brethren, prayer, and seeking Christ. This combined with prayer for the release of the community anointing will bring much and large change.

## **11. The Spirit of Competition.**

Natural to our sinful condition is the idea (even if subconscious) that we are better than other people. You might sometimes meet someone with a low sense of self-worth, or inferior complex. But even they have the same struggle, and their disappointment with themselves is that they are not receiving what they believe subconsciously to be theirs. Deep down they think they are better than other people too.

People naturally look out for themselves; that is the nature of sin and the world we live in. When young children are born into a loving home, they don't have to be taught to fight and argue, but they do have to be taught to share.

It's the same in churches too. People fight (not that they would admit it) for recognition by the pastor and by other people. I remember at the age of 10 being very proud of myself for being the best (so I thought) OHP operator in the church. (Younger readers may not even know what an OHP is.) Associate pastors often want to be the senior associate. Deacons want promotion to higher positions. Everyone is looking for recognition. When someone else is promoted, recognised, or publicly honoured, we wish it was us. Sometimes we even wish for the failure of others so that we will get an advantage.

And this happens between church congregations and denominations too, and in doing so, they fail to recognise the Body of Christ.

We refer to this phenomenon in churches and in people as the "spirit of competition," The whole idea of striving to be better than someone else, and the emotions and feelings associated with that, is a nasty thing that must be removed.

It can only be removed by grace, and through a move of God.

On the Day of Pentecost this is exactly what happened to the early believers. Previously we know they had struggled with this same issue, but after the giving of the Holy Spirit there was a dramatic change in their midst. The spirit of competition was removed from their hearts, and it was a sovereign move of God. It was something they needed (and we all need) and something we can believe for and seek God for.

Imagine the possibilities in your church, when the people start putting each other first from the heart.



## **12. The Next Level of Community.**

What God did in our church in Rockhampton at a congregational level He wants to do at a citywide level. The change required to achieve this requires the miraculous intervention of God, and the prayers of His people.

In previous articles in this set, I have spoken about the dramatic changes in our church as a result of receiving the community anointing from Christ. This was not something we could have done ourselves and not something we deserved, or even understood initially. It was grace, and it was a blessing to us.

We came into a place where the vision was focused in our hearts, and we worked together to achieve many things for the sake of Christ. The most profound changes were in how we felt toward each other and loved each other. The spirit of competition was gone. This was to provide us with a long period of grace and stability which continues even to this day and for which we are grateful.

However, at the same time as this had happened, there was tremendous resistance in our city to the congregations being in unity. Pastors did not meet together and this had gone on for decades. It wasn't as if they would speak negatively about each other (at least most of the time) but they were too busy with their own agendas and ministries, to consider each other. Of course nobody would say this publicly or admit it was them. Each minister would say that "I have tried to get the Body of Christ together, but nobody else was interested."

It was very apparent to us that the grace that we had received from Christ for our people and our church has to spread beyond just one local congregation, and must be something that influences our City. This is the next level of community and this is where we are right now.

It is our prayer that Christ will give the whole Church of our city (Rockhampton, Queensland) the same grace He gave to our local church (Peace Christian Church). We are working towards this end in our prayers and also in building relationships with other church leaders. There are some great leaders in our city who have caught the vision and are working with us, and there are some others who have yet to catch it, but we love them just the same. Praise God for progress.

The grace of Christ for community is not something that should be confined just to a local congregation and you should not seek just that alone. You should seek to see God's Kingdom advanced beyond the walls of your people and allow grace to come for your whole city. This is what we should all strive for. This is the next level of community.

### **13. The Health of the Body of Christ.**

A few years ago I was concerned for my children. I began to pray for them, in particular that they would grow up with genuine love for Christ and to know Him.

In seeking the Lord, the story of King David came to mind. David wanted to build a temple for the Lord. Ultimately it was his son Solomon who did the building, but because of David's great desire, the Lord said to him, "because you wanted to build me a house, I will build you a house."

It became apparent to me what God was saying to me. If I would pray for the family of God, (that is His children) then He would look after my family and my children. It was a promise unique to me, although not unique in the sense that this is Christ's way, as evidenced in Scripture and His dealings with other people. When we seek first the Kingdom and His righteousness, all of these things are added unto us.

