



United Church of God

an International Association

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Friday, May 23, 2025

Greetings brethren,

What a miraculous event was the Feast of Pentecost in 31AD. For the first time in world history, the very essence of God's divine nature was made available to more than a tiny number of people. Accompanied by extraordinary, miraculous signs, including a rushing mighty wind and tongues of fire, the bestowing of the Holy Spirit to those disciples marked the very beginning of the New Testament Church.

Now, 1994 years later, we are approaching the same festival with renewed focus on achieving what Christ gave His life for us to become—at one with the entire God family. “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1). *John Gill Commentary* states, “they were very unanimous and peaceable; there were no jars nor contentions among them; they were of the same mind and judgment in faith and practice, and of one heart and soul, and had a cordial affection for one another.”

The barrier to oneness is simply an elevated self. The solution to selfishness is selflessness. But a mindset refocused onto sacrificing the self in service to others is a divine quality entrenched in *agape*. “By this we know love [*agape*] because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16).

While it is easy to recite those words, doing them as He did is quite a challenge for us human beings with our self-focus. We strive for a fulfilling life through personal development, opportunity seeking, goal-setting, and achievement. This “normal” human mindset sets us up as independent goal seekers who occasionally encounter obstacles to our achievements. Invariably, some obstacles to our achievements are other achievers themselves. And like in any sport or racing event, the problem with reaching the goal are the other participants.

Thankfully, the divine solution to this is given us in God’s Word. One tool that has directly helped me immensely in this regard is the book of James. When viewed through a lens of how to reduce *self* in my nature—effectively changing the focus of *me* to *we*—a process for accomplishing it is laid out for us.

James begins with the ultimate obstacle to *my* success: trials arising from others. They can crush our spirit, confound our thoughts and seemingly stop forward progress to a point of defeat. Yet, James shows that if the quest is oneness, trials are positive milestones as we progress to spiritual maturity like Christ. Ultimately the trials that come through judgments, criticism, defamation, injury and even martyrdom become badges of eternal-related accomplishments. Jesus was able to ignore personal defamation, stating “Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him” (Matthew 12:32).

God's Holy Spirit is part of your and my thinking process. It is a dramatic tool to help us shift our focus from *me* to *we*. Jesus tells us to pray as one Body of Christ, together in unity. "Our Father . . . Give us . . . our daily bread, forgive us . . . as we forgive . . . lead us . . . deliver us . . ." (Matthew 6:9-13).

Many are showing wonderful progress in shifting our focus onto removing critical, judgmental *me* elements of our nature and refocusing on building up each other as co-heirs in the Body of Christ. It's encouraging to see imaginary walls dissolving and arms linking, "joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:16).

A personal fast can appropriately assist us to further humble our posture, reflect on causes and effects, and be stirred by God's Spirit to rise above carnal thinking toward godly oneness. **Please consider making a personal fast in that regard sometime before the Sabbath and Pentecost next week.** Personal fasts are a tool of which you determine the timing, length and substance. For Merrie and me, we plan to start after dinner on Thursday and finish at dinnertime on Friday, then step into the refreshing weekly Sabbath and Pentecost. Plan yours when most convenient for you.

A two-part sermon series, "Towards Oneness" may be helpful for you going forward. The second part will be given tomorrow and then posted soon thereafter.

I am so thankful for you being my brother and sister in this incredible Body on its journey to eternity at the right hand of our Lord, Master, Husband and Friend, Jesus the Christ. Let us each strive harder to become like Him, deflecting self and embracing oneness together.

With love in Christ's service,



John Elliott