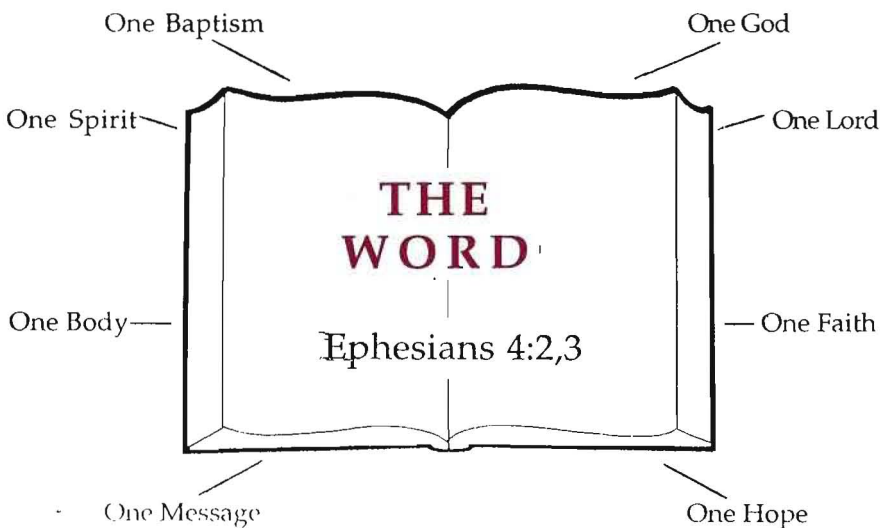


The Bible Doctrine Of Unity

First Annual Lectureship
Cold Harbor Road Church Of Christ
November 2-5, 1997



**First Annual Lectureship
at Cold Harbor Road**

**The Bible
Doctrine
of
Unity**

November 2-5, 1997

Neal Pollard, Director
Greg R. Elliott, M.D., Editor

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Dedication

It is becoming more difficult to find congregations of the Lord's people who believe in being "silent where the Bible is silent, and speaking where the Bible speaks". The Bible does not remain silent on the worship, the work, or the leadership of the church. Paul ordained elders in each church. Why? Because it was God's purpose that these men should be the shepherds, overseers, pastors, presbyters, or elders. For the church to function in its full capacity, she must have qualified elders. We have two such men at Cold Harbor, brothers Russell Young and Jim Dalton. Both brothers work tirelessly to strengthen, encourage, admonish, and, yes, rebuke when necessary. They recognize the great responsibility that is theirs and they do not shy away from it. Although worthy of double honor, neither takes but only gives. They are retired from secular work, but work full time, rather overtime, for the Lord's body. These men are to be commended for their steadfastness in carrying out the God given tasks of an overseer. They indeed teach us, encourage us, pray for us, "watch for our souls", and "convict the gainsayers". If the churches of Christ across our world had faithful men such as these, the church would not be in regression as it is in so many places. We are grateful for them and their wisdom in so many areas including their support of this lectureship. May God bless them with many more years in His service.

FORWARD

Rugged individualism, alternate lifestyles, multiculturalism, and the age of tolerance are the tainted springs of the world. From such all-accepting ideologies flow streams coursing violently through the continent of our culture. The unity for which Christ prayed and died seems stranded over on the opposite bank of righteousness. At times, it is scarcely visible due to the overflow of society's sins.

The final plea of the Christ, in thinking about disciples even yet unborn, was that "they all may be one..." (John 17:21). Pleasant and good in the sign of the Lord is unity based upon what God has taught and revealed (cf. Psalm 133:1). The divine pattern has laid out the command for oneness upon the foundation of God's word (cf. Ephesians 4:1-13; 1 Corinthians 3:11). One of, if not the greatest of the scourges of, denominationalism is that it fosters and promotes the very division God hates and Christ longed for believers to avoid. Division hurts the cause of Christ.

Disunity so hurt a congregation earlier in this century that the church, now two warring factions, would not meet together for worship. They worshipped in the same building at different times on Sunday. Because of their geographical location, coal was the fuel of choice during the winter months. But, how would they determine if the coal was being equitably distributed? With

uncharacteristic cordiality, they formed separate coal piles. Each group would use only their respective pile of coal. A boy from the neighborhood, having heard of this schism, somehow got possession of the letters from the church sign and posted this message: "One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism-- *And Two Coal Piles!*" (McCord)

From an obscure incident during the Restoration Movement comes an attitude, the courage of one man, that all Christians should desire to possess. Over petty differences, a congregation was divided on some opinion. In the heat of infighting, the leader of one faction gathered his followers to sit on the left side of the building. Another brother, likewise, gathered his cronies to the right side. There they sat, fuming and glaring at one another. One brother had lingered outside, but now entered the auditorium with a folding chair under his arm. The two divided leaders each asked him to join their side of the building. He unfolded the chair, sat, and exclaimed, "Everyone who is on the Lord's side meet here in the middle." A church was saved from division by a brother's ability to know the difference between faith and opinion.

It is sinful to make God's laws incidental in the name of compromise, as it is wrong to equate incidentals as being on par with God's laws. Unity requires a great many things, while it prohibits a great many others. Thus, in an age where division is glorified by the world, urged by false teachers,

accepted and tolerated by too many, and a cause of stumbling to precious souls, there is a dire need for renewed instruction about the Bible doctrine of unity. God sets forth His expectations for unity, but He also gives, through His word, guidelines and an outline to assure the possibility for its accomplishment.

The fine work and research done by the brethren whose written materials comprise this lectureship book, whose zeal and clarity in presentation are so appreciated, will serve the reader well in ascertaining the importance that we be one and know that oneness is acceptable to the God who sent His Son to make religious unity a reality. His death caused the end for the need of religious division (cf. Ephesians 2:14). It is man that has reconstructed the faulty walls of religious division. May we be encouraged to present the clear lines of fellowship drawn by God (cf. I John 1:7, II John 9-11) and call the lost and erring to live therein. Our prayer is that this is one step, however small, in that direction.

Neal Pollard, director
Cold Harbor Road Lectureship

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Chapter 1

The Bible Doctrine Of Unity

William L. Burton, Jr.

Brother Burton was born in 1935 in Richmond, VA. He is married to Geraldine and they have two sons, Alonzo and Nathan, and three grandchildren.

He obeyed the gospel in 1955 while in the military. He began preaching in Alamogordo, NM in 1957. Subsequently, he has preached in CA, MI, NM, TX, VA, Germany and Vietnam. He is a graduate of the school of preaching at the North Broadway church of Christ, Mt. Clemens, MI. He has a B.A. and a Masters in Special Education from Virginia State University. He also has a Doctor of Religious Education from the Midwestern Christian Institute, Mt. Clemens, MI.

Currently, brother Burton teaches in the Richmond Public Schools and is a deacon at the Cold Harbor Road church of Christ in Mechanicsville, VA.

As I look upon life with its many avenues of division and the disunity among mankind, I must wonder, "Why!" When I view The Lord's church from the sidelines and witness its divisions and disunity, again I wonder, "Why!" The answer is "Man's failure to recognize the Bible (God's word) that teaches (doctrinal) unity". "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1).

The apostle Paul admonished the Ephesian Christians to be longsuffering toward each other,

forbearing one another in love. But most importantly, he said they should make a serious, determined effort (endeavor) to keep the oneness of the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:2-3).

Bible Doctrine - Terminology

Bible - The Bible is a book of books, sixty-six of them, divided into two testaments or covenants. Bible is derived from *biblion* and means "roll or book" (Luke 4:16-21). In this setting, Jesus' custom was to read "The Book" (Bible) in the synagogue on the Sabbath. He stood up, opened The Book and read from Isaiah 61:1. After reading, He closed The Book and sat down.

Abraham Lincoln said, "There is but one book, the Bible, which is the best gift God has ever given to man. All the good from the Savior of the world is communicated to us through this book."

The Bible is the one book for all mankind. It has established itself as a common possession wherever given, and begins to fulfill its great mission as the savior of life unto life, a guide and a lamp to the stumbling feet of the nations (Psalm 119:105).

In simplest terms, the Bible is the book of books and the record of revelation. It tells us all that we know about God and every fact that we know about Jesus. The Bible is divinely inspired (II Timothy 3:16) and

men were under the influence and control of the Spirit as they spoke and wrote (II Peter 1:19-21).

Scripture - Used in the New Testament were the sacred books of the Old Testament, which were regarded as inspired (II Timothy 3:16; Romans 3:2). Also used in the New Testament were other parts of the New Testament (II Peter 3:16).

Word of God - Used in both the Old Testament and the New Testament in written form (Matthew 15:6; John 10:35; Hebrews 4:12).

Doctrine - Teaching or instructions about the will of God, particularly about Jesus Christ (John 7:14-18).

Oracles of God/Living Oracles - In the Old Testament usage, refers to the inspired Old Testament scriptures, in whole or in part. Messages or promises of Jesus (Romans 3:2; Hebrews 5:12; I Peter 4:11).

Attitudes Toward the Bible

Rationalism - Extreme form denies the possibility of any supernatural revelation. The moderate form admits the possibility of divine revelation, but the human mind is the final judge of revelation.

Romanism - The Bible is the product of the church; therefore, the Bible is not the sole or final authority.

Mysticism - Experience is authoritative along with the Bible.

Neo orthodoxy - The Bible is a fallible witness to the revelation of God in the Word, Christ.

Cults - The Bible and the writings of the particular cult's leader are equally authoritative.

Orthodoxy - The Bible alone is the ground of authority.

The Wonders of the Bible

Its Formation - It was written over a period of 1500 years.

Its Unity - It was written by 40 different authors, yet one book.

Its Preservation

Its Subject Matter

Its Influence

Bible Unity

Bible unity is a genuine mark of biblical inspiration. It is not an artificial unity that one must read into it, but is a natural and essential unity that binds it together.

The whole book is concerned with one thing, the record of God's redemptive work. It provides us with a vivid picture of man's spiritual state when Adam and Eve enjoyed unbroken fellowship with God (Genesis 1:26-31). This was followed by a break in fellowship when sin entered into human life (Genesis 3:1-24). However, God had a future victory which restored man to fellowship with His creator and redeemed him from sin. That promise was fulfilled through Jesus Christ.

Doctrine of Unity

As was mentioned before, doctrine is teachings or instructions about the will of God. However, there are bad and good doctrines. The following are examples:

In Matthew 15:9, Jesus says "For in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men." (See also Hebrews 13:9; I Timothy 4:1-5).

In Matthew 5-7, Jesus began His sermon on the mount by revealing His doctrines (teachings) about adultery, killing, loving enemies, salt of earth, prayer, forgiveness, serving God, worldly things, rash judgment, the straight gate, false prophets, house built on rock and to be doers of His word. Finally, the Bible summarizes all these by saying in Matthew 7:28-29, "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the multitudes were

astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."

The Bible teaches unity. The Son of God, Jesus, teaches unity. In John 17:1-26, Jesus prayed for unity that His disciples be one (John 17:11). He prayed for unity that the world might be one (John 17:20-22).

God has intended for all of His children in this age to be united in Christ. The apostle Paul pleaded with the brethren in Corinth to speak the same thing through the name of Jesus Christ, that there be no divisions but be perfected together in the same mind and judgment.

Friends, the unity of all the followers of Christ is a basic doctrine in the New Testament. Jesus does not teach disunity or conflicting doctrines. As members of the church of Christ, one of our expected results is to win the cities of Virginia for Christ or the conversion of the world, but it is next to useless to call upon others to accept the New Testament plan of salvation, while those who claim to stand upon the Bible alone ignore its teachings. I wish to God that we did not have the various differences that have come about because of opinionated individuals. We call ourselves Christians, then, liberals and conservatives. However, these and other actions only reveal the power of Satan and insure us that he is well and alive. We must remember that everyone who professes to be a member of the Lord's church is not

recognized by Christ as being loyal and faithful to Him.

We have a responsibility. We must accept the responsibility of maintaining unity among the brotherhood. We have the opportunity of doing something about it; and it goes without saying that if professed Christians really want to bring about the unity of all the people of the earth, they should first make an honest effort to set their own house in order.

Causes of Disunity

Within any organization, before a positive basis of unity can be established, the causes of disunity must be removed.

A cause of disunity is a human tendency to follow man rather than God. Paul admonished the Corinthians to follow him only as he followed Christ (I Corinthians 11:1). Jesus said we should not follow leaders blindly, for both shall fall into the ditch (Matthew 15:14).

Another factor in religious disunity are human creeds and confessions of faith. Human creeds contain much error and no two of them are alike. Most of them are contradictory and they are the embodiment of the doctrines of men. In addition, these creeds crystallize false doctrines and stand as a great barrier to religious unity (Matthew 15:9; Romans 16:17-18).

In Philippians 2:1-4, the apostle Paul's desire was to safeguard the Philippian church from the danger of disunity. This type of danger is in every healthy church. When people are really in earnest, when their beliefs really matter to them, when they are eager to carry out their own plans and their own schemes, they are apt to get up against each other. The greater their enthusiasm, the greater the danger that they may collide. In verses 3 and 4, Paul gives the three great causes of discord and disunity.

Selfish Ambition - There is always the danger that people should work, not to advance the work, but to advance themselves.

Personal Prestige - The desire for empty glory or prestige is for many people an even greater temptation than wealth. To be admired, to be respected, to have a platform seat, to have one's opinion sought, to be known by name and appearance, to be listened to, to have a certain degree of fame, and to be flattered are for many people most desirable things. However, the Christian's aim is not self display, but self obliteration. He does not do good deeds to be seen of men or to glorify himself, but that Jesus may be glorified. The Christian desires not to focus men's eyes upon himself but to focus them on God. He shines with a light, but the light is not his own light, but the light of God shining through him.

Concentration on Self - If a man is concerned first and foremost with his own interests, then he is bound to collide with others. He will always think of other human beings as enemies or as opponents who must be pushed out of the way when he feels that life is a competition whose prizes he must win or to conquer others. There cannot be anything else but disunity when there is a selfish ambition, desire for prestige and where every man concentrates on his own interests.

The Cures for Disunity

Be In Christ - The fact that we are all in Christ must keep us in unity one with another. No man can walk in disunity with his fellow men and in unity with Christ. If a man has Christ as the companion of his way, he is inevitably the companion of every fellow wayfarer. No man can live in the atmosphere of Christ, and at the same time live in bitterness with his fellow men.

Christian Love - The power of Christian love will keep us in unity one with another. Christian love is that unconquered benevolence and good will which will never know bitterness, and which will never seek anything but the good of others. This Christian love is not a mere reaction of the heart, as human love is; it is a victory of the will achieved by the help of Jesus Christ. It does not mean loving only those who love us, those whom we like, or those who are lovable. It means an unconquerable good will even to those who hate us. It means the

power to love the people we do not like. It means the Christ like ability to love the unlovely and unlovable. Herein is the very essence of the Christian life, and herein is that which affects us in time and in eternity.

United with the Holy Spirit - The fact that they share in the Holy Spirit must keep Christians from disunity. The Holy Spirit is He who binds man to God, and man to man. It is the Spirit who revealed to us that which God wishes us to do through the Holy Scripture. It is the Spirit who has shed abroad the love of God within our hearts. It is the Spirit who enables us to live the life of love, which is the life of God, by following the plan He gave by inspiration through the apostles and prophets. If a man lives in disunity with his fellow men and not in harmony with God's word, he has thereby given proof that the gift of the Spirit is not his.

United With Christ - It is imperative that we unite with Christ and accept His absolute authority (Matthew 28:18). All authority was given Christ in heaven and on earth.

Accept New Testament Writings - We must accept the complete and sole authority of the New Testament writings.

Accept Paul's Plea For Unity - We must accept Paul's plea for unity in Ephesians 4:1-6. There he wrote, "I beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness

and meekness with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all."

Duplicate the Lord's Church - Unity of the faith cannot be accomplished without duplicating the church of the first century. We must teach the way of salvation as taught by apostles.

Worship In Spirit/Truth - We must worship in spirit and truth as did the first century Christians.

Wear the Christian Name - We must wear the name "Christian", without denominational prefixes or suffixes, as did the first century disciples, being, in truth, undenominational Christians.

Reflect The Glory Of God - We must conduct our personal lives in such a way as to reflect the glory of Christ and cause our fellow men to recognize us as a people called out of the world of sin (Matthew 5:16; Colossians 1:12-13). When we have done these things, we will be one with Christ and united with all who have united with Him.

Conclusion

The Bible is The Book that continues to teach those biblical principals relating to unity in the home (Ephesians 5:22-33), in the church (I Corinthians 3:19), in giving (II Corinthians 9:1-9), with church

leaders (Hebrews 13:7,17), and with members (I Corinthians 1:1-13).

However, as a rule, men do not read the Bible. It is a book that sells many copies annually, yet it is one of the most misunderstood books because people just do not read the Bible regularly. The Bible tells us that it is a book that ought to be read and studied (Isaiah 34:16; II Timothy 2:15).

In order for man to be one in doctrine and practice, there must be a close adherence to the word of God. There can be no additions or subtractions (Revelation 22:18-19). There can be no man-made doctrines, human opinions, or power seeking individuals.

The Bible is the record of revelation. It meets all religious needs of the human heart and life. In the realm of religion, it is sufficient, trustworthy, authoritative, and final.

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Chapter 2

Unity: A Hebrew Word Study

Edwin Jones

Brother Jones was born in Atlanta, Georgia. He and his wife Sara are the proud parents of 3 children, Meredith, Morgan, and Matthew. Brother Jones holds a Th.D. from American Theological University, having previously been educated at Faulkner University, Southern Christian University, and Auburn University. He has preached since 1968 in Alabama, North Carolina, Ohio, New Zealand, and Tennessee. He presently serves as an elder and preacher for the Karns church of Christ in Knoxville, Tennessee. He is a widely published writer and active in several gospel meetings each year.

The Hebrew word translated as "unity" in Psalm 133:1 of the King James Version is actually a misleading translation. The phrase "together in unity" is actually one word with an attached preposition "in". A rendering such as, "in togetherness," would be more in keeping with the way the idea is usually translated. The word itself yachad is an adjective. With the second adjective form yach^edav, we find a combined 139 of the approximately 160 forms of the y/ch/d consonantal root. The NASB translates the adverb form as "together" 120 times.

The technical material available on yachad is not lengthy or complicated as to its meaning. Basically,

the adjective form means "together". The importance of the word is found more in the way togetherness is used as an Old Testament theme. Our study will highlight what are considered to be the key concepts associated with the Hebrew idea of togetherness or unity.

In Genesis 13:6 a problem arises that will prevent Abraham and his nephew Lot from dwelling "together." The land cannot support them both being camped at the same location. Consequently, Lot moved his camp as far as Sodom (Genesis 13:12).

While this particular occurrence of yachad deals with physical rather than spiritual togetherness, it nevertheless will illustrate the basic idea associated with the word. Togetherness or unity requires closeness and the sharing of things in common. In this the rich theology of fellowship is readily accessed. Fellowship is the primary biblical vehicle of expressing ideas of unity and togetherness.

Amos 3:3 very clearly draws from the idea of fellowship. "Can two walk **together** unless they are agreed?" (NKJV as in remaining citations). Amos 3:3-6 deals with expected cause effect relationships. If certain things happen, then those things have a cause. When two walk together, it is because a prior agreement has been reached ("unless they have made an agreement" NASB margin).

The idea of togetherness becomes especially important for the nation of Israel. Just prior to the giving of the Ten Commandments, the nation of Israel vows to do all that the Lord has spoken to them. "Then all the people answered **together** and said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do.' So Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord" (Exodus 19:8). The entire history of the Jewish nation is evaluated on the basis of how well they were united **together** behind God's word. For that matter, our success as the church will be evaluated in the same way (II Timothy 2:15; John 17:17, 21-23).

Togetherness can be wonderful if God is part of the unity, but if God is absent, togetherness is the worst of all conditions. The tower of Babel is a tragic testimony to the potential and the consequences of a people who came together but neglected God (Genesis 11:1-9). The second Psalm speaks of those who "take counsel **together** against the Lord and against His Anointed..." (vs. 2). Evil scheming brings men **together** against not only God but also against His people (Psalm 31:13). Such people will be "brought to confusion **together**..." (Psalm 35:26). Those who "whisper **together**" (Psalm 41:7) against the godly should be "brought to dishonor" (Psalm 40:14). God does not want evil people united; on the other hand, the High Priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17 accentuates the need for believers to "be one" (vs 20, 21, 22). To "be made perfect in one" is the prayer of Jesus for His people (vs 23). Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12 have much to say about the

nature of Christian unity. These chapters elaborate on how diversity of talent works within a unity of doctrine to bring about a true body of Christ (cf. Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4; John 17:17).

The Old Covenant points forward to the day when God would bring His people together in Christ. "Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered **together**, and appoint for themselves one head; and they shall come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel!" (Hosea 1:11).

When sin abounds, God scatters (Genesis 11:8). However, when people come to God they are to be brought **together** in **unity** (Galatians 3:26-28). The people of God are to enjoy a unity of function that allows each person to use his or her talent in the most appropriate way for the growth of the body (Ephesians 4:16). It is a **togetherness** of thought, worship, and service that is to distinguish the **unity** of the people of God.

The study of togetherness is eminently practical and useful. In it we are not taxed by the deeper points of truth; neither are we overwhelmed by applications that are foreign to our understanding. We can practice unity daily and, in fact, we must! We would be remiss if at the close of this lesson we did not spell out in very practical terms some of the things that make unity work in all covenant areas. Consider how the following suggestions can bring

to life in our day the ancient ideal of togetherness. Unity exists because we work on it together.

- Cling to truth (Proverbs 23:23).
- Practice truth (Hebrews 5:14).
- Help others to find truth (I Peter 3:15).
- Let others show us truth (Romans 2:21).
- Be kind, long suffering, and understanding in seeking to bring others to truth (II Timothy 2:24-26).
- Assume the best until you know otherwise (I Corinthians 13:7).
- Be as strong for liberty in opinion as for offering no compromise in the truth (Romans 14:1; Matthew 5:11-20).
- Realize the church is a body; there are no "Lone Rangers" (I Corinthians 12:14-27).
- Love God (Matthew 22:36-38).
- Love others (Matthew 22:39-40).
- Care more about salvation than condemnation (John 3:17).
- Deny self (Luke 9:23).
- Slay pride (Proverbs 16:18).
- Give preference to others (I Corinthians 10:24, 33).
- Let the mind of Christ be in you (Philippians 2:5).
- Give room for growth (I Peter 2:2).
- Realize God is with us as we are faithful (Romans 8:31-39).
- Keep our vision focused on Jesus (Colossians 3:1-2).
- Forgive (Matthew 6:12-15).

Togetherness in **unity** is a marvelous concept. We determine if its power remains mere potential or if it is to live among us. Togetherⁿess must pass from concept to reality.

Chapter 3

Unity: A Greek Word Study

Clifford Newell, Jr.

Brother Newell was born in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan and is married to the former Diane King. They have 2 children, Joy and Clifford, III. He attended the Memphis School of Preaching, Southern Christian University, and Kentucky State University. He has been involved in radio and television preaching. He has preached for over 20 years and presently works in Bristol, Virginia. He has taught religious courses at various colleges and universities.

Introduction

We are indeed living in the best of times and the worst of times. These are the best of times regarding transportation, medical advancements, mass communication, technology, etc., which have improved the quality of our lives. These are the worst of times, because on the other side of these wonderful times are the dark ominous clouds that are leading many to spiritual bankruptcy. At the very center of this religious controversy is the matter of "unity".

The Need for Studying Unity

The need for a study relative to unity is vital to one's being approved of God. To this end we solicit your studious attention. Brother N. B. Hardeman

realized the seriousness that division posed when he penned,

The greatest curse on this earth tonight is religious division. The greatest hindrance to the cause of Christ is denominational rivalry. The greatest handicap and the greatest discouragement unto faithful, godly men is the fact that people who claim to be members of the body of Christ are torn asunder, riven, by human opinions, popular preference, rather than submit to God's will, all speak the same thing, and be of one mind and one judgment, as the Lord prayed and for which the apostles pleaded.¹

Another man outstanding in his era was Leslie G. Thomas, whose wide exposure helped him to see the state of affairs. He stated,

The present divided condition of the professed followers of Christ clearly reveals a departure from the divine plan, and shows the need for studying the New Testament basis of unity.²

C. R. Nichol, a man of small physical stature but a giant in the scriptures, wrote,

In discussing unity...we have reference solely to the unity which should exist in the local

¹ N. B. Hardeman, *Hardeman Tabernacle Sermons*, Vol. II, (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1960), p. 178.

² Leslie G. Thomas, *One Hundred Sermons*, (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1967), p. 110.

congregation, where division and strife is often found.³

Frederick D. Kershner, a writer who authored several books promoting the Restoration Movement, penned,

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of the so-called Christian world of the present day is its disunion and lack of harmony.⁴

Benjamin Franklin, the gospel preacher, who wrote and spoke a great deal regarding the topic of unity and in his own unique way, stated,

The subject in hand is the union of the people of God ... It is not the union of 'professors of religion,' 'professed Christians,' 'Christian sects,' or 'Christian denominations,' that is to be considered, but simply the union of Christians, those who are truly the people of God. The union of others, before they are converted to God, is not in view nor desirable. They will do less harm divided than united.⁵

The above quotations all have something in common. They came from men during the time of

³ C. R. Nichol, *Sound Doctrine*, Vol. 3, (Clifton, TX: Nichol Publishing Co., 1923), p. 62.

⁴ Frederick D. Kershner, *The Restoration Handbook*, Series IV, (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Co., 1920), p. 12.

⁵ Benjamin Franklin, *The Gospel Preacher*, Vol. I, (Delight: Gospel Light Publishing Co.), p. 305.

the Restoration Movement. It seems apparent that the religious division which resulted in their day was due to the lack of unity, and it continues to plague us today.

Greek Word Study

The word "Unity" is found in two books of the sacred scriptures: Psalm 133:1 and twice in Ephesians 4:3, 13.⁶ The KJV reads, "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" and "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." The ASV reads, "giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" and "till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." The NKJV reads, "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" and "till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The Byzantine/Majority Greek text reads, "σπουδαζοντες τηρειν την ενοτητα του πνευματος εν τω συνδεσμω της ειρηνης" and "μεχρι κατανησωμεν οι παντες εις την ενοτητα της πιστεως και της επιγνωσεως του υιου του θεου εις ανδρα τελειον εις μετρον ηλικιας του πληρωματος του χριστου."⁷ In

⁶ All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

⁷ Logos Bible Software, Version 1.6.

Ephesians 4:3 we have ("σπουδαζοντες τηρειν") endeavoring or being diligent to keep ("την ενοτητα του πνευματος") the unity or oneness of the Spirit, i.e., unity/oneness that comes from the Spirit ("εν τω συνδεσμω της ειρηνης") in the bond (that which binds firmly together) of peace or harmony. It is the case that the inspired Paul writes to the saints at Ephesus and binds upon them the need to work diligently to keep (watch over or preserve) the oneness of the Spirit (literally, the unity that comes from the Spirit), that firmly binds together in harmony. In verse 13 we have ("μεχρι κατανησωμεν οι παντες") until we all may come or arrive ("εις την ενοτητα της πιστεως") at or in the unity/oneness of the faith. This literally has reference to God's revealed objective standard. The completion of the word of God would be a unit of revealed truth that would lead and guide us to maturity. ("και της επιγνωσεως του υιου του θεου") and of the knowledge of the Son of God, ("εις ανδρα τελειον") at a perfect or full grown man, ("εις μετρον ηλικιας του πληρωματος του χριστου") unto the measure (lit. that which is measured) of the stature of the fulness of his virtues and excellencies of Christ. The gist of Ephesians 4:13 is, that miraculous gifts were to be present until we all come in the unity of the system of faith. This is God's objective revelation.

New Testament Usage

First, let us note that unity is demanded. Beloved, even a casual reading of the New Testament will reveal that the people of God were to seek unity and this unity is emphasized with such clarity and

importance that it demands our attention. From the time of creation, God has demanded unity among His people. It does not require a genius to see this great principle in the natural realm. In the creation of plants and animals the Lord made them to bring forth after their kind. One does not see evolution, confusion, and division here but rather unity and harmony. The principle is that seed will bring forth after its kind. Spiritually, "the seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:11). Hence, in each age, when the pure seed has been sown, it has produced a people who were, and are, united.

Christ likened the unity of His people to the vine and the branches. He is the vine, and those who abide in Him are the branches (John 15:1-11). It is an interesting fact that the branches are men and not churches or denominations! Therefore, the one fruit that is brought forth, New Testament Christians, attests to the unity for which Christ prayed.

Unity of the Spirit was also evident in the life of Christ. He lived and died under the law of Moses. He was a Hebrew, Israelite, and a true Jew. However, He refused to identify himself with or have any fellowship with the Sadducees, Pharisees, or Essenes for they rejected the law of Moses, made the law of Moses void, or made laws for God. Christ rebuked the sects, denominations, heretic groups of His day.

The Lord emphasized unity, not union. Consider, "For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition [between us]; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, [even] the law of commandments [contained] in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, [so] making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Ephesians 2:14-16).

The unity which comes from the Spirit is seen in Paul's rebuke to the Corinthian church regarding the Lord's Supper. When they broke bread at the Lord's table, they communed with the body of Christ (I Corinthians 10:16-22). But they could not commune with the Lord and also commune with the world without neglecting the Lord's requirements. That would unite the table of the Lord with the table of Satan. Paul rebuked them sharply, stating, "When ye come together therefore into one place, [this] is not to eat the Lord's supper" (I Corinthians 11:20). Their problem was they did not love one another as brethren. They made distinctions between each other (rich and poor). When they came together, the rich were full while the poor were hungry. How could they pretend that they were one body, which partaking of the one bread indicated? (I Corinthians 10:17). The answer was, "when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another" (I Corinthians 11:33).

Listed below are some additional passages regarding the demands of unity:

"And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we [are]. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, [art] in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world

may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (John 17:11-23).

"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any [of them] that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common" (Acts 4:32).

"Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits" (Romans 12:16).

"Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: That ye may with one mind [and] one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:5-6).

"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and [that] there be no divisions among you; but [that] ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Corinthians 1:10).

"Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (I Corinthians 13:11).

"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" (Ephesians 4:1-6).

"Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, [being] of one accord, of one mind" (Philippians 2:2).

"Finally, [be ye] all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, [be] pitiful, [be] courteous" (I Peter 3:8).

Second, we observe that unity is possible, even amidst all the religious confusion which has resulted in division. True unity can prevail "if there be first a willing mind" (II Corinthians 8:12) and if we are willing to lay aside all human creeds, manuals, disciplines, and manifestos. Unity is possible when we apply the various principles as set forth in inspiration. It can be desired and it must be desired. Before unity can be attained or maintained, the desire must be strong enough to lead to an effort in that direction. It must also be strong enough to hold our personal preferences in subjection. This requires real effort. There must be a definite work to accomplish unity. Even though

it is basically true that all Christians want to see the Lord's cause advanced, there should be efforts enabling them to become involved constructively. Paul reminded them at Philippi, "[Let] nothing [be done] through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Philippians 2:3-4).

Bible unity is possible when the Bible is our only guide. "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7).

The principle is that if we keep on walking in the light, the blood will keep on cleansing. Hence, "buy the truth and sell it not" (Proverbs 23:23). Bible unity is possible when Christ is recognized as the only head. This truth is applied to the body. "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, [being] many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Romans 12:4-5). In a healthy human body there is unity of action, because all members are controlled by the head. So in the church, the spiritual body, over which Jesus is head, and of which we are members, there is unity of action when each member is guided by Jesus, the head. "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all [things] he might have the

preeminence" (Colossians 1:18). Bible unity is possible when we deny self. In our relations may we never forget to let our conduct be seasoned with salt. "Let every one of us please *his* neighbour for *his* good to edification" (Romans 15:2). "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:31-32). "[Be] kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another" (Romans 12:10). "[Be] of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits" (Romans 12:16).

Luke recorded that the early church was united, "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all [men], as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:44-46).

This kind of unity can exist because of the "one faith" of the New Testament. The word of God unites, whereas the word and traditions of men will only divide people into such splinter groups that unity may seem undesirable or even impossible. Our Lord demonstrates this principle for us through every page of His inspired book, the

Bible. There is a unity of purpose that is interwoven through every fabric of the pages of Holy Writ which could only come from a higher source. Is there any doubt that the higher source is God? Further, it is a logical conclusion that if Christ prayed for unity; then it must be possible to attain such. For example, when Christ prayed in John 17 "that they may be one, as we are ... That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us ... that they may be one, even as we are one...", Jesus prayed for Himself, the apostles, and all that would truly believe in His word. In each of the books where unity is emphasized, there existed the possibility for unity to be achieved (Acts, Romans, I & II Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, and I Peter, to mention just a few). Though Christ's prayer for unity was answered, much division has existed in the religious world. How does one account for all the disunity? The simple but plain answer is that whereas a few would obey the gospel and persist in following the divine precepts of truth, most would cling to their particular beliefs and traditions. Those who have submitted to the apostles' doctrine, the word of Truth, have been at peace both with God and with all others who have obeyed Jehovah God. John wrote, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ ... But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another,

and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:3, 7).

It is not possible to have fellowship with God and not at the same time have fellowship with all others in fellowship with Him. Further, those not in fellowship with Christians are not in God's fellowship.

Third, there is a diversity in unity. Often times we hear people speak of "Unity-in-Diversity." Beloved, the Bible is silent as a tomb relative to such an idea. The truth of the matter is there can be diversity in unity. Observe. We presently have disunity in diversity. Illustrations of such would include, the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship, the use of women in leadership roles within the organization and worship of the church, the calling for a new hermeneutic or, as the liberals would say, a new approach to studying the Bible for the twenty first century, and the fellowshiping of denominational churches. It is this writer's opinion that the underlying cause or culprit in these disruptive devises has to do with the views of the authority of the scriptures. We have those who are much too narrow in their view, making optional matters obligatory. We have those who are too liberal in their views, making obligatory matters optional. Both of these views are divisive and disrupt the unity of the Spirit. These are the direct results of "unity-in-diversity."

However, we can have the Bible kind of diversity in unity. For example, in I Corinthians 12 one can see a true picture of diversity in unity. There is a unity of doctrine and purpose in a diversity of function. You have diversities of gifts (12:4), diversities of administrations (12:5), and diversities of operations/workings (12:6) with the same Spirit (12:4, 5, 6). We see diversity of members, but unity of the body (12:14). Here is true diversity in unity. However Paul warned, "That there should be no schism in the body; but [that] the members should have the same care one for another" (I Corinthians 12:25). Do not allow diversity to cause disunity!

We can have unity of doctrine in spite of diversity of opinion. We will never be perfectly united in our opinions, but we can have Bible unity in spite of those differences. It is a unity not only of doctrine but also of attitude. This is the only kind of unity that can prevail in the political, social, and marital realms, and it is no less true in the religious. For example, Paul and Barnabas had a difference of opinion about whether to take John Mark with them on their second missionary journey. The scriptures state, "And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, [and see] how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp

between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches" (Acts 15:36-41).

The case is that the diversity of views caused "a sharp contention" between Paul and Barnabas. However, they worked out a solution to the potentially explosive problem so that unity could once more prevail. Inspiration records that they parted and went on two separate trips. Barnabas took John Mark with him, and Paul took Silas with him.

Another evidence of diversity in unity within the Lord's church is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We do not deny that the Holy Spirit indwells Christians, but how does He indwell? There are three prominent views commonly held by brethren regarding the indwelling question. Although we subscribe to one view does not mean that the others are false views and, therefore, false doctrine. Guy N. Woods and Gus Nichols, two well respected men of Bible knowledge and character, differed over how the Spirit indwells, but they were united in the matters of faith! Brother Woods would invite brother Nichols up to the platform and extended him an open invitation to speak, while he conducted the open forum at Freed-Hardeman College Lectureship (now a university).

The determination between these matters centers around whether a statement is false affecting one's salvation, or is stated differently than the way I or you would state something. In Galatians, Paul said, "And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you" (Galatians 2:4-5).

Paul showed the Galatians how the contentions of the Judaizing teachers were a compromise. They were making circumcision a condition of salvation. They said, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). This was not a matter of judgment or a personal matter between Paul and the Judaizing teachers. It was a change they instituted and were seeking to implement upon the Gentiles. That is why Paul spoke of them as "false brethren - to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour" (Galatians 2:5). This was a matter of faith, not of opinion. Paul knew the difference, and so should God's faithful today! If it is a matter of opinion let there be liberty, but in matters of faith may we stand as did Paul and say "To whom we gave place by subjection, no not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you" (Galatians 2:5).

This above illustration presents the type of unity the Bible demands. Good people, we can maintain

Bible unity whenever diversity is present as long as we keep the diversity confined to the realm of opinion.

Fourth, let us consider “unity of the Spirit” versus the “spirit of unity.” The unity of the Spirit means the unity that is furnished and wrought by the teaching of the Holy Spirit through inspired men. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians he recorded by inspiration the Spirit’s plan for unity (Ephesians 4:1-6). These seven pillars of unity are the undergirding of the superstructure of the “oneness” of Christianity. We are not saying that unity is based only on these items listed below, for Paul elsewhere spoke of united mind, love, and judgment, among other things.

- One body - unity of organization (I Corinthians 12:20; Ephesians 2:14-16; I Timothy 3:15).
- One Spirit - unity of guidance (Galatians 5:16-18, 22-26; Romans 8:1-17).
- One hope - unity of aspiration (Titus 1:1-2; Hebrews 6:19; Romans 2:7).
- One Lord - unity of authority (Matthew 17:5; 28:18; Ephesians 1:22-23; Hebrews 1:1-2; Colossians 1:18).
- One faith - unity of message (Jude 3; Romans 10:17; Romans 4:21).
- One baptism - unity of practice (I Corinthians 12:13; Romans 6:1-5; Acts 2:38; 22:16).
- One God - unity of worship (Matthew 4:10).

Unity is the blending together of particles which are identical and of the very same kind. This can be illustrated as follows. If I were to break the tibia so that it is severed into two pieces, I would expect the bone to grow back together. That would be unity; i.e., elements of the same kind blending together in a cohesive manner and thus forming one out of the same material and identical in nature. Surely, people would recognize such as unity or oneness. Unity is oneness. Where oneness of faith and purpose exist, God's people will be a unit, i.e., they will be cemented together as one. A number of elements may be brought together into a combination or union so far as outward appearances go, and may have the appearance of unity, while all the elements of division and strife may exist in it. In view of the above it is still contended by some that the "unity of the Spirit" means "the spirit of unity." In fact, some of my brethren think they discovered unity some 12-15 years ago! But, lo and behold, it was not unity they discovered. It was a union including all the antagonistic, divisive, and devilish elements they could bring together.

Evils of Division

The evils of division are numerous. First, it is unpleasant because of its attitude. Second, it hinders progress because all of its energy is spent trying to resolve the strife within. Third, it leads to sins of all kinds, as Paul taught in Galatians 5:15. Fourth, it will effect the members, making them disturbed, discouraged, and ultimately inactive.

But, most importantly, it will drive out Christ (Matthew 25:40).

The causes of this division within God's people are many. It may stem from personal matters unresolved, selfish ambitions, inactivity, and unscriptural practices. In the last few years, the real issue that has done more to disturb the precious unity of brethren has been a failure to differentiate between matters of faith and matters of opinion. The case is that Christianity is essentially a religion of faith, "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (II Corinthians 5:7). Faith can not be broader than revelation, "So then faith [cometh] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). It is by or through faith we apprehend God. "But without faith [it is] impossible to please [him]: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and [that] he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6), by faith we become children of God, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26), by faith we approach God in prayer. "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed" (James 1:6). Faith is the basis of all acceptable obedience to God. Faith is not only the belief of the truth that God is, but also is confidence in Him. Moses and Aaron did not doubt the existence of God, but because they turned aside from doing exactly what God commanded, God said, "Because ye believed me not" (Numbers 20:10-13). They must have been

of the persuasion that their opinion was just as good as God's.

The case of Cain and Abel further illustrates the seriousness of matters of faith and matters of opinion. Abel brought the offering God commanded: i.e., he offered it by faith (Hebrews 11:4). Cain brought one not commanded by God, his opinion being that it would do just as well. Good people, if opinions are to be standards of action then every man becomes a law unto himself, for each man has equal rights with all others to his opinions. That is why any and all acts of worship based on opinion are sinful (Romans 14:23). The rule should be that if we are dealing with a matter which God has not specified, then we exercise the principle set forth in Ephesians 4, "...forbearing one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2).

The unity of the Spirit will unite us, whereas the spirit of unity will divide. The unity of the Spirit is based upon Jehovah's revealed word, while the spirit of unity came from the devil. He (the devil) has always been interested in causing disunity. Paul charged the Ephesian elders, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:28-30).

I have never known of someone from the outside (i.e., outside the Lord's church) to come in and break the unity of a local church, but I have known the unity of the Spirit to be broken by men on the inside (i.e., within the Lord's church) or as Paul expressed it, "also of your own selves". Friends, there is only one kind of unity that hell, with all its forces and all its power cannot destroy and it is a unity based on the Spirit's teaching, the Bible!

The basis of unity must contain every essential in the religion of Christ. By essential we mean every requirement the Lord has made of His people. There can be no unity by accommodating truth to suit sectarian ideas and opinions, no matter who may espouse such. If we attempt to do so, we become perverters (Galatians 1:7-9). Truth is unvarying; therefore, individuals must accommodate themselves to it, for only as we learn and accept the truth are we made free (John 8:31-32).

The basis of unity must not contain one non-essential. By non-essential we mean those things which the Lord, in His word, does not require of His people. It is sinful to contend for those things which are not divinely authorized or required.

We cannot have unity by substitution. By substitution we mean the putting of our own ideas and laws in the place of the divine law (Genesis 4:3-5). By doing so we place ourselves above the Lord,

play havoc with His law, and promote division among His people.

Conclusion

Much of the religious world claims an interest in unity. However, their brand of unity is man-centered and not Bible-centered. That is why the Bible is not wanted nor consulted in their unity forums.

We have pointed our attention to the fact that the Bible teaches (1) Bible unity is demanded; (2) Bible unity is possible; (3) Bible unity involved diversity in unity; (4) Bible unity is "Unity of the Spirit" and not "Spirit of unity"; and (5) the evils of division.

