

Unity

In his book “The Eternal Kingdom- A History of the Church” writer F. W. Mattox takes his reader on a journey that begins at the inception of the church of Christ, on the first feast of Pentecost after His resurrection, to her restoration which began early in the nineteenth century (*even though meanwhile some small group[s] of simple New Testament Christians would have continued to exist*). The church, based on the foundation of Peter’s statement professing Jesus as the Christ and Son of God, slipped into a time of apostasy which reportedly began toward the end of the first century and lasted for centuries before reformation and ultimately restoration of the body of Christ on earth would begin.

In order for union among the denominations to exist it was understood, at that time, that creed books and other man-made doctrines and established governments within the church had to be cast aside in order to allow the God inspired word, the Bible, to be the “common ground” and source of all inquiry in such matters. And even though for a while there was excitement over the idea of allowing only the Bible to guide each individual Biblically self-governed autonomous congregation, once again factions arose and denominationalism continued to be the norm.

Paul dealt with the seed of such disunity, much of which had to do with a lack of brotherly love and desire for the truth, knowing then that factions were on the horizon. Sadly, it seems to go with the territory.

1Co 1:10 I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our **Lord Jesus Christ**, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. **11** For it has been reported to me by **Chloe's** people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. **12** What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." **13** Is **Christ** divided? Was **Paul** crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of **Paul**?

There is a need for the unity which Christ prayed for before His crucifixion. The oneness existing between Father and Son has never been accomplished outside of truth but should be the goal for every human who has the intellect and desire to search for truth in all things spiritual. To strive for such a unity would only be accomplished when “self” is replaced with humility and personal interpretation with a “what saith the Lord” attitude.

Charli Yana/Sentinel Editorial- Jan 12, 2012

Persecution Expansion/Contraction

How did the church begin to grow after first being introduced to the Jews at Jerusalem? It was through the persecution of specifically, one man who had such disdain for Christians to the point of “ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he (**Saul**) dragged off men and women and committed them to prison” (**Act 8:3**). This

of course was after Saul approved of the stoning of Steven as the first recorded Christian martyr.

Act 8:1 And Saul approved of his (*Steven's*) execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Fulfilling Jesus' word in Acts 2, the gospel was spreading. And persecuting the church as a form of cell division only furthered it because...

Act 8:4 ... those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

Persecution is to be expected from without when we continue to preach the truth but, the one place oppression should never come from is from within the church. Such will always cause disruption of true fellowship and is detrimental to the eagerness of those who teach, preach and evangelize to continue to do so. Such is a discouragement that displays a lack of love for the body as a whole and can therefore slow or even stop it from reaching out to the lost. When even one of our brethren are discouraged it has a snowball's effect on the work of rest of the church.

Eph 4:1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with (*Gk.430- put up with*) one another in love, 3 eager (*Gk.4704- to make an effort, to be earnest*) to maintain the unity (*Gk.1775- oneness*) of the Spirit in the bond (*Gk.4886- a joint tie, that is, ligament, [figuratively] uniting principle*) of peace.

To be eager as this verse promotes is the same as in 2 Tim 2:15, where we are to “do [our] best” (*Gk.4704*) as we “present [ourselves] to God as one approved”. How we present ourselves to God can be therefore understood as how eager we are to “maintain the unity”. Both are mandated and carry the weight of a Biblical command. Bond here in one of the Greek glosses refers to what the purpose of a ligament is. A ligament is “a band of tissue connecting bones or holding organs in place” (*Webster*). That “oneness” of the Spirit can only be accomplished when there is a peace within the church that holds each part of the body together. And Paul's admonition to the Corinthian brethren came about because there were those among them that were attempting to weaken, or even sever, that bond of peace. Sowing discord through factions has its objective but should never be done on purpose.

1Co 11:18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, 19 for there must be factions among you **in order that** those who are genuine among you may be recognized.

“such is human nature, such are the corrupt passions of men, the propensity to ambition and strifes, that they are to be expected, and they serve the purpose of showing who are, and who are not, the true friends of God.” Albert Barnes

We've heard the saying "don't kill the messenger". Well, the messenger has feelings just like everyone else but in many cases when opinions that differ arise it seems evident that many don't realize it. How sad it is when brethren with their own personal agendas attend studies with a premeditated desire to disrupt. They seem to hang on every word that comes from the podium with the intent to pick apart and deride the motive of the one speaking. They aren't literally killing the messenger but their conduct and attitude are killing the efforts of those who have the zeal to even want to teach. It's one of the big reasons there are so few men who even want to be in such a position. Who wants to stand before an assembly knowing in advance they'll be pummeled with the fiery darts of disgruntled brethren? Such is predictable from the world outside the church but should never be expected from within.