So I began to pray for the family of God, or God's children as I referred to them. In my mind I was considering this to be the whole Body of Christ in my region. I also began to fast for the health of the Body of Christ. Essentially I was praying for the unity of God's people. I was praying for the Body of Christ to be healthy. I believed sincerely that as I continued to do this, there would be change and my faith began to rise.

Change did happen, but it turned out that it was me that needed to change. At least I needed to be the first to change. And it happened.

In my home town of Mt Morgan, which was a small community near Rockhampton, I had worked hard for the sake of Christ and the Gospel for about 12 years. During this time I had prayed much and shared the gospel in various ways but often felt like Jeremiah the prophet. It had been the toil of years and yet with few results. Of course that was not entirely true, because there had been many answers to prayer and miracles and salvations too, but it certainly felt like the results did not compare with the effort.

However I had been faithful and patient and this had been good for the congregation. Then along came someone new to town. He said he was sent by God to be a missionary to Mt Morgan, and yet his approach to the gospel was strange. He did not believe in the gifts of the Spirit, he did not believe in miracles. He said that the only inspired Bible was the King James Version and he named a prominent well-known Christian preacher as being the Anti-Christ much to the concern of some people who knew him. There was certainly some strangeness to his ways.

My wife and I invited this man and his wife over for a meal and attempted to get to know them. During this time I learned that they were planting a church in my town and I took the time to share some insight about our region. I said that the churches needed to consider each other and work together, and not be a law unto ourselves. We needed to serve one another. He was friendly and seemed appreciative of the time together.

Shortly after this it was his wife's birthday. My wife decided we should make a cake and deliver it to their home one evening. I was not in favour of the idea because I knew how much he could talk and did not feel "in the mood" for several hours of talking. However within me I knew my wife was right and we should show love. And so we went.

When we arrived, and my wife delivered the cake. We sat around talking and this man started to tell me of the success of his new church. He said that in the last week he had led someone to Christ and baptised him, and had 4 new people join his church. He continued sharing how easy it was

starting this church and how good it was.

As he continued I felt a touch of disappointment within myself because I knew how hard I had strived for Christ and the Kingdom. I thought that I had been selfless and giving and done all I could, with often very few results. However outwardly I tried to be gracious and heard myself saying “That’s wonderful.” I struggled with the idea that someone could simply come to my area, and have instant success when they didn’t even have the “right beliefs about God.” They had obvious strangeness and yet seemed to be doing well.

As I struggled with this, I had an amazing moment of revelation. God opened my eyes in a second to recognise the family of God – the Body of Christ. I saw this man as the answer to my own prayers. I had prayed for years for the salvation of people in my area and for the Kingdom to grow. I had prayed for workers in the harvest field. Here before me was a man who was sent by God in answer to my prayers, and was bringing people to Christ.

In that moment I accepted him. I would have said earlier that I had accepted him, but that was more of an intellectual acceptance, but now I **really** accepted him. I loved him because I recognised that we belonged to each other. His strangeness was still there but didn’t seem to matter to me.

That was the first of many moments for me in recognising the Body of Christ and seeing Christ in others who I would normally have felt distanced from in my feelings as a result of many other differences.

This whole set of experiences gave me even greater faith. I know my prayers are going to be answered. I remembered the words of Psalm 133 where it says that when brothers dwell together in unity, God commands His blessing. I knew that the days ahead are going to be different.

I share this to encourage you to see the Body of Christ differently. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 11 that when we fail to recognise the Body of Christ, we eat and drink judgement on ourselves. It’s a warning that we need to see who we belong to and accept each other as Christ accepted us. It’s not a threat, but rather a liberating idea that will challenge you and change you.

So pray for the health of the Body of Christ, and your body will be healthy. Pray for the family of God and your family will be blessed. Help build God’s house (His people) and your house will be built. Seek first the Kingdom and all these things will be added unto you.

Once your eyes are opened to this, things will never be the same again.