Chapter 4

An Overview Of Unity And The Old Testament

Bill Snell

Brother Snell was born in Shelbyville, Tennessee and raised in Akron, Ohio. He is married to the former Jewell Moseley and they have 2 daughters, Jewell Anne Snell and Jennifer Wenger, and 2 granddaughters. He served in the military for 37 years and on the Richmond City Police force for 30 years. He has an A.S. from J. Sargent Reynolds College and an M.B.A. from Virginia Commonwealth University. He attended the Hermitage Road congregation in Richmond, Virginia for 20 years where he served as a deacon for 10 years. They started Cold Harbor Road congregation in 1983 with the Roy Meyer family and the Jim Dalton family. He has served as an elder at Cold Harbor and is currently an associate minister at Cold Harbor.

Exodus 20:5 "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me."

Charles Dicken's, in his book *A Tale of Two Cities*, begins by writing, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." As I approach this study of "Unity in the Old Testament", I cannot help but think that this was how it was under the Old Law.

Unity in God and His word is a central theme throughout the Old Testament and was central to the faith of Israel.

Unity In The Godhead

Creation and Before

There was unity in the beginning. We can see from the scriptures that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit all worked together as one in creation. Never in the word of God, His holy scripture, do we find the Father saying one thing and doing another, the Son saying or doing something different, and the Holy Spirit saying and yet doing something else. Always, they speak the same thing. Look at the account of the creation in Genesis chapter one and following and then look at the first chapter of the Gospel of John. Does it not expressly teach the unity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit?

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:1-3).

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:1-2).

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26).

It becomes evident from the examination of these scriptures that the Word is Jesus, the Christ, and that He was there from before the beginning of all things. Nothing was accomplished without Him. It is also evident that the Holy Spirit was involved in the same manner. The Genesis account states "the Spirit of God" moved upon the face of the waters. God then said "Let **us** make man in **our** image," (emphasis BJS).

Undoubtedly there was divine unity in all things from before time and in the beginning of creation. The theme of unity and the commands of God for unity continued throughout the Old Testament and into the final Testament. God's demand for unity is from everlasting to everlasting.

The Patriarchal Law

Unity in the Family

How was unity demanded by God when His law was communicated directly to the patriarchs? It begins with family. God said that there should be unity in the family. Sin immediately attacked what God had said.

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

This verse of scripture in and of itself says that God's plan of unity for the family was that it would consist of a father, mother, child (or children) and husband and wife. These are the acceptable people that make up a family. Families were to be united in God and serve and worship Him. The creation of God called woman is referred to as Adam's wife. There was unity in marriage and the family. God never intended for there to be a single parent family. This was not God's plan. We know that sometimes this occurs because of the death of one of the parents. How sad this is. God said, "Father and mother". From the beginning, though, God never said a man shall leave his father and father or mother and mother. Most reasonable people with normal intellect realize that such a situation is dysfunctional and does not constitute, according to God's definition, a family unit. In this verse we find that from the creation of the woman as a help

meet, God grants us authority to have children and have a unified family in service to Him.

"And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden" (Genesis 3:8).

There was total unity in the garden between God and man and man's family until the serpent caused a division between God and man in that there was never any question about obedience to God's word. God walked in the garden of Eden with the man and his wife, the original "First Family".

Unity of Mankind

Prior to the time that the people began the construction of the tower of Babel there were no divisions among the people. For all those many years the scriptures tell us that the people were all one. They were united. There was unity in the language that they spoke and the work that they accomplished. There was only one tongue. There was no problem communicating, different family units or different tribes. They all understood one another until such time as they decided they would build a tower that reached up into the heavens. Consider the scriptures, examine, and remember the lessons we learn from the account of the building of the tower of Babel.

"And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech" (Genesis 11:1).

"And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one anothers speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth" (Genesis 11:6-9).

Unity and the Flood

The people increased in number and became a great and evil generation in their words and deeds, so much so that God repented that He had ever made man and would have destroyed all mankind (Genesis 6:6-7). God stated emphatically that all flesh was corrupt. The Bible says, "But Noah found grace in the eyes of God." Thus, God provided Noah with instructions regarding the construction of an ark that would be the salvation of mankind through eight faithful people.

There was complete unity between God, Shem, Ham, Japheth, Noah and their wives before the destruction of all flesh other than those eight faithful individuals. There was no division about

what God meant when He gave the specifications of the ark. They understood that it was to be built exactly to the dimensions specified. They all knew and understood that they would have to do exactly as God had commanded them. They did not quarrel about using gopher wood, as God commanded, for the construction of the ark. They knew that they would gather into the ark the living creatures in just the way that God had directed.

There were no divisions about anything God had commanded. They found unity in obedience to God's word. There was no division among them. What a lesson we could learn for today from this example of old! Where can the child of God find unity today? As it was found in the Old Testament so is it found in the New Testament. It is exposed for all in the word of God.

Yes, there was unity of family, marriage, purpose, people, language and faithfulness to God found in the examples of those who lived under the patriarchal dispensation. We find examples of the best of unity when God walked in the garden with man. We find the best of unity when God gives the structure for the family unit. The best of unity was found in Noah and his family who obeyed the instructions exactly as God had given them. The best of unity is **always** found in obedience to God's word. Therefore, God allowed the created to continue to exist. It was also the worst of unity because of the sins of mankind. There can never be unity between sin and God. Because of this, God

destroyed His creation save those eight precious souls. He started over and gave man a second chance, perhaps a chance that man did not deserve. Nonetheless, because of the righteousness of Noah, God spared mankind.

The Law Of Moses

Unity between God, Moses and the children of Israel

As we examine the Bible after the flood, the accounts of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Jacob and Esau are given. Jacob's son, Joseph, is sold into slavery and taken to Egypt. As a result of this, Jacob and all his family, including the sons, Joseph's very own brothers that sold him into bondage, were brought into Egypt where they were cared for during the great famine. This eventually led to their bondage. Joseph died and the scriptures tell us that there arose up a new King over Egypt which knew not Joseph (Exodus 1:8). Subsequently we have the Biblical account of the Israelites in Egyptian bondage. The related acts of Moses and all that he did to get the people out of their captivity is well known to everyone. After the tenth plague, the taking of the first born; including the first born son of the Pharaoh, the people were told to leave Egypt. After the people had departed from Egypt, Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, observed that Moses was overburdened with the judgments involved in the proper settlement of both spiritual and civil disputes among his people. Jethro came to Moses and asked, "just what do you think you are

doing?"⁸ Moses responded by saying that the people brought these matters to him to inquire of God, and they were there from morning until evening. Jethro asked Moses why he tried to handle all of these matters alone. Jethro tells Moses that what he is doing is not good. He says, "Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee" (Exodus 18:18). It is too much for you alone. "Listen to me Moses and I will give you some good advice from God, says Jethro. Find you some men that you can teach the ordinances and laws and show them the proper way in which they must walk. Instruct them in the work they must do to help you settle these disputes and problems before God. These men that you pick must also be men that fear God, they must be men of truth and they must hate covetousness. Then Moses, here is what you must do. You must put some of them to be rulers over thousands, and some hundreds, and some fifties and some tens. Let them judge the people at all times and on all occasions when there is need. If they come upon a great matter then, and only then, can they bring that matter before you" (Exodus 18:13-26).⁹

Moses recognized the wisdom of this plan and this is what Moses did, with God's approval. The Bible tells us that there were men over thousands, and hundreds, and fifties and tens. They judged the

⁸ Paraphrased

⁹ Paraphrased

people at all seasons and brought the more difficult things to Moses.

What is important here and is implied is the fact that there had to be unity between these men who were selected to make judgments in these matters. There had to be unity between these men and Moses and these men and God. Moses was instructed to select godly men and was given some specific qualifications for these individuals. Then he was instructed to teach them what to do and how they were to do these things. They all had to speak and do the same things in similar matters. They all had to be unified in their judgments. If they were already godly men, men of truth and men that were not covetous, in what then must they be instructed? Perhaps they were to be instructed in fairness, temperance, self control, kindness, gentleness and firmness. We really do not know. We do know that whatever it was, they all had to emerge with oneness and unity befitting God's word in the moral and civil law under which they had to live. They had to be taught which things were to be brought to Moses for judgment. It does not seem logical that they could go to one for judgment and then if the decision was not favorable go to another for a different decision. It does not appear that there was an appeal process that would allow the individual to proclaim the decision unfair and take his case to a higher court. It simply says that the weightier matters were taken to Moses.

The Law of Moses and Unity in God's Worship

God gave the written law to Moses. The Bible tells us that the Ten Commandments were literally written with "the finger of God" (Exodus 31:18). Found in the tables of stones were God's commands to the children of Israel about oneness with God and about the unity that they were to have in the relationship between man and the creator. Directions were given about how and when they were to worship. They were all to do certain things at the same time. Never was it such that individuals could "do their own thing".

"And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day. The LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire, (I stood between the LORD and you at that time, to show you the word of the LORD: for ye were afraid by reason of the fire, and went not up into the mount;) saying, I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other gods before me. Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous

God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments. Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" Deuteronomy 5:1-11).

Within the Ten Commandments God specifies the following:

- "Thou shalt have none other gods before me."
- "Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth."
- "Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God,...."
- "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain."

The children of Israel knew and understood that there was only one God. They were by, through, and under that one God. They knew there were no other gods. They did not partake in the worship of any of the strange or pagan gods of the Egyptians. They did not make graven images or likenesses of anything that is in heaven above or the waters beneath. They did not bow down to strange gods or serve them, for they knew that their God was a

jealous God and that they would not be held guiltless for taking the name of God in vain. This is pure, true, and undefiled unity with God.

So it would seem that this would be the case with the children of Israel. How soon they forgot. After God had brought the ten plagues upon the inhabitants of Egypt, led the children of Israel out of the land of bondage, allowed them to cross the Red Sea on dry ground and destroyed Pharaoh's army in that same Red Sea, what did they do? When Moses did not come down from Mount Sinai, they immediately became involved in sin. They constructed a golden calf (Exodus 32:1-4). Moses begged God for their lives and persuaded God not to destroy them all.

When Moses came down from the mountain and was questioning Aaron about his part in the making of the golden calf, he asks Aaron what had happened. The scripture says, "And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf" (Exodus 32:24). Aaron tells Moses, "I just threw it in the fire and out came this golden calf".¹⁰ I cannot help but smile inwardly when I think of Aaron's response.

God gave, through Moses, specific instructions for the children of Israel.

¹⁰ Paraphrased

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates" (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

What do these words mean? Do not ever forget! Sadly but truly, the children of Israel constantly left their covenant relationship with God and continually did those things that displeased Him. When they disobeyed God and rebelled against Him they became "discontented" and they had no unity with God. They did not remember the things that God had done for them. When the scriptures tell us in Exodus chapter 1 that there arose up a Pharaoh that knew not God, unfortunately, the same was true with the Israelites. There arose up generations that knew not God or what He had done for their ancestors. They lived on the principle that many people adhere to today. "What have you done for me lately, God?"

Unity in the United and Divided Kingdoms

We remember the cry of the people as related in I Samuel 8:6 they said, "Give us a king." God granted their request and Samuel appointed Saul as their first king. After King Saul, King David reigned and then King Solomon. All these kings at some time were great men in service to God. Each, however, had and lost his battle with sin.

Jeroboam and Rehoboam were kings over the divided Kingdoms. When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam was to be king over the twelve tribes of Israel. However, Rehoboam's judgments and interaction with the people brought great difficulties near dissolution to his kingdom. Ten of the twelve tribes revolted and appointed Jeroboam as their king.

The kingdom was divided into Judah and Israel and there was no longer any unity among the people of God. There was no longer any unity between the two kingdoms nor between God and the people. Part of this was because both Rehoboam and Jeroboam continued the pagan ways that were instituted and condoned by the great King Solomon.

Jeroboam was concerned that if the children of Israel went up to Jerusalem to worship their hearts would return again to the one true God and Rehoboam, the king of Judah. He was afraid that they would kill him and be united in one kingdom as one people under God. Jeroboam sinned greatly

in that he made two golden calves for the people to worship so that they would not have to go to Jerusalem or participate in the feast days that they had been commanded by God to observe. "Behold thy gods, O Israel," Jeroboam said, "which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (I Kings 12:28). He placed one at Bethel and the other at Dan and told the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem". The Bible tells us that the people went to worship the golden gods.

Jeroboam also appointed priests that were not from the tribe of Levi. This was an affront to God. He appointed feast days and made offerings upon the altars. He sacrificed calves and other animals. The Bible tells us that God was not pleased. There was no unity among the children of God nor in the two divided kingdoms.

Conclusion

The Matter of Unity in the Old Testament

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

How true it is, especially in matters of man respecting and adhering to the basic principal of unity in his relationship to God. How simply it is stated in this scripture. If we will have unity we must simply "Fear God, and keep his commandments:"

There is complete unity throughout the entire Bible between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Our subject, however, is "Unity in the Old Testament", and our comments and discussions have been restricted to this area of God's word. God establishes in the Old Testament that there is unity in creation and unity in the family. It is evident that the holy scripture establishes this unity in the creation of man and his help meet. God instructed the people that there is only one true God and God's people must be unified in word, thought, and deed in order to worship Him according to the way He has instructed. There were hundreds of gods from Egypt, Mesopotamia, Assyria, Canaan and the peoples round about. These, however, were never intended to be the God of His children from the time He revealed Himself to His creation.

One would expect to find unity in all spiritual things in the Old Testament. To not find this unity would be to destroy the underpinnings of the faith which we now have in Christ Jesus. How much stronger would Christ's church be today if people would study more carefully the unity found in the Old Testament? How much stronger would Christ's church be today if we heeded the examples given in the Old Testament of those who violated this principle of unity?

May the lessons of the past given for our learning always be beneficial in guiding us in the paths we must take today.

Chapter 5

An Overview Of Unity And The New Testament

David Sain

Brother Sain was born in Fountain Head, Tennessee. He and his wife, Phyllis (Cherry) have 2 children. He has preached full time since 1958. He has preached for the Wood Avenue church of Christ in Florence since 1977. Since 1982, he has preached on the *Way of Life* T.V. program (which airs in the Richmond area). He has also done radio work for many years. David has over 20 years experience as a family counselor.

A benchmark in dealing with human conflicts is the moment recorded in the book of Genesis when Abraham and Lot had to deal with a conflict among their herdsmen. The divine record reads, "And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle ... And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren" (Genesis 13:7-8).

This serves as a powerful example of the attitude that should characterize every child of God anytime there is a conflict with his brethren. There should be no strife among us "for we be brethren". However, divine injunctions notwithstanding, this is not the case.

Instead, division is so common among us that few congregations of the Lord's church that have been in existence for more than a few years have been spared the heart wrenching, spirit draining, and soul smothering experience of discord and division. And, regrettably, not only is strife experienced within many local congregations, but our entire brotherhood is being shaken by division over "issues".

We are so fragmented as a brotherhood that any plea for unity today has a hollow sound to it. With so many different kinds of "churches of Christ", what reasonable and effective plea can be made to the denominational world? The spirit of denominationalism has infiltrated the church of Christ and preachers who once condemned the sectarian spirit now lead in the practice of such.

Adapting the terms often heard in the political arena, we have brethren who are to the "far left" doctrinally (usually identified as *liberal*), and we have brethren who are to the "far right" doctrinally (often referred to as *radical*). Those who are in between the two extremes are divided into dozens of classifications according to how they worship, what they teach about remarriage, who they fellowship, where they "stand" regarding a current "hot topic" in the brotherhood, and the like.

Sadly, this divided state has far-reaching and long-lasting effects. (1) It damages the souls of countless Christians. In discouragement over strife and

discord, thousands have laid their faith aside and turned back to the world. (2) Our evangelistic efforts are stifled. There is little time or motivation for teaching the lost when we are consumed with internal battles. And, what efforts we do make are hindered by the perception that people have of us as they observe our splintering.

What a sad and miserable state of affairs. Oh, how this must grieve the heart of our heavenly Father, and it is time for us to be grieved by these conditions.

It is time for us to determine to accomplish the will of God regarding peace among those who believe in Christ. It is time for us to be impressed more than ever with what the scriptures teach about unity and division.

The Sinfulness Of Division

Even a casual reading of the New Testament will impress the reader with the fact that the Lord's disciples are warned about division, and that division is condemned.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Galatia, "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they

which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21).

Christians are given a divinely inspired injunction to, "...mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Romans 16:17-18). In other words, we are commanded to identify and call attention to the one who disrupts the unity of God's people.

The New Testament also teaches us that strife and discord have absolutely no place in the Lord's body. Paul judged those who are guilty of causing strife and division as being worthy of death (Romans 1:29ff). And, later in the same epistle he exhorted the brethren not to engage in strife (Romans 13:13). Those who do engage in strife are classified as being carnal in behavior (I Corinthians 3:3).

Furthermore, Paul's charge to the Philippians is emphatic and clear, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3).

Timothy was warned about the one who is "proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife..." (I Timothy 6:4).

Also, in studying what the Bible teaches about division, we must consider the words of the

revered apostle to the Corinthians. Paul said that he had heard of division among them in a situation which might be described as "preacheritis." He clearly dealt with the matter, commanding, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Corinthians 1:10).

Finally, regarding division and strife, let me add that thousands of Christians have experienced the painful reality of the words of James 3:16. There the brother of our Lord declared, "For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work." Nothing delights the devil more than to have God's children fussing with each other.

Divine Teaching About Unity

A proper beginning point in a study of the Lord's will regarding unity would be what our Savior prayed just before He was crucified for our sins. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:20-21).

This scripture is often misapprehended and misapplied. That for which Jesus prayed in this scripture was that all of His disciples should be one

in faith, in practice, in aim, in purpose, and in love. It does not advocate or permit the “unity-in-diversity” that is so popular among churches today (including some churches of Christ).

The *oneness* for which Jesus prayed was outlined by the words of the apostle Paul when he penned his epistle to the Ephesian saints. He wrote, “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” (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Just prior to this declaration of spiritual *oneness*, Christians are given the responsibility to “...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” (Ephesians 4:1-3). In other words, it is our duty to do and say those things which promote and preserve the peace and harmony of the Lord’s spiritual body. We must never allow Satan to use us to stir up strife and discord among God’s people.

Remember that Jesus taught there is strength only where there is unity (Matthew 12:25), and we are never weaker than when we are in conflict with each other. To the contrary, note the power of unity in that Jesus taught that the world is led to

believe in Him by the unity of His disciples (John 17:20-21).

Furthermore, we are taught to be aggressive regarding peace and unity. The divine record teaches us to "seek peace, and ensue it" (I Peter 3:11), and to "Follow peace with all men..." (Hebrews 12:14). The words "ensue" and "follow" in these scriptures come from the same Greek word, διοκω. As used here, the words mean, *to run after, to run swiftly in order to catch a person or thing*, and it teaches us that peace and unity do not happen accidentally. We must work at it if we are to achieve them.

The paramount lesson to learn from all of these scriptures regarding unity is that achieving and maintaining unity in the church is the duty of every child of God!

Clarifying Unity

Obviously, unity is taught as the will of the Lord, and it is essential if we are to be pleasing to the Lord, but, what is unity?

People generally equate religious unity with union, or a consolidation of different parties, regardless of their faith. This school of thought says that people should unite *in spite of differences* instead of uniting *because of agreement*. However, unity is not attained by merely agreeing to disagree. Rather, it means oneness, a state of being one.

Regrettably, however, the idea of unity-in-diversity is not only popular in the denominational world but is now also being embraced by many of our brethren. Many of our brethren are reaching out to our denominational friends with an ecumenical proposal of coming together with them upon common ground. They emphasize that, even though we disagree about some doctrinal matters, we do have something in common, viz., faith in Jesus as the Son of God. The appeal that is usually made is, "Let us lay aside our doctrinal differences and come together in unity upon this common ground, and recognize each other as brothers and sisters in Christ."

However, to make an appeal to "set aside our differences" is to say that our differences do not matter, and that is the same as saying that what the Bible teaches (relative to that about which we disagree) does not matter. It amounts to setting aside the teaching of the word of God for the sake of union with others, which, in effect, says that union with them is more important than agreement with God.

Regarding the matter of establishing fellowship with one whose teaching is not in harmony with the word of God, we would do well to take a sober look at what is taught in II John 9-11. "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this

doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”

The biblical truth is that any unity with one another that does not grow out of unity with God is not a valid unity (cf. I John 1:7).

...

Regarding the trendy appeal for unity-in-diversity, I am persuaded that this grows out of the philosophy of pluralism that characterizes our culture - a culture that advocates, “No one has the right to judge another person or to force his opinion upon another person.”

Consequently, that which is advocated in the secular world is advocated in the religious realm. We are told, “No one has the right to tell anyone else that he is wrong or that he must believe any certain doctrine.”

The Quest For Unity

We are presently hearing and reading about the concern that a lot of people have about our divided religious state. Individuals and groups are thinking and talking about how men can be united in their religious beliefs and practices. In the presence of such, it is vital that we understand how to achieve unity.

The heart of the matter, dear reader, is the matter of authority in religion. For there to be unity, we

must first agree upon what shall be our standard of authority.

What shall be our standard for determining truth? By what standard shall we resolve our disagreements? Will we be guided by what our parents taught? Shall we follow the tradition of our spiritual fathers? Or do we make consensus our guide?

I submit to you that the only feasible, workable and acceptable basis for unity is the teaching of the New Testament. It is inspired of God and is all-sufficient as our source of truth (II Timothy 3:13-17). It is the only basis for truth that is mutually acceptable to all.

We can never be united on the creeds, theories, and speculations of men, but when we come to respect God's word as we ought (I Thessalonians 2:13), "I believe..." and "My church teaches..." will give way to "The Bible teaches..."

If each of us will lay aside our opinions and personal desires and objectively seek the truth of God's inspired word, we can come to a knowledge of the truth (I Timothy 2:4) and be one in Christ (Galatians 3:28).

An Appeal

The plea that characterized the Restoration Movement is still valid. That plea was: *Let us go back to the Bible. Let us speak where the Bible*

Chapter 5: An Overview of Unity and the New Testament

speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent. Let us believe, teach, and practice only those things which are authorized by the New Testament.

That, dear friend, is the beginning point of unity, and it is the only basis for unity!

Chapter 6

Self-Centered Christians

Richard Bentley

Brother Bentley was born in Kansas City, MO. He is one of five siblings raised by Christian parents. He grew up in Oak Grove about 30 miles east of Kansas City. He was baptized at age 15. He received an A.A. at Freed-Hardeman in 1983 and a B.B.A. at Memphis State University in 1986. In 1993, he received an M. Min. at Freed-Hardeman. He has preached in MS, TN and is currently with the Cary church of Christ in NC. He is married to the former Laura Deising and they have 3 children, Lauren, Mason, and Jonathan.

Introduction

Psalm 133:1 "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

Christ wants His church to be in unity. We are to endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

We are to "come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13 NKJV).

Christ prayed to the Father for unity, that all believers, "...may be one, as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21).

Anything that would, thus, hinder, or be a "barrier" to unity, is against God's will.

Understanding Definitions Is Our Topic

What is "Unity?" "Unity" is defined as, "1) The state of being one, or united, oneness, singleness. 2) Something complete in itself, single, separate. 3) The quality of being one in spirit, sentiment, purpose, etc., harmony, agreement, concord."¹

According to God's perfect plan for unity, "there shall be one fold, *and* one shepherd" (John 20:16).

According to God's perfect plan for unity, "*There is* one body, and one Spirit, even as we 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" (Ephesians 4:4-6).

According to God's perfect plan for unity, Christ is the "head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; **that in all things he might have the preeminence**" [emphasis RWB] (Colossians 1:18).

The Greek word for "preeminence" (proteuo - πρωτνω), means "to be first (in rank or influence): - to have the preeminence."

In order for unity to exist, Christ must have the preeminence in all things.

What is a "Barrier"? A "Barrier" is, "anything that holds apart, separates, or hinders."²

¹ David B. Guralak, Ed. *Webster's New World Dictionary, Second College Edition*, (Cleveland, OH: Wm. Collins Publishers, 1980), p. 1552.

² *Ibid*, p. 115.

Chapter 6: Self-Centered Christians

Many things could be considered a "barrier to unity." **Disrespect for Divine authority** creates a barrier to unity. Binding where God has not bound and loosing where God has not loosed. **Inactivity of Christians** creates a barrier to unity, as we will hear later in the lectureship. But today, we want to focus on **Self-Centered Christians** as being a barrier to unity.

What does it mean to be "Self-Centered?" "Self-Centered" means "occupied or concerned only with one's own affairs, egocentric, selfish."³

Characteristics of Being "Self-Centered" Include:

- Being stingy and having no compassion. "But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?" (I John 3:17 (NKJV)).
- Being selfish, greedy and coveting. "*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interest of others.*" (Philippians 2:3-4 NKJV) "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'You shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, all are summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' " (Romans 13:8-9 NKJV).
- Being lovers of wisdom. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud,

³ Ibid, p. 1291.

blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy..." (II Timothy 3:1-2).

- Pleasing ourselves. "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves" (Romans 15:1)
- Seeking our own. "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all *men* in all *things*, **not seeking mine own profit**, (emphasis RWB) but the profit of many, that they may be saved. Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (I Corinthians 10:32-11:1). Paul said that Timothy was a good example of not seeking his own..." (Philippians 2:19-22).

Self-Centeredness is a Barrier to Unity! It is contrary to the law of God.

"Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: *I am* the LORD" (Leviticus 19:18).

"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40).

"If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well" (James 2:8).

The Examples of Christ Condemn Self-Centeredness.

"Jesus said unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34).

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"For even Christ pleased not himself, but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me" (Romans 15:3).

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (II Corinthians 8:9).

Christians are to Avoid Being Self-Centered.

"Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's *well-being*" (I Corinthians 10:24 NKJV).

"He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (II Corinthians 5:15 NKJV).

Love ... "seeketh not her own" (I Corinthians 13:5).

"*Let* nothing *be done* through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem the other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:3-5).

"And he said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. for whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Luke 9:23-24).

Biblical Examples and Consequences of People Whose Self-Centeredness was a Barrier to Unity.

Aaron and Miriam (Numbers 12:1ff). Their sedition was brought about because of their dissatisfaction (self-centeredness) with being in "second place". The consequences included 1) holding back the whole Israelite nation from moving forward in their travel, a barrier to unity!

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"And Miriam was put out from the camp seven days and the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in *again*." (Numbers 12:15) 2) most likely discouraging the whole nation and untold consequences we do not know about, a barrier to unity!

Korah and his seditious rebellion in Numbers 16. Korah led a crippling rebellion "sucking in" prominent leaders of the people. The consequences included: 1) The terrible death of innocent children and blinded followers because of one man's influence and self-centeredness, a barrier to unity! 2) Self-centered, erroneous, false blame - a barrier to unity! "And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, *Ye take* too much upon you, seeing all the congregation *are* holy, every one of them, and the LORD *is* among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?" (Numbers 16:2-3) And in I Kings 18:17-18 we find "And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, *Art* thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel, but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou has followed Baalim."

The great discouragement of godly leaders is a barrier to unity! "...when Moses heard it, he fell on his face" (Numbers 16:4).

Notice Achan and his "sin against the accursed thing" (Joshua 6-7). This tragic event happened because of Achan's covetousness (self-centeredness). The consequences included: 1) The unnecessary deaths of thirty-six men. 2) The terrible discouragement of the Israelite nation. "...wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water" (Joshua 6:5) 3)

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The hindering of the progress of the children of Israel, all because of the self-centeredness of one man!

Consider King David and his self-seeking lust and adultery with Bathsheba in II Samuel 11-12. This heart-breaking story of lust and cover-up has its roots deeply centered in the sin of self-centeredness. The consequences included: 1) Having servants help David to fulfill and conceal his own sinful lusts - a barrier to unity! 2) Self-seeking deceit, abuse of power and murder of the innocent - a barrier to unity! 3) Cover-up and reproach brought on the Lord and His people. "Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also *that is* born unto thee shall surely die" (II Samuel 12:14), a barrier to unity!

James and John's desire to sit at both sides of Jesus in Mark 10:35-41. Self-centeredness caused these two brothers to seek after something that was not theirs to have. The consequences included: 1) A barrier to unity caused by unhappiness of the brethren! "And when the ten heard *it*, they began to be much displeased with James and John" (Mark 10:41). 2) The distraction of self-centeredness may have caused them to not pay attention to what Christ was teaching (Mark 10:32-34).

The prodigal son's brother refused to be happy for his saved brother in Luke 15. Self-centeredness, in the form of "I disease", caused this sad story. "And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him. And he answering said to *his* father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf" (Luke 15:28-30). Five times in verse 29 the brother says "I" or "my". He had "I disease" just like the foolish farmer in Luke 12:16-21 The

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consequences included 1) Misguided anger at the father and
2) No unity of the family - all caused by self-centeredness!

Judas Iscariot betrayed our Lord in Matthew 26. The ultimate betrayal of the Son of God was brought about by self-centeredness! The consequences included: 1) The very crucifixion of Jesus. 2) Not only the fulfilling of prophecy, but also the scattering of the apostles. "But all this was done, that the scriptures might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled" (Matthew 26:56). A barrier to unity!

Paul rebuked Peter "face-to-face", in Galatians 2:11-14. Peter's self-centeredness caused him to be hypocritical and sinful. The consequences included: 1) The division of unity. "For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision" (Galatians 2:12). The negative influence of God's chosen apostle was a barrier to unity caused by Peter's self-centeredness!

We learn of the preeminence of one named "Diotrophes" in III John 9-10. The self-centered heart of this man caused a terrible barrier to unity! The consequences included: 1) The denial of the preeminence of Christ, setting himself up as "the" leader of the church there - a barrier to unity! "...He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he might have preeminence" (Colossians 1:18). The refusal to receive brothers in Christ - a barrier to unity! The denial of apostolic authority - a barrier to unity! Many evil deeds, no doubt unknown, yet are very divisive. "Prating" (gossiping, spreading, unjustly accusing), "malicious" words (hurtful, evil, hurting the influence, derelict, vicious, grievous, hard, lewd, wicked) - a barrier to unity! Discontent with "prating", he not only does not receive or welcome brethren but he also forbids (will not suffer, keeps from, withstands) and will not let

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anyone else receive them - a barrier to unity! And if that is not enough, he casts out (drives, ejects, drives out, expels, plucks out, pulls, thrusts out, sends away) anyone who tries to receive any brother of whom he does not approve! There was a barrier to unity because of his self-centeredness!

Conclusion

Unity is precious and should be regarded as such. Anything that would hinder, or be a "barrier to unity," is against God's will. As Christians, we are to "deny" ourselves, (Luke 9:23), and not be self-centered. May God give us the strength to focus on Christ, so that we may build unity and never be a barrier!

Chapter 7

Critical Christians

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"Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice"
(Ephesians 4:31).

Introduction

The quest for Biblical Unity is one that characterized the Lord's church from the very beginning (I Corinthians 1:10). Today, as was the case in the first century, there are things that, if left unchecked, will undermine and destroy the unity in Christ which God expects among His people. What we will be dealing with in this discussion are the problems that exist as a result of "negativism" among Christians and the passages which deal with those problems. At the very outset, let me make clear that there are indeed times when it is necessary to be 'negative' against certain things. That is not disputed. What is under consideration in this paper are the

problems brought about by a "mind-set" that is "negatively oriented".

We will divide this discussion into the following sections. First of all, we will note the passages which deal with this issue. The reason for this approach instead of merely listing these passages as lengthy end notes is two fold. First, by seeing them in print, the reader will be more impressed by the magnitude of the problem and the amount of space given to it in scripture. Second, although not an exhaustive list, it will give the reader a ready resource of quoted passages to review as the rest of the article is studied. Then, we will deal with the underlying principles that these passages have in common and the related problems that they caused in the first century church and in the church today. Third, we will suggest biblical solutions to the problems that negativism raises. One of the biggest problems to be overcome in the Lord's church today, relative to this offense, is that those who are the most guilty of it are aware neither of their involvement in this sin nor the consequences it can wreak on the Lord's church.

What Saith the Scriptures?

The reason we are beginning this way is to impress upon you the weight that God's word places on the seriousness of this offense. This is

not an exhaustive listing of all passages that relate to the problem ... but these are sufficient to show how this attitude is dealt with in God's word.

Conflict - Anger - Division - Hatred

"... those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man" (Matthew 15:18-20a; see also Mark 7:18-23).

"Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. ...And when the ten heard it, there were moved with indignation against the two brothers" (Matthew 20: 20-24).

"... a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest" (Luke 9:46; see also Mark 9:34 and Luke 22:24).

"Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another" (Acts 15:39a).

"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a

debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them" (Romans 1:28-32).

"Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is at all possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. Therefore 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:17-21).

"Let us walk properly,. . . not in strife and envy" (Romans 13:13).

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"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them" (Romans 16:17).

"Now I plead with you, brethren, ... that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Corinthians 1:10).

"... nor revilers, . . . will inherit the kingdom of God" (I Corinthians 6:10).

"... nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer" (I Corinthians 10:10).

Some of Paul's critics slander him in his absence (II Corinthians 10:10).

"... I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it" (I Corinthians 11:18,19).

"For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults" (II Corinthians 12:20).

"But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!" (Galatians 5:15).

"If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another" (Galatians 5:25-26).

"Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil" (Ephesians 4:26-27).

"Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice" (Ephesians 4:31).

"Do all things without complaining and disputing" (Philippians 2:14).

"But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth" (Colossians 3:8).

"... and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not" (I Timothy 5:13).

"If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord

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Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself" (I Timothy 6:3-5).

"But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition..." (II Timothy 2:23-26).

"... speak evil of no one, . . . be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men" (Titus 3:2).

"For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there" (James 3:16).

"Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law" (James 4:11).

"Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!" (James 5:9).

"But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters" (I Peter 4:15).

"If someone says, "I love God", and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" (I John 4:20).

Favoritism Toward One Another - (With Its Very Negative Consequences)

"And He said to them (the Pharisees) , 'You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15).

"Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble" (Romans 12:16).

"... that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against another" (I Corinthians 4:6).

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality ... If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well; but if you show partiality,

you commit sin, and are convinced by the law as transgressors" (James 2:1-9).

Hypocrisy Toward One Another

"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them..." (Matthew 6:1-8).

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck out of your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:1-5).

"... desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm" (I Timothy 1:7).

"If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless" (James 1:26).

Negative Influence On One Another

"... Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men' " (Matthew 15: 3-9).

"... And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into the ditch" (Matthew 15:14).

"... beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees... the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matthew 16:11-12).

"The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers" (Matthew 23:2-4).

"Woe to you lawyers: For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered." And as He said these things to them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to assail Him vehemently, and to cross-examine Him about many things, lying in wait for Him, and seeking

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to catch Him in something He might say, that they might accurse Him" (Luke 11:52-54).

"And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1).

"But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, 'It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses' " (Acts 15:5).

"... some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls... " (Acts 15:24).

"Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:30).

"So we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ" (II Corinthians 2:17).

"... not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's

conscience in the sight of God" (II Corinthians 4:2).

NOTE: There are other topics which could be included in this listing of scripture dealing with negativism which we have taken neither the time nor the room to include. However, we wanted to impress upon your mind the significant amount of space which God, in His infinite wisdom, used to address the severity of the problem.

Principles And Problems Of Negativism

Speaking from Christ

"Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!' (Matthew 16:22).

This bold and false statement by Peter comes right upon the heels of his famous confession of Jesus as the Christ (see verses 13 - 16). Matthew records that "From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day" (v. 21). Why the boldness of Peter in uttering such an arrogant statement? Was it due to the praise he had earlier received? Had he taken the Lord's commendation as evidence

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that He was in a position to respond to the Savior in such a manner?

While we are not given insights into the mind of Peter on this occasion, we are treated to one of several negative statements he uttered which show some of the problems that continue to be created by such a mind set. What Peter uttered was an emphatic negative. Here in this "NEVER of SELF-PITY" is one who had confidence in himself rather than confidence in the Lord and felt compelled to tell the Lord where He was wrong.

Here is a statement which borders on lunacy and was spawned in unrealistic self-perception. While it is shrouded in the context of 'pity' for what the Lord has expressed, the inappropriateness of its arrogance cannot be overlooked. Jesus responded by telling Peter, "Get behind me Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (v. 23).

What kind of attitudes will invariably be tied to such a mind set as that expressed by Peter? What further negatives will follow if that mind set is allowed to run its course? Tied closely to the "NEVER of SELF-PITY" is the "NEVER of SELF-WILL". In the touching and teaching moment of John 13 when Jesus impresses upon

His apostles the importance of serving by washing their feet, Peter again responds to the Master's lesson with a negative. "... Lord, are You washing my feet? ... You shall never wash my feet!" (John 13:6,8).

This second statement shows an unwillingness to accept what the Lord has done (or is doing) and is seen most readily in those who go to great lengths to prove their worthiness to others. Peter's statement, by its very context, showed that he was placing himself in a different category than the other apostles. They may have needed the Savior to wash their feet, or at least (poor souls) they were not "wise" enough to stop Him. Peter, however, was different. This is yet another way that one speaks against Christ or against God's Word, and it is just as deadly as the first.

In the third place, there is the "NEVER of SELF-CONFIDENCE". Jesus had finished observing the Passover with His disciples, they had sung a hymn and begun the walk to the Mount of Olives. On the way there, He told them 'All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night ...' (Matthew 26:31). Peter's response was, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble" (Matthew 26:33). Once again, arrogance is seen in Peter placing himself above everyone else. There is nothing

wrong with self-confidence, but there is something terribly wrong when God's word or that of His only begotten Son is contradicted in the process. The problem today is seen in judgmental attitudes which lack humility or compassion (cf. Gal. 6:1). In each of these areas in which the words of Jesus are spoken against is the fostering of disputes and division. Unity is not a by-product nor can it be where such is practiced or allowed to continue.

In each instance of Peter's negativism, a lesson was painfully learned. Years later, he uses this emphatic negative again ... but as a warning. After listing the virtues which must be in our lives if we are to be fruitful and productive for the cause of Christ, He wrote "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble" (II Peter 1:10). Here is the criteria in which such a negative will work for the good of all involved. If we focus on faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love (vs. 5-7); then we have choked the negative mind-set out of our heart, mind and soul.

Supporting Traditionalism And Fostering Prejudice

"And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!" (Acts 11: 2-3).

Another problem associated with negativism is the tenacious way in which man-made traditions are held onto and even how prejudice is fostered. While it may be argued that in this instance, those who would be true to the old law are merely expressing its requirement for Israel to remain free from mingling with the Gentile nations, it must be immediately pointed out that even those who cried out in outrage at Peter lived in a society where many Gentiles had embraced the law of Israel (cf. Acts 2:10; 6:5; 13:43). Here is a case of standing for tradition to the degree that conclusions are drawn before the details are known (notice the lack of detail in Acts 11:1). The problem is again seen in the conflict that results in the council in Jerusalem over the condition of the Gentiles and what is to be done about them (Acts 15:1,5). The problem with this type of negativism is that it invariably jumps to conclusions and often takes uninspired tradition as being as valid and as binding as scripture. Once again, there can be no unity where this kind of mind set prevails.

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The problems which this kind of negativity can bring to bear are too numerous to mention, and those who have been members of the Lord's church for quite some time will recognize the problems of the past that fell into this category. It was not uncommon in the first century for there to arise these types of conflict in the early church. In his instructions to the Christians in Corinth, Paul dealt with the role of "head coverings" in the worship. The conclusion in the middle of chapter eleven of First Corinthians is "But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God" (v. 16).

In recent years, this type of negativism has been popularized with a different twist. Phrases such as a "New Hermeneutic" (i.e. new way of interpreting and applying scripture to our lives) or "progressive Christianity" make light of what they term the traditions of the past, and offer us new "traditions" encapsulated in "irreligiously correct" (???) terms. One of the major problems is the lack of distinction in these new movements and philosophies between what falls into the realm of the teaching of the scriptures and what is found in the realm of opinion and expediency. And remember, neither opinion nor expediency can contradict what is taught in God's word and be correct.

There are other problems of negativity which we could discuss. Scripture supplies examples of how negative thinking destroys one's self esteem, causes one to bury their talent, provides excuses for lack of involvement, hinders the spreading of the gospel (sometimes bringing evangelism to a complete stop), stagnates spiritual growth, etc. At every turn, unity in Christ is undermined by its presence. In fact, the problem of negative thinking was not only of major concern in the early church, but as both Old and New Testaments are replete with examples of its cancerous effects, it is seen to be a problem that man has dealt with from the creation. How then do you deal with such a problem? The solution is just as widely recognized as is the problem ... for God has spent a great deal of time in His word providing us with solutions to negativism. Rather than provide any additional observations at this point that would detract from the wealth of teaching found in God's word on this subject, we will conclude this study as we began. We close this discussion by letting God's word speak for itself on the solutions to this Barrier to Unity - Negative Christianity.

Biblical Solutions to Negativism

"To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away

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your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either" (Luke 6:29).

"... bless and do not curse." "Repay no one evil for evil" (Romans 12:14,17).

"... resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way" (Romans 14:13).

"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple" (Romans 16:17-18).

"... Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure it; being defamed, we entreat" (I Corinthians 4:12-13).

Note all that Paul has to say about the need for different parts in the body and our view toward each one as the need it fulfills (I Corinthians 12:12-31).

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29).

"Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them" (Ephesians 5:6-).

"Do all things without murmuring and disputing ..." (Philippians 2:14).

"Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

"... and if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (II Thessalonians 3:14-15).

"Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers" (II Timothy 2:14).

"But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies; contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless" (Titus 3:9).

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"... therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (I Peter 2:1-2).

This list, like the one at the beginning of this article is by no means complete. In fact, there are as many other verses on the solution to negativism as the ones here quoted. These are sufficient to show that the solution to the problem of negativity in the heart of any Christian and to the plague of "negative" in any congregation of God's people is a heart and mind solution. If one is growing in the footsteps of the Savior, such a negative quality of life will be diminishing with time. May we be encouragers of one another and build each other up and never succumb to Satan's tactic of tearing each other down.

Chapter 8

Unity In Diversity

David Sain

Brother Sain was born in Fountain Head, Tennessee. He and his wife, Phyllis (Cherry) have 2 children. He has preached full time since 1958. He has preached for the Wood Avenue church of Christ in Florence since 1977. Since 1982, he has preached on the *Way of Life* T.V. program (which airs in the Richmond area). He has also done radio work for many years. David has over 20 years experience as a family counselor.

