

## Corporate Faith

Unity in Doing God's Will

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Last time the word of the day was “corporate,” and today we are going to be talking a bit about one of its antonyms, “individualistic.” There are at least two ways we can approach the word “individualistic.” We can approach it from a general or a more specific definition. Ultimately, the one we will be using the most throughout the sermon is going to be the general definition, which means, “Marked by or expressing individuality or distinctiveness.” In order to understand the general definition, we need to take time to understand the specific one, which is “a believer in the philosophy of individualism, or an individualist who is a believer in the philosophy of individualism.” Some believe in individualism and individuality so ardently that they have made a philosophy out of it. In fact, many people believe this so ardently that they have made several philosophies out of it, and they are philosophies that we are exposed to on a daily basis.

What is individualism? A brief, one sentence definition is: “Individualism is the belief that society exists for the benefit of individual people who must not be constrained by government interventions or made subordinate to collective interests.” From a governmental point of view, we might agree with this idea that government should not be intervening in our lives at every turn. We do not want to be at government’s beck and call 24/7, being regulated all the time. In fact, the Constitution as it was originally written and given to this nation enshrined this idea as a governing principle. The Constitution was set up to limit government, making it small so that it would not intrude into people’s lives all of the time. Adding to this the Declaration of Independence recognizes that God has given us various rights and freedoms. Spring boarding from this belief that the government should allow these freedoms to continue and should not have power to intrude on those rights and freedoms given from God. Therefore the Constitution limits the power of government (and that is what government is: power, authority, force) to a few specific activities. Even our 10<sup>th</sup> Amendment states that the powers that are not specifically mentioned in the Constitution or the Bill of Rights are given to the states or to the people. The federal government according to the Constitution, then, is to have just a few powers such as power over our defense and such things as that.

Unfortunately, over the past two centuries most of that has been undone, and so many laws and regulations have been enacted that the government is regulating virtually every activity in our lives. For most people this rubs against the grain because Americans tend to be highly individualistic.

The philosophy of individualism runs into conflict with the concepts of the Bible and Christianity because at its base, individualism promotes self-interest. Obviously, there is an amount of self-interest that is good—if you do not feed yourself, you will die. However, often self-interest leads directly into selfishness, and it opposes traditional and perceived societal, familial, institutional, and religious ideas and goals. What that translates into is that we do everything for ourselves, and we do not care what tradition, or society, or the wisdom of the ages says. We do not care about anything unless we ourselves have experienced it or thought it through with our own reasoning processes. We can see, then, because individualism centers on the individual, it has a strong, almost universal streak of humanism running through it. You cannot get away from humanism when you talk about individualism. By definition, “humanism” makes mankind, not God, the center of all things. Humanism’s ideas tend to exalt mankind and his accomplishments and potential, so that God becomes an afterthought.

You might think that individualist thinkers are rare, but that is not true. Individual thinkers run the gambit from Aristotle, Antiphon and Zeno to Emerson, John Locke, Oscar Wilde, Thoreau, our President Jefferson, Nietzsche, Gandhi, Jean-Paul Sartre, Schopenhauer, Adam Smith, and H.L. Mencken. I could have made this list many, many times longer but these are some of the best known. There are literally hundreds of thinkers and writers that would fit in this individualism camp of philosophers. This shows you just how influential this philosophy of individualism is because it is being propounded by all these so-called philosophical giants, and people follow them because at heart everyone is an individualist.

When it comes down to it, individualism tends to be about “me, myself, and I;” and we are always tuned in to self. It is about satisfying the self, and in many cases it is about satisfying our lusts. We can see already how it can lead to problems with God. It is about pursuing one's ideas, hopes, and dreams at the expense of all else and others. It is the philosophy that underlies American self-reliance, which in many cases is good, but tends to tip over into selfishness. It is the philosophy which underlies “climbing the ladder of success” because YOU want to get to the top, and you do not care how you treat anybody else who might get in your way. It is the philosophy that underlies such slogans as “Be all that you can be,” and the famous Nike one that I bring up quite a bit, “Just do it!” It does not matter what is out there to stop you, what kind of obstacles you must go over, just do it, and leave a path of destruction in your wake. It is also the philosophy of “I’m not letting anyone get in my way,” which reminds me of the Frank Sinatra song.