## 14. Congregational Government.

This section is not meant to offend anyone, but simply enlighten people about a concept which is frequently misunderstood. No method of church government is without its failures, however congregational government is deeply flawed and this needs to be understood.

Previously our church in Rockhampton was a Baptist fellowship, and was governed congregationally. We were happy with this at the time and didn't see any need to change, but over time as we learned things shown to us by Christ, we came to see that having a congregationally governed church did us no favours. This was not to say we didn't need to have people working together, and placing value on consensus and having a sense of community in decision making. These things are important, but it is how one goes about achieving them that matters.

What is needed is community and not democracy.

Congregational government is democracy in the local church. It introduces separation between people with competing ideas of how churches should be run. The very nature of it causes "parties" to form favouring different thoughts. It becomes political even if the word political is never mentioned. By its very nature it divides people.

Of course the idea behind congregational government is that it involves people. Everyone is a priest and needs to be a part of what the church is doing. While this is completely true and scriptural, there is not a single example of congregational government or democracy in the entire Bible.

I have heard people counter this point by saying, "*What about the appointment of the 7 deacons in the book of Acts? They were chosen by the people.*" (Acts 6:1-5) Actually, the real decision **was** made by the Elders who decided that the people should choose. It's not an example of democracy, but of community.

On the other hand, the Bible is full of examples of single leaders being in charge. There are many prophets in the Old Testament, and apostles in the New Testament who were placed in charge. It wasn't dictatorial, but it is God's way of doing things.

Leaders are not supposed to be harsh, or bossy, but gentle, and Christ is our example. These leaders are supposed to build people together to be of one heart and one mind. They are supposed to build community, and that is an entirely different thing to democracy.

So the con in congregational government is that it divides and separates. It's very unusual to find big congregationally-governed churches because they struggle to grow past a certain size.

It took many years, but we eventually left congregational government. Strangely enough, we voted not to vote. It was a work of Christ and a work in the hearts of our people, and it has been very rewarding.

## 15. A Mutual Admiration Society.

Of the Moravians it was said (see the section about Count Zinzendorf) that they were a people “who greatly admired each other.” There was an invisible 'something' that this group of people had that caused them to admire each other significantly.

That is very unusual!

We can all bring to mind countless examples of groups of people who don't get along, or simply put up with each other. Church-split stories abound, and so do stories of community groups and clubs also fighting and competing within for control and competing ideas. Nearly every single nation has a political situation that has some level of opposition and confrontation. Human beings by nature consider themselves better, and their ideas right, and tend to look down on others. This “looking down” which is the opposite of admiration, has the effect of dividing people and the groups they belong to, of which churches are no exception. The key to working together is really “looking up” - which is admiration.

There are very few groups of people that get along so well as a result of admiring each other and working together. In fact, many people cannot think of a single example. We all know how hard it is for just a husband and wife to get along in many cases. For a whole group it is even more difficult.

This type of admiration was true of the Moravians under the leadership of Count Zinzendorf.

We all know about couples who “fall in love” and this feeling of admiration between each other causes them to overlook faults and be “blind” to problems and work together well. It is a feeling but more than that, it is something which still includes the mind. The mind may know of problems but it doesn't seem to matter. With couples the 'in love' feeling doesn't last long before reality sets in. But we are looking for a permanent admiration. This is what the state of the church should be.

As the leader of the Moravians, Zinzendorf espoused what he called “religion of the heart” which was where following Christ was something that belonged in our hearts and feelings towards each other. It was unusual in his day and is still unusual in our day. Christ is the one who said to “love one another,” and yet it seems nobody understood this simple instruction more than Zinzendorf and his followers did. It was obvious to them that religion (that is our faith) was not something you do but something you feel. Of course if you knew anything about the Moravians, they actually did do a lot for Christ and the gospel. However it was because their feelings towards Christ, and for each other were right, and it enabled them to succeed in the doing part.

So they were a “mutual admiration society” – which really should be a definition for “church,” and we should aim for that to be the case. .