In the prayer of Jesus which is recorded in John 17, Jesus prayed that all who believe on Him would be united (John 17:20-23). It is obvious from this portion of His prayer that the matter of unity is a matter of great importance. To deny the importance of unity would require that one ignore the divine emphasis which Jesus gave to the matter and deny that which He taught about it (e.g., Matthew 5:9).

Unity among the Lord's disciples is a matter of responsibility which is required of all Christians. Paul wrote, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Corinthians 1:10). And, he commanded that God's

people "give diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Further, Peter exhorted Christians to be "of one mind" and "seek peace, and ensue it" (I Peter 3:8, 11).

However, while unity is important and even required of disciples of Christ, it should be noted that the biblical teaching on unity can be misapprehended and misapplied. Some, for example, conclude that unity is top priority, and must be achieved at any cost - even at the cost of truth. And they become willing to lay aside the doctrinal differences which they have with their religious neighbors in the interest of accomplishing the Lord's petition for unity (John 17:20-21). And, although some would vigorously deny this conclusion, such is nothing less than compromising truth and is "unity" in *error*.

Our Lord did not come to this earth to unite believers at any cost. To the contrary, He said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). He further declared, "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division" (Luke 12:51). So, Jesus does not approve all unity, nor condemn all division.

We must realize that the need for unity never justifies the compromise of truth. The truth is that which sets men free (John 8:32), and there can be no

real, God pleasing unity unless that unity is based upon and rooted in truth!

We must strive for and pursue peace with all of our hearts, but in our quest for peace and unity, we must never compromise the truth of God. The only unity of which the Lord approves is unity based upon the truth, which is the word of God (John 17:17).

To deny this is to affirm that truth does not matter. And, if truth does not matter, why would division be a matter of concern? Why would anything be a matter of concern?

Some Diversity Is Allowed

In Christ, some diversity is allowed and even expected because of the very nature of the gospel of Christ.

In the letter to the saints in Ephesus, Paul wrote that God made it possible for both Jew and Gentile to be in Christ Jesus by the blood of Christ. He called Jesus "our *peace*", and said that the precious Saviour abolished the law, breaking down the wall that divided the Jew and Gentile. He made both to be *one*, reconciling both unto God in *one body* by the cross. He declared that Jesus "came and preached *peace* to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh" (Ephesians 2:11-22).

In Christ there are people from all nations (Matthew 28:19). In Christ, there is equality of all

racess, and gender does not matter (Galatians 3:28). In Christ, there is a blending of people from all educational levels, economic levels, and social levels. As human beings, we are all different. We are different in personality, personal tastes, personal interests, and emotional makeup. In Christ, there is equality of blue collar workers and white collar workers. In Christ, CEOs and people on welfare are of equal value.

The church is a melting pot for all types of people, and all can walk together and have fellowship with one another if they have fellowship with God (I John 1:7). Our fellowship in Christ is not to be contingent upon nationality, race, gender, or status in life.

So, we conclude that there is a type of diversity expected and allowed simply because, as the beloved hymn declares, "The blessed gospel is for all."

However, there is another type of diversity that needs to be considered, in which some diversity is allowed and some diversity is not allowed. Allow me to explain.

Some Diversity Is Not Allowed

The fact that we have an obligation to strive for unity in Christ does not warrant or justify the conclusion that men can be pleasing to God while *agreeing to disagree* on matters which, according to biblical teaching, are not optional but obligatory.

Let it be clearly understood that while some things are matters of judgment, there are some matters which are required by the word of the Lord. AND THOSE MATTERS WHICH ARE REQUIRED BY THE LORD ARE NON-NEGOTIABLE AT THE RELIGIOUS UNITY TABLE.

Of course, there are some matters which, according to biblical teaching, are matters of option or expediency. That is, they are matters about which God has not decreed, in which case human judgment can be exercised with God's approval. In those matters, there can be disagreement without the breaking of fellowship.

But, such is not true in matters which are specified and required by the Lord. In matters required by the Lord, we must hold to the same view and practice the same thing (I Corinthians 1:10-13).

May God help us to always remember: (1) that in matters required by the Lord there must be unity, (2) that in matters of expediency there must be liberty to exercise human judgment and choose one of two or more optional matters (in which case diversity is allowed), and (3) that in all things there must be love – love for God, love for those who are in Christ, and love for the souls of all men.

The Boundaries Of Fellowship

Relative to the matter of unity-in-diversity, let it be clearly understood that the child of God cannot scripturally extend Christian fellowship to anyone

who is not in fellowship with God. When two people attain fellowship with God, they attain fellowship with each other (I John 1:3-7). If either of them does not have fellowship with God, the one who is in fellowship with God cannot have fellowship with one who does not have fellowship with God (Matthew 18:15-17; I Corinthians 5:1-13; II Thessalonians 3:6-15; Ephesians 5:11; II Corinthians 6:14-18).

God has a law of inclusion: No man should be regarded as a child of God if he has not been born of water and the Spirit (John 3:3-5; Acts 2:38).

God has a law of exclusion: Some people who have been baptized into Christ should, because of their unfaithfulness to God, be excluded from the fellowship of the faithful Christian.

No Christian can be faithful to the Lord and the word of God if he does not observe God's law of inclusion and God's law of exclusion.

A Look At The Concept Of Unity In Diversity

There is a great emphasis by many members of the Lord's church upon the concept of unity-in-diversity.

There are preachers in the Lord's church who are reaching out to our denominational friends in a unifying spirit and are trying to bridge the gap between us by engaging in ecumenical meetings with them. In such meetings they charge preachers

of past generations who debated and fought religious error as having been mean-spirited. They speak condescendingly about those who still preach "obedience", as those who have not "discovered grace". They ridicule those who teach against denominationalism. They even apologize publicly to their denominational friends for our "exclusive" and "self-righteous" attitudes.

Newspapers and church bulletins carry headlines such as, "CHURCH OF CHRIST, METHODIST CHURCH HOLD JOINT MEETING," "A COMMON BOND" (extolling the "unity" that was experienced as thousands from various faiths "marched for Jesus"), "DOCTRINES PLACED ASIDE, CHURCHES GOT TOGETHER," and "COMMUNITY-WIDE WORSHIP" (a Sunday evening assembly of five different churches, including the church of Christ). In one of the articles reviewing one of the ecumenical gatherings which included some of our brethren in Christ, the proud pronouncement was, "Doctrines were not an issue. Being Christian was all that mattered."

In another article reporting on a similar meeting in another city, one of our brothers wrote, "All these people were together to affirm the common elements of orthodox Christian faith to which we are committed. In spite of doctrines and traditions that divide us, we were able to join with Presbyterians, Methodists, Disciples of Christ, and Baptists..."

The cry of the 90's is for us no longer to focus upon our differences with our religious neighbors, but to focus upon those things about which we agree. The words "come together on common ground" have become the common rallying cry of those in the denominational world and those in the Lord's church who are caught up in the spirit of ecumenism. We are being told that no one has to give up any conviction or practice, but that we can find "common ground" (i.e., things about which we are in agreement) and have fellowship with one another.

Some contend that wherever a Christian finds a man who believes in Christ, that Christian has found a brother in Christ – regardless of what else that man believes and practices religiously. We are being told that we can embrace those of other churches who use mechanical music in worship, teach that baptism is not essential to salvation, etc. and join hands with them in our common faith in Jesus as the Lord and Saviour.

This concept, however, is filled with error.

Doctrine Does Matter

Unity-in-diversity ... ecumenism ... call it what you will...is based upon the false conclusion that it does not matter what one believes. Well, the Bible teaches clearly and emphatically that it does matter what one is taught and believes and practices religiously.

Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:21-23). Obviously, what one believes and practices does matter because the subjects of this divine declaration were unacceptable to the Lord because they did not do the will of the Lord.

In Romans 2:2, Paul taught the judgment will be according to truth. Well, that prompts the question: is it possible for someone to be religious and believe something other than the truth? And, of course, such is possible. Then, in the judgment, what would be the sentence pronounced upon one who has embraced that which is not true? Surely, it does matter what one is taught and believes.

Paul wrote the Galatians that anyone who taught anything other than the pure gospel which the apostles had taught was to be accursed (Galatians 1:6-8). Now, why would such be written if doctrinal diversity is all right? The inescapable conclusion that one must reach from this scripture is that it is possible for someone to be taught that which is not the true gospel of Christ, in which case one has been taught error. Friend, can one be taught and believe error and be saved?

Furthermore, to the Thessalonians, Paul declared that Jesus will take vengeance on those who do not obey the gospel when He returns to judge the world (II Thessalonians 1:7-9). Dear reader, consider: is it possible for someone to be religious and obey something other than the gospel? Obviously one would have to conclude from these inspired words from the apostle Paul that one who believes and obeys something other than the gospel, has only the prospect of condemnation to eternal punishment! Yet, if it does not matter what one believes and practices religiously, as some believe, why would Paul teach such?

To Timothy, Paul warned of those who would deceive and those who would be deceived, and he exhorted Timothy to stay grounded in the scriptures because the scriptures make one wise unto salvation (II Timothy 3:13-17).

And Paul charged Timothy, "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; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (II Timothy 4:1-4).

Clearly, this scripture teaches that (1) One can teach something other than the word (i.e., that which is not from God), (2) That some will teach that which is not sound doctrine (i.e., they will teach that which is not harmonious with the Scriptures), and (3) Some will turn unto fables (i.e., that which is not true, but false).

If the concept of unity-in-diversity is valid, how does one explain these words penned by the divinely inspired apostle? If the concept of unity-in-diversity is valid, why would Paul sound such warnings?

Also, note these words from the apostle Peter, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of" (II Peter 1:20-2:2).

Peter said that while there were true prophets in the old time, there were also those who were false prophets. And he said that, in like manner, **there shall be false teachers among you**, who would bring in damnable heresies.

Peter then wrote the prophetic phrase, "...many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of..." (II Peter 2:2). And, all faithful brethren would certainly agree that we are seeing that fulfilled today.

Oh, I acknowledge that we are not the first Christians to have to deal with false teachers, and neither shall we be the last. But, anyone who would deny the presence and influence of false teachers today is: (1) oblivious to what is going on, or (2) because of a lack of Bible knowledge, is unable to discern truth from error, or (3) is unwilling to see or identify anyone or anything as being wrong.

The Ephesian elders were warned by the apostle Paul in his farewell words to them, "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them". (Acts 20:29-30). How senseless were these words of Paul if the concept of unity-in-diversity were true.

Our Relationship To Those In Religious Error

It is unmistakable that it does matter what one is taught. It is unmistakable that it matters what one believes. It is unmistakable that it matters what one practices religiously. And, it is equally unmistakable that it matters what kind of relationship we have with those in error.

John wrote this sobering injunction, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (II John 9-11).

John's words are clear and emphatic. We must not in any way condone, endorse, or encourage one who teaches contrary to the doctrine of Christ (and the "doctrine of Christ" is not just the doctrine *about* Christ, but the teaching which Christ did personally and the teaching which He did through those whom He inspired).

Paul taught the Corinthians to keep themselves separate from those who worshipped false gods. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? ... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (II Corinthians 6:14, 17).

And note well the often quoted command of Romans 16:17. "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary

to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them."

From a practical viewpoint, what should my relationship be to those who are in religious error?

First, If the One in Error is Not a Brother or Sister in Christ:

1) I should do all that I can to befriend the person and hopefully have contacts with the person that would allow me to help the person to know and understand the truth.

2) I might even attend a teaching or worship assembly conducted by those in error in order to further understand that which others teach and believe. In such a setting, however, I should not participate in any action which would be unscriptural.

If given the opportunity to do so, in a decent and orderly manner I should speak the truth in love, and without compromise. Such an opportunity was given to me a few years ago when the local Baptist church invited me to speak to their evening assembly. I spoke on "What We Believe and Why." I spoke with kindness and respect but I did not for a moment allow them to believe that I believe that they are Christians.

Second, If the One in Error is a Brother or Sister in Christ:

1) I should use every opportunity I have to point out the error to the person, just as Priscilla and Aquila did with Apollos (Acts 18:26). I am commanded to restore the one overtaken in a fault (Galatians 6:1).

2) I should love the person in spite of his or her error, and that love should prompt me to pray for the person. And I should demonstrate kindness, humility, forbearance, and a God-like graciousness. I should treat the person as I would want to be treated (Matthew 7:12).

3) If the person is divisive and propagates the error, disrupting the unity of the church and misleading people, he or she must be "marked" (i.e., call attention to) as a false teacher and avoided (Romans 16:17).

What Is Behind The Concept Of *Unity In Diversity*?

There are a number of factors which seem to be influential in the cry for us to lay aside our differences and come together upon common ground with our religious neighbors.

First, there is the quest for church growth. In our efforts to grow, it sometimes becomes obvious that it is difficult to convert some people because of certain things we teach and practice. For example, vocal music only in worship and baptism being essential to salvation are viewed as being very

unpopular and unappealing, and therefore are viewed as huge barriers to church growth. So, in the absence of dedication to the truth, some decide these are not matters to be made a test of fellowship.

Also, I am convinced that peer pressure is an influential factor in this and all the current liberal trends. Most people, adults and children, cannot stand to be disliked and unaccepted by our peers. It seems that some of us just cannot stand to be religiously different or thought of as being narrow-minded!

Only a brief analysis is necessary to realize that most of the "changes" currently being effected in the churches of Christ are changes which make us *less different* and *more like* the churches around us.

And, there is a growing number of preachers who apparently think more of number than genuine conversions, and more of public image than God's approval. They seem to be more concerned about offending religious neighbors than offending God, and they are aggressively advocating these unbiblical sentiments in the pulpit and in print.

They know what to preach and what not to preach to satisfy the desires of a society engulfed in pluralism and relativism! They know how to preach inoffensively and grow a user friendly church, and some are doing it with great boldness!

Our market driven culture is influencing a lot of churches and church leaders to set aside biblical truth for that which is more acceptable to the "consumer." In an effort to be user friendly, they are ready to change or remove anything that hinders them from ACCEPTANCE AND SUCCESS.

Our Response To Current Trends

We must preach the truth in clear, emphatic, and unmistakable language.

We must proclaim and reaffirm the mighty truths of God's word with an urgency.

We must preach what the Bible teaches about any subject, preach all that the Bible says about it, and preach only what the Bible teaches on the matter.

We must stand always and everywhere for the right and against the wrong.

We must have the same conviction of the apostle Paul: "Christ shall be magnified in my body whether by life, or by death" (Philippians 1:20).

We must unmistakably expose those things which are a departure from the truth and point out to people plainly what God says.

Final Word

Unity-in-diversity as it is currently advocated by some in the Lord's church is unscriptural and is impossible without compromising the truth! In

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reality, it is *unity in toleration of error*. And that we must not allow!

In harmony with the prayer of Jesus, I want to see unity among all believers. However, the unity that is enjoined upon all Christians in the Bible does not call for us to unite *despite* our differences regarding how to be saved, how to worship, etc. Instead, unity must be achieved by *resolving* our differences - with the scriptures as the standard of authority!

Chapter 9

Bible Knowledge

Garland Elkins

Brother Elkins was born near Woodbury, Tennessee. He has been preaching for over 48 years. He was educated at Freed-Hardeman College, Middle Tennessee State University, and the University of Tennessee. He has done local work in Tennessee and Virginia. He is currently an instructor at Memphis School of Preaching. He has done extensive radio work, writing, and debate. He is married to the former Corrinne Smith. They have 3 daughters, Connie, Jan, and Denise.

Our salvation is involved in the matter of our knowing the will of God. Therefore, we need to study the Bible. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psalm 1:1-2). Jesus said, " And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). He also said in His prayer to the Father, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Jesus said to the Jews, "Search the scriptures, for in them ye think you have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). Paul wrote, "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17).

Handle Aright The Truth

Before we discuss the proper way to handle (rightly divide) the truth, let us note some wrong ways of handling it.

If we deal with the Bible as if it were simply a book of literature then we are mishandling it. It is indeed a book of literature, the finest literature, yet it is infinitely more than a book of literature. The Bible is not simply a book of human wisdom. Paul wrote these words to the Thessalonian congregation, "And for this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that when ye received from us the word of the message, even the word of God, ye accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which also worketh in you that believe" (I Thessalonians 2:13). Paul preached it as the word of God. However, he did not preach it as the "mere" word of God. Some of the liberals among us depreciate God's word, speaking of it as the "mere" word of God, as if it were a "dead letter", i.e., powerless to save. Such a statement is blasphemous. It is a derogatory statement. The psalmist wrote, "Thou has magnified thy word above thy name" (Psalm 138:2). God has exalted His name so high that He will not hold a man guiltless who takes it in vain (Exodus 20:7). The psalmist said that God has exalted His word even above His name. Question: If a man cannot mishandle God's name without being guilty, then how could a man mishandle the word of God and be held less guilty? The devil rejoices to have preachers preach that the Bible is a "dead" letter, but he knows better. The

devil is represented as snatching the word out of the hearts of men as soon as possible. Why does he do that? The answer is, "lest they should believe and be saved" (Luke 8:12). The devil is afraid of the word of God for he knows that it is "quick and powerful", "living and active" and "sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12).

No one is handling aright the word of truth who does not properly divide it. Paul wrote, "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not be to ashamed, handling aright the word of truth" (II Timothy 2:15 ASV). We must know under which covenant we live (Hebrews 7:12; Hebrews 10:9-10; Colossians 2:14). We are not under the law of Moses but we are under the law of Christ (Hebrews 8:6-13; Galatians 6:2; James 2:12). Some of the liberals cite passages which inform us that we are not under the law of Moses, and reach erroneous conclusion when they say that we are not "under the law". Nothing could be further from the truth. Paul wrote, "Where then is the glorying? It is excluded. By what manner of the law? of works? Nay, but by a law of faith" (Romans 3:27). Paul taught that he and others were "under the law to Christ" (I Corinthians 9:21). Not only are we under law to Christ, but we also shall be judged by that law on the day of judgment. Jesus said, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). Any doctrine that implies a false doctrine is itself false.

If we were indeed under no law, then no one could commit sin for Paul wrote, "for where no law is, there is no transgression" (Romans 4:15). Even the liberals will admit that at least some things are wrong. Again I emphasize that if there is no law, then there could be no sin!

Three Dispensations

There are three great dispensations or laws set out in the Bible. The first was the Patriarchal which was from Adam to Moses. This was a family religion and the father or head of the house was the officiating priest to offer sacrifices for himself and his family. Abraham lived under that system. The next was the Jewish age from Moses to Christ. This began with the giving of the law of Moses at Mount Sinai (Deuteronomy 5:1-3; Nehemiah 9:13-14). It was a national religion, with Jerusalem at the place of worship (John 4:19-24). The Mosaic age ended at the cross (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 9:15-17). The Christian age went into effect on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), and all living today are subject to the New Testament. The Christian age will continue until the end of time (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16).

The Christian Dispensation

We live under the Christian dispensation, not under the Patriarchal or Mosaic dispensations. John wrote, "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath

in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:1-2). We must now hear Him. When Peter suggested the putting of Jesus down on a par with Moses and Elijah, God said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matthew 17:5). Though the Old Testament is inspired and is a part of the word of God, we are not under it as a system of religion (II Timothy 1:10; Romans 15:4). Christ died to remove the law of Moses, "blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross" (Colossians 2:14).

The first four books of the New Testament present Christ as the Son of God and they were written to give us the miracles and signs and personal ministry of Jesus that we might believe in Him (John 20:30-31). The fifth book, Acts of the apostles is a book of conversions. From Acts we learn the history of the establishment of the church, the first additions to the church, and also the preaching of the apostles under the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49). Then beginning with Romans, the sixth book of the New Testament, we have twenty-one letters written unto churches of Christ and individual Christians telling them how to worship God under the New Covenant, and how to live the Christian life. The last book, Revelation, points out that truth will triumph and tells of the beautiful place called

heaven, where no pain, sickness, sorrow, crying and death can ever come.

Some Specific Things One Must Know

One must know the truth relative to the Lord's church. The church of Christ is indeed the true church, but it is not enough merely to affirm that truth. One must know how to prove that affirmation. Please note the following:

There is one and only one New Testament church. The New Testament, of course, will be the standard to which we must turn for our evidence (I Thessalonians 5:21). The word "church" comes from the Greek word "ekklēsia" and it simply means the "called out". The New Testament church was composed of people who had been called out of darkness into the light of the Son of God. Such a group of "called out" people in any given locality was called the "church". Therefore we read of the church at Corinth (I Corinthians 1:2), the church at Thessalonica (I Thessalonians 1:1), and when reading of a plurality of congregations of that one church in a given locality we read of "the churches of Galatia" (Galatians 1:2). The church of the New Testament was therefore composed of literal human beings (Acts 2:41, 8:4). The denominational view of a "mystical organism" composed of the saved in every denomination is without any foundation in the word of God. That there was an exclusive New Testament church in the first century is shown by the following:

The church is the body of Christ. The apostle Paul wrote that God "gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body" (Ephesians 1:22). He also wrote, "He is the head of the body, the church" (Colossians 1:18). In one of these passages Paul says, "the church" is "his body" and in the other he says "the body, the church" (Colossians 1:18). Therefore the body is the church, or the church is the body. In both of these passages the apostle is simply speaking of the saved people of God, the church of our Lord.

Further, we learn that there is only one church that was built by our Lord. In Ephesians 4:4-6 Paul lists seven ones, and the first one that he lists is, "There is one body" (Ephesians 4:4). Since "one God" means that there is one and only one God (Ephesians 4:6), and it does, and if the "one Lord" (Ephesians 4:5) means that there is one Lord, and only one Lord, and it does, then it follows that the "one body" means that there is one and only one body! In fact Paul declared, "But now are they many members, yet but one body." The irresistible conclusion is: there is "but one body" and "the body is the church", then, there is but one church in the New Testament.

Christ owns but one church. Christ promised to build but one church when He said, "Upon this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it" (Ephesians 5:25). The words "the church" means but one. And the pronoun "it" can refer to but one.

The conclusion is: Christ loved one church; He died for one church; He built one church. Therefore He is the owner of but one church - the church of Christ. The plural form "churches" is never used except in reference to a number of local congregations located in different geographical locations, or sections of the country, as "the churches of Galatia" (Galatians 1:2), and "the churches of Macedonia" (II Corinthians 8:1).

The church of our Lord originated on the first Pentecost following Christ's death. Pentecost was an annual Jewish feast day that came fifty days after the Sabbath of the Passover week (Leviticus 23:15-16). On the first Pentecost after Jesus died, the church of Christ was established. This is shown by many scriptures, though time and space permit me to give but a few of these scriptures.

Note the use of the word "church" before and after this day. Statements before the Pentecost of Acts 2:1-4 pointed forward to the establishment of the church. A short time before Jesus died, He put the origin of the church in the future when He said "Upon this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). All students of language know that "will build" is the future tense of the verb, and it definitely shows that the church had not been built when Jesus made the statement. However, beginning with the day of Pentecost of Acts 2, the church was always referred to as present. It was on that day "there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:14) and, "the Lord added to

the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). Never after Acts 2:1-47 was the church referred to as something to be built. This shows that the day of Pentecost of Acts 2 was the time when the Lord's church was built.

Prophecy pointed to that day of Pentecost. Isaiah wrote, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths, for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:2-3). A number of things were predicted by Isaiah: (1) The mountain of the Lord's house - also called the house of God of Jacob - was to be established. (2) It was to be established in the last days. (3) When thus established, "All nations" were to flow unto it. (4) And the word of the Lord would go forth from Jerusalem. All of this was fulfilled on that day of Pentecost in Acts 2. (1) Peter referred to that time as "the last days" (Acts 2:16-17). (2) The commission that embraced "all nations" then became operative (Matthew 28:19; Luke 24:47,49). (3) The word of the Lord went forth from Jerusalem as they began to preach in Jerusalem that day (Acts 2:16-42). The harmony between the prophecy and the fulfillment proves that Pentecost of Acts 2 was the day that the Lord's church was established.

The kingdom (which is the church) came with power. The words "kingdom" and "church" are often used with reference to the same institution. We are told the following: (1) The kingdom was "to come with power" (Mark 9:1). This means that the kingdom and power would come at the same time; one would come with the other. (2) But the power was to come when the Holy Spirit came. And the kingdom was to come "with power". The conclusion is irresistible, the kingdom came "when the day of Pentecost was now come". Furthermore, the kingdom was established with those who were saved and added by the Lord to the church. Therefore, this proves beyond any doubt that the church and the kingdom are the same institution.

This Pentecost is referred to as "the beginning". When the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and his house, Peter compared it with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and said, "The Holy Spirit fell on them, even as on us at the beginning" (Acts 11:15). From this we also see that Pentecost of Acts 2 marks the origin of the Lord's church.

People belong to the Lord's church without belonging to a denomination. Since people were members of the church in the first century, but not members of a denomination, why would anyone want to be a member of a denomination today? (Acts 2:41,47; 24:5,13-14). Paul was accused of being a member of a "sect" (Acts 24:5). However, he denied that he was a member of a "sect" and said that no

one could prove that he was a member of a "sect" (Acts 24:13-14).

In the first century people became members of the church by gospel obedience. When people obeyed the gospel, as taught by the apostles, that did not make them members of a denomination. Wherever the gospel was preached and obeyed people became members of the church, but not of any denomination. Please note the following:

The church in Jerusalem: In Acts 2 we have recorded the conversion of the three thousand. Peter preached Christ to them (Acts 2:16-36). When they heard, they were pricked in the heart and asked what to do (Acts 2:37). They were told to "repent and be baptized for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). They did that and were added that day by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:41). Then we are told that "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). They did not become Christians first and then go through some sort of ritual to become members of some denomination. The very acts of gospel obedience that made them Christians made them members of the church of our Lord.

The church at Corinth: The Lord had a church in the city of Corinth (I Corinthians 1:2). How did people become members of that church? When Paul preached the gospel in Corinth we are told that "many of the Corinthians hearing believed and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). The same simple acts of

obedience that made people members of the church in Jerusalem did the same thing for the people in Corinth. They were Christians; they were members of the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:20). However, they were not members of any denomination.

The church in Samaria: We learn from Acts 9:31 that the Lord had a church in Samaria. But how did people become members of that church? The answer is exactly the same way that people became members of the churches in Jerusalem and Corinth. Philip went to Samaria and preached the gospel to them (Acts 8:5). Then we read, "But when they believed Philip preaching the good tidings concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12). As in the case of the people in Jerusalem and Corinth, their simple obedience to the gospel made them members of the Lord's church. They did not join a denomination. Question: Since these simple acts of gospel obedience made people members of the New Testament church in the days of the apostles, would not the same gospel obedience make people members of the same church today? If not, why not?

A falling away was foretold. Inspired men made specific mention of an apostasy that they said would come. Paul said in his farewell address to the elders of the church of Ephesus, "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in

among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). To the Thessalonian congregation he wrote, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" (II Thessalonians 2:3).

Even though a falling away did occur which ultimately led to the establishment of the apostate Roman Catholic denomination, which during many centuries exercised sway over the world and killed multitudes who would not renounce their faith and accept the authority of the popes. The Lord's church was not destroyed.

A kingdom is reproduced by its seed. In the creation of the world, God gave the immutable law of reproduction when He decreed that everything should bring forth after its kind (Genesis 1:11-12).

The seed principle is also true concerning the church, the kingdom of the Lord. Prophesying of this kingdom the prophet Daniel said that, "it shall never be destroyed" but "it shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44). Although there was a falling away, an apostasy, there was not a complete destruction. If every citizen of the kingdom, every member of the church, were put to death, the kingdom or church would not be destroyed. In order to destroy any kingdom the seed by which it is reproduced must be destroyed. But what is the seed of the kingdom? In

the parable of the sower, which represented the kingdom of the Lord, Jesus plainly said that "The seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:11). This seed must be destroyed before the church or kingdom is destroyed. But men will never be able to destroy the word of God (Matthew 24:35). They have attempted to do so through the ages but have always failed. Peter wrote that "the word of the Lord endureth forever" (I Peter 1:25). Men therefore, will never be able to destroy the word of God - the seed of the kingdom.

The New Testament pattern of becoming members is reproduced in churches of Christ today. It has already been shown that people become members of the New Testament church by obedience to gospel requirements. These requirements are belief in Christ (Acts 16:31), repentance of sins (Acts 17:30), confession of faith in Christ (Acts 8:36-37; Romans 10:9-10), and baptism (Acts 2:38,41,47). These were conditions of salvation. Jesus placed salvation after both belief and baptism (Mark 16:16). Peter told men to "be baptized for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Saul of Tarsus was commanded to "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins" (Acts 22:16). Paul wrote that people are "baptized into Christ" (Galatians 3:27). And Peter declared: "Baptism doth also now save us" (I Peter 3:21). The process by which men were saved made them members of the New Testament church. By this same process men become members of the church of Christ today.

The organization of the church of Christ is reproduced in the true churches of Christ today. In the church of Christ today one will find two groups of officers - elders and deacons. Each congregation had not one elder over a number of congregations as per the denominational practice, but a plurality. The deacons are not overseers, but servants under the direction of the elders.

This form of organization is a reproduction of the organization used by the congregations of the New Testament. They had a plurality of elders for one congregation (Acts 14:23, 20:17). These elders were also called bishops (Titus 1:5-7), overseers (Acts 20:28), pastors (Ephesians 4:11-12), and the presbytery (I Timothy 4:14). The church of the New Testament had no such thing as a Pope, a Presiding Elder, an Archbishop, a Cardinal, a General, an Overseer or a State Overseer. These officers are found in various denominations, but not in the church of the New Testament. The Lord's church also had deacons (Philippians 1:1). Since the church of Christ has the same organization as the church in the first century, this further helps us to identify, the true church of the New Testament.

The New Testament form of worship is reproduced in churches of Christ today. The church of the first century engaged in prayer and the teaching of the apostles doctrine and in "breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42). This they did on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Since there is a first day of the week each week, this was a weekly service (Acts 20:7).

The congregations in the days of the apostles gave upon the first day of every week (I Corinthians 16:1-2). Churches of Christ today do the same. We do not use pie suppers, raffling contests, etc. to raise money for the church.

The congregations of Christ under the direction of the apostles offered their praise to God in the singing of songs. Paul wrote, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19). Their making of music was not only limited to vocal music, but even more specifically to singing. They did not use pianos, organs, banjos, horns, fiddles or other mechanical instruments in their worship to God. They sang; they did not play! Therefore, any church today that employs such mechanical instruments in its worship is not identical with the church of the New Testament. However, the true church of Christ limits its music to singing just as did the church of the New Testament.

Conclusion

When any religious group adheres strictly to the divine rule of faith and practice - the word of God - and refuses to accept any man, or any man-made doctrine as authority from God, these members are like unto the church in the first century. When they hold faithfully to the organization that was featured in the New Testament church; when they worship according to the simple form of worship

revealed in the New Testament church; then that group of people constitute the church that Jesus built, the Lord's church. Therefore, the church of Christ constitutes the true church today!

The great truths that we have discussed in this lecture should be studied, learned, and obeyed. Salvation depends upon learning, obeying, and teaching others to submit to the truth that we may enter into heaven when this life is completed.

Chapter 10

Church Discipline

James Watkins

Brother Watkins was born in Lafayette, Georgia. He served in the United States Navy during World War II. He is married to Foye Shirley Dooly and they have 4 children, Mrs. Richard (Teresa Ann) Mansfield, sonographer RT/RDMS, in Nashville, Tennessee, James III, minister of the West Gate church in Dothan, Alabama, Alan Dale, minister of the Great Oaks congregation in Memphis, Tennessee and Mrs. John (Hope Elizabeth) Crawford.

Brother Watkins began preaching at Ebenezer, Alabama in 1949, and has served churches in Georgia, Tennessee, and Alabama. He is presently engaged in full time meeting work. He holds B.S. and M.A. degrees from Southern Christian University. He conducts a number of gospel meetings each year and Foye has spoken to ladies at seminars in several states.

That unity is essential to the success and productivity of the body of Christ is obvious. Our Lord prayed for the unity of His followers (John 17:20-21). Paul required unity within the membership of the church (I Corinthians 1:10-13). If the scripture referred only casually (though it speaks volumes) to the subject of unity, Paul's use of the physical body of man to represent the spiritual body of Christ, the church (I Corinthians

12:12-26), would mandate unity. One cannot imagine His physical body divided, the members warring against one another and none of them following the instructions from the head. Not only would chaos result, but destruction would be inevitable. Such is the warning of the peerless apostle Paul. "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another" (Galatians 5:15).

Some of the indications of unity are PEACE, COOPERATION and SYMPATHY. These, however, do not come without cost and sacrifice. We are commanded to "...Follow after things which make for peace, and things whereby we may edify one another" (Romans 14:19). Cooperation is, of course, the act of working together (II Corinthians 6:1). Sympathy is the emotion stirred when the object of our love stands in need of comfort or solace. When these indicators are conspicuously absent, then is magnified the need for the subject assigned for this discourse: DISCIPLINE. The present generation has a negative view of the word discipline, equating it with punishment. Discipline, however, is from the same root whence we derive disciple, and, while all discipline is corrective, it is not necessarily punitive. The value of discipline is to be observed in the statement: "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Hebrews 12:6).

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That all men will not follow the instruction of the Lord and grow to their spiritual maturity in the loving embrace and comfort of His discipline is obvious. Such failure brings weakness, unhappiness, and division to the body of Christ. The marvelous thing about the instruction of the Lord is that it never leaves the faithful without a scriptural course to pursue. Paul said, "A factious man, after a first and second admonition refuse; knowing that such a one is perverted and sinneth, being self condemned" (Titus 3:10-11). This is not to say that such a one is to be ignored. If the offense is personal, Jesus gives instruction in Matthew 18:15-17. If the offense is congregational, inspiration tells us, "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which they received of us" (II Thessalonians 3:6). Through the years this has been called the "forgotten commandment". Such instruction, however, is mandatory and indispensable to the growth and success of the church. One excuse employed in the failure to exercise discipline is that it may be done to gratify personal animosity. Such could happen, though it would be rare in the Lord's church. Despite that possibility, the mandate for discipline is found throughout the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. God has always punished the disorderly to the end that man may fear and obey Him (Deuteronomy 21:18-21; I Timothy 5:20). When Cain slew Abel, God disciplined him (Genesis 4:11; I John 3:12). The flood was in

consequence of man's wickedness (Genesis 6:5-8). God rained fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah because of their extreme wickedness (Genesis 19:24-25). His discipline of the Israelites in the wilderness was severe (I Corinthians 10:5). One could go on and on with God's correction and discipline of His people. Consider the case of Ananias and Sapphira who lied to God and were destroyed (Acts 5:1-11).

The purpose of corrective discipline is the salvation of the soul of the one exercised thereby (I Corinthians 5:5). An effective side benefit brought on by the withdrawal of fellowship is the shame to the one thus disciplined, to the end that it may lead him to repentance (II Thessalonians 3:14-15). A third design of church discipline of the disorderly is the salvation of the other members of the congregation. Recall, for example, the church at Thyatira; the Lord commended them but He added, "...I have this against thee, that thou SUFFEREST the woman Jezebel" (Revelation 2:20). They needed to remove that corrupting sore. Paul, in giving instructions to the church at Corinth relative to their disposition of the incestuous adulterer, said, "Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, even as ye are unleavened. For our passover also hath been sacrificed, even Christ: wherefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (I Corinthians 5:7-8). All have heard the illustration of one rotten apple corrupting a barrel full of good

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ones. Such is the influence of undisciplined sinners in the church.

Great love, care and concern is to be urged in the exercise of church discipline. The withdrawal of the fellowship of the church is not a duty lightly performed. Such action is a last resort. It follows many tears, much entreaty and continuing prayer. This is a beloved brother or sister being severed from Christian fellowship. Such is always accompanied with sorrow.

When we take a serious look at the question, "From whom should the church withdraw?", a broad spectrum appears. Paul, in the context of II Thessalonians 3:6-15, is teaching that the able bodied Christian who will not work is subject to discipline. Of course, any member who persists in teaching error is subject to the withdrawal of fellowship (Ephesians 5:11-12; Romans 16:17-18; Titus 3:10-11). A brother who trespasses against another and will not repent can become subject to church discipline in the form of withdrawal. A brother or sister who is a fornicator or covetous, an idolater, a railer, a drunkard or an extortioner, who will not repent, certainly must be disciplined (Ephesians 5:3-5; I Corinthians 5:11). Blasphemers, those who speak against Christ or His teaching, are to be disciplined (I Timothy 1:20). Hypocrisy, when it is a known sin from which a brother or sister will not turn, certainly must be disciplined with the severance of fellowship. Liars, murderers, unbelievers, abominable, sorcerers and sex perverts

are to be disciplined (Hebrews 3:12; Revelation 21:8; I Corinthians 6:9-10; Romans 1:24-32). To be sure, there is no class of people within the church that is exempt from discipline. Someone has said, "There is no rank among slaves." We are all the bondservants of Jesus Christ. While we highly esteem and honor our elders, respect our deacons and evangelists, and endeavor to exhibit the love of Christ toward all, we are preserved and sustained by the discipline (teaching) of our Lord.

The scriptural procedure for the exercise of corrective discipline in the withdrawal of the fellowship of the church from the disorderly is quite simple. In the first place, guilt must be established. Church discipline should never be exercised on the basis of hear-say, thinkso's, dislike or to hurt someone. Even under the Law, God required that guilt be established beyond any doubt (Deuteronomy 13:1-8; 19:15). Once guilt is established, every effort should be made to impress upon the sinner the error of his way and the terrible consequences of sin. In all such disciplinary action the attitude of those responsible for the discharge of such action is all important. It must be an attitude of love and concern.

Once the discipline has been carried out, faithful Christians must "note" that man and have no fellowship ("company") with him so that the shame of his position may lead him to repentance.

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Some, on the basis of love, would deny the validity and thus cease the practice of church discipline. Bear in mind that the Lord, who loves all and possesses perfect knowledge, wisdom and goodness has commanded the church to "...put away the wicked man from among yourselves" (I Corinthians 5:13).

Chapter 11

Brotherly Love

M. Floyd Bailey, Jr.

Brother Bailey was born the son of Merritt and Lynda Bailey in Atlanta, Georgia. He is married to Elizabeth M. Palmer of Jacksonville, Florida. They have 3 sons and 1 daughter. He is a 1988 graduate of Faulkner University with a B.A. in Bible. Currently, he is the full time preacher for the Dalraida church of Christ in Montgomery, Alabama. He has also preached in Georgia, Florida, and Virginia. He is the co-editor of the Faulkner University Lectureship book. He is also the director of the Virginia School of Biblical Studies.

Unity is a precious, yet endangered relationship. Unity is dying as pragmatism takes an increasingly stronghold on the minds of the masses. Arguments for the acceptance of all opinions and lifestyles may produce union; however, it secretly and cunningly destroys the possibilities and joys of true unity. Unity is the state of being one. "Can two walk together except they be agreed" (Amos 3:3). Unity is defined by Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary as "the quality or state of not being multiple: oneness". There is no doubt that scripture declares the goal of Christianity to be unity in Christ. Jesus prayed for such unity and oneness in the garden. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in

us" (John 17:20-21). Paul exhorted the Corinthian brethren to oneness when he wrote to them, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Corinthians 1:10).

Love is a precious, yet endangered relationship. As the nature and characteristics of love are compromised, we see a hybrid developing in which unconditional acceptance is the name of the game. It is true that God loves us unconditionally, yet He does not unconditionally accept us. Love can be unconditional without offering unconditional acceptance. In fact, a "love" that accepts people unconditionally fails because it does not want what is truly best for the recipient. I love my child unconditionally and yet I will never unconditionally accept my child's choices and manner of life, if those choices lead to my child's hurt. A powerful illustration is seen in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15). The father's unconditional love is seen, and yet the father did not go looking for his lost son. He waited for his prodigal to come home. When the son came home, he welcomed him back. In the same sense God, who is love (I John 4:8) accepts only those who come to Him in accordance to His will. True love wants only what is good, it offers correction, requires change, and unconditionally sacrifices for the recipient.

The Most Excellent Way

I Corinthians is a book about a church that needed help. They were divided (1:11), and they needed some instruction on how to overcome the difficulties that were interfering with the unity that God demands. Paul pleaded with them to "all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1:10). In the first twelve chapters Paul discussed all the terrible squabbles that were going on and addressed all the spiritually immature arguments that resulted. In chapter 1 he described the problem. Chapter 2 devotes itself to the authority of God's word as it came through Paul and the other apostles. Chapter 3 illustrates the desired unity with a building in mind. Chapter 4 declares the fact that we are stewards of the word of God and thus examples to the rest of the world. Chapter 5 deals with sin in the camp. Chapter 6 responds to brotherly squabbles. Chapter 7 addresses the marriage relationship. Chapter 8 corrects the attitudes toward one another regarding eating meat sacrificed to idols. Chapter 9 gives reply to those who think the apostles were preaching for the money, and yet makes it clear that a man must be financially supported by his work or charge. Chapter 10 gives reference to Old Testament figures as our examples. Chapter 11 corrects worship errors. Chapter 12 shows the real nature of spiritual gifts and the concluding verse of this chapter says "...and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way" (I Corinthians 12:31). Brotherly love resulting in

unity is the more excellent way to live, both socially and spiritually. It is the more excellent motive of worship. It is more excellent than all the many self help, "*How to Win Friends and Influence People*" seminars and creeds that man can give. Love is the only way to live.

Admonitions to Brotherly Love

Romans 12:10 exhorts, "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another". I Thessalonians 4:9 says "But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are *taught of God* to love one another". Hebrews 13:1 commands "Let brotherly love continue". I John 3:10 declares that those who do not love their brother are manifest as the children of the devil. And the all encompassing words of Peter exclaim "Love the brotherhood" (I Peter 2:17). Similar admonitions are given to love our brethren, such as in John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye love one another."

Love is the foreman on the construction site of unity. When brethren love one another with a pure heart and fervently, unity will ensue. The kind of unity God wants and the kind of unity that Christ prayed for (John 17). May it be the prayer and practice of all brethren to pursue biblical unity.