Pride: Number 1 Cause of Disunity

Many, many a preacher has moved on from one congregation to another because of the few who made it difficult on their work and on how it affected their families negatively. Once a beloved preacher made certain comments in his class on taking the Lord's supper on Sunday evenings and another brother, who never taught a class or preached a lesson, berated him publically for it. This man would often sit in the balcony and interrupt the teacher by filibustering the class as though to make himself out to be some sort of Biblical scholar. He made such haste when the class dismissed to leave the balcony to get down to where this preacher was, as he was greeting those leaving the assembly, to expose his utter contempt and lack of self-discipline toward him. It seemed he couldn't wait to flex his knowledge of scripture in front of all who would witness it. And he wasn't even correct on that issue. Even if he had been correct, he had no right to disagree with him in such an un-Christ-like manner. What did he hope to gain? A following? Was he jealous of another's status in the church? Was his pride damaged knowing how most everyone knew of his beliefs on that particular subject since he made every effort to push it on any and all who would even listen to him? One of the qualifications for the eldership that Paul instructed Timothy on was that...

1Ti 3:6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the **condemnation of the devil**.

"That is, the same kind of condemnation which the devil fell into; to wit, condemnation on account of pride."
Albert Barnes

Pro 16:5 Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the **LORD**; be assured, he will not go unpunished. **6** By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the **LORD** one turns away from evil.

- It was obvious from the attitude of this disgruntled brother that he had no "fear of the Lord". He showed his inner contempt by such an outward display of obvious hatred toward another brother. Yet he still claimed to be a **Christian**.

1Jn 4:20 If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love **God Whom** he has not seen. **21**

And this commandment we have from Him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

- How can the world outside the church be convinced that we have the truth they need if we can't show love, especially for each other. The saying is so true "People don't care how much we know until they know how much we care."

Psa 36:1 To the choirmaster. Of David, the servant of the LORD. Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes. **2** For he flatters himself in his own eyes that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated.

- We can convince ourselves that our intentions are good when they're actually not, but sooner or later and especially "on the day of judgment people will give an account for every careless word they speak, for by [our] words [we] will be justified, and by [our] words [we] will be condemned" (*Mat 12:36-37*).

Psa 36:3 The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit; he has ceased to act wisely and do good. **4** He plots trouble while on his bed; he sets himself in a way that is not good; he does not reject evil.

- Each of us need to ask ourselves honestly and without bias if my speech or my actions promote unity or division. We need to humbly ask God, as the Psalmist did, to...

Psa 26:2 Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and my mind.

- As Paul wrote to the Ephesians...

Eph 4:29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to **those who hear**. **30** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by Whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. **31** Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. **32** Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

- As God in Christ forgave you. God didn't have to save mankind from his sinful nature. He could have just condemned the world to fire and created a perfect race in its place. But that's not the God we serve! He was willing to give His best, as He commanded the Israelites in **Lev 3:1** that their "peace offering" be "without blemish before the Lord". He offered His peace offering that ended all others.

Eph 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. **14** For He Himself is our peace, Who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility **15** by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, **16** and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

- Of course speaking of the division between the Israelite and Gentile nations before Christ came, He, none the less, came as an offering of peace to reconcile man back to his Creator.

1Ti 2:5 For there is one God, and there is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 Who gave Himself as a ransom (*Gk.487- a redemptive price*) for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

- A ransom is a price paid from one party for the release of those held captive by another. Christ became that ransom.

Joh 3:17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.

- Ever since the fall in the garden man has been captivated by the pleasures of sin and the desire to commit it. But temptation in and of itself isn't sin as long as we don't entertain it by following through in committing it. Jesus was tempted!

Heb 2:18 For because He Himself has suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted.

- A true child of God will suffer "when tempted". Just as Lot "was tormenting his righteous soul over their (*the inhabitants of Sodom*) lawless deeds that he saw and heard" (*2 Pet 2:8*), we too can allow ourselves to be exposed to the same when we watch certain TV programs or go certain places where we know there will be people dressed immodestly. Spring is upon us so we need to be careful not to allow our eyes to produce thoughts that will later haunt us.

Jas 1:14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

- We understand death to have two aspects to it. Physical and spiritual. Physical death is when the body and soul are separated whereas spiritual death is when the spirit of a man is separated from his Creator throughout eternity. Thus "the second death" of Rev 20:6. Partaking of the first death, in being baptized into Christ (*Rom 6:3*), now makes me free "from the law of sin and death" which is a very simple law: you sin, you die. But...