Individualism is also the underlying dogma of, among other philosophies, hedonism,

existentialism, classic liberalism, libertarianism, anarchism, Ayn Rand's objectivism (which has recently come out in a movie), liberalism as seen in the movements of individual rights, multi-culturalism, post-modernism and a whole slew of other "isms" that I could name.

In fact, just about every human philosophy has individualism at its heart. Even some of the more collective ones like communism usually are the brainchild of someone who will benefit from such a system, so it comes around to individualism again. Did you notice as I listed all these philosophies that they ran the gambit from extreme right, like anarchism, to extreme left, like liberalism and existentialism and such. No matter where a person falls on the philosophical, political, or social spectrum, he desires to be unique, special, autonomous, and distinctive; he wants to be a stand out.

Therefore, it is all about "me, myself and I." This means that instead of relying on the tried and true, seeing social norms and following them (if they are what God would agree to), maintaining traditional ideas and methods and listening to the wisdom of God, the individualist rejects all these things and trusts his personal intellect, his reason, and his experience. Ultimately, humanity is made up of billions of children who are saying "I want to do it myself!" They do not want any help from anyone else. They are going to do it their way, and so they do.

As history records, sometimes there is progress. You can look at the march of history and say that we have progressed at least scientifically and technologically to the point where we are all living fairly well. We have food on our tables, nice clothes to wear, automobiles, all kinds of fun things to do, all kinds of gadgets in our houses, but all this must be contrasted to the broad swath of destruction that has brought us to this point. Turn to Proverbs 14:12 (this is a memory scripture and one of the first I remember having to memorize):

**Proverbs 14:12** There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

I just took about 15 minutes to talk about individualism, but this scripture right here defines it. There is a way that seems right to a man and every one of us has followed it, but the end result is death and destruction. Individualism and being individualistic, at its heart, is anti-God. Even though we are individuals and we have individual needs we must make sure our guiding light is God and not ourselves. We have to do those things that seem right, not to men, but to God, and the end, as we will see, is eternal life.

Having covered corporate sin in the last sermon we are going to consider the positive other side of that which is corporate faith. You will see how all this fits in, but these two sermons go together like a sandwich and probably need to be heard together. However, there is enough information in this sermon that if you did not hear the first one, you will still be able to grasp this one. Corporate faith requires that we lay aside our individualism and join our brethren in Godly works that accomplish God's purpose. In many respects, this is what being part of the body of Christ is all about. In keeping with the theme of the holy day, go back to Exodus and we will see in Exodus 13:3-10 how these ideas fit into this day. For those of you who are using a King James Version, please note the pronouns.

**Exodus 13:3-10** And Moses said to the people: "Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out of this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. On this day you are going out, in the month Abib. And it shall be, when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall keep this service in this month. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord. Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters. And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, 'This is done because of what the Lord did for me when I came up from Egypt.' It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the Lord's law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt. You shall therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year.

This is the second command in the Bible to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The first command was in chapter 12, which we went through in the last sermon. This passage, when looked at as a whole, begins and ends with very heavy emphasis on the fact that when they came out of Egypt, it was God who brought them out with a strong hand. Moses puts the emphasis where it belongs. The people walked out of Egypt and they responded to the command to leave, but God made it happen. We know about all of the plagues that God performed so that Israel would have the opportunity to be redeemed from the land of bondage. It was His might that redeemed them from their slavery and sent them walking out of Egypt. Because He took the time and effort to do this for them, He says that no leavened bread shall be eaten. As it states in verse 3: "Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by

strength of hand the Lord brought you out of this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten.”