Chapter 12
Unity Is Not Found In
Pragmatism

Maxie Boren

Brother Boren is the son of the late J.D. Boren, gospel preacher for 55 years, and the 1st gospel preacher to be a chaplain in the U.S. Army. Brother Boren attended the University of Oklahoma and Abilene Christian University. He is married to the former Fran Ives. They have 4 children. He is widely published. He has held over 400 gospel meetings. He is presently an evangelist with the Brown Trail church of Christ in Bedford, Texas.

It is a distinct honor and privilege to be a part of this series of lessons, and I sincerely thank brother Neal Pollard for having invited me. It is always a great joy to me to be able to be with faithful brethren from other parts of our nation on a lectureship such as this.

And what a timely and relevant theme has been selected... "The Bible Doctrine Of Unity." I commend brother Pollard and whoever may have assisted him in the planning. It is my ardent prayer that what I have to say may contribute to the overall treatment of the subject under consideration.

What Does The New Testament Say About Unity?

Jesus prayed for unity. And every Christian should strongly support the unity for which He prayed, as recorded in John 17:17-23. We should recognize "how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psalm 133:1)! It is a blessing beyond measure when a congregation of the Lord's church is "of one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32). And what is true of an individual congregation is certainly true regarding the brotherhood as a whole. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the church of Christ were truly united today? The New Testament scriptures address the importance of this repeatedly:

"Be of the same mind one toward another" (Romans 12:16).

"...let us follow after things which make for peace" (Romans 14:19).

"Now the God of patience and of comfort grant you to be of the same mind one with another according to Christ Jesus; that with one accord ye may with one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:5-6).

"Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Corinthians 1:10).

"...that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one soul striving for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27b).

"Make full my joy, that ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (Philippians 2:2).

"Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfected; be comforted; be of the same mind; live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (II Corinthians 13:11).

Additional passages could be cited, but these should suffice in setting before our minds the significance of the topic. With sincerity of purpose and earnestness of heart, we should all give "diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). That diligence should be demonstrated by each one of us in the local congregations of which we are members, but brotherhood wide too.

Jesus "laid down the ground rules" for unity. Hear what He said: "If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). Therefore, we must keep uppermost in our hearts and minds the imperative of truth, and realize that any form of unity that allows for a perverted or distorted gospel is but a sham and a farce and stands condemned in holy writ:

"But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons" (I Timothy 4:1).

"If any man preacheth unto you any gospel other than that which ye received, let him be anathema" (Galatians 1:9).

"...mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned; and turn away from them" (Romans 16:17).

"Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God; he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting; for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works" (II John 9-11).

So again may I stress that we are to be interested in the unity Christ prayed for, which is unity based on truth. We should be willing to "spend and be spent" (II Corinthians 12:15) in our endeavors to promote true unity among brethren. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9). Notice, He did not say, "Blessed are the peacebreakers," but "blessed are the peacemakers". With a humble spirit, and a sincere heart, each of us should really try to do his best to keep the church united.

Unity At Any Cost?

While surely we all agree that unity is important, and that we should desire it and work for it, the question is this: should we insist on unity at any cost? Should we compromise truth in order to have unity? Should we "water down" the teachings of the New Testament to accommodate the sinful practices of the world in order to have unity? The answer to these questions is an unequivocal NO! Let us note them one at a time.

Jesus did not compromise the truth. A careful reading of Matthew 15:1-20, enlightens us concerning His handling of an opportunity for compromise with the Pharisees. Keep in mind that the Pharisees and Sadducees were the leading religious sects of the Jewish religion during the time of our Lord's personal ministry. From a "human standpoint", it would have been advantageous for Him to have "gotten along" with them. But please observe what happened in the context just mentioned. Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus with a question pertaining to the failure of His disciples to wash their hands before eating, accusing them of transgressing "the tradition of the elders". He could have said something like this: "I'm sorry that my disciples have offended you in this matter, and from now on you can be assured they will wash their hands as your tradition dictates, because I want us to all be united in spite of the fact that some of your teachings are contrary to what I've taught them." But instead, Jesus

responded by asking them a question: "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?" He pointed out to them that they had failed in providing funds for their parents' needs under the pretense of having given such to God. He then said to them: "Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, 'This people honoreth me with their lips; But their heart is far from me.' But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men" (vs 6b-9).

Hearing what Jesus had said to the Pharisees, and apparently observing their reaction, the disciples said to Him, "Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying" (vs 12)? Jesus replied to the disciples with these words: "Every plant which my heavenly Father planted not, shall be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into a pit" (vs 13-14). What Jesus said on this occasion does not sound to me like a willingness to compromise in order to have some sort of fabricated unity. Does it to you?

Again, we have the example recorded in Matthew 23 of Jesus upbraiding the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and false teachings. Read that entire chapter and see if you can find the slightest inclination on the part of our Lord to compromise truth? Personally, I would have to say that I've never read a more direct and poignant renunciation of a body of religionists than what

Jesus said in this context. And notice also that He spoke this openly "to the multitudes and to his disciples" (vs 1). In the preceding chapter of Matthew's account of the life of Christ, we read of Jesus having a confrontation with the Sadducees. This time, the subject was the resurrection, the Sadducees denying that such would be. Jesus said to them, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God" (Matthew 22:29). No compromise here! The Sadducees were teaching error and the Lord pointed it out to them in very direct fashion.

Jesus did not "soften" His teachings to accommodate the sinful teachings and practices of the world. This statement answers the second question posed above. Should we "water down" New Testament teachings to accommodate the sinful practices of the world so as "to make fellowship wide enough to include most everyone?" Not if we follow the example of our Lord, which Peter said we are to emulate (I Peter 2:21).

Let's note another such incident in the life of Jesus that illustrates His emphasis concerning His authority. Once again, the Pharisees came to Him, "trying him" (Matthew 19:3). They asked Him the following question: "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" Jesus responded by citing Genesis 1 and 2, and said, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (vs 6). The Pharisees pressed Him, inquiring, "Why

then did Moses command to give a bill of divorcement, and to put her away?" Jesus explained that it was because of the "hardness of heart" of the people who lived in the day of Moses, "but from the beginning it hath not been so. **And I say unto you**, 'Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery; and he that marrieth her when she is put away committeth adultery'" (Matthew 19:8-9). In essence, Jesus was informing those Pharisees that regardless of what Moses allowed, or what the people had practiced in times past, what mattered was what He taught them. Notice the "ring of authority" with which He spoke... **I SAY UNTO YOU!** Jesus in no way capitulated to the teaching and practice of those people in order "to get along" with them. If there was any conforming to be done, it was up to the people to conform their lives with the teachings of Jesus instead of Jesus modifying His teaching to accommodate their sinful practice of divorce and remarriage for variable reasons. At this point let me make one point very clear. The "crux of the issue" is the authority of Christ! It was then, and it is now. Jesus said that "all authority hath been given unto me" (Matthew 28:18). Peter declared that "God hath made him both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Keep this incident in mind because we will have more to say about it later.

Unity Is Not Found In Pragmatism

It is a mistaken notion that we are to strive for unity at any cost. But some of our brethren seem to

think we should make whatever concessions are necessary to moral pollution and religious error in order to have at least a semblance of unity. It is that very mindset that prompts these brethren to compromise truth and "water down" New Testament doctrine in order to accommodate the false teachings and sinful practices that surround us. Are such brethren right when they argue for a pragmatic approach to achieving unity? When they tell us that we must be more inclusive of divergent beliefs and practices, and more tolerant toward views and lifestyles with which we disagree? When they tell us that the church must change with the times? When they tell us that we need to be more identified with the culture in which we live?

Picture a gospel preacher working in remote African villages. Let's just imagine that he encounters a tribe of people who have practiced polygamy for innumerable years. He preaches Christ to these folks and, in time, many are converted. Should he broach the subject of their multiple marriages? Some might suggest that in deference to their culture he should leave the subject alone. While we would all agree that he should be kind and gentle in informing these people of their error in the matter, yet he is duty bound before God to declare unto them the "whole counsel" as did Paul throughout his ministry (Acts 20:26-27). Cultural acceptance of a sinful practice does not make it right. We cannot gloss over sin just for the sake of peace and unity.

So what about in the realm of morality in our nation? We hear it parroted most every day that "Jesus was inclusive", and turned none away. The example of His actions in the context of John 8:1-11 is advanced as proof for the "inclusive" approach. Let's notice what happened. There was a woman taken in the act of adultery, who was brought before Jesus by her accusers. They appealed to the law of Moses that she be stoned, but asked Jesus what He thought? This they did, not to learn, but to have grounds upon which to accuse Him. "Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground" (John 8:6). They continued their questioning, and Jesus said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her," and He again wrote on the ground. Note carefully how that after all her accusers had left, Jesus asked her where they were that had condemned her - "did no man condemn thee?" She responded by saying, "no man, Lord." Jesus then said, "Neither do I condemn thee; go thy way; **from henceforth sin no more**" (vs 11). Jesus was willing to forgive her sin when He perceived in her a penitent heart. But He did not sanction or condone her sin. He told her to "**sin no more!**" His acceptance of her was obviously predicated on her cessation of sin. Certainly we would all agree that the Lord's "umbrella of grace" is large enough for all who believe, repent, and obey His directives. But we do not find the slightest hint in the New Testament of the "inclusion" of the unbelieving, impenitent, and disobedient! Had this woman acted obstinately and impenitently, what Jesus said

to her would surely have been different. In no way does this context support the idea that impenitent adulterers would not stand condemned.

In fact, the apostle Paul made it very clear that the church must withdraw itself from a brother (or sister) "caught up" in immoral conduct. In I Corinthians 5, Paul, by the authority of Christ commanded that the brother guilty of incest be disciplined, and instructed the church "to have no company with fornicators" (vs 5, 9). His instructions were simple but very direct: "Put away the wicked man from among yourselves" (vs 13). Paul gave these directives "in the name of the Lord Jesus", which means "by his authority" (vs 4).

Was Paul interested in unity? By all means. Remember I Corinthians 1:10? He pleaded with them to be unified and have no divisions among them. But his pleadings for unity were not so inclusive as to condone sinful conduct. In chapter 6, he taught plainly that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God and explicitly pointed out that fornicators, adulterers, and homosexuals were among those he classified as unrighteous. Surely the church can not be in fellowship with one that inspiration "spells out" as unrighteous and who will not be saved. In Galatians 5, the apostle enumerated life conduct he described as being "works of the flesh". Again, immorality and other things are "spelled out," concerning which he declared, "that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (vs 21). Again, in

Ephesians 5:3ff, there is a similar noting of sin, with clear instruction: "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even reprove them" (vs 11). We cannot allow a decadent society, in the midst of which we live, to impact the church and stain it with sin. The Lord wants His church to be "glorious...not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:27).

A matter of crisis proportions we face in the church today revolves around the marriage, divorce, and remarriage issue. Some are saying we cannot judge on these matters and it is best to leave the subject alone. To illustrate: about 3 weeks before I was to go to a certain place to preach in a gospel meeting, I received a letter from the elders with the usual, "we're looking forward to having you," etc., but with one request..."please do not preach on the marriage, divorce, and remarriage issue while here." It was just a Sunday through Wednesday night meeting and I really was not planning to preach on that subject anyway, so I replied that I would honor their request but that I would like to discuss the matter with them upon arrival. On that Sunday afternoon, I met with the elders, and asked them concerning their request. They told me that there were so many divorces and remarriages in that area, even in the church, and so many differing viewpoints concerning it in the brotherhood, that they had decided to "just leave the matter alone". I was appalled, and asked them to read with me Acts 20:26-27, a text to which I have already once

referred. I inquired of them, "brethren, how can you possibly just ignore a matter upon which Christ plainly taught (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18), which is spoken of in other New Testament references also?" (Romans 7:2-3; I Corinthians 7:39). I reminded them of the fact they would have to give an account someday for such decisions (Hebrews 13:17). It is my conviction that gospel preachers must preach the whole counsel of God and the shepherds of the flock should uphold their hands in doing so. In fact, it is the shepherds' responsibility to see to it that the flock is properly fed (Acts 20:28) and cared for (I Peter 5:2). Brethren need to know the truth on every subject that pertains to their eternal well being, and that certainly includes what God's word has to say on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. But to a large extent, brethren have watered down what the Bible plainly teaches on this subject to accommodate the sinful practices of a world that just does not seem to care what the will of God is. With divorces and remarriages rampant in our country, it is naturally going to affect the church. The tragedy is that too many brethren want to accommodate the teachings of the New Testament to this oft-practiced vice, instead of impacting the world with the "hard-hitting" message of truth!

Consider with me another major problem we face. The homosexual agenda of our day calls for that abominable lifestyle to be "pawned off" on a gullible American public as an acceptable "alternate lifestyle". The movement has gained avid support

from many Hollywood celebrities, by people in influential government positions, such as President Clinton, and by most of the news media. The country is being inundated beneath a deluge of propaganda designed to place the "stamp of respectability" on this lewd and debasing lifestyle. With the pressures brought to bear in the "politically correct climate" permeating our country, many religionists have modified and "softened" their opposition toward the issue of homosexuality. A number of denominational bodies now accept practicing homosexuals into their "clergy". I wonder how long it will be before such "pressures" cause some of our brethren to jump onto the bandwagon? While we would certainly try to reach these misguided souls with the gospel and rescue them from sin if and when we have opportunity, never can we lower the standard of truth on the subject in order to accommodate a world gone mad. The Bible still teaches that homosexuality is sinful and wrong (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:18-27; I Corinthians 6:9)! That is where we must stand, come what may!

There is no doubt but that we are living in a morally corrupt society. The moral foundation of our nation is crumbling fast! Moral standards have been substantially lowered by the tolerant mood that has been championed by the Hollywood crowd and the liberal controlled media. Should the church capitulate to evil? Should we as Christians

sort of merge right in with the accepted cultural garbage of this day and age? I say, NO WAY!

What about in the realm of doctrine regarding salvation, the church, and true worship? These three subjects comprise the main "battleground" for what is really troubling the brotherhood today. Brethren who have drifted away from their moorings, and have set sail for seawards left, are making concerted efforts to lead as many other brethren as possible into following them in modifying their positions on these three topics. And regrettably, they are having more success than any of us want to admit. The church is "ripe" for such an apostasy because (1) many Christians stopped studying their Bibles over the last several years and would not recognize error even if it was blatantly paraded before them; and (2) many gospel preachers have long since ceased to preach the "old time Jerusalem gospel" and the congregations where they fill the pulpits have been fed with "pabulum" and sugar coated sermonettes with little substance and that have not "grounded" the hearers in basic truths; and (3) many brethren relish the approval of their denominational friends and don't want confrontation of any sort with them.

Put all three of the above "ingredients" into the "mixture" of a congregation's "makeup" and you will find a willingness to embrace most any changing fad that comes along. And in such cases, you have a congregation which is more like a "social club" than an aggregate body of people called

out of the darkness of sin and death with a desire to serve their Savior loyally and faithfully. Believe me, a lot of our brethren like the new "image" that was obtained when we started moving from the proverbial "wrong side of the tracks" to finer buildings in better neighborhoods. The attending prestige and acceptance was gladly received by many brethren. Many like the "glory that is of men" more than the "glory that is of God" (note John 12:42-43). And it was at this point the church quit sounding forth the unadulterated gospel in all its power and simplicity, boldly challenging the proponents of error to meet us on the polemic platform. Brethren became less aggressive in the promulgation of the gospel and commenced to minimize doctrinal differences between New Testament truth and the teachings of men.

Thus, the weakened spiritual condition in many segments of the brotherhood, and the atmosphere of a "compromising climate" that had been created over the last twenty to thirty years by the above three factors, and you see the situation we have on our hands today.

From this "springboard-rationale" has emanated the "change agents" that tell us we must change with the times to meet the needs of a changing culture. This "thinking" is evidenced in the following vital areas of concern:

- In the matter of doctrine.
- In the matter of fellowship.

- In the matter of worship.
- In the matter of "direction."

First, in the matter of doctrine. I first encountered a distinct "softening" on the part of some concerning our doctrinal stance as early as the mid-1960s. I started preaching in 1954, so I was a young preacher at the time. But I had been reared in the way of truth by faithful Christian parents, my dad having been a courageous, faithful preacher of the gospel for many years. At the 1966 Abilene Christian College Lectureship, I heard a preacher openly claim direct leading of the Holy Spirit, and the same man was advocating taking the Lord's supper at weddings and on other occasions. A number of preachers, including myself, confronted him, but to no avail. The matter was taken before the administration and we were cajoled with fair words but nothing really tangible was done about it. In the years since then, the seriousness of the problem has steadily grown more acute. Things are now preached at the ACU Lectureship, applauded by hand-clapping, that would not have been tolerated forty-five years ago. That demonstrates to my mind the kind of impact that an errant culture can have on "Christian" colleges and congregations of the Lord's church unless we are extremely careful NOT to allow it.

In the early years of the 1970s I preached in Lubbock, Texas, with a congregation whose building was joined "hard and fast" to Lubbock Christian College. One of the Bible professors there was a man who

was known throughout the brotherhood for his teachings on "the Man versus the plan," and for his out-of-proportion-teaching on grace. As a result of his influence, a goodly number of brethren in that area had imbibed his ideas, and were pretty-much saturated with the grace, grace, grace only philosophy. Several of these individuals were in roles of leadership where I preached, and became irate with me when I kept emphasizing the necessity of a proper response on the part of men to God's offer of grace and mercy...that while it is true we are saved by His grace, it is also true that in order to be recipients of His grace we must believe the gospel and obey the commands thereof in order to be saved. I taught what I still firmly believe...that God through His grace has provided salvation for mankind, but in order for it to be realized in the life of any person, that individual must trust the Lord and do what He said to do...that obedience is absolutely necessary. Jesus declared, "Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). The matter "came to a head" when in an elders' meeting, I was instructed not to mention "the plan of salvation" any more on Sunday nights. I told them that I could not imagine elders of the Lord's church making such a request of a gospel preacher, and insisted on knowing their rationale. I was told that we were not having many non-Christians on Sunday nights and that it was not needed. (At the time, we were averaging 500 or better on Sunday nights, often times with several non-Christians in

attendance). I said to them, "Brethren, even if there is just one non-Christian present, that person deserves to know what God would have him do to be saved. But if that's the kind of preacher you want ... one who will delete God's plan of salvation ... then you have the wrong man, because I do not intend to compromise the truth for you brethren or anyone else. Thus, you hereby have my resignation and, as far as I am concerned, this meeting is concluded." Whereupon, I got up and walked out.

That many congregations are "giving-in" to the culture that surrounds us is undeniable. For an example, the "politically correct" mania is one of tolerance toward divergent views, unless of course, they are conservative views. But nonetheless, in the religious realm, since most believe that salvation is based solely on one's personal faith, and that baptism has nothing to do with it, our stance, based on plain New Testament teaching, is not very popular to say the least. Therefore, some brethren are beginning to wilt because of these influences, and have embraced a much weaker position on baptism than they once held. Thus, the subject of baptism is slowly becoming a source of contention among us. Some are beginning to question whether a person being baptized has to understand that its design is "unto the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38)? Some are even questioning whether baptism is absolutely essential or not? The very same kind of clichés employed by denominationalists through the years are being revived by some of our brethren. Expressions are

being used such as "who are we to judge?" or "surely God wouldn't condemn a good man who is a strong believer, just because he's never been baptized". But brethren, hear me well! We must never allow the prevailing views of a misguided culture to make determination for us on what is right and what is wrong. There is only ONE source book of truth and that is the Bible! "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Timothy 3:16-17).

Second, in the matter of fellowship. Of the gravest concern is that many brethren are abandoning the New Testament teaching of there being but one church. Though the Bible makes that plain (Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25; Colossians 1:18; I Corinthians 12:12-27, etc.), yet many of our liberal brethren have taken "hook, line, and sinker" the idea that there are faithful, dedicated Christians in all the denominations. These are saying that we should not take an "exclusive" stance any longer, but that we should extend the hand of fellowship to the "broader 'Christian' community". This is graphically illustrated by a letter written by Rubel Shelly under the date of March 11, 1997, inviting folks to come meet Max Lucado at a luncheon held on April 22. He informs the recipients that Max would be the "nighttime keynote speaker at Jubilee '97" (July 2-4) which, "is **intended for the larger Christian**

community of Nashville". The fact is, our liberal brethren are more desirous of fraternizing and fellowshiping with their denominational friends in a pretended "union" of sorts than in maintaining the true unity our Savior prayed for in John 17 with their own brethren. Again, we note the "cultural influence" of "acceptance" across denominational lines. This is very popular in our country, and brethren who have come to view the church of Christ as but another denomination, find no problem with joining right in with "Promise Keepers" or interdenominational "joint Easter or Christmas" services, etc. While this might be the "easy and popular" thing to do, it is to prostitute the CAUSE of Christ. Because the Lord's church is NOT a denomination, but designed and purposed of God (Ephesians 3:11) and brought into existence at tremendous cost, the blood of Jesus (Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28; I Peter 1:18-19, etc.)! The church has a divine mission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16) and should not become entangled with religious institutions made by men. Cultural acceptance of a mistaken notion should NOT be equated with divine approval.

Third, in the matter of worship. Who among us ever dreamed we would have to refight the battle over mechanical instruments of music again? I thought that matter had been laid to rest a long, long time ago, didn't you? But brethren, don't be deceived! There is a much larger percentage among us than we like to think that would have little or

no objection to introducing the organ or piano in our worship to God.

And what about the trend toward theatrics? Some congregations are turning their worship into entertainment, what with special singing groups, drama skits, and after-dinner-speech type sermons. It seems that respect for the Lord's authority has "gone by the board" in the hearts of many. Though He has "all authority" (Matthew 28:18) and is "the head of the church" (see Ephesians 1:20-23), and is "Lord" (Acts 2:36), some of our brethren seem prone to put their own likes and dislikes ahead of His will in these matters of worship. No longer do some seem to care what Christ taught about true worship as recorded in John 4:23-24. It seems that many have fallen into Satan's snare of doing what they "want" to do, instead of heeding the Lord's directives. These brethren would do well do re-read very carefully Leviticus 10:1-3, and re-think the principle of Genesis 4:3-7 and Hebrews 11:4. It does not matter what men want, or what "the culture of our society" sanctions; it is submitting to the will of God that counts.

Fourth, in the matter of direction. Actually, what has been said concerning what is taking place among us in the matters of doctrine, fellowship, and worship, give strong indication as to the direction a large part of the church is taking. Many of the larger, urban congregations, at least in Texas, are going that way. It is my judgment that eight to ten of the largest congregations in the Dallas/Ft.

Worth Metroplex tilt strongly to the left. In Abilene, where the church once was so strong, liberalism has taken a devastating toll, much of which can be attributed, sad as it is to say, to a "climate" fostered by my alma mater, ACU. (That's not to say that everything at ACU is wrong, because that isn't true. But the administration at ACU has tolerated some on the Bible faculty who teach things that are fallacious, and thus, the school has "set a trend" leading to the left. That, and the many liberal speakers they have had on their annual Lectureship for the past twenty to twenty-five years, is reason for alarm. ACU has drifted far enough to the left that many of us who are alumni have become so disenchanted with the school we once loved so dearly, that we have stopped attending functions at the school. It breaks my heart.)

Conclusion

Unless we can stem the tide of the present trends, I fear that we will see within the next ten years or so a solidifying of the division among churches of Christ that already exists. That literally crushes my heart, and I have shed many tears over the situation. I know that our dear Lord wants His people to be united. But that unity must be achieved only on the basis of truth and right. Brethren must be made to realize that cultural influences, or practices and teachings accepted by the world, **MUST NEVER TAKE PRECEDENT OVER THE TEACHINGS OF GOD'S WORD!** Let each of us continue to give diligence to work for

true unity, to reach out to straying brethren, to try to heal, to try to build bridges and to become peacemakers. But compromise truth? Never!

Personally speaking, all I know to do for now is to pray often and fervently to God that erring brethren might somehow be persuaded to come back to the biblical stance we all once stood for, to the "apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42). And in addition to prayer, continue to preach the truth in love, without favor or compromise. And, as occasions present themselves, try to reason with "brethren adrift" to come back to the fold.

I believe we have the greatest opportunity ever to take the gospel to the whole world. The fields are truly white unto harvest. But, finding ourselves so distracted by the present distress among brethren, we've been turned aside to some extent from presently fulfilling the Great Commission. It is understandable that we have tried to do "damage control." But even while doing all we can to bring about accord, let us not forget our main mission to preach the gospel to as many people as we possibly can. Let's not become so bogged down with internal problems that we cease being evangelistic.

Much more could be said, but I close with the words of the great apostle to the Gentiles, "unto God be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:21).

Chapter 13
Unity Is Not Found In
Relativism

Dave Miller

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Relativism is a philosophical viewpoint that holds that all moral value is relative. The relativist insists that no absolutes exist. Right and wrong are to be determined by life's circumstances and the human condition. Right and wrong depend upon the situation. Of course, this viewpoint naturally leads to self-contradiction. You may have heard about the professor who stood before His college class and insisted, "There are no absolutes!" A student raised his hand and asked, "Are you sure about that?" To which the professor responded, "Absolutely!"

Joseph Fletcher, the "father of Situation Ethics," has been an influential force in the promotion of relativism in America. He was preceded by men

like Emil Brunner (*The Divine Imperative*), Reinhold Niebuhr (*Moral Man and Immoral Society*), and John A.T. Robinson (*Honest To God*) who all promoted ethical relativism. These forces have taken their toll on our nation and, sadly, on the church.

Relativism insists that we humans are free from prefabricated decisions and prescriptive rules. Relativism presupposes that truth is relative and nonabsolute. Relativism allows for openness and differences of judgment with the understanding that value exists only in reference to persons rather than retaining an absolute, independent existence. The far reaching impact of relativism is seen in the shift away from ironbound do's and don'ts and a set standard of morality to the common sentiment expressed widely in our culture that what is right for one person may not be right for another.

Relativism in our country is seen in many forms. It is seen in the public school's push for "multiculturalism" in which a variety of viewpoints are set forth as equally legitimate ways of looking at life and reality. It is seen in the nationwide promotion of "pluralism" in which divergent, even contradictory, religious views are held up as equally credible. It is seen in the domination of evolution as the only scientifically plausible way to account for life on earth. It is seen in the constant clamor for everyone to refrain from being judgmental about the views of others (cf., Genesis 19:9). It is seen in the aversion to authority

and the breakdown of the judicial system that has lost sight of the objective standards to which citizens were once held accountable.

Perhaps the greatest tragedy of all is the presence of relativism even in the church. The clamor for unity at all costs, unity-in-diversity, is a direct manifestation of the influence of relativism. For many in the church, unity takes precedence over truth and the need to be right about what God says. In reality, the unity of which they speak is simply **togetherness**. It is an emotional, "touchy-feely", nonrational sensation of blind acceptance. Truth is relegated to a nonessential status, creating an illusion of love through superficial friendship and physical closeness.

The Bible is extremely clear in its treatment of relativism. From the Garden forward, relativism is condemned as evil in God's sight. Attempting to achieve unity through relativism is futile. Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Here is the only way to achieve unity with fellowman and unity with God. God's truth must be embraced and lived. We must ascertain the divine standard, determine what God's will is on any given subject, and then conform and comply with those regulations. The central concern of humanity as set forth in scripture is to obey/love/glorify God (Ecclesiastes 12:13; Micah 6:8; Matthew 22:37; I Corinthians 6:20; II Corinthians 5:9; 10:5; I Peter 4:11). By definition, the only way to please God is to do what He tells us to

do (John 14:15; I John 5:3; Leviticus 10:3). If we would devote ourselves to this one all-encompassing, all-consuming objective, unity would be achieved. All other attempts to bring unity are flawed and ultimately fatal.

One blatant attempt to promote unity through relativism is seen in the treatment given to Matthew 12 by some within the church.¹⁷ They insist that Jesus and His disciples violated the Sabbath law when they plucked grain from a neighbor's field on Saturday. Consequently, we should not be too rigid about insisting upon meticulous compliance with Bible regulations. People take priority over rules and we should be flexible in our handling of Bible legalities. This kind of thinking makes a mockery of God's word

¹⁷ A chorus of voices are promoting a relativistic view of Matthew 12 within churches of Christ, including the following: Gary D. Collier, "Bringing the Word to Life: An Assessment of the Hermeneutical Impasse in Churches of Christ; Part II: The Scholarship Movement", A paper presented to the Christian Scholars Conference (Malibu, CA: Pepperdine University, July 1987), pp. 24-28; Max Lucado, "When Religion Goes Bad", A sermon at the Oak Hills Church of Christ (San Antonio, TX), Oct. 29, 1989; John Clayton, *Does God Exist?* (Jan/Feb 1991), pp. 21-22; James Woodruff in Thomas B. Warren's *Charts You Can Use in Preaching, Teaching, Studying on Divorce and Remarriage*, (Moore, OK: National Christian Press, 1978), pp. 198-200; Richard Rogers, "Encouraging Things I See", *Image*, 5:1 (Jan. 1989), pp. 14-15; David Wray, "Future Directions for Religious Education," *Direction in Ministry*, 1:4 (Fall 1992), College of Biblical Studies, Abilene Christian University, p. 1.

and ultimately will make Bible regulations irrelevant.

The facts of the matter are that the accusation of the Pharisees was false. Jesus' disciples were not violating the Sabbath when they plucked from a neighbor's field on Saturday (Exodus 12:16; Deuteronomy 23:25). They were acting in complete accordance with Mosaic law. Jesus provided a penetrating, logical refutation of the Pharisees' position. He began by employing what logicians call **argumentum ad hominem** in which attention is directed to an individual endorsed by one's opponent. The Pharisees held David in high regard. Yet in I Samuel 21, David violated the law by consuming bread which was to be eaten only by the priests (Leviticus 24:5-9). Jesus' point is that the Pharisees approved of David, though he clearly violated the law. Yet, they inconsistently condemned Jesus' disciples, though they had not violated the law.

He advances a second argument in verse five. Priests were required by the law of Moses to perform work on the Sabbath. Yet they were not guilty of violating the Sabbath because their work was authorized to be performed on that day.¹⁸ The

¹⁸ Jesus' use of the word "profane" in this verse is an example of the figure of speech known as metonymy of adjunct in which the appearance of a thing is put in place of the thing itself (in this case, priestly activity on the Sabbath). See D. R. Dungan, (continued next page)

Sabbath law did not enjoin total inactivity. The law authorized a variety of options and obligations which did not constitute violation of the Sabbath regulation. Authorized Sabbath activity included eating, temple service, circumcision, and extending kindness or assistance to the needy (Deuteronomy 22:1-4; Matthew 12:10-12; Luke 13:14-16; 14:1-6; John 7:22-23).

Next, Jesus deduced a logical conclusion that followed from His analogy of the disciples' action with the action of the priests in the temple. If mere temple service was authorized on the Sabbath, then obviously service rendered in the presence of the Son of God was authorized!

These three points were sufficient to refute the false charge of the Pharisees. However, Jesus proceeded to penetrate beneath the surface issue which they had raised to focus upon their hearts. The truth was that they were not really concerned about a correct application of the law to life. They were masquerading under that pretense (cf., Matthew 15:1-9; 23:3). Their problem was not in an attitude of desiring careful obedience to God's law. Rather, their zest for law-keeping was hypocritical and unaccompanied by obedience themselves and concern for their fellowman. They were more concerned with scrutinizing and blasting people

than with honest, genuine applications of God's laws for the good of mankind.

They had neutralized the true intent of divine regulations, making void the word of God (Matthew 15:6). They had ignored and skipped over the significant laws which enjoined justice, mercy, and faith (Matthew 23:23). Consequently, though their attention to legal detail was laudable, their misapplication of it as well as their neglect and rejection of some aspects of it made them inappropriate and unqualified advocates.

Indeed, they simply did not grasp the teaching of Hosea 6:6. "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice" is a Hebraism (cf., Matthew 9:13).¹⁹ God was not saying that He did not want sacrifices offered under the Old Testament economy (notice the use of "more" in Hosea 6:6). Rather He was saying that He did not want sacrifice **alone**. He wanted mercy with sacrifice. Internal motive and attitude are just as important to God as the external compliance with specifics.

The same point is made in Micah 6:6-8. In both Micah and Hosea, God struck a blow against the mere external, ritualistic observance of some laws to the neglect of heartfelt, sincere, humble attention to other laws and treating people properly. Samuel

¹⁹ See J. W. McGarvey's discussion of Matt. 9:13 in *A Commentary on Matthew and Mark*, (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Co., 1875), pp. 82-83.

addressed the same attitude shown by Saul (I Samuel 15:22). If the Pharisees had understood these things, they would not have accused the disciples of breaking the Sabbath law when, in fact, the disciples had not done so. They were “not guilty” (vs. 7).

While the disciples were guilty of violating an injunction which the Pharisees had made up (supposing the injunction to be a genuine implication of the Sabbath regulation), the disciples were not guilty of a technical violation of Sabbath law. The Pharisees’ propensity for enjoining their uninspired and erroneous interpretations of Sabbath law upon others was the direct result of cold, unmerciful hearts that found a kind of sadistic glee in binding burdens upon people for burdens’ sake rather than in encouraging people to obey God.

In verse eight, Jesus placed the finishing touches upon His argumentation with a fifth and final point: He is Lord of the Sabbath day. As God, He was in the position to assert His divine authority and apply accurately the teaching of the Old Law. One can trust Jesus’ exegesis and application of Sabbath law - after all, He wrote it!

Matthew 12 does not teach that Jesus sanctions violation of His laws under extenuating circumstances. His laws are never optional or relative, even though human beings many times find God’s will inconvenient and difficult (John

6:60; Matthew 11:6; 15:12; 19:22; Mark 6:3; I Corinthians 1:23).

Let us not succumb to the pressure being exerted by those around us to “lighten up”, loosen up, and embrace a broader view of unity and fellowship. Let us seek first and foremost to please the great God of Heaven. Let us strive for the unity which pleases God. Unity is not found in relativism, relaxing the limitations and restrictions of God’s will. Rather, unity is to be found in only one place and in only one way: when honest hearted people have enough love and trust in God to conform themselves to His holy word (John 17:14a, 17, 20). Only then will we achieve the unity for which Jesus prayed and for which Jesus died.

Chapter 14

Unity Is Not Found In Ecumenism

Bobby Duncan

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The subject assigned to me is, "Unity is not Found in Ecumenism". Webster defines ecumenism as meaning, "the principles or practice of promoting cooperation or better understanding among differing religious faiths." Since unity is the state or condition of being one, then I am to show that we cannot be one - cannot have unity - by promoting cooperation or better understanding among differing religious faiths.

Bible Unity Is Not Unity With Error

In the very outset, please let it be understood that God has never wanted His people to be united with anyone who refuses to obey Him. Psalm 133:1 says, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Notice, the psalmist does not say it is good and pleasant for brethren to dwell together in unity with the children of the devil. In I Corinthians 1:10, the apostle wrote, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." You will notice there is no admonition to be perfectly joined together with those who will not obey God. In Philippians 3:16, Paul said, "Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." The apostle knew there could be no unity of God's people with those who refuse to walk by God's rule. And in the same letter he also wrote, "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27). The apostle did not expect the Philippian Christians to stand fast in one spirit with those who were of the mind to strive against the faith of the gospel.

The prayer of our Lord for His disciples in John 17 involved a plea for their unity: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." Certainly no right thinking person can believe this prayer is answered when the children of God set about to promote cooperation with religious groups which exist without God's authority and in opposition to His will.

The Bible Prohibits Uniting With Error

I care not how many passages dealing with unity one may quote, there is not one of those passages which encourages cooperation with false teachers and false teaching. In fact, there are many passages which show clearly we are to do the very opposite. II Corinthians 6:17 says, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you." That passage does not say, "Stay in among them, and get just as close to the unclean thing as you can." It says the very opposite. Zophar gave good advice when he said, "If iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles" (Job 11:14). The ecumenical spirit of some indicates they believe iniquity should be brought very near, and that the righteous should dwell in the tabernacles of the wicked.

John wrote in II John 9-11: "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." Do you suppose those people to whom John originally wrote understood John to be encouraging them to cooperate with false teachers?

A few years ago some of our brethren got together with some in the Independent Christian Church at Joplin, Missouri, in what was referred to as a Summit Meeting. The next year these meetings began to be called Restoration Forums. Some of the brethren (not all of them) who participated in these meetings said their purpose in doing so was to try to get the two groups to work more closely together. What we should be doing with respect to religious error is staying as far from it as possible, so that those engaged in such will be ashamed and renounce their error. Is that not what Paul said in II Thessalonians 3:14? "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed." While we should be courteous and kind in dealing with all people, we should never act toward those in error in such a way as to suggest to them that we do not consider their error as being a serious matter.

Ecumenism Is Inconsistent

For God's people to cooperate in a general way with the churches founded and controlled by men is the very height of inconsistency. Those who participate in such cooperation are saying by their actions, "It's all right for you to preach that sinners are saved before and without water baptism. That is, it's all right for you to do it in your building, but not in ours." "It's all right for you to sprinkle babies, that is, so long as you do it in your building. But it would be wrong for you to do so in our building." "I don't object to your preaching that babies are born hereditarily totally depraved, but it would be a sin for me to preach that." "We will all preach what we believe in our own buildings and when we are not together, but when we all come together we will avoid mentioning our differences, and spend our time bashing those who refuse to be cooperative." That, my friends, is what is involved in being ecumenical.

Why Do We Not Fellowship The Denominations?

The things already said should provide reason enough for knowing that the people of God are not to fellowship denominations. (When I talk about being in fellowship with those in the denominations, I am not talking about having fellowship on an individual basis, such as working together in P.T.A., or with a Little League baseball team, or in the Band Boosters' Club. I am talking about cooperating with denominational churches in their religious activities.) Notice with me some

very specific reasons why we do not fellowship the denominations in that sense.

Reason number 1: The church of Christ is not a denomination, and fellowshipping denominations implies falsely that it is. In fact, those formerly of our number who now are receiving and accepting invitations to promote joint efforts of the denominations have made it quite plain they believe the church of Christ is a denomination. The Purpose Statement in *Wineskins* magazine states, "Our background and commitment is to the Church of Christ that was born of the American Restoration Movement. Our goal is to move that group closer to the church of Christ revealed in Scripture."²⁰ Notice that: the "Church of Christ that was born of the American Restoration Movement." The church of Christ I am a member of was born on Pentecost Day of Acts 2. They say they are trying to get their group closer to the one I am a member of. Friends, it's later than we think when prominent brethren are invited to address denominational groups and the only thing they can find to criticize is their own brotherhood, the church for which the Lord died!

Those in the denominations think the church of Christ is a denomination also. When members of the church of Christ promote cooperation among various religious faiths, such simply strengthens

²⁰ *Wineskins* (Vol. I, No. 1) p. 6.

the false belief that the church of Christ is a denomination.

Reason number 2: People in denominations, generally speaking, have not obeyed the gospel, and fellowshiping them implies they have. I know there may be a few rare cases in which one learned the truth through his own private study, and then was baptized at the hands of some denominational preacher. Not knowing any better, he then became associated with that preacher's church. That could certainly happen, and no doubt has happened. But let us be realistic; it does not happen often. And it certainly does not happen often enough to justify the declaration that "[t]here are sincere, knowledgeable, and devout Christians scattered among the different denominations."²¹ But when we cooperate with the denominations we are implying that we believe they have obeyed the gospel and that their religious practice is in harmony with the will of God.

In connection with this it needs to be remembered that doing what the New Testament teaches will lead one into the church we read about in the Bible. That is all it takes to get into the church, and that is the only way to get into the church. It also needs to be remembered that just following the New Testament will not lead one into any denomination. In other words, to get into any

²¹ Rubel Shelly, *Christians Only* (Nashville: 20th Century Christian Foundation, 1983), p. 18.

denomination on earth, or any man-made church, one has to leave the teaching of the New Testament and do something else - something the New Testament does not lead one to do. If those fellows who put out *Wineskins* magazine are in some church which was born of the American Restoration Movement, as they say they are, then it is because they have left the teaching of the New Testament and have followed something else. Instead of trying to bring the group they are in "closer to the church of Christ revealed in Scripture," as they say they are trying to do, why not just get out of that church and follow the teaching of the New Testament. That will make them members of the church one reads about in Scripture, and not just close to it!

Reason number 3 why we do not fellowship denominations: Worship unauthorized by God is a very serious sin, and fellowshiping those in denominations implies it is not a serious sin. God refused to accept the worship of Cain (Genesis 4) for the simple reason it was not the very worship God had specified. Nadab and Abihu lost their lives because they deviated from God's prescribed plan of worship. We are told in Leviticus 10:1 that "Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not." "Strange fire." What made it strange? It was fire "which the Lord commanded them not". The ASV says, "which he had not commanded them." Now, I can just hear

some of my brethren saying that this is a peripheral matter, or a third order matter. But the truth is it was "core"; it was "first order"; it was a life and death matter. Verse 2 says, "And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD." Why? Because it is a serious sin to worship in a manner not authorized by God!

Jesus told the woman at the well about worship, and he said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). That means that God will not accept unauthorized worship. Jesus also said, "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." II John 9 says, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." What is the doctrine of Christ? It is what is contained in the New Testament, isn't it? Then how would one go about abiding in the doctrine of Christ when it comes to the matter of worship? By worshipping in the manner that is authorized in the New Testament. Well then, how would one go about transgressing and not abiding in the doctrine of Christ when it comes to the matter of worship? By worshipping in some way that is not authorized in the New Testament. It's as simple as that. And those in denominationalism worship in ways that are not authorized in the New Testament. When we promote cooperation with them we are saying, though inadvertently it may be, that it really does

not make all that much difference whether or not our worship is authorized.

Reason number 4: We cannot fellowship denominations because they do not teach the doctrine of Christ, and fellowshiping them implies that they do. We read earlier from II John 9-11: "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds."

Some say "the doctrine of Christ" mentioned here is the doctrine of the identity of Christ, and not the doctrine taught by Christ and His apostles. That simply is not the case. Reference is made to abiding in the doctrine. How would one go about abiding in the doctrine of Christ if the doctrine of Christ is nothing more than teaching He is the divine Son of God? I can see how one could keep on teaching that fact, and how he could keep on believing that fact, but how could he abide in that fact? Furthermore, the phrase "doctrine of Christ" simply means "Christ's doctrine." In the Greek it is the same construction as one finds in such passages as Acts 2:42: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine...." Literally, the "doctrine of the apostles." Does that mean they continued steadfastly in the doctrine of who the apostles really

were? No, it means they continued steadfastly in the doctrine taught by the apostles.