## 16. Who Was Count Zinzendorf?

Count Nikolaus von Zinzendorf was a landowner and nobleman in Moravia (modern day Germany) in the early 1700's. The Church of the day had gone 200 years since the reformation and many 'traditions' had grown "tired" and the Church was lacking in life. Some believers such as the Lutheran minister P.J Spener hoped to bring fresh life back to the Church by promoting "the practice of piety." Through prayer and Bible reading he hoped that life would come back to God's people. And it did begin to work with groups of "Pietists" springing up in various places.

Nikolaus von Zinzendorf was one of these people influenced by the Pietists. As a wealthy landowner and politician, he welcomed religious refugees onto his land at Moravia (in modern day Germany) and formed a settlement there for them to live, called Herrnhut which means "The Lord's Watch."

By May 1725, 90 Moravians had gathered there and Zinzendorf would preach weekly at the church he established in their midst. By the next year there were over 300 believers in the "town" and all involved in the church. It was a community in the sense that they all were together, but they did not yet have "community in their hearts."

Zinzendorf had trouble with these people because there was discord. They didn't agree with each other and they eventually also took issue with Zinzendorf himself, even though he was their benefactor and providing a place for them to live. They wanted to get rid of him as their pastor. Eventually Zinzendorf was so troubled that he went to prayer and prayed all night long. Then next morning was the Lord's Day (Sunday) and he went to church to meet with his people. During the communion there was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit which changed their hearts.

When the Holy Spirit fell it swept away all of their differences and they became a people of one heart and one mind. It is said that they greatly admired each other from this time onwards. This was not a human work, but something miraculous, something supernatural. It was the answer to Zinzendorf's prayer, and the desire of his heart.

After this they started a prayer meeting which ran continuously 24 hours a day for over 100 years. It was also called "The Lord's Watch." Also from this time on, they united behind the work of Christ and began to send missionaries into all the world. (60 years before William Carey) For every two families that went out, one would stay behind to support and pray.

2 young Moravian missionaries sold themselves into slavery to reach men on an island who were slaves themselves. The only way onto that island was to be a slave, so they became slaves for Christ so that the other slaves could be free for Christ. This was the kind of revolutionary Christianity that the Moravians became known for.

When John Wesley was on his way across the Atlantic Ocean between America and England, he met Moravian missionaries on the ship. The result of this encounter was the genuine conversion of Wesley and his life turning around completely. This encounter changed the whole world. After this, Wesley's people who also changed the world, would influence William Booth (the founder of The Salvation Army) who would change the world again. The influence of the Moravians continues today.

It has been said that this one group of people did more to evangelise the world in 20 years than the entire church did in the 200 years before it.

However to look at Zinzendorf and the Moravians and marvel at "their feats" would be to distract

ourselves from the main point. Zinzendorf himself said, “There can be no Christianity without community.” He was not referring to some ideal of people living together or working together, but rather to the “religion of the heart.” He was referring to the idea that God’s people would “like each other deeply.”

The point is that Zinzendorf and the Moravians admired each other and as a result they achieved much. Without their devotion to Christ and each other being right, they could not have done what they did. And they could not have loved each other without a great miracle... the giving of the spirit of community.

Have faith, and pray. Let God do it again, and do it better.

## 17. The Danger of Vows and Covenants.

How do you maintain a revival once you have one? This is a relevant question because most revivals and moves of God are short-lived. Revival does not fade because of anything God does, but rather something that its leaders do.

This is what happened to Jonathan Edwards, the famous revivalist and preacher in 1742, in his church in Northampton, England. Edwards had a great heart and a very ordered mind, and he observed and understood many things to do with grace, and sin, and human nature, and society.

Edwards published some articles in which he describes a move of God, *A Narrative of Surprising Conversions*, another *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, and the third, *An Account of the Revival of Religion in Northampton in 1742*.

There are wonderful stories of how the Spirit of God fell on people and changed them completely, often transforming whole towns and communities. After recounting these stories, he conveyed the following: *“About the same time there were two remarkable instances of persons led away with strange enthusiastic delusions.”*

“Enthusiasm” was a word used to describe the motive of people who were considered “flaky”, “super spiritual” as we would say, or “over the top.” These were people very eager about religion but assumed to be running in the way of the flesh.