Rom 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. (*Baptism puts us into Christ- Gal 3:27*)

- But once our sins are forgiven in baptism we need to continue to "walk in the light, as He is in the light, [to] have fellowship with one another" so that "the blood of Jesus His Son [then, continually] cleanses us from all sin" (*1 Jn 1:7*).

Faithful Christians need not fear death since we “[pass] from death to life” (Jn 5:24). Before Jesus came, though, “death reigned” (Rom 5:17).

Heb 2:14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

- Satan was not prepared for what would happen after he thought he had defeated Christ in having Him crucified. With the power of death at his command, the devil didn't expect his defeat would come from the very force he so vainly wielded. He was behind the Jewish rulers in provoking them into unknowingly take their part in the redemptive process prophesied since Gen 3:15 when God foretold of Satan's downfall.

1Co 2:8 None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

- It was after the ascension of Christ when He was “seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in Heaven” (Heb 8:1) that the promises of the spiritual kingdom on earth were fulfilled. Peter preached that sermon in Acts 2 on how all can receive redemption from being held captive to their sins.

Eph 4:8 Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high He led a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men."

“Men had lived in bondage to, or [in] fear of, sin and death prior to Christ's coming because there was no means of escape. When Jesus was raised from the dead, man's freedom was purchased and those righteous of the past, who had submitted to God's will, and those of Christ's own time, who would submit, gladly followed him out of captivity.”
Gary Hampton

- But even before Christ would suffer the ultimate sacrifice for man's sin, He “made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Php 2:7). He had to become flesh and blood. Thus...

A Body (needed to be) Prepared

Heb 10:5 Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; 6 in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.

- Jesus knew in eternity “before the foundation of the world” (1 Pet 1:20) that in order to purchase His creation back from it being captivated by sin and thus subject to “the law of sin and death” He had to offer up His own life as the only perfect sacrifice for sin. But how could He do that? Under the first Covenant,

God prepared man to understand how the destructive nature of sin had to be atoned for through the sacrificial system. But...

Heb 10:1 ... since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

- It was difficult for the Jews during Jesus' earthly walk to accept that the promised Messiah would have to suffer as He did, such as what was foretold in the prophesy of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53. They either didn't believe, or misinterpreted, most if not all the Old Testament prophesies concerning Him. They were blinded by their own pride.

Joh 9:39 Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." 40 Some of the Pharisees near Him heard these things, and said to Him, "Are we also blind?" 41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains. *(Many didn't understand then as most don't understand even today.)*

People still search for the battered, crucified, physical body of Jesus, even after so many have done so in vain. Some still believe His body was stolen away while it was guarded by battle hardened Roman soldiers, His tomb sealed with such a heavy rock.

Mat 28:12 And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers 13 and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.' 14 And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." 15 So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

Christ's Body on Earth

Archeologists still search the tombs throughout Palestine and even though they sometimes come across a few evidences of crucified remains they have yet to identify them as those of our Lord. Why? Because first of all He's risen and secondly they're looking in the wrong place! His body is still here as He left it in the form His church.

Eph 1:22 And He (God) put all things under His (Christ's) feet and gave Him as Head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness (Gk.4137-completion) of Him Who fills all in all.

- People still searching for the body of Christ need look no further! The church is Christ's body, and as Christ's body on earth, each individual member, and collectively as the church, is responsible, not just to evangelize the lost, but "to keep oneself unstained from the world" (Jas 1:27). Which includes taking care of the body of believers as Jesus Himself would.

Eph 5:29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of His body. *(How we treat each other reflects on how we would treat Christ.)*

- How we treat others reflects on how we would treat Christ. And in taking care of His body, a.k.a. His bride, He did not leave us without the methods to do so.

Eph 4:11 And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

- As we strive to wean ourselves off the “milk” of the word and mature into the “solid food” of it (*Heb 5:13-14*), we will no longer be influenced by the lies that are often spoken by even the slyest of manmade ideas. But we can be doctrinally pure and at the same time we can lose sight of “speaking the truth in love” (*Eph 4:15*). As stated earlier, “people don’t care how much we know until they know how much we care”. Obviously we can’t allow truth to suffer at the hand of our love for the lost. Both go hand in hand. If I love you I’m not going to lie to you. But in the same token I’m not to be so blunt about it.

Col 3:14 And above all these put on love, which binds (*Gk.4886- ligament*) everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. *Because...*

1Co 13:4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things (*“the best about others, unless we have evidence to the contrary.” - Brad Price*), hopes all things, endures all things.

Col 3:12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

- I certainly hope this lesson has touched all our hearts in one way or another. If you have a need or would like to further study what the Bible says we need to do to be saved, please let us know if we can help you to that end.

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www.searchfortruth.church