Look at Matthew 7:28: "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine." Notice the phrase "his doctrine." It is the same construction in the Greek as one finds in II John 9. Literally the verse says, "the people were astonished at the doctrine of him". But it is obvious they were astonished at the doctrine He taught and not at the doctrine of His identity.

Another interesting passage in this respect is Acts 5:28, where the Jews said to the apostles, "Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." In the Greek, the construction of the words translated "your doctrine" is identical to the construction of the phrase translated "doctrine of Christ" in II John 9. Were the apostles filling all Jerusalem with the doctrine of their own identity? Certainly not! Their doctrine was the doctrine they taught, and not the doctrine of who they were. So it is in II John 9-11; the "doctrine of Christ" is the doctrine taught by Christ, and not merely the doctrine of who He is.

Those in the denominations do not teach the doctrine of Christ. They do not teach the doctrine of Christ with reference to the church. They do not teach the doctrine of Christ with reference to the

plan of salvation. They do not teach the doctrine of Christ with reference to the subject, action, and design of baptism. They do not teach the doctrine of Christ with reference to the kind of music we are to have in worship. They do not teach the doctrine of Christ with reference to the frequency with which the Lord's Supper is to be eaten. They do not teach the doctrine of Christ with reference to the wearing of human names. They do not teach the doctrine of Christ with reference to giving men such titles as Father and Reverend. Yes, they teach some truth. I doubt that any of them are so far gone that they do not teach some truth. But they have departed from the truth in so many areas that their doctrine could hardly be called the doctrine of Christ. When we fellowship the denominations we become guilty of their false teaching. Is that not what John wrote? "For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (II John 11).

Unity To Be Found On Common Ground

For the reasons we have given, and no doubt others we have not mentioned, unity will never be found in ecumenism. The prophet Amos asked, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). We cannot hold hands while we walk in different directions. Truth and error are not compatible, any more than darkness and light are compatible. Ecumenism is nothing more than union; it is not unity. Someone has described the difference between the two by saying, "If you tie two cats' tails together and throw them over a clothesline, that's union, but not unity."

Is there a course upon which believers can be united? There must be, in view of the prayer of Jesus and in view of the many exhortations to unity by the inspired writers. Yet there are hundreds of churches, all claiming to follow the Bible, but they are teaching contradictory doctrines. It is not possible for contradictory doctrines to be true. If two unambiguously stated propositions contradict, then at least one of them is false. It is not possible for both of them to be true; it is possible for both of them to be false, but not for both of them to be true. At least one of them must be false. In view of all these contradictory teachings and practices, is it possible to find a course upon which all believers can unite without offending anyone's conscience, so the prayer of our Lord might be realized? I confidently affirm it is. What is that course? It is determining what, in the various areas of difference, can be embraced and practiced by all of us, without anyone's offending his own conscience. Let me give you an illustration or two.

In the religious world there are many, many creeds. I wonder how many creed books have been written? I have several in my own library. Each one sets forth the distinctive beliefs of some particular religious group. Is there one of these many creeds to which all believers can subscribe without anyone's violating his conscience? If so, which one would it be? Would it be the Baptist Manual? The Methodist Discipline? The Creed of Presbyterians? The Episcopal *Book of Common*

Prayer? Notice what the Bible says: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Timothy 3:16-17). It also says, "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (II Peter 1:3). These things being true, why would any man need to write a creed? If a creed book contains more than the Bible, it contains too much; if it contains less than the Bible, it contains too little; if it is exactly the same as the Bible, then it is superfluous.

Is there a creed book that is acceptable to all? Yes. Who would say he cannot conscientiously follow the New Testament as his creed? The creeds of men cause division. There is not a one of them upon which all could agree to unite? But the word of God produces unity. Not one believer would conscientiously object to letting the Bible be our only creed. All who really want the unity of all believers will discard the creeds of men, which cause division, and will agree to follow the word of God only, which brings about unity. This is unity on common ground.

Look at another example of unity on common ground. There are many different practices with reference to baptism. Some practice what they call infant baptism, which is not baptism at all, but is

merely pouring or sprinkling a small amount of water on the baby's forehead. Some sprinkle or pour a little water on people who are more mature, and they call that baptism. Others reject infant baptism and they reject sprinkling and pouring as baptism. They insist that baptism is immersion, and they insist that infants are not to be baptized. But they immerse people who believe they are already saved, and who are being baptized merely as a symbol of their salvation and as an initiation rite into the church.

The New Testament teaches that baptism is a burial in water (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12). Is anyone conscientiously opposed to this practice? I know some sincerely believe sprinkling and pouring is just as good, but I have never met a person who believes we sin by immersing people in water. If I have, I don't know it. The New Testament teaches that baptism is for the penitent believer who has confessed his faith in Jesus as the Christ (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; 8:37). Does anyone believe this practice is sinful? If so, I am not aware of it. This is common ground. The New Testament teaches that baptism is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Are there those who say it is sinful to baptize for this purpose? I've never met them if there are such. On this all believers can unite. This is common ground.

Look at yet another example of unity on common ground. I realize some think it makes no difference how one worships, but we need to remember two

things: (1) God has always, in every age of the world, given specific instructions with reference to worship, and (2) God has always severely punished those who deviated from His instructions about worship. The worship of Cain (Genesis 4) and the worship of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10) are evidence of these two facts. A good sermon on worship *might be built* around the following three points: the right object, the right attitude, and the right actions. It is not my purpose to present a lesson on what all is involved in scriptural worship, but I will mention two things over which there is a great variety of practice, and we will notice how we might have unity in connection with these two things.

The first thing I will mention is the Lord's Supper. So far as I know, nearly all evangelical churches believe the Lord's Supper should be eaten. There is great variety of practice with reference to the regularity with which it is eaten. Some require their members to furnish evidence that they have eaten the Lord's Supper at least once a year. I am told that some groups eat the Lord's Supper twice each year, and still others on a quarterly basis. Bible scholars generally agree that it was the practice of the saints in New Testament times to eat the Lord's Supper on a weekly basis. This is the implication of Acts 20:7: "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight." Adam Clarke, the great Methodist

scholar, says this intimates "that they were accustomed to receive the holy sacrament [sic] on each Lord's day." Both Albert Barnes and the *Pulpit Commentary* say essentially the same thing Clarke says in commenting on this verse.

Would anyone's conscience be violated by eating the Lord's Supper every Sunday? I have never heard a person say he thinks we sin by so doing. We can have unity on the frequency of the supper just by doing what every single person can do without violating his conscience.

The second act of worship I will mention is the kind of music we are to have. Some of us cannot conscientiously worship to the accompaniment of a mechanical instrument. We know that there are at least nine verses in the New Testament which mention singing as worship, but not one that mentions playing an instrument. Being convinced that what we do in worship must be authorized, we simply cannot sing to the accompaniment of a piano or other instrument. Then how can we have unity with those who see nothing wrong with the use of the instrument? By following the only course of action all can follow without violating anyone's conscience, that is, singing without the instrument. Did you ever hear of anybody's saying it is a sin to sing without the instrument? I never have, and never expect to.

In this connection, please notice one other observation. Some among us now are insisting on

having solos, quartets, and choirs in worship. Others of us cannot conscientiously do so. What is the solution? Must we divide? No. The solution is to do what all of us for years have done, and to which nobody objects, that is, have congregational singing.

The same principle would do away with problems over singing during the Lord's Supper, clapping during a sermon or after a baptism, putting women in roles of leadership in the worship assemblies, and the like.

I am not here suggesting that any man make a law binding that which God has not bound. That is a mistake made by some of our brethren in the past as well as in the present. Some of them say we can have unity by just doing away with the Bible class arrangement, or doing away with the individual communion cups, or doing away with the orphan homes. These are trying to place restrictions upon God's people that God did not place upon us. And the restrictions are such as would greatly hinder the cause of the Lord. Paul's attitude toward such is stated in Galatians 2:5: "To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you." That is the attitude we should have toward those who try to write laws for God.

Conclusion

We sometimes hear it said that religious division exists because of different doctrines that are taught and practiced. This is only partly true. Religious division exists because most people do not care enough about the unity of all believers to give up the religious teachings and practices that cause division and embrace that upon which all believers can be united.

Jesus gave His blood on the cross that He might reconcile all men unto God in one body. Ephesians 2:16 says, "And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby." When men reach the point they are willing to give up their long held human traditions, their human names in religion, their man-made churches, their divisive creeds, then - and only then - can all believers be united in that one body which is the church purchased by the blood of Christ.

Chapter 15

Ephesians 4

Tracy Dugger

Brother Dugger was born in the Bethesda Naval Hospital in Bethesda, Maryland. He graduated from the University of Tennessee and Tennessee Bible College. He and his wife, Julie, have 2 daughters, Rachel and Hannah. His great-grandfather came out of denominationalism and became a gospel preacher. He has been preaching for 8 years. Six of those 8 years have been with the Dale Ridge church of Christ in Cloverdale, Virginia, where he presently resides.

God's "One-Derful" Plan (Unity of the Spirit):
Ephesians 4:1-6

Recall the contents of the three chapters of the gospel according to John (14, 15, 16). Jesus revealed to His chosen few that He would soon leave them but that they should not despair. He would not leave them "**comfortless**" but would send them another Comforter. He promised that the third person of the Almighty Godhead, the Holy Spirit, would abide with them. Being the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit would teach and bring all necessary spiritual truths to their remembrance; they would be miraculously guided by the Holy Spirit to reveal God's "**ONE-DERFUL**" plan (Ephesians 3:1-5; I Corinthians 2:7-10). That which was revealed by the Spirit was an objective body of doctrine. He revealed a perfect unity - the "**unity of the Spirit**".

It is extremely important for us to have a clear understanding of the word "**unity**." It can be defined as the absence of discord and diversity; oneness; being in agreement on essential matters; uniformity; harmony. We will say more of this later.

Ephesians 4:1-6 is Paul's short, but thorough discussion of the unity of the Spirit. Thus, he was a unity preacher. Let us consider what the unity of the Spirit entails.

Unity Of Vocation (Verse 1)

These Ephesians were to walk worthy in this vocation of Christianity. At one time they had been walking unworthy (Ephesians 2:1-12). But that had changed, they had a new vocation!

The word "**vocation**" means a calling. We understand that a man's calling signifies his trade or occupation in life. It demands the idea of that which his life is centered around. We have been called to a higher life than the course of this world. When we respond to that call we agree to live a certain way; to have different priorities in our life. Our vocation or calling is Christianity. God has called us through the gospel (II Thessalonians 2:14). Because of the spiritual blessings we enjoy in Christ (Ephesians 1:3) and the promise of an eternal habitation in heaven (our "**one hope**"), we ought to be energized to put Jesus Christ first and foremost in our lives.

Unity With Brethren (Verse 2)

When you bring together a number of people with different backgrounds into the church there is a great potential for division. This division can be kept in check by remembering this passage which deals with the proper attitude toward brethren. One way to destroy a good work is for the members to be contentious and quarrelsome (Galatians 5:13-15). Jealousy and discord have no place in the body of Christ!

The words in verse two are important to our understanding of the proper unity that should exist between those of like faith. The word "**lowliness**" relates to humility and is the opposite of pride.

"**Meekness**" is the opposite of violence. It is strength under control and includes suffering wrongfully for the sake of Christ. "It is that unresisting, uncomplaining disposition of mind which enables us to bear without irritation or resentment the faults of others."²²

"**Longsuffering**" is another vital word. It means to be slow to anger. The next phrase explains what it means to be longsuffering. To "**forbear one another**" involves faults and weaknesses of others.

²² David Lipscomb, *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians)*, edited by J.W. Shepherd (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1939), p.71.

It means to hold up under strain and to bear with others. Notice next that all this is to be motivated by "**love**"! Inspiration's point is that we need to learn to bear with one another in love.

The numerous times the New Testament entertains the subject of the proper attitude toward our fellow brethren is staggering. Just look at the life of Jesus and see His merciful compassion and the numerous lessons regarding the proper attitude that should percolate from our hearts. Jesus expressed great forbearance toward others. In Matthew 17:17, Jesus stated, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?" (ASV "How long shall I bear with you?").

Unity Of Determination (verse 3)

It takes determination to maintain the kind of unity God demands. The word "**endeavoring**" means to make haste, give diligence, to exert one's self. It is the opposite of indifference and laziness. Also, unity is something we must "**keep**". The word means to watch over, preserve, guard carefully.

These Ephesians were to endeavor to preserve the unity (the oneness) of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Peace is to bind and hold together the unity of God's people. The basis of that unity is found in verses 4-6.

Foundation Of Unity (verses 4-6)

The prophet Amos asked many years ago, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). Webster's Dictionary defines unity as absence of diversity. This makes the concept of "unity-in-diversity" a contradiction in terms. How can we agree when we do not agree? There can be no unity-in-diversity! We are not talking about diversity in judgment matters, but in matters of faith and doctrine. Hear the words of the Holy Spirit through Paul, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Corinthians 1:10). Does this sound like unity-in-diversity? This passage forever destroys the concept of unity-in-diversity.

In order for us to rid ourselves of division in and outside of the church we must embrace the seven one's of unity.

(1) **ONE BODY.** This involves the **unity of organization.** The body is the church (Colossians 1:18). The claim of denominationalism, that all churches with contradictory creeds make up the one body, is utterly false. It is nothing more than "unity-in-diversity". Denominationalism is division and is a rival to God's plan of salvation (Ephesians 2:16). It does not answer Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17:20-21. Imagine what the

practice of Ephesians 4:4 would do to the concept of denominationalism. It would cause all man made churches to cease, thus leaving only the Lord's church.

(2) **ONE SPIRIT.** This emphasizes **the unity of revelation.** The Holy Spirit is a divine person and is responsible for revealing the basis for unity (II Peter 1:20-21; I Corinthians 2:7-13). He made it possible to have the unity of the "**one faith**" (Ephesians 4:13). Paul said there was only one Spirit! If what is going on in the denominational world is approved of God, then there must be more than one Spirit. Whose "Spirit" are we to believe? The Mormon's? The Assembly of God's? The Catholic's?

(3) **ONE HOPE.** In this we find **the unity of purpose.** Hope is the desire with the expectation of receiving. This one hope pertains to the future (Romans 8:23-25; I John 3:2-3). Our hope is heaven (Colossians 1:5) and is our anchor to keep us from drifting into the world (Hebrews 6:18-19). Hope enables us to endure steadfast unto the end and lifts us up when discouragement arises.

(4) **ONE LORD.** This points us to **the unity of authority.** Jesus Christ is Lord! He has all authority (Matthew 28:18)! He has the right to command and expect submission to His will from every person. If all recognized Jesus Christ as the sole source of authority all false doctrines would be destroyed. Jesus Christ being the one Lord is why we worship

without mechanical instruments of music in worship (Colossians 3:16-17). It is also why we are opposed to women teaching and preaching in mixed assemblies (I Timothy 2:8-14).

(5) **ONE FAITH.** This is our basis for **unity of doctrine** and refers to the body of saving truth (the Gospel, the Word, the Doctrine). We have an absolute and objective body of doctrine. Paul was not a religious agnostic nor a post modern preacher, he saw truth as absolute!

Many are those today who deny the existence of the one faith. In an issue of *Reason And Revelation* from Apologetics Press (vol. 16, p.53), Garry Brantley quotes from Letty Russell, a religious feminist: "Though there are plenty of persons and churches still laying claim to God's preference for their form of Christianity, the discovery of the whole inhabited world and the many faiths of that world has made the claim to salvation for only a few seem less and less credible." **God disagrees - I will stand with Him!** In another example reported about one who used to be within our own ranks, Buster Dobbs wrote in the *Firm Foundation* (1/96, p. 5), "Rubel Shelly, in a public meeting held August 11, in Nashville, with a Jewish Rabbi and a Muslim minister, conceded one can be eternally saved by following either Judaism or Islam."

Paul preached the one faith (Galatians 1:23). Jude admonished us to contend earnestly for the one faith because it will always be under attack (Jude 3).

Thus, the one faith stands opposed to the numerous doctrines, commandments, and religious creeds of men (Matthew 15:9). It contests the multitude of human philosophies in our time (atheism, humanism, evolution, existentialism) (Colossians 2:8).

Some believe the "**one faith**" to be out of date. We are told that faith, truth, and the message of Christianity change or evolve as time goes on and that these three elements are not absolute or permanent; they are subject to change and development through history. We are further told that what was good for first century man is not necessarily good for us today. We would be asked, "What would the apostle Paul have to tell a twenty-first century NASA research scientist?" They would further contend that God's word is not relevant to us today, and because of the change in society's needs we must change the message to meet those needs. As one who believes in the all-sufficiency of God's word, it is our firm conviction that the Bible is our "never-changing" standard for today's modern era. Just because society has changed its standards does not mean our Creator has changed.

We learn in I Corinthians 6:9-11 that Corinth's societal standard was opposed to God's "one faith". However, this did not change God's law. God's word is relevant to the 20th and 21st century (relevant - bearing upon or applying to; pertinent; applicable to today's society). Paul unequivocally

stated in Romans 10:17, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Thus, faith comes one way and one way only! Nothing has, nor can, change this! For those who would contend that the Bible is not relevant we would ask, why isn't the Bible relevant for today? What problem does it not address in principle? God through the Bible has anticipated the needs of every century. Could not God, who foresaw the future as though it were history, also foresee the troubled conditions of our time? Could He not foresee man's needs today and record the answers for us? Has man changed? Has his nature altered? What about his tendencies and desires? He does the same things he has always done. Murder is still murder and lying is still lying. Did something occur in history that discounted or diminished the need of man needing a Savior for redemption today? A NASA scientist needs a Savior just as much as the slave of the first century. Hear these words: "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, (living & active - ASV) and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). The one faith is alive and busy today; it is relevant to today's society. The one faith needs no revision, no update, no modernistic overhaul.

(6) **ONE BAPTISM.** This highlights the **unity of practice.** Immersion, sprinkling, pouring, Holy Spirit, Triune, and Baptism for the Dead, all

describe the different types of "baptisms" adhered to in the religious world. In many of these there are even different purposes. Some believe water baptism is administered after one is saved; others practice vicarious "baptisms" (baptism for the dead), and still many others believe Holy Spirit Baptism is evidence of one's salvation. The true intent of water baptism is "**for the remission of sins**" (Acts 2:38) and "**to be saved**" (Mark 16:16).

Verse five says there is only "one baptism"! Is there only one God? Is there only one Lord? The answer is obvious. If only one, can all these "baptisms" we mentioned be right? No! By the time Paul wrote the Ephesian letter, there was only one in effect - I will believe him!

The religious world is divided over what baptism is, why it is to be practiced, and to whom it is to be administered. The one faith will settle it immediately. Baptism is a burial (Romans 6:3-5) in water (John 3:5, 23). Penitent believer's are to be immersed for the supreme purpose of having their sins forgiven and washed away (Acts 2:38; 22:16). The one baptism is the Great Commission Baptism of Matthew 28:18-19 and Mark 16:15-16.

(7) **ONE FATHER.** This seventh "one" refers us to **the source of unity.** David wrote, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Psalm 14:1). Paul further wrote, "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of

him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Romans 1:19-21). As the song says, "Our God, He is Alive!"

Contrast Between Theism and Atheism

The Unity Of Theism

Ephesians 4:1-6 "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; Endeavoring 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."

The Disunity Of Atheism

"I therefore, the prisoner of evolution, beseech you to walk worthy of the skepticism in which the prince of this world has called you. With all presumption and pragmatism, following the call of your own pleasure and personal preferences. Endeavoring to be an infidel regardless of the logical contradictions, disunity, and rejection of the facts and evidence. There is no body, no Spirit, no hope, no Lord, no faith, no baptism, and especially

no God who is above all, and through all, and in you all!"

Is unity that important? The inspired apostle Paul said we should keep the unity of the Spirit in verse three. Do you suppose that God demands in us unity but did not tell us how to obtain it or how to practice it?

The book of Ephesians is not the only place we learn about the Christians at Ephesus. Paul charged Timothy to remain in Ephesus for the purpose of working with the saints. He stated in I Timothy 1:3, "As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine." Paul knew that the only way to have unity was to teach the doctrine of Christ, for all to teach the one faith. When the one faith is compromised, the basis for our unity crumbles.

Paul warned the elders of Ephesus, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend

you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:28-32). The point, it is possible to lose this unity of the Spirit. We are seeing evidence of this today across our brotherhood. Many have left the faith and many more are on the road toward leaving it. There are those in our brotherhood who are clamoring for change in God's due order (I Chronicles 15:13).

Change is called for in the role of women, "special music", applause in worship, replacing the sermon with skits and drama, attacks on the authority of elders, charismatic beliefs regarding the Holy Spirit, religious observance of Christmas and Easter and fellowship of denominations. We must **"take heed unto ourselves"** and stand firm with **"the word of his grace."**

In the book of Ephesians, these Christians were admonished to be unified with God, the truth, and one another. May we take these vital lessons and apply them in our lives. May we ever endeavor to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"!

Chapter 16

John 17

Neal Pollard

Brother Pollard was born in Oxford, Mississippi. His father, Gary N. Pollard, Sr., baptized him. He is married to Kathleen Joyce Gillaspie and they have 2 sons, Gary and Dale. He received his Bachelor of Arts from Faulkner University and has done graduate studies at Freed-Hardeman University. He has served as minister for the church in Allenhurst, Georgia, Bay Minette, Alabama, Millbrook, Alabama, Livingston, Alabama, and Mechanicsville, Virginia. He has held gospel meetings, spoken on lectureships, retreats, youth rallies, and other preaching appointments in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, Ohio, and Virginia. His writings appear in several brotherhood publications. He edits a monthly publication, *Glad Tidings*, with James Woodall of Atlanta, Georgia.

In the hours of trial of heart preceding the mockeries, injustices, and sufferings He would submissively endure (cf. Isaiah 53:4-5), Christ approached the Father in prayer. The prayer recorded in John 17 was prayed by Christ on Thursday evening after He had earlier instituted the Lord's Supper and taught concerning the future of the kingdom (John 14), the nature of the kingdom (John 15), and the establishment of His kingdom (John 16). It was in the context of the most monumental week in history that Jesus

reflected, with great fervency, about the future of the institution He was about to purchase by the shedding of His blood at the cross of Calvary (cf. Acts 20:28). An examination of this beautiful, challenging prayer yields several truths to be observed.

Unity Involves Cost

"Pierced hands, feet, and side but He'd humbly abide
With the plan of redemption in sight
Since all men were cursed, lost, Jesus paid the high cost
Oneness in Him is God's holy delight."

Jesus was to pay a high cost indeed by submitting to heaven's plan for man's salvation. The weight of knowing He was born to die was a burden only deity could bear. As He prayed solemnly moments before His arrest and ensuing torture, He knew that religious unity would involve a personal cost to Him.

That this unity was costly is seen in the Lord's anxiety relative to the impending suffering (John 17:1). As He began His prayer to the Father, Jesus acknowledged that "the hour is come". This was the hour of trial, the moment unto which all human events must lead. Since spiritual death came by Adam, eternal life must come by Christ (Romans 5:17). As the words of His prayer would later demonstrate, Jesus saw that His suffering, death, and ultimate resurrection was the cost through which unity must occur. As Paul preached, "Christ must needs have suffered..." (Acts 17:3). He suffered, being tempted (Hebrews 2:18).

He suffered in yielding to this Master's plan (Hebrews 5:8). He suffered for our sanctification (Hebrews 13:12), for each of us particularly (I Peter 2:21), and for each of our sins (I Peter 3:18). Is it not plausible, then, to conclude, that He would undergo this hurt to provide a clear, simple plan all people of all places and times could follow to walk in "The Way" (John 14:6)? Would He suffer for conflicting, confusing schemes of redemption? Would not such be counterproductive? Unity was part of the light Jesus suffered to shed for all mankind's enlightenment (Acts 26:23). Surely unity was part of the joy set before Him, for which cause He would endure much suffering (Hebrews 12:2).

That this unity was costly is seen in His anticipation of death (John 17:1-2). Jesus implies this certain cost, saying, "that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." Jesus knew, as He had long taught, that this gift of eternal life would require Him to die (John 3:16; 10:11). As an inspired penman teaches, "... we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Hebrews 2:9). Unity cost Jesus the physical life He would sacrifice to have all men everywhere come unto God by Him (cf. Hebrews 7:25).

That this unity was costly is seen in the certain work He endeavored to perform (John 17:4). This work was by no means effortless. He endured temptation (Matthew 4:1-10), hardship (Luke 9:58),

hatefulness (John 7:1), and opposition (John 8:6; 11:48). He ministered at great personal cost (Mark 3:10; Luke 5:1; Matthew 14:13ff). All of this, however, was purposeful. Jesus endeavored to so live as to die a perfect, acceptable sacrifice, doing all right and never doing wrong (cf. Hebrews 4:15-16). The objective of His labors? "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). It was this work that Jesus had perfectly striven to accomplish. Without His accomplishing the work the Father had sent Him to do, unity in Him would be impossible.

Unity cost Christ much! He knew that. His intense focus was to pay this price to open the avenue of unity. Paul reminds Christians, "...ye are bought with a price" (I Corinthians 6:20). Indeed, it is a high price. In light of it, one who would truly serve Him must not be a servant of men (I Corinthians 7:23). Because He paid so much for unity, those truly grateful for His gift will desire unity by following His pattern to achieve it.

Let it be remembered that unity means that God gave first and most (cf. I John 4:19). His demands for unity are not tyrannical. He is the ultimate giver (John 3:16; I John 5:10). He asks nothing except that He has first given infinitely much, though He owes mankind *nothing!* All that He asks in the New Testament is infinitesimal next to His matchless love.

So, pursuing unity, God's way, will cost His disciples. Disciples seeking only unity according to His law will experience the hatred of this world (John 17:14), isolation from the world (John 17:16), and the reactions and misguided actions of an ignorant world (John 17:25). But, as Christ paid the highest price ever paid, His followers must stand ready to sacrifice for doing things His way.

Unity Involves *Comprehension*

"World of men in confusion stands beguiled by illusion
That many ways, conflicting, are yet true
But in woeful compromise they fall short of the prize
Who, despite truth, do not what God says to do."

First of all that He expects, in view of all He has given, is that man comprehends His expectation that all be one under the banner of His immutable truth.

One must know God's nature and character to achieve unity (John 17:3,5). In verse five, Jesus speaks of the everlasting nature of God. Then, in verse three, knowledge of God is a stated prerequisite for having life eternal. But, what does the Bible teach about the nature and character of God?

Concerning His nature, the Bible affirms that God is spirit (John 4:24), love (I John 4:8), and light (I John 1:5). He has always been, and He has always been the same (Psalm 90:2; 102:26-27). That is His nature and essence. Within the scope of His nature is His character, that God is wholly just and wholly

merciful. His mercy does not negate His justice, nor does His justice negate His mercy. God loves everyone (John 3:16), and He wants not one person to perish (II Peter 3:9). This bespeaks His divine, surpassing mercy. Yet, God will judge everyone by the holy word (John 12:48), and will consign to eternal punishment all who lived and died in rebellion of His word and will (II Thessalonians 1:7-9; Matthew 25:46). God, in His word, teaches the necessity of one conforming to His will (Hebrews 5:9; Matthew 7:21). If all were to do so, universal unity would be achieved. When an individual obeys all the will of God, he will worship and labor with the church for which Jesus died (cf. Ephesians 5:25). He will walk in fellowship with all others who, like-minded, serve in obedience to the Lord's commands (I John 1:7). Such an individual, thus maturing in Christ, comes to know God! He has a biblical view of unity, appreciating the character of God. Yes, "The Lord our God is one God" (Deuteronomy 6:4). As there is unity among the Godhead, there should be unity among God's people in light of His character.

One must know God's revelation (John 17:7). Jesus prayed, "Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee." Through divine revelation is made apparent the integral importance of unity (Ephesians 4:3,13). Most religious people recognize that God desires unity, and many like the idea of agreement or, at least, "getting along". It is only the unprejudiced Bible student that grasps God's teaching relative to

unity who sees the parameters of such and who works to live and teach within them.

One must understand God's purpose (John 17:25). Though the world would soon shun Him, Jesus Christ was the world's only hope. In the infancy of the church, Peter would boldly proclaim the same truth (Acts 4:12). That truth prevails to the present time. Yet, the masses have yet to grasp why God sent Jesus to this world. The vast majority, viewing the historicity of Jesus, even deny that God sent His Son into the world (cf. I John 4:9). They deny that He is God's Son (I John 2:22-23; Titus 1:16). Yet, from the heights of Calvary, standing erect, is God's purpose: man's salvation to God's glory through the means of Christ's sacrifice. To comprehend unity, one must understand God's purpose was to bring all men unto Him by Christ (John 12:32).

Unity Involves *Conditions*

"Full & free, Christ's shed blood, forms that atoning flood
Which can save one who God's law has breached
But, though free, it has cost, so to save one who's lost
One must go where the blood can be reached."

Keeping God's word is a condition of biblical unity (John 17:6). The apostles continued in fellowship with Christ, and thus with the Father. This is noted by the phrase, "they have kept thy word." What the apostles did is what all disciples of Christ must strive to do today, and what any religious person must do to be right with God. No Christian or congregation of Christians can fellowship one who, in doctrine or worship, is not

keeping God's word! A Christian, in a loving disposition (Ephesians 4:15), is to reprove such religious people and is certainly not to fellowship them in the name of unity (Ephesians 5:11).

Receiving God's word is a condition of biblical unity (John 17:8). Men must do today what the apostles did and receive the word of God. The Bible elsewhere teaches that one who receives the word is baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:41; 8:12-14; Acts 10:48-11:1). Receiving the word means having that readiness of mind (Acts 17:11) that makes one "good soil" (Luke 8:15). Receiving the word is to be done in meekness and humility, understanding that the gospel saves (James 1:21; cf. Romans 1:16).

How can one receive into fellowship anyone who rejects God's word? Such is tantamount to embracing, and even promoting, religious error (II John 9-11). The Tekoan's prophesy echoes out, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3).

Following God's pattern for unity is a condition of unity (John 17:22). The divine example is set forth, that acceptable unity in the eyes of God comes only after the similitude of the unity existent between Father and Son. Jesus prayed that future believers would be united as or like He and the Father are one. While it is impossible that finite, frail human beings could ever have the maturity and perfection of mind to agree in matters outside the realm of the

Chapter 17

Psalm 133

James Woodall

Brother Woodall was born in Thomaston, Georgia, in 1972. He is married to the former Kristy Gillaspie. They have one son, Lee. James graduated at the top of his class at Faulkner University in 1994 and has worked with the Lithia Springs church of Christ in Atlanta, Georgia since that time. James is a co-editor of *Glad Tidings*, a monthly periodical.

Oneness. Harmony. Agreement. Each of these words is among the various definitions of "unity". Every child of God desires to see unity in the church today; division and strife are the unpleasant and bitter results when disharmony reigns among brethren. We all know that God's desire is for unity in the church. As Jesus prayed in John 17, He centered His prayer around His followers, desiring that "they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us" (John 17:20-21). God's plan for the church was for a united body of believers (Isaiah 2:2 - "all nations"), and as Christ built the church (Matthew 16:17-19), we know that His intent and prayer was for our unity.

Throughout the New Testament we find encouragement, commands, and pleadings for unity among the church. Consider the simple phrase used by Paul in Romans 12:16, "Be of the

One comfort of unity is the confidence of Christ's intercession (John 17:9). While upon the earth in the posture of prayer, Jesus spoke on behalf of His disciples. He spoke not only inclusively, but also exclusively. He made no plea for those in the world.

Now in heaven, Christ is the Christian's intercessor (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). He is the only mediator a Christian has in prayer (I Timothy 2:5). This is significant, in light of the true statement of the blind man that God does not hear the prayers of sinners (John 9:31). He intercedes for the Christian in the matter of forgiveness of sins when the Christian penitently turns from and confesses to Christ (cf. I John 2:1-2). What comfort it is to be a part of the only institution in which Christ intercedes for lowly man!

Another comfort of unity is the confidence of the Christian's preservation (John 17:11). Jesus prayed, "keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are." What a comfort! This comfort is not necessarily the preservation of physical life, for all, including the Christian, will die if Christ does not first return (Hebrews 9:27). Nor is this spiritual preservation such that no Christian can so sin as to walk beyond the cleansing blood of Christ and apostatize (cf. II Peter 2:20-22; Hebrews 6:4-6; I John 1:7). Yet, there is a real sense in which a Christian, striving for oneness with the saints, is preserved by the Father. If one lives faithfully in accordance with God's will,

he can be assured that the faithful Lord will "stablish" and "keep" him from evil (II Thessalonians 3:3). To those who walk in the light of Christ, there is comfort in knowing that He is able to keep them from falling (cf. Jude 24; I John 5:13). The conditional promise in Revelation 3:10 also provides hope that the Lord keeps His children in the hour of temptation. What verity that "the Lord preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy" (Psalm 145:20). The one desiring the Lord's brand of unity, losing his own life in Christ's will, shall find that spiritual preservation so comforting to have (cf. Luke 17:33).

An additional comfort of unity is the confidence of the Christian's sanctification (John 17:17). This "purifying process" is only possible through the avenue of truth. Undoubtedly, man's sanctification is the will of God (I Thessalonians 4:3), works to the glory of God (I Corinthians 1:30), is the culmination of His purpose (II Thessalonians 2:13), and the direct product of His divine foreknowledge (I Peter 1:2). Thus, when the Christian learns how to "possess his vessel in sanctification and honour" (I Thessalonians 4:4), he has access to one of the comforts attached to unity. Not purified by meritorious works, but by God's grace and his access to that grace by obedience, the Christian is set apart and for God's holy purposes.

A further comfort of unity is the confidence of the Christian's glorification (John 17:22). As applied to Christians here, this means honor and dignity.

There is worth in the name Christian. A Christian wears the name of the world's Savior (Acts 26:28; I Peter 4:16). The Bible clearly teaches that no one who wishes to please God will exalt self, and it shows that all who do so face heaven's reprimand (Luke 14:11). By the same token, a Christian is not inferior to this world (I John 5:4). A Christian is not ignorant in the most important sense like the world is (Acts 17:30). A Christian is neither less fortunate nor deprived by reason of his modesty, self-control, and chastity (I John 2:17; Philippians 4:8). While a Christian will be persecuted for wearing and honoring the name, he will draw the respect of the vilest offenders if he lives consistently the holy life to which all men are called by Christ to live (I Peter 1:15-16). As Paul longingly wrote, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are not worthy to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). When the world sees Christians united, what added glory God receives and how much stronger and more influential it can become!

Another comfort of unity is growth in love (John 17:26). Why would David exclaim, "Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1)? Dwelling together implies a form which shows brethren how to so dwell, and those who follow the pattern begin to imitate God's love. Jesus prayed, "And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare *it*: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:26). Jesus

wanted His disciples to develop toward one another the same type love that God has for Christ. Love, as personified by God in 1 Corinthians 13, is vital to building lasting unity within a congregation and throughout the brotherhood.

Such basic, fundamental truth is found in the writings of John. In one chapter he wrote, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love ... If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also" (I John 4:7-8, 20-21). The word "love" (Greek *agape*; *agapao*) is found 33 times in the 105 verses of I John, and it is found 19 times in the 21 verses of chapter four! The simple, practical wording of I John proves the rudimentary need of love in the church. Love is not synonymous with tolerance of error or compromise of truth. Such actions reflect cowardice toward men and disrespect toward God. True love teaches with distinctiveness (cf. Ephesians 4:15), rebukes with boldness (cf. Revelation 3:19; II Timothy 4:2), forbears with patience (Ephesians 4:2), and edifies with anticipation (Ephesians 3:19). Love for God first and also for one another promotes unity. What a wonderful prayer is found in the following verses: "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in

love one toward another, and toward all *men*, even as we *do* toward you: To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints" (I Thessalonians 3:12-13).

Unity Involves *Commission*

"The order in our hands delivered by nail-scarred hands
He calls Christians to spread broad the news
And molded by recognition the daily commission
Is seeking the lost e'er they lose."

Verse 18 teaches the ever relevant need to convert the lost to Christ. Hear Christ. He said, "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." At least three noteworthy truths can be extracted from this verse.

Christians are sent. Jesus states it. There is a mission in which every saint must be engaged. Every Christian is thrilled and thankful that Christ was actually sent to die for the sins of the world. No one is saved without Christ's efficacious offering (I Corinthians 15:17). But, as surely as God sent Christ, Christians are sent. Christians, then, are to be mission minded. A Christian is salt to preserve this world (Matthew 5:13). A Christian is light to illuminate a world lost in darkness (Matthew 5:14). A Christian is an ambassador to lead this world to reconciliation with God (II Corinthians 5:20). A Christian is a servant to be an example before this world (I Timothy 4:12; John 13:12-17). Jonah teaches how important it is that

every Christian accept this charge rather than running from it (Jonah 1:2-3).

A Christian is sent by Christ. A commission is an authorization to carry out a task. Jesus authorizes soul winning, as can be seen from Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, and Luke 24:46-49. So, as with every matter, a Christian is to do what Jesus says in evangelizing.

Jesus commands that Christians "preach" (Mark 16:15). The lost are to be taught (I Corinthians 2:13; Acts 5:21). Otherwise, they will never know what to do to be saved (Romans 10:14). Thus, the Bible stresses the indispensable commodity called preaching (Romans 10:10-17). Even if the world (and some in the church) have grown tired of it, it is still God's means to save (I Corinthians 1:18). If the lost never learn what to do to be saved, they will have no hope for all eternity (II Thessalonians 1:8-9). Jesus sends Christians to the rescue (cf. Luke 10:3). As He said, "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (John 6:45).

Jesus commands Christians to "make disciples" (Matthew 28:19). The Lord is not interested in numbers. He teaches that few find eternal life (Matthew 7:13-14). But, the Lord loves souls. God wants none to perish (II Peter 3:9). And He wants more workers in His vineyard to bring even more

to Christ (Matthew 9:38). The Christian's mission is to win as many as possible!

Christians are sent by Christ into this world. Jesus told His disciples, "Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves" (Luke 10:3). The world has changed little since his giving that Limited Commission. As Christians go into the world through the Great Commission, they will be seeking to reach bitter, wicked, and callused hearts. The scriptures say, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Timothy 3:12). A person can stay pretty unscathed from the world's attacks if he just keeps his Christianity and the gospel message to himself. But, despite whatever small sacrifices one makes in soul winning, the rewards are boundless. In the inspired wisdom literature, one reads, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise" (Proverbs 11:30)." James further teaches, "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20). Oh, to walk heaven's street one day and see up there men and women who otherwise would not have been there but for the power and efforts of evangelism. If not for soul winning, Peter would never have been won to Christ (John 1:40-41). If Peter had not been won, he would not have been present to preach to the over 3,000 honest-hearted people who obeyed the gospel (Acts 2:14-41). If the 3,000 had not

responded, then the church growth and ultimate expansion of the gospel would have been severely hampered (cf. Acts 6:7). Truly, God's providence would have worked mightily through other men, if not through the Barjona brothers. Yet, the influence of one soul winner and the impact he was able to have for God's glory is impressive. Thus, Paul exhorts a young preacher, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (II Timothy 2:2). The goal of winning souls to Christ works toward the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer for unity.

"In times of fear and war, and whether near or far
Still unity must be our cry
For eternity lurks, may there be none that shirks
The plea for which Jesus did die."

The climax of John 17 is the most familiar verses of the chapter. Jesus prayed, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (20-21). Unity is **costly**, and Jesus knew He was the price (20). Unity implies **comprehension**, and Jesus knew that men must learn of Him (20). Unity dictates **conditions**, and Jesus knew that men must have obedient faith in Him (20). Unity implies **comforts**, and Jesus foresaw the assurance of salvation through Him (21). Unity requires **commission**, and Jesus knew disciples would have to be sent (21). Jesus is, then,

first, last, and always the center of any discussion about true unity. Without conforming to His will (Romans 8:29) and obeying from the heart His form of doctrine (Romans 6:17-18), unity cannot be achieved. But, may all remember that Jesus prayed for it, died for it, and longs for it even right now.

"Men's fickle trends fall but towering over it all
Is the prayer of a Lord before His dying,
One as He and God are, there's our beacon and star
Purest unity all error denying."

Chapter 17

Psalm 133

James Woodall

Brother Woodall was born in Thomaston, Georgia, in 1972. He is married to the former Kristy Gillaspie. They have one son, Lee. James graduated at the top of his class at Faulkner University in 1994 and has worked with the Lithia Springs church of Christ in Atlanta, Georgia since that time. James is a co-editor of *Glad Tidings*, a monthly periodical.

Oneness. Harmony. Agreement. Each of these words is among the various definitions of "unity". Every child of God desires to see unity in the church today; division and strife are the unpleasant and bitter results when disharmony reigns among brethren. We all know that God's desire is for unity in the church. As Jesus prayed in John 17, He centered His prayer around His followers, desiring that "they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us" (John 17:20-21). God's plan for the church was for a united body of believers (Isaiah 2:2 - "all nations"), and as Christ built the church (Matthew 16:17-19), we know that His intent and prayer was for our unity.

Throughout the New Testament we find encouragement, commands, and pleadings for unity among the church. Consider the simple phrase used by Paul in Romans 12:16, "Be of the

same mind one toward another." The Holy Spirit, by the pen of that same apostle Paul, brings us a plea for unity with the expression, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you" (I Corinthians 1:10). In another epistle, Paul gives us the formula for attaining heavenly unity. We must "walk by the same rule..." (Philippians 3:16). Therefore, we see that the Bible is the only platform for true, godly unity among Christians - from the first century through (if the Lord permits) the twenty-first century! Obviously, God's will for Christians of all ages can be summed up in the words of Peter. "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous..." (I Peter 3:8).

Psalm 133

In Psalm 133, we find a great passage of the Bible that tells us about true unity and fellowship among brethren. This short Psalm (three verses) brings us pictures of true unity.

Psalm 133:1 "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

Godly unity is described as both "good" and "pleasant" in this verse. These are words that we might use to describe a walk in the park. Just imagine a springtime stroll through a forested area. The trees are just beginning to bud with leaves of the brightest green. Flowers are blooming all

around as we wind our way through all the beauties of creation. It is a good and pleasant experience. The peaceful, serene sights and sounds calm us, bringing us joy and peace. That is the true beauty of unity.