Those things do not occur one right after the other without a reason. There is a reason and Moses states that because God brought them out of the land by His mighty hand, no leavened bread should be eaten. There was a cause and effect relationship, a work of God and a response of the faithful. Put another way, it is an obligation. Because God did this, they must do this other thing, which was to refrain from eating leavened bread. Because of what God did, it is an obedient response not to eat leavened bread, and then he goes on to talk about eating unleavened bread. In verse 8, it is made especially plain when it talks about telling the children:

**Exodus 13:8** And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, This is done because of what the Lord did for me when I came up from Egypt.

They were to teach their children that in keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread they were not to eat leavened bread but to eat unleavened bread because of what God had done. It was a faithful response to the act of God. In the same way, we keep this feast because of what the Lord did for us. He did the same thing in bringing us out of spiritual bondage and out of spiritual Egypt. In response, we keep this feast as a memorial.

Back to the bit of grammar I spoke of earlier. Watch the pronouns because modern translations obscure pronouns a great deal, especially the second person. In middle English, and even early modern English, there are several different ways to use “you.” We say “you” when referring to one person and we say “you” when referring to a group of people. When we want to talk about the subject versus the object, we use “you” as a subject and we use “you” as the object, so it becomes blurred when you are reading a modern translation. You have to go to either a King James or an Interlinear or some sort of Hebrew Bible that gives you the pronouns and their number in order to figure it out. In the King James Version they leave it as it was, they translate the pronouns properly. Back then when you said “thou” or “thee” you were speaking in the singular, but if you said “ye” or “you” you were speaking in the plural. If we were living back then and I said “you need to go to the store” then all of you would go to the store. If I said “thou needest to go to the store” it would mean that you individually needed to go to the store. Now that we know this, looking at verses 3-4 in the King James Version all the second person pronouns are plural.

**Exodus 13:3-4** And Moses said unto the people, Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength

of hand the LOORD brought you out from this place: there shall no leavened bread be eaten. This day came ye out in the month Abib.

Moses is addressing the group as a corporate body, the nation of Israel. He says it in the plural, including all of them. In verses 5 through 10 the second person pronouns are all singular, narrowing it down to each individual Israelite using “thou” and “thee” as well as the possessives “thy” and “thine” (by the way, you use “thine” before a vowel).

**Exodus 13:5-10** And it shall be when the LOORD shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he sware unto thy fathers to give thee, a land flowing with milk and honey, that thou shalt keep this service in this month. Seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, and in the seventh day shall be a feast to the LOORD. 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. And thou shalt shew thy son in that day, saying , This is done because of that which the LOORD did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt. And it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the LOORD'S law may be in thy mouth: for with a strong hand hath the LOORD brought thee out of Egypt. Thou shalt therefore keep this ordinance in his season from year to year.

In considering our subject today, we are more interested in things done corporately, not things done individually. We are more interested in the plural rather than the singular at this point. As we see Moses begins by addressing the people as a body and draws their attention to an act that they accomplished together—they all walked out of Egypt under the mighty guiding hand of God.

Then, still speaking to them as a body, he commands them not to eat leavened bread, repeating and emphasizing that they ALL left Egypt on this particular day of Abib. The command begins with the whole body. They were all to keep these days of Unleavened Bread, refrain from eating leavened bread, and leave Egypt on this particular day. Then in verse 5, he addresses them as individuals, telling each of them to keep the feast when they come into the land emphasizing this will also occur under the mighty hand of God. He reiterates not eating leavened bread as well as eating unleavened bread.

In verse 8, he instructs the individual Israelite to pass this instruction on to his children, emphasizing again what God has done. What God did He did for each individual

Israelite, not just for the whole nation, but for each one in particular showing that He was not just interested in calling Israel out, but He was interested in each individual.