Jonathan Edwards describes their fault. *“That which has made the greatest noise in the country was the conduct of the man at South Hadley. His delusion was that he thought himself divinely instructed to direct a poor man in depression and despairing circumstances to say certain words in prayer to God as recorded in Psalm 116.4 for his own relief.”*

In modern English, this was a brother who thought the Lord had impressed on him to tell another brother, one who was struggling, to pray according to Psalm 116.4 and God would help him. Psalm 116:4 says “Lord save me.” The “strange enthusiastic delusion” referred to was simply that an ordinary member of the church thought he had heard from God and should try to encourage a brother.

If this leaves you shaking your head, remember we are living in different times. Edwards goes on to describe that this man was actually a “*pious man*” and that he accepted correction and repented. He was sorry for thinking that he could be used by the Holy Spirit.

In Edward’s day they seem to have believed two falsehoods. One, that only some people were ministers, and the other, that only a few people who were ministers, could be led by the Holy Spirit. That year 1742 marked the end of the revival. Edwards remarked *“The Spirit of God not long after this, appeared to be withdrawing from all parts of the country.”*

If we wish to maintain revival, or wish to remain in grace, we need to avoid resisting God. He always seeks to push into new areas where we are not accustomed. That is not all however, as Edwards writes more regarding events in 1742.

*“...the people were exceedingly moved crying out in great numbers in the meeting house, and a great part of the congregation commonly staying in the house of God for hours after the public service.”*

Edwards believed that he had to maintain this revival (unlike previous unsuccessful attempts) and



that the people needed to enter into an oath (a covenant) before God. In March 1742, he drew up a document (which took up 4 pages of his article) and required everyone over the age of 14 years to subscribe to it. He had many things to say (including much Scripture) on how this was going to help. However he writes, “*In the beginnings of the summer of 1742, there seemed to be an abatement of the liveliness of people’s affection in religion...*” This was just 10 weeks after the signing of the covenant, which was supposed to help maintain the revival.

You cannot take a system of law and impose it on revival to create some kind of spiritual order. It has to be a work of grace. We all need to find greater grace from God than we do have, and we will only maintain what we have by walking in the way of grace.

Vows and human covenants (all the Bible covenants were initiated by God) always take away freedom, and kill off faith and hunger for God. Jesus Christ said, “*let your yes be yes, and your no be no, anything else comes from the evil one.*” (Matt 5:37) That is certainly food for thought.

It seems that a great many Christians and Church movements use vows, covenants, pledges, promises to God and similar declarations as ways to try to enforce our faith and make it stronger. It does no such thing. Grace and a move of God is supposed to change our heart so that by our love for Christ we continue to serve him from a place of pure devotion, not from rules or requirements. Resolve to serve Christ is wonderful, but turning it into a system of compliance removes the life from it.

Paul said to the Galatians, “*Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law?*” Of course the answer was no. They received the Holy Spirit by faith and grace, by believing the Gospel and what God said, and desiring what God had to offer. The same is true today.

God wants to do wondrous things in our midst, to change our churches and hearts. He wants to bring a sense of community and purpose, but it will not come through legalism. This is dangerous, and we will do well to avoid it. We will do well to renew our first love for Christ and our love for the brethren, the result of which is... life.

## **18. How To Be A Church Like the New Testament Church? (A Summary)**

We have heard many sermons inspiring us to be like the Church of the book of Acts. It sounds exciting. Jesus at the wedding in Cana served the best wine last, and so the Church of today is supposed to surpass the Church of the book of Acts. But how?

Such a thing is requires a work of God, a miracle of the heart that comes by the moving of the Holy Spirit, and it is such a move that we must seek.

First we teach values of community, the removal of competition, loving one another above ourselves and many similar concepts taught by Christ during His life. We do this consistently and thoroughly.

Then we add to that prayer for a move of God like that which happened at Pentecost. We pray for God to take a hold of a diverse group of people and unify them into one body. What is needed is a communal baptism of the Holy Spirit, and this will do what no man can do. It will change the heart, unite the people, and produce a people of one heart and one mind.

This is a summary of what is in this booklet, and of how to become a people like the New Testament Church.