The importance of unity may be illustrated by a jigsaw puzzle. When we first begin the puzzle, we can see by the picture on the box that the finished product will be beautiful, but with all the pieces scattered about, we have simply a promise; there is nothing good and pleasant about the puzzle at this point. Even halfway through, or when we lack just a few pieces, the full beauty of the puzzle is not yet realized. Only when the last piece of the puzzle is put in its place do we come to see the fulfilled promise. At that point, we see that the puzzle is "good" and "pleasant." Every piece of the puzzle is required for the beauty of unity to be seen. Likewise, the beauty of unity can be seen among brethren only when we all are in our place, working together. Unity truly is both "good" and "pleasant."

Psalm 133:2 "It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments;"

This second picture of the psalmist brings us a specific event from the history of Israel. Unity among brethren is compared to that precious and sweet ointment used to anoint Aaron as Israel's

first high priest. Today, that picture may lose some of its meaning with us, since we are the beneficiaries of a better covenant and a better high priest. Indeed, we have a "great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God" (Hebrews 4:14). By His own blood, Jesus offers atonement for us even today.

For the Israelites, though, having a human high priest was a step forward. Now, there was one who would go into the very presence of God, as it were, as he entered into the most holy place of the tabernacle on the Day of Atonement. There, he would offer the proper sacrifice on behalf of the people that their sins might be "rolled forward" until the following year. Just imagine the praise and rejoicing of the people when Aaron was anointed to be that first high priest.

The picture of Psalm 133:2 goes deeper than the actual anointing of Aaron as high priest. This verse refers specifically to the oil used as he was anointed. In Exodus 30:23-25 we see the instructions given as to the making of that oil. "Take thou also unto thee principal spices, of pure myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet cinnamon half so much, even two hundred and fifty shekels, and of sweet calamus two hundred and fifty shekels, And of cassia five hundred shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, and of oil olive an hin: And thou shalt make it an oil of holy ointment, an ointment compound after the art of the apothecary: it shall be an holy anointing oil."

This was the substance that ran down Aaron's beard, "that went down to the skirts of his garments". The beauty of unity is compared specifically to this oil. Notice the intrinsic monetary value of such a compound. Each component had its own worth in the market. Far beyond that, this ointment would have been sweet smelling, almost perfume like in its odor. And most importantly, this was a holy anointing oil. It is not called holy simply because of its basic composition but because God commanded its making, and He declared it to be a holy oil. Therefore, the goodness and pleasantness of unity is expanded to include a time of emotional and religious significance to Israel and an ointment that is holy because it is made after the commission of the almighty God.

Psalm 133:3 "As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore."

This third verse of Psalm 133 further augments our understanding of the beauty of unity by its comparison of the harmony among brethren to the dew of Mt. Hermon. Mt. Hermon "was the great landmark of the Israelites. It was associated with their northern border almost as intimately as the

sea was with the western."²³ Additionally, the height of this mountain added to its distinctiveness. Thus, by both its geographical position and its prominent altitude, Mt. Hermon stood as the crown of Israel.

We would do well to note that:

the literal rendering of this passage would be, 'like the dew of Hermon which descends on the mountains of Zion.' According to our version two things are referred to: the dew of Hermon, and the dew on the mountains of Zion. But this is not in the original. There no dew is referred to but that which belongs to Hermon.²⁴

The psalmist here makes reference to the cooling and life sustaining dew that covers this great mountain of Israel, and in turn compares that dew to the dew that covers the mountains of Zion. This verse helps us to see that unity provides plentiful pleasures among brethren. Just as the dew that settles to the earth covers all things in refreshing, sparkling newness, so the unity of brethren provides an encompassing peace.

In the words of Psalm 133, we are brought to truly see how "good and how pleasant" unity is among

²³ Smith, William. *A Dictionary of the Bible*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986). p. 242.

²⁴ Barnes, Albert. *Notes on the Old Testament*, Vol. 4, Psalms. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996). p. 271.

brethren. It is that same unity to which our minds turn today as we consider our own brothers and sisters in Christ. This biblical unity can be ours today if we are all "of the same mind" (Romans 12:16). That means first, that we must have the same purpose, goals, and aims in life (Matthew 6:33; Colossians 3:12). Secondly, we must develop the same love one for another (John 13:34-35; Hebrews 13:1). Number three, we must have the same doctrine (II Timothy 3:16-17; II Peter 1:3; II John 9-11). Outside of these things, it is impossible to have true, biblical unity. Groups may organize and band together under the banner of "unification," but without the same goals, love, and doctrine, their so-called unity is but an exercise in futility. However, when brethren truly are likeminded, godly unity is the natural result, and at that point we will discover how "good" and how "pleasant" unity can be.

The Beauty of Unity

In the church of Christ today, we can find the beauty of unity among our brethren who encourage one another. We live in a day in which derision and ridicule are completely unacceptable -- unless, of course, one wants to "run down" those who claim Bible authority for their faith and practice. In that case, any amount of mockery is overlooked. We live in a time in which brethren who stand for the truth must weather trials on all sides; and we are fortunate when others stand with us and encourage us. The words of Hebrews 10:24 remind us of this great privilege and blessing: "And let us

consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." Every Christian has a reserve of strength in the person of his brothers and sisters in Christ. As we see Christians who lean on one another, who give a "helping hand" to their brethren, and who constantly exhort other Christians (consider the example of Barnabas - Acts 4:36-37; 9:26-30), we find a path brightened by the true beauty of unity. Brother Coffman, in his commentary on Hebrews, made the following observation in connection with the words of Hebrews 10:24.

Mutual love among the brethren and mutual participation in the common joys and sorrows of the entire membership, and the mutual encouragement in every good work are basic principles of the kingdom of heaven.²⁵

Therefore, we observe the beauty of unity in the encouragement offered by brethren to one another.

Secondly, the restoration of a brother or sister in Christ brings out the beauty of unity in the church today. Despite the claims of many among the denominations, the scriptures plainly teach that a child of God can fall away from the truth, having "escaped the pollutions of the world" only to become "again entangled therein" as they "turn from the holy commandment delivered unto

²⁵ Coffman, James Burton. *Commentary on Hebrews*, (Abilene: ACU Press, 1984), p. 215.

them" (II Peter 2:20,22). Thankfully, it is not necessary that this is the end of that person's walk with Christ. Out of the God planned unity of the church, we have been given a divine command to seek out and restore those who have fallen away. Galatians 6:1 tells us who is to do the seeking and restoring - spiritual Christians. God wants those who are faithful to find the unfaithful and bring them back home! As we see this in action today, the beauty and blessedness of biblical unity will come to mind, as we see the body of Christ acting in harmony to bring an erring brother or sister back to the truth. Indeed, those who participate in the restoration of a lost soul "shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:19,20). Restoration truly brings us the beauty of unity!

Likewise, we find the beauty of unity in the act of visitation. When we see someone whose concern for a Christian brother or sister extends beyond a mere thought to a sacrifice of time and effort to make a visit, the description of unity from Psalm 133 may come to mind. It is "good" and "pleasant"! In Matthew 25:35-36, we are told in the parable of the sheep and the goats that visitation is a part of God's desire for His people. Those "sheep" who will be told to "inherit the kingdom prepared for you" (Matthew 25:34) are those who, among other things, visited the sick and those in prison. Christians are also encouraged to visit the "fatherless and widows" as we practice "pure and undefiled religion" (James 1:27). When a child of

God is sick, faces an illness or death in the family, appears discouraged, or misses an assembly of the saints, they should receive a visit from a concerned brother or sister! When we see such in action, we are reminded of the beauty of godly unity.

A fourth observation is that fellowship among brethren shows the beauty of unity. In worship and Bible class, in our singing and prayers, Christians enjoy a deep and abiding fellowship with one another. Outside of the assembly, that fellowship should not be forgotten. One Christian can serve as an "anchor" for another as we face the rigors and temptations of the world. As we meet together for general discussion, to share a meal, or to play a game, we learn so much more about one another than a simple name and occupation. Christians fellowship one another in affirmation of the common bond we share in Christ, and the common love that exists among us. Fellowship will help us to form new friendships and to strengthen old friendships. It will encourage us by reminding us that there are others who share the same goals and aims in life, who want the same things for their families and others whose lives are centered around God and His word! From the very start of the church, there was fellowship among Christians (Acts 2:42). Years later, we see that fellowship was still important to the church of Christ as Paul wrote to his brethren in Philippi: "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for

your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now" (Philippians 1:3-5).

It is in just that sort of close, loving fellowship that we can find the beauty of unity today!

Despite the beauty of unity, no matter "how good and how pleasant" that unity may be, we know that the world today can point to a great deal of disagreement among those who profess Christianity. One particular voice from the past, in observing the "modern" system of denominationalism, wrote:

Sectarianism or denominationalism is the great blot upon modern Christianity; and it is doing more to encourage skepticism and infidelity than all other causes combined.²⁶

Today, with literally thousands of "religious groups" calling themselves by the name "Christian," the situation has obviously deteriorated. There can be no unity as long as men and women continue to seek the philosophies of men, to follow the creeds of men, and are members of "churches" begun by men. Let us always remember that God desires us to obey His will (Matthew 7:21-23) rather than following the

²⁶ Creel, James C. "Plea to Restore the Apostolic Church." *New Testament Christianity*. ed. Z.T. Sweeney. (Columbus, Indiana: New Testament Christianity Book Fund, Inc., 1930). p. 47.

leanings of our own feelings (Proverbs 16:25) or the doctrines of men (Matthew 15:8-9).

In that simple, faithful obedience to God's inspired word, we find the cure for the problem of denominationalism: to be a part of Christ's united body we must reject all sectarian creeds and teachings, and heartily embrace the word of God as our only rule of faith and practice. Then, we will truly be "Christians only." Then, we can truly experience the words of inspiration, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

Chapter 18

Maintaining Unity In The Leadership

Perry Cotham

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I am grateful for the privilege of being a part of this good lectureship which concerns unity in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. The greatest institution in the world is the church that Jesus built, and the greatest work in the world is preaching the glorious gospel of Christ. A sound lectureship can be a great source of strength to the church in any area.

Our plea is for simple New Testament Christianity, a plea for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Thus the subject of unity is of great importance. Christ prayed that all who believe in Him would be united (John 17:20-21). Peter exhorted Christians to be "of one mind" and "seek peace, and ensue [pursue, ASV] it" (I Peter 3:8, 11). But the only unity of which the Lord approves is unity based upon truth, which is the word of God (John 17:17). In all phases of the church and in Christian living this

unity is possible (Acts 4:32), as well as "good" and "pleasant" (Psalm 133:1). Jesus said that His disciples would be known by their love for one another (John 13:34-35). Christians are to "walk in love" (Ephesians 5:2). The church of Christ is the spiritual body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23). Those in the Lord's church are to strive to maintain unity and promote peace (Romans 14:19; Philippians 2:3-4). This is essential for the church to do a good work and to have the proper respect of the world. Thus Christians are to endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

Unity in Leadership

Our particular study in this lesson is *maintaining unity in the leadership*. Sometimes the word church is used in a local sense; that is, the Christians in that particular place who assemble and worship as a congregation. For example: the church at Corinth (I Corinthians 1:1-2), or at Philippi (Philippians 1:1-2), or the seven churches of Asia Minor (Revelation 2 and 3). These local churches, and there were many of them, were called "the churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16). However, they were all a part of the one universal church, "the called-out" ones, the saved (Acts 2:47; Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 5:23, 25; I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27).

In each local church, when fully organized, there were "bishops and deacons", as in the congregation at Philippi (Philippians 1:1). The qualifications for these men are set forth by inspiration in I Timothy

3 and in Titus 1. Of course, Christ is the head of the church. He has "all authority" (Matthew 28:18, ASV). Each congregation is a local independent unit of Christians and directly related to Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23). The church of Christ has a perfect organization, although men have sought to change it.

Terms Used

There are three different terms used in the New Testament for the leaders of the church; each term suggests some characteristic of the men and their work.

1. **Elder.** This word primarily means an older man, one of age, wisdom and spiritual maturity. The group of elders of a congregation is called the presbytery (I Timothy 4:14).

2. **Bishop.** This word means an overseer. Paul called for the "elders" of the church at Ephesus to meet him at Miletus (Acts 20:17), then later he spoke of them as **overseers** (vs 28), or **bishops** (ASV). Paul told the young evangelist Titus to ordain "elders in every city" (Titus 1:5), yet each one is called a "bishop" when he gave the qualifications (vs. 7). (The footnote in the American Standard Version is "overseer".) This suggests a man who oversees and directs the work of the church; he is a superintendent.

3. **Pastor.** Paul said that the Lord gave some in the church to be pastors (Ephesians 4:11). The word

means the same as a "shepherd", one whose duties are to watch for enemies trying to attack and destroy the sheep, to defend the sheep, and to lead, feed and guide the sheep. The pastors of the church, as **shepherds**, care for the souls of the congregation, the sheep of God's pasture, in the same way that shepherds care for their flocks. Peter wrote concerning these shepherds:

"The **elders** which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder ... feed [**tend**, ASV; **shepherd**, NASB] 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. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (I Peter 5:1-4).

The New Testament never speaks of "the pastor of the church" as the expression is often used today in the religious world. This concept of leadership in a church is contrary to the scriptures. The preacher is an evangelist (II Timothy 4:5), or a minister of the gospel (I Timothy 4:6, 16), whose duty is to faithfully preach the word, God's power to save the lost (Romans 1:16). Moreover, no elder is "THE pastor" of the church, although he may labor "in the word and doctrine" (I Timothy 5:17), and a preacher may serve as one of the elders of the church if selected. But the preacher is not "the pastor" of the church.

Scripture teaches that in each congregation there was a plurality of elders. On Paul's return on his first missionary journey, he "ordained" ["appointed", ASV] them elders [plural] in every church [singular]" (Acts 14:23). Each local church was a congregation of disciples under Christ, and each one of them then had elders.

Thus, the church must be governed by two or more qualified men who act as shepherds of the flock. These men have the right to decide expedient ways to carry out the responsibilities assigned to them by the Lord. But they are not to act as dictators or "lords". To take the "oversight" certainly implies that some decisions are to be made that affect the congregation. So the elders meet together at times and prayerfully consider matters and make decisions for the good of the church. They may hire the services of others to help them do this work, depending on the size and needs of the flock. Elders are the under shepherds to Christ, for after all, it is Christ's church, not their's (Acts 20:28 ASV; Ephesians 5:25).

So, the Bible uses the words **elders**, **bishops** and **pastors** interchangeably. They all refer to the same men. The leadership of a congregation in any locality, when scripturally organized, consists of older men as elders (presbyters) whose responsibility it is to be overseers (bishops) of the affairs of the congregation in the same way that shepherds (pastors) tend their flocks (cf. Psalm 23;

Ezekiel 34:2-3; Jeremiah 23:1-4). These terms tell us **who** they are, **what** they do and **how** they do it.

A Great Work

There are no specific instructions in the holy scriptures as to how elders are to conduct the affairs of the church. Elders do not make laws for Christ. The Lord has already done that. But elders see that Christ's laws are carried out. This involves circumstances and human judgment. The congregation is to obey the elders in their decision, according to the teaching of the Scriptures:

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17).

"And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves" (I Thessalonians 5:12-13).

But, it is **possible** that elders might make a decision that would violate the teaching of the Lord. If so, in that case, the Lord must always be obeyed, and it would not be wrong to go against the decision of the elders. For, "we must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). The curse of the Lord falls upon any one who would dare to change, add to or take from the word of God (Galatians 1:6-9; Revelation

22:18-19; Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32). No authority has been delegated to any man, pope or council to abolish or alter any part of the Lord's divine will. The church has no deficiencies. What the Lord has done cannot be improved upon. The inspired record left by the apostles and prophets is the only source of authority in religious matters. We must, therefore, follow the teaching just as these men gave it. This is the only standard for church government.

The church of Christ has no earthly headquarters. Christ, being the only head of the church, lives in heaven (Philippians 3:20 ASV). Shepherds of the local congregation are only entrusted with the responsibilities of tending and overseeing the flock, being knowledgeable men of **exemplary** lives.

Deacons (Servants)

The Bible also mentions "deacons" of the local church (Philippians 1:1). These men were special servants of the church to assist in special duties as may be directed by the overseers. Their qualifications are given in I Timothy 3:8-13 (cf. Acts 6:1-5). They do not have the authority as elders.

Furthermore, each congregation selects her own elders and deacons, as directed by the teaching of the scriptures. The generic command to "look ye out among you" does not describe the specific details as to how this was to be done (Acts 6:3), but the church in Jerusalem did it in selecting seven men to "serve tables".

Moreover, no one should ever be placed in the leadership of the church as an elder, or a deacon, in order to encourage him to be faithful. Let them "first be proved" (I Timothy 3:10). Often there is a dearth of qualified men to serve in the local congregation as elders and deacons, but still it is unwise to put unqualified men in the leadership. As the church grows, spiritually and numerically, there will probably be men who will become qualified to be elders, and they should be selected and appointed as such. Then later, there may be those men in the church who can serve faithfully as deacons, and they should be appointed.

Men's Business Meeting

According to Acts 14:23, congregations can exist and worship and serve the Lord without elders, or until such men can be appointed. If a congregation does not have men qualified to serve as elders, then the men of the church can meet together at times and discuss affairs of the church and make decisions. But at all times there should be unity among brethren. Usually the voice of the majority in such meetings is the decision of the meeting. But never should "the men's regular business meeting" become a meeting of disunity and strife (cf. Genesis 13:8).

Faithful Men Needed

Every church needs a group of strong, biblically qualified elders. If the leaders of the church are not faithful to God in life and in teaching (doctrine),

then how can they encourage, by their own example, the members to be faithful? It seems at times that the men who serve the congregation as elders do not grasp the seriousness of their charge. These men must give an account at the day of judgment of their stewardship as shepherds of God's people (Hebrews 13:17). Sometimes elders will allow division to arise among them in their decisions for the church, and this then leads to division in the church. So at all times the elders should strive to maintain unity among themselves and to labor for unity in the congregation.

Elders are to be watchmen against false teachers and errors creeping in and destroying souls that are easily misled (Acts 20:28-31). Paul said that the bishop is to hold "fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince [convict, ASV] the gainsayers" (Titus 1:9).

The wide spread digression that came to the church one hundred years ago would not have occurred if the leaders of the churches had remained true to the Bible and united in carrying out their responsibilities according to God's word. The same is true today. It has often been said that those who will not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. Will there be another apostasy? (II Thessalonians 2:3-12). The elders' main concern today should not be that the local preacher "fill the building" and "fill the plates", having a good amount of "fun, foolishness, and frivolity". One of the great needs

today is for qualified men (not novices) to serve the churches of the Lord's people in these troubling times and to see that good sound gospel teaching is done from the pulpit and in the classrooms. This is the way for the church to grow as God would have it to grow (cf. I Peter 2:2; II Peter 3:18; Acts 14:1, 7; 16:5, 14). It does not come by aping the denominations (cf. I Samuel 8:19-20).

It is possible to have a self-willed man in the leadership in a congregation, one who wants to have his way all the time or else. He is a modern day Diotrephes. The apostle John wrote of this brother in the first century as one "who loveth to have the preeminence" (III John 9-10). A man of this type often dominates the meeting of the elders and gets decisions made according to **his** will, and then says, "The elders decided this..." He needs to know that **his** decisions always are not necessarily the decisions of the eldership and that he is only one of the elders. A "one man rule" in the church is not scriptural, regardless of the number of men who may be considered as elders of the church. This attitude will sooner or later cause trouble in the congregation. He needs to change his attitude or else resign as an elder. All the elders have equal authority in a church.

However, the lesson is still needed; members are to respect the authority of the elders (plural). Especially is this true for many of the young people today. Rebellion against God's constituted

authority has always been wrong (cf. Numbers 16 and 17; Jude 6, 8, 11).

The Question of Fellowship

Sometimes there arises a question among the elders regarding God's teaching on fellowship. For example: one or more of the number might desire to extend fellowship to all the denominations, but that would be aiding false teaching. The aged apostle John wrote: "Whosoever transgresseth [goeth onward, ASV], and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (II John 9-11).

John, in his first epistle, also said concerning fellowships: "... that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:3, 6-7).

When one is in fellowship with God, he can also be in fellowship with all others who are in fellowship with God. But for one to claim to be in fellowship with God does not prove it true. Regardless of how

sincere and pious one might seem to be, he is not a child of God, a Christian, unless he has been baptized into Christ as a penitent believer for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:26-27). One may say he loves the Lord, but true love for Christ is proved by one's keeping His commandments. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" (I John 5:3). "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected" (I John 2:4-5). Jesus declared: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth If a man love me, he will keep my words" (John 14:21, 23). Christ once asked, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).

We desire to extend fellowship to all who are in fellowship with God, but we cannot accept those whom God does not accept. The Christian is in fellowship with God and with other faithful Christians who are in fellowship with God, but he is not in fellowship with those who are not in fellowship with God. The Lord alone has the right to determine what is the correct plan of salvation, the true items of public worship and the precepts of morality. He alone can reward the true blessings for observance of His laws and the just punishments for their violation. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35; cf. Romans 2:9-11; Deuteronomy 11:27-28). No one is a child of God who has not been born again (John 3:3-5). But,

a child of God can depart from the faith and teach religious error and thus break fellowship with God and with His faithful brethren (I Timothy 1:19-20; 4:1-2; II Timothy 1:13; 2:2, 16-18; 3:1-5; 4:10). Many have learned the hard way that God means what He says and that His rule of faithfulness includes punishment for disobedience of His laws. Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron and priests of God, "offered strange fire before the Lord, **which he commanded them not**. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord" (Leviticus 10:1-2). The things written aforetime "were written for our learning" (Romans 15:4; cf. Hebrews 2:1-4). People do not break God's laws; they break themselves on God's laws, just as people do in violating God's laws in the natural realm. God is faithful; He cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18; I Corinthians 1:9). He does not fellowship sin. Neither should we. Paul wrote to Christians concerning fellowship: "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Ephesians 5:11; cf. II Corinthians 6:14-18).

The prophet Jehu in the long ago asked Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, who had allied himself with the evil and idolatrous Ahab, king of Israel: "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord" (II Chronicles 19:2). What caused Jehoshaphat to consort with Ahab in battle? Was it because the two kings had now become related because of marriage? Probably so, but

regardless of the reason, the Lord was displeased with Jehoshaphat that he loved those who hated God and was attempting to help the wicked. These Old Testament examples should teach us something. As David declared: "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts" (Psalm 119:63).

Nothing could be any clearer in the Bible than that those who teach false doctrines and worship incorrectly are doing wrong and should not be fellowshiped by faithful Christians. The so-called "ecumenical spirit", or "unity-in-diversity" movement, is contrary to the teaching of the Bible. "Holy alliances" with denominations and human sects are strictly forbidden. Those in man made churches, practicing religious errors, are not in fellowship with God and with the faithful in the Lord's church. On these principles the elders of the church must be united. So, God's fellowship includes not only those who have obeyed the gospel, but all who are consistently walking in the light. Furthermore, all those who keep God's commandments and remain "faithful unto death" will have an eternal fellowship with God in heaven (Hebrews 5:9; Revelation 2:10; 22:14; Ecclesiastes 12:13).

There are other matters in which the leadership of the church must maintain unity, but time does not permit a discussion of them. These would include being united in helping to spread the gospel to all parts of the world and knowing the difference

between matters of faith and matters of opinion (expediency). Godly elders must always stay united against departures from the faith (I Timothy 4:1), for there have always been extremes of radicalism on the right and liberalism on the left. Each of these can be a problem in maintaining unity in a congregation. But the church of our Lord and the word of God are eternal; they shall stand (Daniel 2:44; Hebrews 12:28; Matthew 24:35; I Peter 1:23-25). One today can obey the Lord, as taught in the New Testament, and become a Christian and not join any human sect, live the Christian life, and go to heaven.

Conclusion

These are some Biblical principles which will help maintain unity in the leadership of the church. May God help us to do it (Hosea 4:6).

The marks of identity, or characteristics of the church, have been changed by unholy hands since it was established nearly two thousand years ago. We must go **back to the beginning**. The stream of religious teaching has been polluted by human speculations. We must go up and drink at the fountainhead. Going back to the first century of the church of Christ, what do we find? There were "bishops and deacons" (Philippians 1:1) and a plea to keep "the unity of the Spirit" (Ephesians 4:3). There were no popes or papal decrees. There were no metropolitan archbishops. There were no ecumenical councils making decrees for the church. We do not read of "the Right-Reverend John

Mark", or of "Cardinal Luke", nor of "Archbishop Titus". These titles and the things they signify arose far this side of the church of the first century. There were no human creeds (Acts 2:42; II Timothy 3:16-17; I Peter 4:11). To all churches of so-called "Christendom", we plead for them to drop their human doctrines and systems and go back to the days of inspiration and infallible teaching and just be the same true church of our Lord in name, doctrine, worship and organization. Here is where the true church of Christ stands today; we cannot do otherwise, so help us God! We must "stand fast in the faith" (I Corinthians 16:13).

When this earthly life is over, if we have been faithful in living the Christian life, all the trials and tribulations we endured here will fade into nothingness for the glory of heaven (II Corinthians 4:17; 5:1). In the words of that beautiful hymn: "*Heaven will surely be worth it all.*" In his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders, Paul said: "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

Chapter 19
Unity In The Home:
Parent's Role

Glenn Colley

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What a delight it is to be included in the list of speakers for this great lectureship. It is both an honor and a pleasure.

The first consideration for unity in any society is common agreement on some principle. Civic clubs are united on community care. Hospital staffs are united in caring for patients. The Republican and Democratic parties are united on their party platforms. Without that common agreement there can be no unity. That is why Paul, in Ephesians 4:1-5, commanded the Ephesians to work at keeping the unity and then said, "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." He knew that unity could only occur if principles were firmly set in place on which they could unite.

The unity in the home also requires such common ground. But the home is a little different. In the home the parents decide what those principles of unity will be.

For this lesson we will consider the beloved parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-24. The text begins, "A certain man had two sons..." Let us draw truth today from that man, the father of the prodigal son.

While the major thrust of this parable is not surrounding the actions of the father, without his role the point could not have been made. This man had seen the joy of childbirth and late night feedings. He knew about changing diapers. He experienced the endless questions of his sons when they were four and five. He probably helped them catch their first fish, doctored skinned knees, and got them a dog. It is interesting that no mother is mentioned in the parable.

We know something else about this family. The man has two sons, and therefore two distinctive personalities. Children are different, aren't they? Think through the Bible families, and the siblings who were not alike. Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Isaac and Ishmael are all good examples. Jesus observed this in Matthew 21:28-30 when He said, "But what think ye? *A certain* man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will

not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not." Many passages demonstrate this odd reality.

America is in a daddy crisis today. Today, nine out of ten single parent homes are homes without a father. In 1994, 16.3 million American children were living with just a mother; and almost half of those had not seen their fathers in at least a year. More than half of kids born in the 1970s and 1980s have spent their time living with just their mothers. So often the problem in homes is not primarily the prodigal sons, but the prodigal fathers. So many youth today who leave home to live in sin will not be changing their spiritual surroundings too much because their parents live in sin.

Studies show that the absence of the father in a home expresses itself in male children in two very different ways. It is linked to increased aggressiveness on the one hand, and a greater manifestation of effeminacy on the other. A 1987 study of violent rapists found that 60% of them come from single parent homes. A Michigan State University study of adolescents who committed homicides found that 75% of them were from broken homes. Girls without fathers fare no better. They become sexually active sooner and are more likely to have out-of-wedlock children.

Fathers must be there to tame adolescent boys, to give a young son a sense of what it means to be a man, and to explain why honor and loyalty and fidelity are important. For daughters, a father is a source of love and comfort that can help her avoid surrendering her virtue in a fruitless search for love through premarital sex.

The single man in our society is often portrayed as having the best of all worlds. He has free access to numerous women, and he is unburdened by responsibility, debts, and demands on his time. A host of lurid magazines present this enticing image of life without commitment. And yet the Bible gives us a godly and healthy contrast in showing us how to be good fathers. Consider these impressive passages: "Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh *but* in vain" (Psalm 127:1). "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). "And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters" (Genesis 5:22).

Today we will consider the good qualities of the prodigal son's father. These are the principles of right on which his family was unified. Hopefully

this study will aid us in having better unified families.

The first principle on which this father based the unity of his family was in his keeping the locks on the doors. This idea is simply to love God and hate the devil in your home. This father had made an understanding about sin and godliness with reference to his house. If the prodigal son wanted to live in deliberate sin, he had to leave that house. "Sin will not live here. Only the Lord and His ways live here." There are three major positions among fathers today on this subject. One is the philosophy which says, "Kids will be kids! I'll ignore their wild oats." Another is, "I'd rather them do this stuff (drinking beverage alcohol, premarital sex, pornography use, etc.) here at home than off somewhere. At least I know they are safe here at home." The third is the one chosen by the father of the prodigal son. Perhaps it was never even verbalized, and yet the sons knew. This is not a house in which sin can comfortably live! This house belongs to the Lord and is committed to right living. This father locked sin out of the house.

Remember that in the Old Testament in preparing for the Passover feast, the Israelites had to get all the leaven out of their houses. The Bible says, "Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel" (Exodus 12:15). Exodus 13:7 says,

"Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days; and there shall no leavened bread be seen with thee, neither shall there be leaven seen with thee in all thy quarters." God did this and then later showed that leaven is a perfect example of sin. A little leaven is allowed to grow into much. Note how leaven is used this way in Matthew 16:6: "Then Jesus said unto them, 'Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.'" Now look to I Corinthians 5:6-7: "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us." This next Sunday, when you eat the Lord's Supper, remember this, and remember that as we eat the unleavened bread we sweep our hearts of the sin that dwells there. But also consider that it is cheap hypocrisy when we sweep our symbolic houses of sin and our literal houses continue to condone sin.

The second principle on which this father based the unity of his family was in his treatment of others. Here is a man who kept the table furnished. He practiced justice and kindness to others. Observe how the prodigal son thinks of his father: "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare..." Some masters abused their servants, but not this man. Remember James 5:1-5. "Go to now, *ye* rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon *you*. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your

gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter."

Our children see how we treat others. May they see us treat the elderly with helpfulness and respect (James 1:27). May they see us treat strangers with kindness (Galatians 6:10). May they see us treat other women with respect (Matthew 5:28). May they see us treat our enemies with prayer (Matthew 5:44). May they see us treat their mother with love (Ephesians 5:28).

The third principle on which this father based the unity of his family was in his compassion. Here is a father who will "keep the light on for you". His principles of right and wrong were mingled with compassion. This prodigal son knew he could come home, but he also knew he had made a serious mistake in his life. What made him think it was serious? The principles of right and wrong his father had taught him growing up. These principles were transferred to the son without the boy even realizing it had happened. "I will say to my father, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy.'" He

respected his father's principles. Where did he learn the serious nature and consequences of sin?

It is impressive that after the son saw the father running and felt his father's warm embrace of compassion, he still started his speech. "I have sinned..." Even though he felt the acceptance of his father, he never thought for a minute that the principles of right and wrong had been dissolved or altered. This was his father's house, and it belonged to God.

Love in the Lord with our children is not in pretending that things are right when they are not. It must have been hard for the father to not pursue the son in the far away country. After all, he had servants who would have fetched the boy back. But, it would not have worked. You could bring the boy out of the country, but you would not have the country out of the boy.

It is the compassion of the parable that makes it the beloved of all ages. The mistake of the elder brother was that he could only see principle, never compassion. We weep as we see the emotion, and the confession. There is penitence and then forgiveness. We serve a God who is like that. His principles and justice must be satisfied, yet those principles are mingled with His sweet compassion. Acts 3:19 says, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." In Acts 17:30, we read, "And

the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent."

Finally, this father kept his family unified by keeping his house in order. He rejoiced over right things. People in our generation often rejoice over wrong things. Paul wrote in the famous love chapter, "Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth" (I Corinthians 13:6). Solomon said there was "a time to weep and a time to laugh" (Ecclesiastes 3:4).

Sometimes Christian parents today make the mistake of rejoicing greatly over temporal things with their children while rejoicing much less over spiritual accomplishments. Which would please you more, your son making a touchdown Friday night, or that son leading the singing in worship on Sunday night?

This father called his friends in to celebrate not only his son's physical return, but his spiritual return as well. Isn't that implied in the words, "This my son was dead, and is alive again, he was lost and is found."? Parents, put great emphasis on spiritual accomplishments. Make this big - bigger than temporal accomplishments.

Father remember, you cannot lead where you will not go. Be a devoted Christian, and guide your house in the unity of the Lord.

Chapter 20

Unity In The Home: Children's Role

Michael Brandt

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"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psalm 133:1). The Sweet Singer of Israel beckons us to consider the excellence and beauty which attends God-approved unity. Descriptively illustrated in the remaining verses of this brief Psalm, we see that people living together in holy harmony brings heaven's delight and man's betterment.

This divine appraisal of unity prevailing among brethren comes as no surprise to those acquainted with God and His revealed will for man. Concerning the divine Three comprising the Godhead, we learn, "The Lord our God is one Lord" (Deuteronomy 6:4). Jesus frequently affirmed and defined the harmony and oneness that characterize the Father, the Holy Spirit, and Himself (John 5:17-20; 10:30; 16:13-15). In Deity, we observe perfect

oneness and the epitome of harmonious unity! From God's revelation we further learn that He planned and prescribed for unity also to exist among His crowned creation, man. A unity that is patterned after that ideal oneness originated in God's own nature. Heaven's design and desire for this unity is especially emphasized in God's plan for the church (cf. Ephesians 1:7-10). As the world's Savior faced Calvary, His earnest prayer to the Father included a petition for such unity to always attend His disciples who would comprise the called out (John 17:20-22). Viewing the church should provide one a glimpse of that supreme and sublime oneness uniting the Godhead Three.

The Scriptures also disclose the divine intent for unity to prevail within the home, another God ordained institution. In the pristine surroundings of Eden's paradise, God, officiating at the first marriage, pronounced, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). The oneness which is to bind earthly husbands and wives together is typical of the incomprehensibly lofty unity existing between Christ and His bride, the church, as explained by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:29-32. A home, being founded upon this united couple, is then broadened to include the children born to them. These additional components of the home, however, should not disrupt the beautiful harmony that began in matrimony. Rather, these precious offspring should enhance the divinely

prescribed unity that is to grace the family. Like the church, the earthly home should reflect the majestic oneness of its Designer and Originator.

Although unity is a cherished state in the eyes of both God and man, it demands constant work to attain and maintain it. Its maintenance also requires the cooperative participation by all those involved. This is certainly the case pertaining to the unity in the home. A harmonious home is not an accident; it is the result of deliberate and diligent effort put forth by each family member. Because of their God-given responsibilities, fathers and mothers contribute the initial and greatest part in assuring that unity adorns the home. Additionally, however, we must recognize that the children also play a major role in producing a home characterized by the peace and harmony intended by God. It is to the children's essential role toward unity in the home that we direct our attention in this chapter.

Interestingly, the very presence of children in a family attests to that oneness of which man's Creator spoke relating to the home in the Garden. Husband and wife, exercising the sacred privilege of sexual intimacy appointed exclusively for the marriage bed (Hebrews 13:4), come together to bring into existence another human being. This marvelous making, brought into the world through the cooperative work of two, adds another dimension to the family unit. As these children gradually grow from infancy to adulthood, they

themselves will become inevitable contributors to the harmony of the home. Sons and daughters will either be *advantageous* contributors by doing their part to ensure unity, or they will be *adverse* contributors by disrupting the peaceful harmony prescribed for the home. How disheartening to witness in our generation so many homes seriously lacking and even completely void of that unity purposed by God. Sadder yet is the realization that it is often children, though bringing unspeakable joy to a home upon their arrival, who will eventually wreak inexpressible misery by destroying the unity which should bind a family together. Such a disturbing trend can be changed, but it will require the childrens' active participation in promoting the unity that God describes as "good and pleasant" (Psalm 133:1)!

Whether discussing unity as it relates to a nation, the church, or the home, there are some indispensable ingredients which must be constantly present for that desired unity to be realized. Let us examine several of these, noting particularly how children can promote these necessary and favorable elements contributing toward unity in the home.

Respect for Authority

In the Christian's plea for unity in Christ, the subject of authority and rendering proper respect to that established authority is quite often the beginning point in teaching another about this God-pleasing and God-prescribed unity. Passages like Matthew 28:18, Colossians 3:17 and II Timothy

3:16-17 are usually introduced early into a home Bible study to emphasize Jesus' rightful authority, and how that His authoritative will is revealed to us upon the pages of the New Testament. It is not uncommon to hear members of the church reason with those whom they are teaching, *"Unless we can agree upon a standard of authority and then reverently respect that authority, we will never attain religious unity."* The need for accepting a common authoritative standard to achieve unity is further emphasized as Christians refer to Amos 3:3, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Agreement and unity are inseparable companions; and this agreement begins with mutual respect for an authority. This writer applauds such an approach in teaching our neighbors about unity in Christ. It would seem also the logical place to begin a discussion regarding unity in the home.

Harmonious homes are those in which all family members, including children, have a genuine respect for authority. The home should be the initial training ground in which children are taught to revere the God of heaven, recognizing His sovereignty as our Creator and Redeemer (Acts 17:24). As the wise Solomon affirmed in Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge...". So the wise parent will strive to instill this reverential fear in their children at an early age. "Fear of the Lord" is one of the ABC's of learning; it is a basic building block. From this foundation, children must then be impressed with the need to respect God's order for the home as

clearly set forth in His authoritative word. Our sons and daughters need to learn that God intends for "Children, [to] obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1). They must further come to understand that heaven's arrangement (whether man concurs or not) is for the husband to be the head of the wife (Ephesians 5:22-23). This divine structure should be agreed and acted upon by husband and wife, who in turn ought to teach and reinforce it through loving, corrective discipline (Ephesians 6:4) to every child. It is imperative that this training entails emphasizing to our children that to disobey their parents is tantamount to disrespect for God, for it is His authority upon which parental obedience stands.

Children, upon learning of God's supreme authority and their parent's divinely appointed authority, must then render proper respect for that authority. This respect will manifest itself in young people's demeanor, speech, decisions, behavior and every facet of their daily lives as they grow toward adulthood. It will also help to ensure that peaceful unity remains a fixed feature in their home. Having designated reverential fear for God as the beginning of knowledge, Personified Wisdom would immediately admonish, "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother" (Proverbs 1:7-8). Continuing this exhortation, chapter three of Proverbs beautifully depicts the blessings enjoyed by those who heed Wisdom's counsel. "My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: For length

of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee" (Proverbs 3:1-2). Peace is promised those who follow the wise course of fearing God and respectfully obeying one's parents. Think of the harmony that will attend a home wherein all the children are uniformly guided by the authoritative word of a godly father and mother! Consider the peaceful place wherein a respectful "Yes sir" and "Yes ma'am" is consistently heard in response to their parents' instructions! Imagine the blissful unity of a family whose members, though possibly disappointed by their father's decision in a matter, will gladly acquiesce out of respect for his rightful authority and knowing that he has the family's ultimate welfare in mind! Peace, harmony and unity are cherished conditions which will describe the home where children are found rendering proper respect to established authority.

To the contrary, a home in which children do not exhibit due respect for their parents' divinely delegated authority will be plagued with conflict and discord. Such disunity is the inevitable condition brought about when respect for established authority is lacking. Every child will be doing that "which is right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25) when they refuse to acknowledge and respect some higher authority. Anarchy will be the form of government ruling in these homes. Regrettably, is this not an accurate description of many homes today? Children ruling themselves, young people showing total disregard for their parents' directions, disrespectful talk, teenagers run away to escape

reasonable rules set forth by loving parents are all too commonly witnessed scenes. They speak to the divisiveness wrought when respect for authority is absent. Tranquil peace will be far removed from the home wherein children refuse to humbly respect and obey their parents. Unruly children will also cause great unrest in the hearts of godly parents who have tirelessly sought to instill such respect to no avail. Solomon explains, "A foolish son is the heaviness of his mother," and "A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him" (Proverbs 10:1; 17:25).

One of the initial and integral contributions which children can make toward promoting unity in the home is rendering respect for authority.

Spiritual Mindedness

Many of the inspired exhortations urging unity among the Christians of the first century include the concept of being of the "same mind" or "one mind" (cf. Romans 12:16; I Corinthians 1:10; I Peter 3:8; etc.). The inspired historian Luke reports that those initial saints in Jerusalem acted with "singleness of heart" and were of "one heart and of one soul" (Acts 2:46; 4:32). These descriptive New Testament phrases emphasize another crucial component pertaining to unity. As brother J.W. McGarvey comments, they speak to "*the concentration of their affections and desires upon a single subject*".²⁷ The unity evident and

²⁷ J.W. McGarvey, *Original Commentary on Acts*, p. 49

encouraged among these early Christians entailed being single minded, all living by the same spiritual principles and aspiring toward the same heavenly goals. Among the Philippian brethren, Paul sought their standing fast "in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel," and entreated them to "walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing" (Philippians 1:27; 3:16). Unity in the church as intended by God demands all Christians possessing and acting upon this single spiritual mind-set which our Lord Himself presented so vividly in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:19-34).

Spiritual mindedness is no less necessary if a home wishes to experience the wondrous unity planned and prescribed for it by heaven. In addition to the forceful analogy gleaned from the Scriptures relating to unity in the church as noted above, common sense should enable our appreciating this essential principle in achieving unity in the home. When all family members are like-minded, perceiving things from the same spiritual perspective and earnestly seeking the same ultimate goal, they will obviously be striving together toward (remember Philippians 1:27) those defined objectives. A common viewpoint and destiny will keep everyone travelling in the same direction. As they continually draw closer to their determined goal, they will all the while be growing closer to one another. Consider a triangle and how that as the lines originating from the two points on the base are shortened toward the common vertex,

the distance between those two points is also shortened. Similarly, as the respective members of a family strive toward heaven, they will necessarily draw closer toward one another, ensuring delightful harmony in the home!

The practical effects in promoting family unity wrought by children being spiritually minded (assuming their parents are of this mind) should be quite apparent. Such a family will be united in Christ, with every child obeying the gospel upon maturing to an age when they are capable of understanding sin, accountability, and salvation. It will be a truly Christian home, like Crispus' of whom the Holy Spirit reports he "believed on the Lord with all his house" (Acts 18:8). A spiritually minded home will be found united in Bible study and worship. There will be no sons or daughters missing from Sunday services because of outings with their friends or other secular activities. There will be no disgruntled teenagers complaining about having to attend Wednesday Bible class each week, nor will it be necessary to threaten punishment to have them devote time to their lessons and memory work. Rather, the family having one spiritual mind will be heard echoing in unison the sentiments of Psalm 122:1, We were "glad when they said unto [us], Let us go into the house of the Lord." These children are thrilled to hear dad summon the family together for a period of Bible reading and prayer in the evening. Minds centered upon spiritual concerns will enable a family to be united concerning morals and values. The

children of this kind of home affectionately hug dad and mom when they prohibit them from engaging in some questionable activity and take the time to talk about why such conduct would be unbecoming to a Christian. Spiritually minded kids are well acquainted with Bible principles like, "Be not deceived: evil companionships corrupt good morals" (I Corinthians 15:33). Therefore, they readily perceive the potential danger to their souls by worldly friends, places and practices (i.e. parties, dances, R-rated movies, the prom, etc.). Making decisions based upon God's truth and righteousness, there will be regular unanimity between children and parents in most matters. Even when it is necessary for punishment to be enacted by their parents, these youthful spiritual minds will call to remembrance the Bible's teaching of Hebrews 12:5-11. They comprehend that such discipline is motivated by a genuine love on the part of their parents, who hurt for having to chasten them but know it to be necessary to "yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness." As adolescence arrives, a spiritual mind in children will even allow agreement with parents regarding dating partners and selection of a life-time mate; for both children and parents alike will appraise Christian character as that which is essential in all possible marriage candidates.

Spiritual mindedness among children in a home will further promote unity because it contributes to holiness in their lives. Holiness, an attribute which is to characterize all of God's children (I Peter 1:14-

16), seeks to separate one from the practice of sin, and that will markedly enhance harmony in the home. For you see, sin is the great separator and divider! Sin separates man from God and His treasured fellowship (Isaiah 59:1-2), man from spiritual and eternal life (Romans 6:23; II Thessalonians 1:6-10), and man from his fellow man (Romans 1:28-31). Sin's ability to divide men has been felt in countless families throughout the generations. Inspired history repeatedly bears testimony to the trouble and unrest wrought in homes by the presence of sin. Cain and Abel, David's sons, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, are just a sampling of the many homes whose harmony has been disrupted by sinful behavior. On the other hand, a home where holiness prevails because of spiritual minds, it will considerably guard itself against the division and disunity inevitably brought on by sin. "And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children" (Isaiah 54:13). The divine formula for a happy and harmonious home includes the ingredient of spiritual mindedness by parents and children alike!

Mutual Concern for One Another

The New Testament writer's frequently picturing the church of Christ as a body emphatically speaks to the harmonious unity which God intends to exist among its members. First Corinthians chapter twelve is one of the passages which develops this glorious theme in much detail. Near the conclusion of this stately chapter, the apostle Paul

spotlights the infinite wisdom in God's tempering the physical and spiritual body (the church) together as He did; to what end? "That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another" (I Corinthians 12:25). This explanation of heaven's desire for no "schism" (a cleft, rent, or division) to infect the body of Christ also points out that unity demands mutual care and concern among all those who wish to delight in that divinely planned accord. This mutual concern among Christians is required in fulfilling the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2), and was commended in the evangelist Timothy (Philippians 2:20). Unity in the church will be a reality only when its members have "the same care one for another."

The mutual concern which must exist among Christians to ensure unity in the church is likewise necessary among family members if a home desires the unity prescribed for it by its Divine Designer. Complete harmony in a home demands that this common care extend, not only from parents to children, but also from children to parents and from sibling to sibling. Although one would expect that such mutual concern naturally exist among these closest of family ties, observation and experience reveal that this is often not the case! This sad state of affairs is a sobering reminder of Paul's inspired description of the deplorable conditions among past Gentile nations (Romans 1:31) and his predictive picture of the perilous times to accompany the future (II Timothy 3:3). "Without

natural affection" accurately depicts some of the unthinkable conduct occurring among family members, including children, in our own time. Children murdering their parents to obtain an inheritance, younger siblings being abused or even killed at the hands of older brothers and sisters, slaying a twin sister to acquire her identity; those responsible for these and similarly heinous crimes reported of among modern day families can be styled as nothing less than "without natural affection." Children with such dispositions are a serious threat to unity in the home.

Absence of mutual concern in children will far more often take on a less violent nature than those noted above, but it is no less destructive to a family's harmony. Selfishness is a constant enemy to the compassionate care that children ought to have for their parents and siblings, and thus a formidable foe to unity in the home. It looks to self first and foremost without regard for others. It demands "my way" and "my desires" above all other considerations. Selfish children view the world revolving around them, thinking that all decisions should be made entirely upon their whims and wishes. And when they are not catered to with such preeminence, one can rest assured that they will be uncooperative, disgruntled, complaining and intent on making every one else miserable. Temper tantrums, which are sometimes exhibited by small children who are yet learning to share, are too often observed in older children who fail to understand that selfishness must give way to

mutual concern for others. How disheartening to witness the dissension plaguing many homes because of selfish children who have never grown up! Rebellious and unruly children, sibling rivalry, bickering, and quarreling, regularly hurt feelings, and parents forgotten in nursing homes are just some of the bitter fruits harvested from homes wherein mutual concern is lacking and selfishness is lingering.

Oh, but what splendid and God pleasing harmony attends those homes wherein children possess and practice mutual concern for other family members! Homes in which children are not chagrined because circumstances would not allow them to go where they had hoped, knowing that the welfare of the whole family is of greater importance than getting their way, are homes of mutual concern. Homes in which children work and play together with amiable demeanors, understanding that they are all part of the same team rather than individual competitors, are homes of mutual concern. Homes in which children treat their parents and siblings according to the Golden Rule, behaving toward them in a way which they would like to be treated themselves (Matthew 7:12), are homes of mutual concern. Homes in which children share the disappointments of their siblings and offer an arm of comfort, rather than relish in their experiencing life's pitfalls, are homes of mutual concern. Homes in which children willingly lend their brothers and sisters a hand at homework or chores, as they would readily answer "Yes" to Cain's infamous

question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9), are homes of mutual concern. Homes in which children, once grown and moved away from their initial family, continue to visit, keep in touch, and honor their parents with respect and financial assistance whenever needed rather than selfishly following the precedence set by those self-centered scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day (Matthew 15:1-6) or reasoning, "I have my own family to worry about now", are homes of mutual concern. The journey toward a harmonious home will be well on its way when parents and children alike have "the same care one for another".

Love

As Paul exhorted those "risen with Christ" to put on the godly attributes corresponding to the new man of regeneration, he concluded his apostolic appeal with, "And above all these things put on charity [love - ASV], which is the bond of perfectness" (Colossians 3:14). The late J. Noel Merideth remarked concerning this passage, "*Love is like the outer garment which holds the others in their place; it is the power which unites together all the graces which make up perfection.*"²⁸ Genuine, biblically defined love is a uniting force of surpassing measure. It beautifully binds together the Christian virtues with which every follower of Christ should clothe himself (cf. II Peter 1:5-7). True love is also the cementing agent for Christians

²⁸ The Book of Colossians, Spiritual Sword Lectureship, 1986, p. 220.

being united in Christ. Earlier to those same Colossian brethren, the apostle to the Gentiles expressed his earnest desire "that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love" (Colossians 2:2). In Peter's urging for saints to be of "one mind," he continued by describing that desired unity as involving, "having compassion one of another, love as brethren" (I Peter 3:8). In discussing indispensable ingredients for unity, love must crown the list!

If children wish to positively contribute to unity in their homes, manifesting a wholesome love toward every family member would be one of the greatest inputs they could make! This beneficial love of which we speak far excels the sentimental, "feely-good," unprincipled emotion which is frequently mistaken as love in our day. Rather, it is the love consistent with the nature of God (I John 4:7-8) who instituted the home, and was supremely exhibited by Him in giving His life for us (I John 3:16). This eminent degree of love ("agape" in the Greek) is that which seeks the highest good of its object. In addition to observing its perfect presentation in God and His redemptive scheme, one can learn of its virtuous qualities in that renowned thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians. Its paramount position among virtues is exclaimed in the closing verse of that chapter, "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity" (I Corinthians 13:13). When children learn of, embrace and then demonstrate this agape love in their relationships with other

family members, it cannot but lead to a home blessed with a peace and harmony purposed by God when He first ordained that marvelous institution in Eden.

Faithful Christians joyfully imagine what the church of our Lord would be like if every member was knitted together with this God-like love. Similarly, the heart thrills at the contemplation of a home wherein all its members are bonded together by such a love. Visualize children always conducting themselves within the parameters of love's dictates as enumerated in I Corinthians 13. Longsuffering, kind, courteous, truthful, patiently enduring wrongs done them, eagerness to believe the best, and hopeful would characterize these loving children. Never would they become envious, conceited, egotistical, rude, self-centered, vengeful nor pleased with wrong doing. Children directed by agape love would never work any ill toward their parents or siblings, but constantly act in harmony with God's righteous law (Romans 13:10). Although this Utopian image may be somewhat idealistic, does it not bring delightful anticipation for such sweet accord to permanently abide in our homes. A unity which is very realistic in families where children learn from a very early age that royal law, "love one another" (James 2:8).

Conclusion

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1). Hopefully, all of us share in this divine appraisal of

God-approved unity. May unity's desirability within the church and the home encourage our contributing to its being attained and maintained in both of these divine institutions. Its reality will require the effort of all of us, including the precious children which make up such a wondrous part of our families. They will markedly impact the harmony which our homes experience, either for the good or for the bad! Positive contributions that they can make toward a happy and harmonious home are: showing proper regard for authority, possessing a spiritual mind, avoiding selfishness by exhibiting mutual concern for others, and always demonstrating true, agape love for every member of one's family. These indispensable ingredients toward unity will promote a holy harmony in our homes that will bring heaven's approval and our joyful contentment.

Chapter 21
Unity In The Home:
Spouse's Role

Tom Marshall

Brother Marshall was born in Manhattan, Kansas. He is married to the former Donna Ross and they have 3 children, Karen, David, and Paul, and 12 grandchildren. He served in the army at the close of World War II in Tokyo, Japan in the occupation forces. He attended Kansas State University and Harding University. His life's work has been devoted to serving small congregations and they have worked throughout the country from California to Virginia with much work being done in northern states. They have directed Bible camps, worked in jails, and walked the streets of inner cities. He was responsible for personal evangelism classes and campaign activities while on the faculty of International Bible College. He now preaches with the Central Chesterfield congregation in Chester, Virginia.

This is the third study in this series and is entitled, Establishing Unity in the Home: "Spouses' Roles."

On the front page of the *Oakland Tribune*, Oakland, California, Tuesday, June 2, 1959, is found the following report. Mr. Kenneth Peck, age 30, married, father of three young children, was a door to door salesman for a bakery company near Oakland, California. On a day like any other day,

Mr. Peck was in his bread truck expanding his territory. He drove his truck to a house occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Jack Cassell. Mr. Peck rang Jack Cassell's doorbell. Jack was not home. Jack's wife Patricia, was home.

On this day in November, 1958, Pat opened her door to Mr. Peck and bought her first loaf of bread from the bread salesman. At the time, Patricia Cassell did not know that buying that first loaf of bread would turn her world upside down and inside out. It would radically change the lives of Jack Cassell and their three children, David, age 15, Diane, age 10, and Denise, age 5. In Mr. Peck's household, the fallout from this sale would also invade the world of Mrs. Dorothy Peck and their children, Ronny, age 7, Penny, age 5, and little Kimmie, age 3. It is not an overstatement to say that the event of that day would change lives for people yet unborn and who would be living in far away places.

Mr. Peck was doing what all salesmen do. He was expanding his route by adding new customers. Pat Cassell became a regular customer of Ken. Actually, the relationship developed into more than just a customer/salesman relationship. Ken became a "frequent visitor" with Pat. This friendship eventually encompassed all members of both households as they discovered they each enjoyed each other's company.

Six months later, it happened. A friendly husband-wife swap took place. Mr. Peck moved into Jack Cassell's house where he became the husband and father of Dorothy and her three children. Jack moved into the house of Dorothy Peck and began filling the role of husband and father to Dorothy and her three children. It was all legal of course. The two couples had driven to Tijuana, Mexico. Mr. Ricardo Martin, an attorney, divorced and remarried the couples at his "One-Stop, Quick-Stop Law Office" and he sent them merrily-married on their way.

Questions. Once Mr. Peck's second marriage became a reality, did he continue going selling bread house-to-house? How could his new wife trust him? He caused the breakup of her marriage. Could Ken be trusted in the house of another man's wife? How will Mr. Peck relate to his stepchildren? How will Mr. Cassell get along with Ken's children? Most instances of child abuse (and wife abuse) occur where stepfathers are involved. We will hear Jack Cassell say what they did was a natural thing. People happen to "fall in love". Well, Jack, if it happened once, could it happen again? Do we not have control over these outside influences invading our marriages? Are we helpless? Perhaps we are inviting such intrusions. There are steps we can take to avoid havoc caused by "home-wreckers" such as these two.²⁹

²⁹ There is an antidote for this. Don't do it. God's marriage manual reads, "Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let (continued next page)"

each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband" (I Corinthians 7:2). One man for one woman for life and everybody else keep your hands off. Mr. Peck and Mr. Cassell violated this law. In spite of attempts to do so, such actions cannot be justified. Of course they said, "It was wonderful." "It feels so right." Just because it was done openly and advertised on the front page of The Oakland Tribune does not make it right. Today some will say, "They were so happy, surely God was smiling on them with His favor." Not so.

Five of the children were ages ten or younger. Swapping fathers would entail some major decisions for those little tikes. She said they "discussed this idea for a long time." According to the article, they discussed this life-changing decision only for the sum of thirty days.

Did the couples of the original marriages make a commitment for life? If each spouse knew the original "covenant of marriage" could be easily broken, could they trust each other in the future? What negative influence would their "affair" have on the lives of the children?. What kind of impact did the promiscuous life of the parents have on their children while at school. Their children would obviously be the recipients of verbal abuse. Teachers and classmates couldn't avoid seeing it on the front page. When the children reach a mature age, what then will be the response to having been abandoned by their fathers for another woman?

It was reprehensible what these couples did. How could, successful, intelligent, mature, responsible adults show such flagrant and insensitive rejection of the welfare of their children? Is there not a time and place for righteous indignation? Wouldn't these children miss their dad? Can you hear them sobbing into their pillows at night, like other cast-off children do? Will the children, when ready to marry, despise God's arrangement for marriage? And will the
(continued next page)

If the “wonderment and beauty” of this modern day romance succeeds, someone will suggest that this is a proper model for troubled marriages today. We all can play “fruit basket turned over”. All wives will be up for grabs and everyone can make a new beginning. Why not? It worked for them. No two couples have ever been happier. They said, “There is absolutely no friction between any of us.” Mrs. Cassell said, “This is a wonderful, beautiful thing.” Mrs. Peck said, “There is nothing to be ashamed of. We don’t want this to be a secret. I just wish everyone were as happy as we are.” (Why did she think there might be reason to be ashamed? tjm) Patricia, the new Mrs. Peck, said, “The children understand the situation fully. I wouldn’t have done it if I thought it would hurt them. We discussed the idea for a long time.”³⁰

“example of marriage” on behalf of the parents provide a solid foundation on which the children can build?

It has now been nearly forty years and these grown children now have children. What about them? Are they proud of grandparents whose photos were printed on the front page back in 1959? Of course someone will show them the clippings. You know they will know. The questions can multiply without end.³⁰ Do you know “how long,” long is? They discussed this thirty days. Some folks take more time trying to decide where to take a vacation than they did to wreck their marriages. Can you imagine discussing the breakup of your home with children ages 3, 5 and 7? Sure they understood!

Christianity is what it is because God is who He is. Marriage is what it is because God is who He is. I am not attempting to read the hearts of the Pecks and Cassells. Nor will I judge them. Eternal judgment belongs only to God. We would all pray that at some point they became Christians, repented of their transgressions, restored their original marriages and reared those precious children in a spiritual, united home.

However, we can make some observations in this case since it was "front page media coverage." Both fathers were successfully employed. These were not just kids. We expect more from them because they were adults. Many young people today possess more integrity than these parents did. They wanted immediate gratification and failed to exercise self-control. Immature people behave in a child like fashion. Babies want their needs met immediately. These parents said they discussed the break up of their home for thirty days before they "split". I guess they deserve a medal for that one. They spent half a life time getting to where they were and in thirty days pitched what they had. The houses, cars, furniture, were matters of no consequence. (Nor were their children.) They were not concerned with financial matters. They said that did not enter into it. Impetuous? Yes. Self-centered? Yes. Was it lust? Were these men mutually lusting after each other's wives? This thing was conceptualized

mentally before it became a reality. You know it was.³¹

Troubled marriages today contain many of these same ingredients. Of course we have a modern day vocabulary. Today we do not say an unmarried couple living together are "shacking up". We gloss it over.³² Some will say a movie contains some nudity and profanity, but it has such "deep meaningful insights". We might as well get our physical nutrition from the garbage dump. To say such movies are "adult entertainment" is to gloss over the facts.

I am reacting very strongly to this because these parents lived in the "golden years" of our nation. Young people today trying to build solid marriages, not having lived forty years ago, cannot possibly know how far society has retrogressed morally because they have no reference point to form a judgment. So we have two thoughts here: 1) Where there is greater opportunity, there will be

³¹ In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord said, "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28).

³² Definition of *gloss*: a deliberately misleading explanation or interpretation. Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary, The Riverside Pub. Co., 1984, p. 535. "Also He (Jesus, tjm) spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous." (Luke 18:9). This couple in the newspaper article were justifying their action. That is a frequent response on the part of both "injured" partners in a marriage dispute.

greater judgment. The Pecks and Cassells had everything in their favor. 2) We will have shown young couples today, trying to have spiritual marriages, will be inundated with carnal forces assailing the newly founded home on every front. This is warfare. There will be casualties. Recognizing the existence of this peril ought to help us fortify against it. I am addressing unity in the home, but much more. It is not just *unity* being addressed here, but the very existence of the institution of marriage that is being openly attacked. Our kids need the support of older generations. In my generation, we were not dealing with these frontal assaults on our marriages that young people today must address everyday. Pray for our Christian homes. ³³

My generation has had its chance. Now we turn the responsibility over to the next generation. We pray you will do better than we did. Why did this husband/wife swap make the newspaper? And why the front page? In the fifties and sixties, divorce was still a rarity outside of Hollywood. Divorce was practically unknown in the church.

³³ See Matthew 11:20-24. A couple of decades later, Billy Graham will have said in San Francisco, if God doesn't judge San Francisco, he will have to apologize to Sodom. Responsibility exists where there is ability and opportunity. A person with ability may truly want to change things, but lacks the opportunity. A person with opportunity may try to change things, but lacks ability. Parents in the fifties had great role models and community support to build lasting marriages. Also, they had great responsibility.

Unwanted pregnancies were kept out of sight, drugs - what are drugs?. Day care centers were not needed. Husbands were bread winners and wives were doing wifely duties at home rearing the kids. Day care centers were not needed because moms stayed home with the kids. Women were a great labor pool for the Lord's work. They were free to conduct daytime ladies' Bible classes, do benevolent and evangelistic work for the Lord. Those were the "golden years" for both the family and the church. In that environment, divorce was not an acceptable solution for a marriage problem. And when someone moved into a house to live with another person, without marriage, it was called "shacking up". Respectable people did not do that. Respectable people still do not do that. It was an affront to society for a couple to swap mates and have the story plastered on the front page of any large urban newspaper. The newspaper printed the story to sell papers.³⁴

³⁴ Basically her response was, why would a follow-up be of interest to anyone. Joe Gilmore, who lived in Hayward where one of the couples lived, told me Oakland, like many large urban areas, is rampant with widespread divorces and "shacking up." Today, that story wouldn't "turn a head," let alone appear in a newspaper. Folks today couldn't care less. Can you possibly imagine how low mankind has fallen? The editor did say we have permission to use this article if perchance someone would be interested.

It made the front page of the Oakland Tribune, Oakland, California, Tuesday, June 2, 1959. God has His own set of books, For we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may receive the things done in the body whether good
(continued next page)

Of course, after this publicity, there were others who imitated these couples. Even today, when others do what these did, they will get what those got. As we said, Christianity is what it is because God is who He is. And marriage is what it is because God is who He is. We must learn to have the same reverence and respect for the institution of marriage that God has.

In October, 1979, Tex Williams taught a class on anthropology at Sunset School of Preaching in Lubbock, Texas, for preachers and missionaries. I was a student in that class. We learned of a recently discovered tribe, native to the back jungles of the Philippines. Sociologists and anthropologists recorded many of their findings including family and religious traditions. Remember, these inhabitants of the jungle had no previous contact with civilized man. *They were monogamous in their marriages.* In the past, I have said some civilized Americans act like people living in the jungle. I must apologize. The truth is, *some tribes in the jungle are more civilized than some Americans.* Where could jungle tribes have heard about monogamous marriages? Remember, we all started from Adam and Eve.

or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (II Corinthians 5:10-11).

Modern, Up-to-Date Definition of Marriage

Here is the latest, up to date definition there is for marriage. "And the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper comparable to him'" (Genesis 2:18). "And Adam said: 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man,' Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:23-24). All other definitions of marriage pale when compared to the above. This was the first, the last and the best definition we have of marriage. This is the definition we will use in this study. Marriage is many things, we will attempt to name only a few.³⁵

Recipe for a Happy Home

Here is a recipe that will make you a happy home. For a start, do these things. This study will discuss the following topics:

- Break the parental umbilical cord.
- There must be permanency.
- There must be mature commitment.
- There must be one-flesh unity.
- There must be spiritual unity.

Leave and Cleave: Break that Umbilical Cord

Hear it again. What is the origin of marriage? "Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her

³⁵ Genesis 2: 18, 23-24. This original definition is repeated in the New Testament.

to the man. And Adam said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh' (Genesis 2:22-23). A few years ago, it was common to see "Jesus is Lord" inscribed on city water towers in southern states. Let's write Genesis 2:22-24 on water towers, skyscrapers and city sidewalks until we all believe it. Next to our commitment to Christ, Biblical marriage is one of the greatest, bravest acts of trust and faith human beings ever perform. God said, "**Leave and cleave**".

Several trips were required for a newly married son to move out of his parents house. Before he took the last load, his mom said, "Son, why don't you leave some things here so you will come back? Parents need to do two things: 1) prepare their children "to be pushed out of the nest", and 2) the parents themselves need to prepare for the "empty house syndrome". Of course it may hurt. Most separations have some pain. But it is *not* rejection. Let us focus on what is really going on here. Kids do grow up and leave home. Let them break that umbilical cord. As they enter a hostile adult world, they need your support.

Another father taught his son differently. "Son, when you leave home, we are breaking off your corner of the table." Heartless? Absolutely not. A son may experience some trepidation when he first leaves home. I was one homesick kid when I was

snatched from the security of my parents and sent to Fort Lee, Virginia. The sergeant wasn't at all like my mother or dad. Facing new obligations in marriage, including financial support for a family will create concerns. Parents can play a supporting role by saying, "Son, we know you can do it". Any imagined uncertainty of the future is offset against a lifetime commitment the "love of his life" has made toward him. You heard it here first. These are the very first words Adam spoke to Eve. "Wow! Thou!"³⁶ That is the shortest love poem ever written, as well as the first. The girl of your dreams will also provide a young man with all sorts of motivation and confidence for success. That is God's way.

God said, "**Leave and cleave**". Parents, do not tell your daughter, "Honey if it doesn't work out, you always have a place here." A meddling mother-in-law was visiting her daughter when suddenly she became ill and died. The son-in-law called home and asked, what shall we do with her? Shall we bury her at sea, or in the local cemetery, or shall we cremate her? The reply came back, "Take no chances. Do all three." Few parents intend to meddle. Listen to this. Parental relationships do not end when a child marries and leaves home. The relationships will never be the same. They will be different. But they are supposed to be

³⁶ Sometimes it is not expedient for authors to give their sources lest the "well run dry." Ah, those in love will know how I know this.

different. This is God's divine plan. Leave and cleave.

Permanency is Necessary for a United Home

Marriage is permanent. How long is permanent? How long do we "leave" and "cleave"? Would ten years qualify as permanent? How about thirty years? Fifty years? Few things are as permanent as the marriage bond. Even employment in your vocation is not for life.

Many life insurance policies terminate long before death. What meaning does "until death do us part" have for young people? Kids seldom have role models for that type of commitment. My wife and I have been married over forty years. Our friends are often amazed at a marriage surviving that long. Write this in concrete. A wedding is a one time event. Note the following stages of a permanent marriage designed by God. See how it begins and ends. This is God's work. He who destroys a marriage, destroys a work of God.³⁷

Description of a Complete Marriage Cycle

- Courtship and engagement.
- Wedding to beginning of the first pregnancy.

³⁷ "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church . ." (Ephesians 5:25). Christ will never turn His back on His bride. The church is the "wife" of Christ. Christ is in it for the "long-haul." The "church/bride" may turn her back on Christ, any who do will have "broken the marriage covenant." This passage and others like it are abundantly clear that marriage is for life.

- Parents of preschool children.
- Parents of school children (ages 6-12).
- Parents of adolescents (ages 13-19).
- Parents of children leaving home.
- Empty nest to retirement.
- Retirement to death of one spouse.

God did not design marriage for angels or animals. Marriage manuals are not written for animals. Man is more than just animal. Not everyone agrees. The Smithsonian Institute had a sign on one of their exhibits apologizing because in their exhibit it appeared they were placing mankind above other animals. God's pattern for marriage is more than two people living under the same roof. Men "married" to men or women "married" to women, will not qualify as a marriage. The sex act or "one night stand" does not consummate a marriage. A good marriage is the work of God. The marriage relationship is to extend from the marriage parlor to funeral parlor. This kind of commitment will contribute to a united home. ³⁸

³⁸ I do not believe I can over emphasize the radical moral changes made in the past forty years. Young people entering marriage today may ignore these trends, but to their own detriment. In many ways, my world was very different from your world. The first time I really became aware of homosexuality was in the military stationed in Tokyo. As a kid, we never heard jokes about it. We never read about it in the newspaper. In high school, I recall hearing kids snicker about condoms. A "marriage" between two men was an impossibility. Perhaps, you say, young people in Kansas were naive. Maybe, but this I do know, things were better then. (continued next page)

Preaching in San Francisco, I got a call from a young woman who lived across from Golden Gate Park. We sat down and she said "I am a lesbian". I was out of my league. Unless you lived in those days, you can't possibly understand how rapidly or how far our culture has degenerated.

Now look at the world of my grandchildren. Recently a capable, mature, middle age gospel preacher, married with a lovely family, plugged into the Internet. He became addicted and made friends with those who were "addicted" to many things. He began taking drugs so he could stay up all night. He abandoned his family, was "fired" by the church and he was on the downhill slide. The question now is, will he ever find his way back. He was no young person. If a mature adult cannot handle the opposition, what will become of our younger generation? Trash on the internet as well as the TV can destroy your marriage.

I have clicked on to areas on the Internet where a warning screen pops up that reads "you must be over eighteen to continue." It said, the following material is "sexually explicit material." Sure, at that point every kid home alone is going to hit the off button. I did, but I am no kid. I can imagine what the material contained. Porn comes in a variety of "packages" today and if time continues, just you wait to see and hear what else will become common. It was Jeremiah who wrote, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9).

"But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as it is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks, For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God ... Therefore do not be partakers with them." (Ephesians 5:3-7). Sin can completely devastate your marriage. No one is exempt.

Maturity and Commitment are Necessary for Unity in Marriage

Next to our commitment to Christ as Savior in the act of conversion, marriage commitment is one of the greatest, bravest acts of faith and trust human beings ever perform.

Is unity in marriage the impossible dream? We are expecting the impossible *if we expect immature people* to make mature commitments. Same old story. Two kids "fell in love", and the legally underage girl needed permission from the father to marry. How can a loving father approve an action that is sure to destroy his daughter's life? Is it "love" to give a child responsibility she will not be able to fulfill? Even those in the world believe some prohibitions are necessary. That is why we men pass civil laws requiring a child to be of a specified age before he or she can marry.

But, some kids will demand their rights. The daughter may say, "I knew you did not like him". or, "You never liked any boy I dated". "Our marriage will work because we are in love." Others make threats, "If you don't give us permission, we will run off and get married." That is a lose/lose situation for child and parents and devastating to both.

Why could not this daughter recognize her boyfriend was immature? The father saw his immaturity. I saw it. Others saw it. There they

were, sitting in the office, huddled together, she softly weeping. They looked so pitiful. The father said, "Give him time to grow up and then we will be glad for you to marry him." That sounded reasonable, didn't it? But children want immediate gratification. Know this. "Love" will not pay the rent, the electric bill, or put food on the table. It is not true two can live as cheaply as one. You want to get married? Grow up.

I Corinthians 14:20

In a context discussing use of spiritual gifts, Paul admonished Christians at Corinth. Barnes makes this application. "They (children, tjm) are pleased with anything that will amuse them, and little things that afford them play and pastime. Christians in the church at Corinth were behaving like children in regard to spiritual gifts. Paul told them to grow up." Scripture all over the place tell us adults are to behave like adults. Albert Barnes said this, "This says Doddridge, is an admirable stroke of oratory, and adapted to bring down their pride by showing them that those things on which they were disposed to value were *childish*. It is sometimes well to appeal to Christians in this manner, and to show them that what they are engaged in is unworthy of the dignity of the understanding - unfit to occupy the time and attention of an immortal mind." Then Barnes makes this application. "Very much of that which engages the attention of Christians is just as unworthy of the dignity of the mind, and of their

immortal nature, as were the aims and desires of those in the church at Corinth."³⁹

We ask, what more than marriage could be worth a lifetime of planning, building, growing, developing and bringing into fruition than a Christ like family to become a part of the bride of Christ, the Son of God? Our bread salesman did not know the purpose of marriage. In a matter of a moment, he tossed aside what cost him half of his life to build. In addition to many other things, I say, he was also immature, childish and selfish.

"Much that pertains to dress, to accomplishment, to living, to employment, will appear, when we come to die, to have been like the playthings of *children*: and we shall feel that the immortal mind has been employed, and the time wasted, and the strength exhausted in that which was foolish and puerile." Barnes may have overstated his case to make a point, but the point should not be lost.

"However in malice be babes, *but in understanding be mature*.". Paul had just told them in one respect not to be children (childish), "Paul would not speak lightly of any one, even of a child - he adds, that in

³⁹ *Barnes Notes*, I Corinthians 14:20., pp. 267,8, 1953 Edition. Scripture abounds with exhortations all over the place to "put off the old man, and put on the new," "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

another respect it would be well to be like them - nay, not only like children, but like infants. The phrase 'be ye children,' here does not express the force of the original. It means, 'be infants,' and is emphatic. Be as free from malice, from ill-will toward others, from envy, and every improper passion, as they (infants, tjm) are."

"[B]ut in understanding, be mature." (Margin, 'perfect, or of a riper age). The word means *full grown men*. "Act like men whose understandings are mature and ripe." A childish Mr. Peck could walk off from his children, but not a mature Mr. Peck.

It would mean little for Mr. Peck to say he would love, honor and cherish Dorothy Peck until death separates them, *if* he were childish. But you say, he was childish. Yes he was, and that is the point. Children (regardless of their chronological age) were never meant to marry.

God as our Father is a role model for fathers. God was the Father, provider, protector, defender, guide and instructor for Adam. God said, "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (I Timothy 5:8). Paul would say to these men, "Why don't you grow up and act like men?" Girls, you must not marry little boys if you want unity and permanency in your marriage. Little "boys" will promise you what they cannot give.

A Check List for Maturity

- Rid yourself of suspicion and resentment.
- Don't live in the past. Few things remain the same.
- Do not waste time struggling with situations you cannot change.
- Force yourself to stay involved with the real world. Resist the temptation to retreat in your own private world.
- Refuse to indulge in self pity.
- Cultivate old fashion virtues such as love, honor, compassion, loyalty, integrity and responsibility. These are always in style.
- Be realistic in goal setting.
- Find something bigger than yourself to believe in.⁴⁰

Scripture abounds with exhortations to “put off the old man, and put on the new”, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2).

Not only do the bride and groom leave father and mother, but any *feelings* from former relationships must be extinguished. Trinkets, keepsakes,

⁴⁰ Freed-Hardeman University 1996 Lectures, *Family Strengths: Making our Families Stronger*, John W. Dale. p. 80. The author freely quotes from numerous authors who compiled lists like the one above. These will be helpful.

photographs and love letters belong in the dumpster. Indeed all sparks from any old "heart throbs" should have been extinguished long ago. Of course, friendships are precious and can continue, but they are limited to exactly that. No secret phone calls or correspondence is allowed. Let's just say, no secrets. A united marriage is built on trust.

All marriages should have a sense of permanency. Ranchers brand cattle because they own them. The brand is not what makes them their property. They brand them because the cattle already belong to them. You can get shot branding cattle that belongs to another rancher. The brand says that cow or bull is already somebody's personal property. Nor does one rancher invade another man's holding pen. Likewise, it is not the wedding ring that makes a woman the man's "property". She is wearing the ring because of a previous commitment to love that man for life. It signifies that she "is the personal property of someone else". The husband and wife must build an imaginary (but real) holding pen to protect their marriage from would be intruders.

Remember the riddle Samson posed to the Philistines? If they solved the riddle, Samson would reward them with some desirable possessions. Of course they could not solve the riddle, so they employed Samson's wife to trick her husband in giving her the answer.

That was a cheap shot. Samson eventually succumbed to his wife's charm and told her the answer to the riddle. She then told the Philistines. Samson said, "If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have solved the riddle" (Judges 14:18)⁴¹. Mr. Peck was plowing with Jack's heifer. She may have been willing, but he did it, nonetheless. On the open range, he could have been shot for "cattle rustling", Some "wife rustlers" have also been shot.⁴²

Malachi the prophet said God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). God did not say he hates those people who are divorced. Whenever there is a divorce, at least one soul is in serious danger of being lost eternally. Remember it takes two to make a marriage. You cannot do it yourself. Two people must be able to make a commitment for life.

Marriage Unity Requires Sexual Unity

Marriage was given to man (mankind), not just to Adam or to Adam and Eve as a pair. God said, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother

⁴¹ Samson's weakness was sensuality. Satan knew it. Satan knew the weaknesses of the two couples who swapped mates. He knows the weaknesses within every marriage.

⁴² An airline stewardess made a passing comment about married men who will remove their wedding rings when they board the plane. The white stripe around the finger is a dead give-away. The first thought that comes to mind is, they are trying to appear "unattached." It is serious business on the range to attempt to change the brand on cattle. It is serious matter for a married spouse to appear to be unmarried.

and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24 NKJV). Since Adam had no mother and father to leave in order to be joined to Eve, this instruction was for future generations. Jesus stated the same conclusion, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh'?" (Matthew 19:4-5 NKJV).

Marriage did not originate in the back alley or in the jungle. (I am aware how I am using the word "jungle".) By saying "jungle", I mean animals did not create marriage. Man did not conceive the idea of marriage, nor could he. It is unthinkable that man can improve God's design for marriage. When marriage is properly understood as having originated in the mind of God, the subject will be approached with the soberness it demands. If we were limited to just one thought or one scripture, the text in Matthew would be our choice. Marriage instructions apply to mankind generally and not just to those who are religious or who are in the church of the Lord. Whether stated in a "marriage ceremony" by the Justice of the Peace, a clergyman or a gospel preacher, God's law still applies. Jesus said, "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matthew 19:6). Marriage is a work of God. Divorce is the destruction of God's work.

A man's first wife was called "your wife by covenant" (Malachi 2:14). God's wrath was against Jewish men because they were dealing "treacherously with the wife of his youth". They put away their first wives to marry younger and more attractive women. So what are we saying? Today, divorces are so easily obtained that some are encouraged to settle marriage conflicts in the divorce courts. Marriage and divorce statistics printed in city newspapers frequently show that divorces outnumber marriages. When divorces are granted, the average person will soon be back to the courthouse for a license to remarry.

Marriage is for the comfort and pleasure of those within the marriage bond (I Corinthians 7:2-5). Marriage is also for the birth, preservation and welfare of children. Marriage and the family is the institution which is the foundation of society. Where the family is honored and respected, the gospel can be preached and God's spiritual kingdom will flourish. A good home is a blessing to the church; a good church is a blessing to the home.

Spiritual Unity is the Foundation of the Home

A school boy was asked to define a Quaker. He said, "The Quakers are a peculiar people invented by Oliver Cromwell. They are a quiet people. They do not fight. They never talk back. My father is a Quaker. My mother is not." So you have spiritual conflicts in your home? Be sure you go to the proper source to solve them. There is a "para church organization" sweeping the land called

Promise Keepers (PK).⁴³ PK is the “brain child” of Coach Bill McCartney. He was concerned, as many are, with the fragmentation of the family. With the assistance of key people in influential places, they created a movement designed to target men and fathers of households. The aim was to motivate men to become spiritual leaders of their families. Also, husbands were asked to take a pledge to honor their marriage vows. You can’t fault that aim.

When I heard of this program, I was encouraged. This is something truly needed. My disappointment came when I learned that PK was tied to a “religious” movement. The word of God says, the same Christ who is head of the spiritual body, the church, is also the head of the family. So what is the problem?

The problem is PK has created a conflict between God’s institution, the family, and God’s institution, the church. Deeper reflection reminded me, if we help the family, this will of necessity require a religious influence. What these men have done is target some crucial needs in the family and then attached a program to deal with those needs, to a man made religion. A Christian can cooperate in

⁴³ I obtained my information on Promise Keepers first hand from those who created the program. Numerous publications, tapes and videos produced by them are available. It is not necessary to attend one of their conventions. You can see and hear it all on video.

strengthening the family, but a Christian cannot cooperate in a man made religion. That shuts us out. Yes, but, some will say they are doing a lot of good. Doesn't that count for something?

I know my refusal to participate may be viewed as narrow by some. Christians deplore division. We labor to break down barriers. But, Satan has perverted many excellent programs and used them to his advantage. Peter said long ago, "we ought to obey God rather than man". I cannot give a lot of space to this point, but we have young Christian men buying into this movement. We admire men who want to be more spiritual. But you won't get your spirituality food at PK.

Consider these facts. PK has now become a worldwide movement reaching into third world nations. The founder Mr. Bill McCartney said, "This is a way we can reach the unreached billions of the world." Dr. A. K. Paul said, training centers are being established around the world to "disciple" converts. Mr. McCartney then said, the main purpose of this movement "is to build disciples". The movement is married to a system of false religious doctrines. Seventeen coliseums will be filled with hundreds of thousands of men and fathers in this nation, this year alone. At these gatherings, each Friday night, the program begins with a worship assembly in which "a strong evangelical message" is delivered, followed by an invitation (altar call) for men to come to Christ" (we call it conversion, tjm). The Saturday program

includes a strong passionate appeal for “men to love God”. Each rally is said to have five speakers. October 4th of this year, the founders of PK announced plans for thousands of men to converge on Washington, D.C. to stage a national rally whereby they can get their message to every family in America. (This document is being written April 1997, before this event.) Their message is one of “salvation by faith only” and the organization is what may be described as a para-church or interdenominational organization made of members of many religious bodies, each teaching conflicting doctrines.

What may have begun as a needed emphasis on the home has degenerated into another man made religious organization. Organizations such as *Focus on the Family*, with Dr. James Dobson have cooperated with PK. Numerous publications, videos and radio broadcasts made by *Focus on the Family* are designed to strengthen families. I wrote Dr. Dobson (he is a psychologist, not an evangelist) explaining why a large segment of us (in the churches of Christ) cannot financially, or otherwise support those programs. I said, we do appreciate your concern for the family, but we are disappointed that you do not teach God’s truth regarding salvation and the church. (I explained to him what I meant. I never received a reply from Dr. Dobson or from *Focus on the Family*.)

We who strive to be the people of God must be “the light to the world” for those who are truth seekers.

Biblical preaching and teaching is the only message that will bless families of America. Even just a few congregations filled with godly families will please God more than seventeen coliseums filled with hundreds of thousands of men propagating religious error. Why? *Because error has never blessed or produced spiritual blessings to any home.* Programs such as PK make the task of preaching Christ more difficult. The hundreds of thousands who buy into PK are convinced they have been saved, when they have not. They are now nearly impossible to teach.

Sunday, April 6, 1997, "About 12,000 women flocked to Richmond this weekend to bond and find joy in Jesus."⁴⁴ A counter part to PK has now been organized as *Women of Faith*. They will target thirteen major cities this year expecting to reach 100,000 women. There is a need to strengthen families, but it must be found within the pages of God's marriage manual, not in para-church organizations that have departed from the truth. Christian men cannot endorse PK and our Christian women cannot endorse this movement and be faithful to Christ.

⁴⁴ Women of Faith "participants laughed and cried during the conference, which was organized last year and is modeled after a similar men's movement called Promise Keepers. Richmond Times-Dispatch, April 6, 1997. Will our Christian wives and mothers be drawn into what could be a noble cause, but it too is married to a man-made religion?"

We say to every husband and wife, read the best manual on marriage ever written. If you are a Christian, you already have a copy in your home. We have in place the institution that can bless your family. God built it, knowing we would have that need. A good church is a blessing to the home; a good home is a blessing to the church. Both were created by the same God.

- A family that is Christ like will treat each other as they would like to be treated.
- A marriage between two Christians will have the counsel of God's word, and they will be able to recognize and avoid carnal counsel of men.
- The Christian family will worship together.
- God's truths will strengthen family members so they can endure those difficult times and situations, whether because of long periods of separation, financial hardship, serious illness, etc.
- The Christian family knows the joy of sharing good times together.⁴⁵
- Christian mates will learn how to be "best friends."

I know it is a common practice for members of our congregations to glean information for strengthening the home from programs such as

⁴⁵ I believe I obtained this list from a sermon by Batsell Barret Baxter. Sermons by Baxter at the Hillsboro church in Nashville were available in printed form. Baxter preached many sermons on the family.

Focus on the Family, Promise Keepers and numerous books on the home authored by TV evangelists. They all contain some good thoughts. However, if these sources are accessed on a regular basis and provide the main part of a Christian's diet, a person's faith will shrivel and possibly die. Faith comes only from God's word. We become what we "eat". I believe these authors and evangelists are deceived. They may sincerely believe they love God and their motives may be sincere. The disciples of these people eventually adopt their "language". Just because a man says he teaches from the word of God does not prove he loves God. Why? John wrote, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (I John 5:3). God said, that is the proof we need to know if a man is God's man. We are told to put all teachers to the test. For the salvation of your soul and unity of your home, do it.

I do not mean for my comments to sound harsh. Do this. Pick any of these men I have named or others like them. Try to engage them in a Bible study. If they will allow you to do this, you will soon come to know for yourself their true attitude toward God's word. I have done this numerous times. I say again, the ones that I have contacted consistently reject plain passages of scripture. They refuse to teach and keep God's commandments. Am I for God's family and God's church? Absolutely, yes I am. But a family cannot be God's family if it is caught up in false religious doctrines.

God's man or God's woman can not draw spiritual strength from religious people who disobey God.

Does it break your heart to see a Christian pulled away from the Lord? Worldly influences destroy many marriages. How ironic it is when religious influences divide a home or family. Just because something is religious does not mean it is good or right. Make your home a center of soul winning. Christians who teach others have a front row seat to see how doctrines of men dull the mind. Everyday, Christians are turning aside from sound, biblical truths. Let us love the brotherhood. Let's build up the brotherhood. Labor day and night to make your marriage reach its full potential. Work to make the church where you serve reach its potential. The family originated in the mind of God. Think about that. God built one spiritual family, the church which is the bride of Christ. It is holy, precious, blood bought and loved by God. Never speak despairingly of His precious church. Be gentle towards all men as we preach the gospel to the lost.

Only God knows the fall out from the unfortunate decisions made by Mr. Peck, the bread salesman and his friends. If only these families truly had Jesus as the head of their families, these children could have been led to Christ and established spiritual homes of their own. We reap what we sow. We reap the same kind of thing we sow. We reap more than we sow. We reap longer than we sow. If that is true of unrighteousness, it is also true of

righteousness. The believer lays up for himself treasures in heaven. A home united in Christ is the best launch pad for reaching heaven. If you have disappointments or regrets regarding your marriage or family, find forgiveness, comfort, encouragement and hope from Jesus. The aged apostle John wrote to young Christians, "My little children, these things I write to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the whole world" (I John 2:1-2).

If perchance you are not a Christian, it will help you to know that the above words of John were not written for you. First, you need to obey the gospel of Christ and let God add you to His spiritual family. Believe in Jesus Christ, allow this faith or trust to move you to repent of sin in your life, confess with the mouth the Lord Jesus, be buried with Him in the waters of baptism for the forgiveness of those sins and arise to walk hand in hand with Jesus. God will add you to His spiritual family, the church that Jesus built. After having done this, the blessings found in I John will also belong to you. Do it now.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Believe, Acts 16:31; Hebrews 11:6; repent, Acts 17:30-31; confess, Romans 10:9-10; baptism, Acts 22:16; Romans 6:3-7, 17; 22-23. If you have questions regarding the church of Christ call us (804) 271-8219. We will locate a helpful Christian near you.

Chapter 22
They Were United In
Evangelism

Keith Kasarjian

Brother Kasarjian is a native of Coral Gables, FA. He was baptized at age 14. He received his B.A. at Faulkner University in Montgomery, AL in 1990. He has preached in AL since then and is currently at the Eastern Shore congregation in Daphne, AL. He has been on campaigns in Scotland and Russia. He is married to the former Kim Sykes and they have 2 children, Mollie and Kyle.

The first century church is our example and our model. Sometimes we see what not to do, but most often we find a great example to follow. Such is certainly the case with regards to evangelism. Never was there a more evangelistic church than the first century church. That they were evangelistically minded cannot be disputed. One only needs to read the book of Acts to gain some idea of the zeal these Christians had for the lost of their day.

**General Observations Regarding Evangelism
In The Early Church**

It was never limited to church assemblies. In fact, this is where it happened the least. They went out to the lost and told them about salvation. This is the work of the church. We must not confuse the

worship of the church with the work of the church.
Soul winning is our mission!

It was always initiated by Christians. Sinners rarely initiated conversations regarding salvation. This must be done by God's children. The unsaved have never beaten down a path to our door and probably never will. Too often we have had the "Field of Dreams" view of the meeting house. "If we build it, they will come". How foolish! Christians must initiate evangelism.

It was never a matter of manipulation. No one begged the first century Christians to speak to their neighbors about the Gospel. No one arm twisted or brow beat. No one had to be coerced into it. It was a natural outgrowth of their faith and love.

It was everyone's business. There were not just a few and the apostles involved in soul winning but the majority. Acts 8:4 says "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word." The greatest potential of evangelism can never be realized with only a few trying to do the work that belongs to everyone.

What a great example to follow! But the question begs to be asked. Why were they so evangelistic? Why were they so much more than we? This writer believes there are three basic reasons for the great soul winning attitude that permeated the early church.

They had a Sense of Gratitude

Every member of the first century church had formerly been a sinner (Romans 3:23). Some had been guilty of grievous sins. Peter, in his preaching on Pentecost, pointed the accusing finger at those present and told them they were guilty of murdering the Son of God (Acts 2:22-23,36). What a heinous and unthinkable crime! But the irony is that the innocent blood they shed was given for even their sin. They were the recipients of His amazing grace!

One specific example is Saul whose name was later changed to Paul. He labored under gratitude for the great grace that had pardoned him. He would later say in I Corinthians 15:8-11, "And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed."

Their attitude was like the one Jesus spoke of in Luke 7:40-43. "And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell

me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged."

The one forgiven the most is more grateful to the forgiver. They never lost sight of what God had done for them. They were continually reminded of the love of God (Romans 5:5-10).

All of this moved them to the natural act of telling others the good news with which they had become acquainted. Even under threat of more punishment they said, "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). The apostle Paul said, "For the love of Christ constraineth us" (II Corinthians 5:14).

Well known "evangelism expert" Michael Green had this to say concerning the evangelistic zeal of the early church:

This gratitude, devotion, dedication to the Lord who had rescued them and given them a new life, this sense of being commissioned by Him and empowered by His Spirit to do the work of heralds, messengers and ambassadors, was the main motive in evangelism in the early church. These men had been gripped by the love of God which had taken concrete form in the person of Jesus and had stooped to unbelievable depths in the agonies of Calvary. Magnetized by this love, their lives could not but show it and

their lips could not help telling it; 'we cannot but speak of the things which we have seen and heard' well sums up the attitude of spontaneous loving devotion to God which acted as the mainspring of their evangelistic efforts. They were convinced that the salvation promised long ago in the scriptures had actually become a reality through what Jesus had done. How could they keep quiet? In such a day of good tidings they could not hold their peace.⁴⁷

They had a Sense of Responsibility

To accompany this sense of gratitude was an overwhelming sense of being responsible to tell others the good news they had learned. They felt the need to tell others.

They were responsible to God to evangelize. God had commanded them to not keep it to themselves. Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Also our Lord said, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). God commands us to tell others. Paul took this responsibility seriously. He said, "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for

⁴⁷ Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970) pp. 242,243.

necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (I Corinthians 9:16).

They were responsible to the lost to evangelize. Once again notice the concern in the words of Paul in Romans 1:14-16. "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Why did Paul see himself as a debtor? Because he knew something they did not! We must come to feel the same way.

Charles Spurgeon gave this simple but profound definition of evangelism. "Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where he can find bread." It is that simple and that important. When we have tasted of the Bread of Life (John 6:35), we are then responsible to tell the starving where to find nourishment for their soul.

A newspaper carried the story of a lawsuit brought against a doctor who passed an accident scene without stopping to render medical assistance. One of the drivers died from blood loss and his family then sued the doctor. The court ruled against the doctor and awarded a great settlement to the dead man's family. Why this judgement? It was ruled that the doctor's knowledge of medicine

automatically made him responsible to assist in the saving of life under all circumstances.

Evangelism is, and always has been, an "every member responsible business"! It is not something for a few who "like that kind of thing". This is a personal responsibility. During the Civil War, a humorist named Artemus Ward boasted, "I have already given two cousins to the war and I stand ready to sacrifice my wife's brother!" Jokingly, Ward admitted the same lack of personal responsibility some have regarding the souls of lost men and women.

They had a Sense of Concern

More than just a knowledge of being responsible (that which appeals to the head), they truly were concerned about the lost condition of their fellow man. Concern appeals to the heart. A love and concern for the lost will move us to reach them with the gospel. Paul expressed this deep concern in Romans 9:1-3. "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:" What a love for the lost that one would be willing to give his soul for theirs! What are we willing to give for the lost?

If we are going to claim Jesus as Lord and ourselves as belonging to Him, it is imperative that we have the same concerns as did He. Jesus made it clear

what His concern was. "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Can we claim to be a Christian while not being concerned about the lost?

Consider this syllogism:

- Major premise: Concern for the lost will cause us to be evangelistic.
- Minor premise: We are not as evangelistic as we should be or could be.
- Conclusion: We lack the proper concern for the lost.

Apathy toward the souls of others is wrong! George Bernard Shaw said, "The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them but to be indifferent to them." May it never be said that we are indifferent to the lost condition of others. I have seen people moved to tears over the death of a family pet. I have seen folks weep because of an unexpected turn in the plot of a movie. I have even seen people cry over the outcome of a football game, but I have rarely seen anyone weep over a lost soul.

Until we are concerned and disturbed by lost mankind, we will not do anything about it. How can we be satisfied until we have done everything we can to prevent eternal damnation to the souls of men and women everywhere?

How do I cultivate this concern the first Christians had?

- **Remember that everyone has a soul.** One thing common to all is the possession of an eternal soul. Your neighbor, your coworker and everyone you see has a soul.
- **Remember the value of every soul.** Your soul is worth more than all the world combined (Matthew 16:26) but so is everyone's soul! The soul is the most valuable part of everyone's being.
- **Remember the price paid for every soul.** We often determine the value of something by the price paid for it. The price paid to redeem even one soul is mind boggling. In I John 2:2 we read "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."
- **Remember that there are only two possible eternal destinations for the soul.** Everyone will "spend" eternity in one of two places. There is no third option. That valuable soul that Jesus died to save will reside forever in either Heaven or Hell. What am I doing to prevent the second choice?

To have the evangelistic zeal the early church had we simply need to come to our senses! We need a sense of gratitude for what God has done on our behalf. This is good news that we cannot keep to ourselves! We need a sense of personal responsibility. This compels us to act! We need a

sense of concern. This cures our apathy! Let us come to our senses! When we do what the first century church did, we will enjoy many of the blessings they enjoyed.

One Mercedes Benz television commercial shows their car colliding with a cement wall during a safety test. The test is designed to demonstrate the energy absorbing design of their new model which is safer than former models. Someone asks the company spokesman why they do not patent this invention. He replies, "Because some things in life are too important not to share". Spiritually speaking, some things are too important not to share.

Chapter 23

They Were United In Doctrine

Denton Landon

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Introduction

As the title indicates this paper will examine the doctrinal unity among first century Christians. In examining this subject it is necessary to first establish what is meant by first century Christians, unity, and doctrine. First century Christians are those recorded in the pages of the New Testament as penitent baptized believers in Jesus Christ, as recorded in the book of Acts (see for example 2:38; 8:5-13; 10:48; 22:16). United, an adjective, is defined as "in agreement, of like mind".⁴⁸ The verb unite is defined "1. join together; make or become one; combine 2. join together for a common purpose or action."⁴⁹ The noun unity is defined "1. oneness; being one. . . being formed of parts that constitute a

⁴⁸ "United," *The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus: American Edition*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) p. 1677.

⁴⁹ "Unite," *Oxford*, p. 1677.

whole; due interconnection and coherence of parts
2. harmony or concord between persons, etc."⁵⁰

The word doctrine is from the "Latin *doctrina*, from *docco*, 'to teach,' denotes both the act of teaching and that which is taught."⁵¹ Hastings in his Bible Dictionary offers the following concerning doctrine:

Doctrine, etymologically regarded, signifies the work of a *doctor* or teacher, from *doceo*, to teach; hence it denotes sometimes the act of teaching, sometimes the substance or matter of that which is taught. It may also be theoretical or practical, refer, that is, to either truth or duty - that which is to be believed, or that which is to be done.⁵²

There are two Greek words used in the New Testament and translated by the word doctrine in the King James Version, *didaskalia* and *didache*. Concerning *didaskalia*, Klaus Wegenast noted it is a noun and it "denotes the activity of one who is a teacher in the Gk. sense. . . . The word also occurs with a passive meaning, doctrine (i.e. that which is taught) or tuition (being taught). . . "⁵³ Concerning

⁵⁰ "Unity," *Oxford*, p. 1677.

⁵¹ T. Rees, "Doctrine," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, reprinted 1980) p. 866.

⁵² A. Stewart, "Doctrine," *A Dictionary of the Bible*, Hastings, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898), p 614.

⁵³ Klaus Wegenast, "Teach," *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971) p. 769.

the word *didache* he writes that it is "derived directly from the verb stem, occurs in Gk. from Herodotus to Thucydides onwards in the sense of instruction, or of the doctrine imparted by teaching."⁵⁴

One other New Testament word important to this study is the word preaching. Again from Wegenast: "There is no hesitation in calling Christian preaching *didaskalia*, and likewise *paratheke* and *didache*. No tension is felt between the gospel, constantly preached afresh, and doctrine to be learnt, kept pure and defended against heresies."⁵⁵

In summary, this paper proposes to show that in the first century baptized believers in Jesus Christ were in agreement, in harmony, were joined together, in their doctrine or teaching. It will show that when that unity was challenged by the teaching of doctrines not acceptable to God, those teachers were confronted and their doctrines exposed. The necessity of unity of doctrine among the first century Christians will be noted. This unity of doctrine concerned both what was taught to non-believers in evangelism, and what was taught to fellow Christians concerning their worship of God and their day to day lives as servants of God. The source of this doctrine, or gospel today, is the New Testament.

⁵⁴ Wegenast, p. 769.

⁵⁵ Wegenast, p. 771.

Jesus Desires Unity

Jesus desires unity among His people. John 17 records Jesus in prayer prior to leaving the upper room and going to the garden where He was arrested and taken away to trial and crucifixion. In His prayer Jesus expressed concern for those believers He was about to leave, the apostles, and for future believers converted through their efforts. John recorded: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (John 17:20-23).

Notice that Jesus is praying for unity among present and future believers. The source of their faith will be the word spoken by the apostles. Plummer commenting on verse 20 wrote, "The order of the Greek insists on the fact that those who believe through the apostles' word."⁵⁶ The first century as well as twentieth century believers believe through their words. So what was to serve as the source of continuing unity among future believers?

⁵⁶ A. Plummer, *The Gospel According To St. John*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1923), p. 313.

Source Of Unity

The unity which Jesus prayed for was soon challenged. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church and required they be united in their doctrine. In I Corinthians 1:10 Paul wrote, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." The reason for this command from Paul was the existence of division among the Corinthian church. The immediate source of division was following a favorite preacher (I Corinthians 1:12). Paul reasoned that Jesus was not divided, and neither should the church be, therefore they needed to mend the division and maintain unity. Concerning this unity Paul called for, Butler commented as follows: "Paul insisted that unity would not come until these Christians were 'restored' (united) in the *same* (Gr. *auto*, one, only, same) mind and same *judgement* (Gr. *gnome*, understanding, means of knowing) (*italics in original*)."⁵⁷ But as one reads the epistle their division was deeper than following a favorite preacher, for the existence of doctrinal division is obvious. Butler lists the things the Corinthians were divided over. Among others he lists division over church discipline, marriage and divorce,

⁵⁷ Paul Butler, *Studies In I Corinthians*, (Joplin, Missouri: College Press Publishing Co., 1985), p. 16.

abuses in observing the Lord's Supper, and the resurrection of the dead.⁵⁸ He continues,

We believe the Lord intends His church to be of the same mentality, knowing the same revelation of His will and understanding His will the same way. We believe that is the reason the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write this epistle to the Corinthian Christians. The Lord intended the church at Corinth to come to the same understanding, to think the same and act the same way in all the matters to which Paul gave instruction in this epistle.⁵⁹

How, it might be asked, could they (and we) be expected to speak and act the same? What source does Paul suggest for such unity in the first century church? The answer is found in I Corinthians 2:9-13, the message delivered by the apostles which they received by inspiration. Concerning the source of their message Paul wrote in verse 13, "Which things we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth..." Butler wrote concerning I Corinthians 2:13,

Paul states emphatically in I Corinthians 2:13 that the mind of God has been imparted to mankind (through the apostles) in *words*-human language. No human being could have known the mind (will) of God had it

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 17.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 17.

not been delivered through words (human language). God wants all men to understand it alike! Paul repeated his appeal many times (cf. Romans 15:5-6; II Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 1:27; 2:2) and so did Peter (I Peter 3:8).⁶⁰

That God chose words to reveal His will to humanity should not surprise anyone. As Jack Cottrell pointed out "word revelation is proper and effective because we are made in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27) and are thus by nature adapted to communicating with Him. To use an analogy, our receiver is already tuned in to God's wavelength."⁶¹ The source then was, and is, the message delivered by inspired men of the first century.

Concerning the doctrine preached in the first century and onward, Paul wrote two epistles to Timothy and one to Titus with instructions for their work as gospel preachers. Paul had much to write about concerning doctrine, some of which is discussed next.

Doctrine And Preaching

Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus with instructions concerning their work as gospel preachers involving doctrine. He opens I Timothy with the following: "As I besought thee to abide still at

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 18.

⁶¹ Jack Cottrell, *Solid, The Authority Of God's Word*, (Joplin, Missouri: College Press Publishing Co., 1991) pp. 25,26.

Chapter 23: They Were United In Doctrine

Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine" (I Timothy 1:3). Newport White in The Expositor's Greek Testament, commenting on the compound Greek word translated "teach no other doctrine" which also appears in I Timothy 6:3, states it means "to teach a gospel or doctrine different from that which I have taught".⁶² Weust comments,

The words, 'teach no other doctrine,' are the translation of a negative the verb *heterodidaskaleo*, the later word being made up of the verb, 'to teach,' the word *heteros*, which means, 'another of a different kind.' The idea not merely that those exhorted are not to teach a different doctrine, a doctrine which is contrary to the true doctrine. Our word, 'heterodoxy,' namely, false doctrine, refers, not to doctrines of false religions, but to doctrine which poses as true Christian doctrine, but which is diametrically opposed to the true teachings of Christianity. This is what Paul is referring to.⁶³

Timothy was in Ephesus, at Paul's instruction, to charge some teachers to abandon their teaching of false doctrines. The warning of Paul issued to these brethren in Acts 20 concerning false teachings

⁶² Newport J. D. White, *Expositor's Greek Testament*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), p. 92.

⁶³ Kenneth Weust, *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1966), p. 26.

arising from within the eldership has begun, and Timothy is there to oppose and correct it. But the warnings of Paul against false doctrine were not over. Near the conclusion of the epistle, in chapter 6 he wrote, "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself" (I Timothy 6:3-5).

Why such attention to doctrine? Proper doctrine is wholesome or sound (ASV), that is healthy, good for the spiritual life of the individual. Sound, wholesome doctrine promotes moral, upright, righteous living, where unsound doctrine does the opposite. Consider what Paul wrote concerning the law and sound doctrine. "But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust" (I Timothy 1:8-11).

Just as improper conduct is opposed to God's will, so is improper doctrine opposed to God's will. To teach a different doctrine is to teach that which condemns rather than saves. That is why Paul instructed Timothy, during Paul's absence to, "give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine ... Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (I Timothy 4:13,16). If the young preacher gave attention to doctrine, took heed of the doctrine he taught, seeing that he also practiced what it required, he would save himself and those who listened and heeded what he taught. Source of the doctrine? Paul. "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (II Timothy 2:3). Timothy's source of doctrine, what he was to teach, what he was to "take heed" to, was what he had heard Paul teach, it was the same doctrine Paul taught and recorded in the New Testament.

To Titus Paul wrote, "But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). Paul then gives instruction concerning the treatment of men and women, young and old. Again Paul requires sound or healthy doctrine, and its source was God. Titus, as a gospel preacher, needed to proclaim a message that promoted healthy spiritual growth among the congregation. The sound doctrine he was to use was the same as Timothy

was instructed to present. The source of his message was the word of God delivered through inspired men and recorded in the Old and New Testament. When properly presented and received, the result is growth, spiritual growth in the image of Jesus.

Paul wrote the Galatian church, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). The writer of the 1964 *Gospel Advocate Annual Lesson Commentary* wrote on Galatians 4:19, "This means according to Thayer, 'until a mind and life in complete harmony with the mind and life of Christ shall have been formed in you.' This development of character is a slow process..."⁶⁴ The preaching of Titus, and every other gospel preacher, is designed to promote that formation of Jesus' mind and life in each individual Christian. If the message is flawed by false doctrine the image formed within the individual will also be flawed. The resulting flawed image will be one of rebellion toward God and Christ destined for destruction.

Not only preachers are to be aware of false doctrine for Paul also gave Titus instructions for elders involving sound doctrine.

⁶⁴ Anonymous, *Teachers Annual Lesson Commentary*, (Nashville, Tennessee, 1964) p. 306.

Elders and Doctrine

Concerning elders, Paul wrote to Titus: "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Titus 1:9). To gainsay is "to speak against, to contradict".⁶⁵ Jude, writing about false teachers, uses Korah who rebelled and spoke against Moses and Aaron in Numbers 16 as an example of gainsaying. "Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core" (Jude 11). Numbers 16 records the incident Jude refers to: "Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men: And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?" (Numbers 16:1-3).

Korah and his cohorts were speaking against God when they spoke against the leadership of Moses and Aaron, for God, not Moses was responsible for their positions. Elders from the first century

⁶⁵ Weust, p 185.

onward have the God given responsibility to "stop the mouths" (Titus 1:11) of any who speak against God's ordained ways. They must do so with "sound" or healthy doctrine. Arnold Sexton offers the following from Thayer and Friedrich on the meaning of sound: "Thayer defines it to mean 'healthy or to be in good health'. 'Metaphorically' it means 'teaching which does not deviate from truth.' Friedrich adds that it also had a special use 'for mental health and faculty of rational thought.'"⁶⁶ It is clear that elders, when fulfilling this requirement do not base their answer to the gainsayer on opinion poles, the lasted fad within the brotherhood, how it has always been done, etc., but from the healthy doctrine delivered by inspired men and recorded in the pages of the New Testament. Many problems within the Lord's church can be avoided by elders taking this charge seriously. Brother Roy Hearn sums up Paul's words thus:

"Shepherds are to 'be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convince the gainsayers' (Titus 1:9). 'Sound doctrine,' of course, means the Bible. To exhort involves admonition and suggests a warning concerning things that are wrong. 'Convince' means to convict and signifies

⁶⁶ Arnold Sexton, "Speak The Things Which Become Sound Doctrine--Christian Character And The Church; Pure Motives And The World; Maintain Good Works," *The Epistles Of I And II Timothy, Titus*, (Pensacola, Florida: Firm Foundation Publishing House, Inc., 1986), p 230.

confute and refute with the idea of putting the offender to shame. There should always be strong opposition to those who gainsay, or oppose the truth. In order properly to correct those who contradict and seek to tear down the truth, it is necessary that the shepherds of the flock have an adequate knowledge of the Word of God. This coincides with the qualification that demands elders be 'apt to teach'.⁶⁷

In the first century, as well as the late twentieth, elders have responsibility in maintaining the unity of doctrine among the Lord's church. Preachers have responsibility to preach "sound doctrine" and warn about false teachers. Elders have the responsibility of correcting false teachers and preachers, using the teaching of the scriptures. The reason elders must "stop the mouths" with sound doctrine involves their responsibility as shepherds of God's flock (Acts 20:28ff). Sound doctrine promotes healthy spiritual lives among the flock, whereas unsound, unhealthy, doctrine promotes spiritual disease and death. When elders take this aspect of their shepherding role seriously, the result is a local church united in doctrine. When all elders take the responsibility a united universal church results.

⁶⁷ Roy Hearn, "Qualifications and Role of the Eldership; Responsibilities in Stopping Mouths of False Witnesses," *The Epistles Of I And II Timothy And Titus*, (Pensacola, Florida: Firm Foundation Publishing House, Inc., 1986), p 85, 86.

The responsibility of knowing and confronting false doctrine and those who teach it also belongs to the members "in the pew" who are not preachers and elders.

Instructions for Treating False Teachers

Concerning false teachers the apostle John wrote in II John 9-11, "And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds."

Earlier we saw what Paul wrote to elders concerning those who gainsay. In the passage before us we have instructions for every Christian concerning the treatment of false teachers. False teachers must not be encouraged in their efforts.

John says they are without God. I. Howard Marshal commented on verse 11 as follows:

The adoption of these measures would obviously curb the influence of false teachers. It is clear, however, that the elder is more concerned with the danger of members of the church aligning themselves with them. To welcome them was to express solidarity with them; even if one professed to reject their views, hospitality was a way of sharing in their work, and those who helped them in this way were in danger of coming under the same condemnation as the false teachers themselves. The church must be kept from contamination by error.⁶⁸

The early church was serious about maintaining unity of doctrine. False teachers were exposed, opposed, and refused hospitality. The dangers of false doctrine upon the souls of men and women was and is too dangerous to allow diversity of doctrines to exist in the Lord's church. Every member of the Lord's body, the church, must avoid giving even passive support to those who teach as doctrine that which is not the doctrine of Christ found in the New Testament.

Consider one more warning from the apostle Paul's pen.

⁶⁸ I. Howard Marshal, *The Epistles Of John*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), p 74.

A Warning From Galatians

In Galatians 1:6-9 The apostle Paul wrote, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

Paul is warning the Galatians about any preaching which is not in harmony with what he and the other apostles were preaching. Williams translates verse 8 "But even if I or an angel from heaven preach a good news that is contrary to the one which I have already preached to you, a curse upon him!" Verse 9 reads in part "if anybody is preaching to you a good news that is contrary to the one which you have already received..." Paul pronounces a curse upon anyone not preaching the same message, or gospel, for doing so amounted to preaching a different doctrine.

When Paul writes of their turning to "another gospel which is not another" he is using two different Greek words. From Weust we learn.

The first is *heteros*, the second is *allos*.
Heteros means *another of a different kind*,
allos, *another of the same kind ... Heteros*
sometimes refers however, not only to

namely, 'accursed.'... It is thus the strongest possible form of condemnation.⁷¹

The Source of the Apostolic Message

Why such concern about different doctrines? First, consider the confusion that would result from different doctrines in evangelistic efforts. Remember Jesus' prayer in John 17 was in part for unity of believers "that the world may believe". There are people today who cite the various doctrinal divisions in what the world perceives as Christendom as causing confusion and resulting in them not becoming Christians. The effort of denominational people to "agree to disagree" does not solve the problem for people still recognize fundamental doctrinal differences which can not logically be overlooked.

A second reason why apostolic doctrine can not be changed or ignored involves the source of their doctrine: God. Three times in John 14-16 Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit guiding the apostles in their preaching the message of Jesus. Note the following verses.

"Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not

⁷¹ Charles R. Eerdman, quoted in "Paul's Greeting And Purpose In Writing," in *Studies In Galatians*, (Denton, Texas: Valid Publications, 1986), p 47.

Chapter 23: They Were United In Doctrine

keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:23-26).

"But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning" (John 15:26-27).

"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you" (John 16:13-15).

The work of the Holy Spirit, as outlined by Jesus here, was to help the apostles remember what Jesus had spoken while on earth, lead them into all truth, show them things to come, and enable them to serve as witnesses as they testified about Jesus to the world. John 14:23 is important for this discussion for according to the promised work of the Holy Spirit, the apostles were to deliver the

word of God. Love for God and Jesus is demonstrated by keeping His word (John 14:23-24), which the Holy Spirit received from the Father and delivered to the apostles (John 16:13-16).

This is the claim Paul made in I Corinthians 2:13 as mentioned earlier. That Paul considered his writings as authoritative for doctrine is seen in I Corinthians 14:37, "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." That the other apostles considered the writings of Paul as authoritative as seen in II Peter 3:15-16, "And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." Peter refers to Paul's writings along with "other scriptures," other sacred writings. Peter then placed the writings of Paul in with the accepted writing of the Old Testament.

In II Timothy 3:14-16 Paul wrote, "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in

righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

All scripture, that which Timothy grew up learning, the Old Testament, and the New Testament, that which Paul and the other writers were currently writing, were inspired. This is again what Paul claimed in I Corinthians 2:13. G. G. Finley, commenting on Paul's words there, understood him as claiming verbal inspiration. "Paul affirms that his *words* in matters of revelation, as well as thoughts, were taught him by the Spirit; he claims, in some sense, verbal inspiration. In an honest mind thought and language are one, and whatever determines the former must mould the latter."⁷²

Jesus informed the apostles that genuine love for Him is demonstrated by keeping His commandments (John 14:23). He sent the apostles out into the world teaching obedience to His commandments (Matthew 28:18-20). The record of their preaching and teaching contained in the New Testament is the Holy Spirit inspired record of Jesus' commands they carried to the world. To willfully change any of the teaching in the New Testament is to willfully pervert the Lord's commandments and show a lack of love for Jesus (I Corinthians 2:13; 14:37; John 14:15,23).

⁷² G. G. Findlay, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1900), p 783.

Conclusion

In the first century the church was faced with challenges to its doctrine. These challenges were met with strong opposition from apostles, preachers, elders, and members. The end result of false doctrine, lost souls of both teacher and disciples, was then, and is now, too great a price to idly stand by and allow it to exist in the Lord's church. As the first century Christians were united in doctrine so must the Christians of the late twentieth and twenty first centuries be also.

May elders, preachers, and members alike stand up and demand the same doctrine be taught now as when the apostles first proclaimed it. May all Christians heed Paul's words to Timothy: "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (I Timothy 4:16).

Chapter 24
They Were United In Worship
And Other Fellowship

Bob Prichard

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A common love for each other,
a common gift to the Savior,
A common bond holding us to the Lord;
A common strength when we're weary,
A common hope for tomorrow,
A common joy in the truth of God's Word.⁷³

⁷³ Charles F. Brown, "A Common Love," (1974).

How beautiful it must be to our heavenly Father when we unite to sing of these wonderful things that bind us together as His people! We unite to worship, and God blesses us. In our unity, we follow the example of the first century Christians, who were united in their worship.

As He prepared to ascend to the Father, Jesus told His disciples, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). It is no accident that the power they experienced in the baptism of the Holy Ghost came as they waited in unity. "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" (Acts 1:14). They were in "one accord," united as they waited for the outpouring of the Spirit. The Pentecostal preaching that resulted brought 3,000 obedient believers into the kingdom of God as the Lord established His church.

This new movement was a united movement. "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:46-47). Just as unity brought the church into being, unity allowed it to continue to grow.

Worship Reflects Unity

The worship of the early church was a reflection of their unity. As they continued in one accord, they necessarily joined together in worship, for worship bound them together as God's people.

Bernard Schalm, writing in *Christianity Today*, made this point:

When the early Christians organized as a visible body of believers, their main reason for organizing was worship. In the words of A. B. Macdonald, the believers 'possessed no buildings; no sacred book that was distinctly their own; no defined creed, nor any rule ... nothing, except their worship assemblies, that could serve as a rallying-point for their loyalties' (*Christian Worship in the Primitive Church*, p. 17). All that the early Christians possessed that could be said to be distinctly Christian were a few burning convictions, born out of their experience of God's redeeming work in Christ.⁷⁴

The first century Christians had a unity of purpose and love for God that caused a unity of fellowship in worship. Schalm adds,

Worship in the early Church also included fellowship. Worshipers were not passive recipients, they were active participants.

⁷⁴ Bernard Schalm, "Biblical Directives For Worship," *Christianity Today*, 14 September 1973, p. 13.

They were not only gathered in one place, but were also of one accord (Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24). It was in Christian fellowship that the individual believer was best able to realize and demonstrate his fellowship with Christ. Hence, absenteeism was considered to be spiritually disastrous (Hebrews 10:25). Among the strongest appeals that early Christianity made to the world was its human warmth and fellowship. Such fellowship was not merely a fruit of worship; it was an integral part of worship.⁷⁵

It is the coming together, the unity, which marks Christian worship.

The Greek word *ekklesia*, the New Testament word for church, means "the called out". *Kaleo*, "to call", is the root word. We rightly emphasize that we are called out of the world by the gospel. Paul was concerned about the Galatians, and said, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel" (Galatians 1:6). He wrote to Timothy, "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (II Timothy 1:8-9).

Not only does *ekklesia* mean those called out of the world, but also those who are called together for a purpose. William Barclay noted the double background of the word.

(i) *Ekklesia* has a Greek background. In the great classical days in Athens the *ekklesia* was the convened assembly of the people. It consisted of all the citizens of the city who had not lost their civic rights... It was an assembly where everyone had an equal right and an equal duty to take part... In the wider Greek world *ekklesia* came to mean any duly convened assembly of citizens ... To the Greek and Roman alike the word was familiar in the sense of a convened assembly. So, then, when we look at it against this background, as Deissman put it, the church was God's assembly, God's muster, and the convener is God.

(ii) *Ekklesia* has a Hebrew background. In the Septuagint it translates the Hebrew word *qahal*, which again comes from a root which means 'to summon.' It is regularly used for the 'assembly' or the 'congregation' of the people of Israel ... It is very common in the Septuagint, occurring over 70 times. In the Hebrew sense it, therefore, means God's

people called together by God, in order to listen to or act for God.⁷⁶

Thus the true *ekklesia*, as demonstrated in Luke's portrait of the early church, is God's people assembled in unity to worship Him.

In his book, *The Worship of the Early Church*, Ferdinand Hahn stressed that early Christian worship was unique, even though it had links to Jewish worship. Through Christ it linked with Judaism in recognizing that there is one God.

Nothing bespeaks the novelty of Christian worship so plainly as the terminology employed for its concepts. Almost none of the traditional concepts appear in the New Testament; and where they do, they are unmistakably used metaphorically... The only term that occurs with a certain regularity is *synerchestai* ('come together') or *synagesthai* ('be gathered together'). The 'coming together' of the faithful is the significant feature of Christian worship; and where the community comes together, God is praised, his mighty acts are proclaimed, prayers are said, and the Lord's Supper is

⁷⁶ William Barclay, *New Testament Words* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), pp. 68-70.

celebrated. All other terms appear only incidentally.⁷⁷

The first century Christians possessed a unity that not only facilitated, but allowed their worship. In truth, we would go so far as to say that where there is *no unity*, there is *no worship*, because the very nature of worship is that God's people must be united as they worship.

Some years ago, there lived a Christian in the community where I preached who had great disdain for the church and most of the members. He believed that having elders was unscriptural, so he chose to demonstrate his disdain for his brethren by walking out of the services each week. He would remain until he had partaken of the Lord's Supper, and then he would march out as I entered the pulpit each week. I always wondered if he really thought he was communing with the Lord when he was so antagonistic to his own brethren. He did not understand how important it is for brethren to be united as they worship. Although he was in the same assembly as we were, he did not experience the Christian unity that would allow him to worship in spirit and in truth.

"He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that

⁷⁷ Ferdinand Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, trans. David E. Green, ed. John Reumann, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), pp. 35-36.

loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes" (1 John 2:9-11).

Unity In Singing

Come we that love the Lord,
And let our joys be known;
Join in a song with sweet accord,
Join in a song with sweet accord,
And thus surround the throne,
And thus surround the throne.⁷⁸

The unity of believers around the throne of God in worship is a marvelous scene.

Perhaps there is no more obvious demonstration of the unity of God's people than when they join together in singing. The beautiful harmony of God's children uniting in song is surely a foretaste of heaven. The Christian who has never had the opportunity of joining in a song service at a great lectureship, with hundreds of other dedicated Christians, has surely missed a great opportunity. The beautiful harmony that lifts up our hearts toward God is a harmony that can come only from unity.

⁷⁸ Isaac Watts, "We're Marching to Zion" (1707).

Ch. 24: They Were United In Worship And Other Fellowship

We sing of that unity often. "Come let us all unite to sing, God is love."⁷⁹ The unity of the song service was not just words, but reality in the first-century church.

Paul wrote to the Christians of Colossae, encouraging them to teach and admonish one another. "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 to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:16-17). The best way to carry out this admonition from Paul is by uniting in corporate worship, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord. The early church must have demonstrated its unity of purpose clearly through their singing together.

In his discussion of the spiritual gifts as exercised in the church in Corinth, Paul says, "What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also" (I Corinthians 14:15). He adds later, "How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying" (I Corinthians 14:26). They

⁷⁹ Millard's & Badger's *Hymn's & Spiritual Songs*, "God is Love" (1849).

could edify one another through their singing as they worshipped in unity, and only through their unity.

Joseph Swain's words remind us how beautiful it is when God's people join in unity:

How sweet, how heav'nly, is the sight,
When those that love the Lord
In one another's peace delight,
And so fulfill the word.⁸⁰

Surely the Lord's prayer for unity in John 17 is at least partially fulfilled as His children unite in worship and song.

The writer of Hebrews points to Christ and the unity He brought to His followers.

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified *are* all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee" (Hebrews 2:9-12).

⁸⁰ Joseph Swain, "How Sweet, How Heavenly" (1792).

The Lord's Supper

The *Didache*, written in Syria at the end of the first century, or early in the second century, stressed the necessary unity for partaking of the Lord's Supper.

Having earlier confessed your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure, come together each Lord's day of the Lord, break bread, and give thanks. No one who has a quarrel with his fellow is to meet with you until they are reconciled, in order that your sacrifice may not be defiled. For this is what was spoken by the Lord, "In every place and time offer to me a pure sacrifice, because I am a great king, says the Lord, and my name is marvelous among the nations."⁸¹

When Christians join together around the Lord's table, surely unity must be the watchword. How can we properly contemplate the awful suffering of our Lord amidst disunity?

After adding three thousand in one day, the Jerusalem church "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). There is some debate among the commentators whether the phrase "breaking of bread" here refers to a common meal, the Lord's Supper, or both. Surely there is something much more than a common meal. The bread becomes significant because of the body of the

⁸¹ *Didache* p. 14.

Savior it represents. They were so close to one another, so united, that they "had all things common" (Acts 2:44), and continued in daily fellowship.

That unity continued in the church, even as it spread outside Judea. Although Paul "had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost" (Acts 20:16), he was determined to share in the worship of the brethren at Troas. "And upon the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight" (Acts 20:7). What a show of unity it was for Paul to join his brethren in breaking in bread, because he had waited seven days to share in the breaking of bread with them (Acts 20:6).

Unity in Giving

The unity of the church in Jerusalem shows clearly in their attitude to their possessions. "All that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need" (Acts 2:44-45). They had formed a community that truly cared for each member. Jesus had said, "By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). In their generosity, they demonstrated to the world that they were united in their love. It is not

surprising that the result was that "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47).

Jesus had prepared His followers for the proper unity in giving in the Sermon on the Mount. "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matthew 5:23-24). Proper giving comes only in the midst of unity of purpose and heart.

It is sad, but not surprising, that the earliest division within the church was over giving. Ananias and Sapphira broke that unity. Having sold a possession, they kept back part of the price, and brought the rest to the apostles. No doubt they were looking for the praises of men, rather than the praise of God. Peter stressed to them that they could do what they wanted to with their money, but they could not lie to God about it (Acts 5).

The unity among brethren continued even as the church spread through the Roman Empire. Prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. "And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which

dwelt in Judaea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 11:28-30).

The Christians of Antioch cared for the needs of their brethren in Judaea, because they shared Christian unity.

Paul's command, "Upon the first *day* of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as *God* hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come" (I Corinthians 16:2), stresses individual responsibility in the midst of the unity of the body.

Unity In Prayer

O what peace we often forfeit
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.⁸²

Tertullian (155-222), the first Latin Christian writer, lived in Carthage. He knew the church as a body of believers who trusted in prayer.

We are a body with a common feeling of religion, a unity of discipline, and a covenant of hope. We meet together in an assembly and congregation so that praying to God we may win him over by the strength of our prayers. This kind of force is pleasing to God.⁸³

⁸² Joseph Scriven, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," (1855).

⁸³ Tertullian *Apology*, pp. 39.5.

That common feeling of unity in prayer carried forward from the very beginning. The early Christians "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). They recognized the power of unified prayer. This power was sometimes even stronger than they realized, as when Herod imprisoned Peter. "Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him" (Acts 12:5). When the angel of the Lord freed him, he knew to go to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, "where many were gathered together praying" (Acts 12:12). They hardly believed Rhoda's report that Peter was at the door.

Paul's admonition, "Brethren, pray for us" (I Thessalonians 5:25), must have been followed again and again by brethren united in worship. Jesus said, "That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:19-20). Because Jesus is in the midst of united brethren, their prayers touch heaven.

Unity in Study of the Word

The first-century Christians "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). They knew that in their devotion to the apostles'

doctrine, spoken then written, they could be united in their understanding.

Although "God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (I Corinthians 14:33), modern man has learned to interject division. No doubt the majority of religious division today is the result of a lack of knowledge of the written word of God.

The example of the Bereans, if followed down through the centuries would have prevented the divided religious world of today. "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Paul's charge to Timothy was to preach the word at every opportunity, holding back nothing. Paul knew that the unity of the believers would one day be compromised by false teachers.

"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; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things,

endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (II Timothy 4:1-5).

Conclusion

We in the Lord's church today can have the same unity in worship as did the first century church. If we dedicate ourselves to preaching the pure word of God, and turn our hearts fully to Him, He will give us unity.

Charles Spurgeon reminds us that we find strength in unity and common purpose:

Communion is strength: solitude is weakness. Alone, the fine old beech yields to the blast and lies prone on the meadow. In the forest, supporting each other, the trees laugh at the hurricane. The sheep of Jesus flock together. The social element is the genius of Christianity.

The harvest of the unity of worship in the first-century church was explosive growth. We can find the same today.

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