Finally, in verse 10 he commands each of them, as individuals, to keep it every year. This is very important from our point of view today. It shows the interconnectedness between corporate and individual acts. There are actually three areas of interconnectedness that are shown in this particular example.

The first and easiest to see is that when we do something as a group, we also do it as individuals. We cannot separate our actions into things I do and things we do. The reason is because the things I do are the things we do. They cannot be separated. We cannot split ourselves into one who does corporate acts and one who does individual acts, it is impossible. All corporate acts are also individual acts and therefore the corporate act is the amalgamation of many individual actions. It takes each individual person willing to do something that makes the corporate act possible.

The second connection between corporate and individual acts is that God commands them both. He told them to do this as a nation and He told them to do this as an individual. As God's way of life reveals in scripture, we must perform individual acts like removing leaven and eating unleavened bread, but we must also do things together. Today is a perfect example of that. Not only are we to keep this feast as individuals by putting leaven out and eating unleavened bread, but we are also to meet on the first day and last day in holy convocation. We do this together. We do this on the Sabbath every week, or we should, because this is a command of God. Even though we can worship Him at home individually, when possible we should also worship Him together on the Sabbath. That is a command of God. We are to be in holy convocation, in fellowship with Him and with our brethren. This includes all the holy days and the Feast of Tabernacles.

Many of our individual acts are also corporate acts, depending on the situation. When we start services, we all praise God individually and we also do it in concert when we sing. We are all doing it together and hopefully in harmony. We pray individually at our homes, and then when we come to church we pray corporately with an opening and a closing prayer. Then there are times that we have to pray corporately for other things. These prayers are usually led by one individual, but we are all, by saying "Amen," putting our voice into the prayer. We do individual works; we did that today in the offering, but that offering allows all of us as a church to do a corporate work—to do a thing together for God's purpose. When you give an offering or you pray for the work to go forward or pray for things to happen, then the ministry or others involved more intimately with it for the rest of you do a work for God. We call it preaching the gospel, or

feeding the flock. These are individual works, and they are also corporate works. God commands them both and we are supposed to do them both.

The third connection and perhaps the most important one between corporate acts and individual acts, especially in God's economy, is that they put us under obligation. This obligation works both ways: when we do a corporate act, it obligates us to do individual acts and when we do an individual act, it obligates us to do corporate acts. We see this in Exodus 13 where Israel's corporate act of leaving Egypt due to God's power put them under obligation to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread as a memorial. Doing that corporate act, following God out of Egypt, required them to keep the feast because of what God had done for them.

Similarly, the fact that each individual left Egypt under God's guiding hand obliged them not only to keep the feast as God commanded but also to teach these same things to their children and to continue to keep the feast. I do not know if this was Moses' idea or whether God put it in there and I just figured it out, or whether it just works this way but in addressing them corporately and individually, he showed how doing one thing put them under obligation to do another. Interestingly, when it comes down to it, if each individual Israelite did as commanded then the whole nation would be keeping this feast together.

I wanted to put these things out there because sometimes in this country we tend to emphasize only those individual acts of worship or those individual acts of doing God's work and we lose site of the corporate aspect of it which is working as a body, as a church. I hope that as we finish today we can see that we need to get together in doing these corporate acts, coming together in unity. That is where God is headed, and if we do not get on the bandwagon, we will not get there. This sounds rather ominous but Christ is only going to marry one bride, the body of Christ. He is not going to marry many brides, so we have to be in unity with one another as the body of Christ in preparation for that wedding supper that we are all looking forward to.

We will now look at a few examples of corporate faith in Hebrews 11, the faith chapter. We see the examples given by Paul, whom we believe to be the person behind Hebrews, where he shows people doing faithful things, doing works of God in faith. Notice in going through all these lives and the works they did, he talks about people, individuals. In describing the acts of these men and women of faith, he starts with Abel, then goes on to Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah and Abraham again in verse 17, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses. He particularly takes a long time with Moses because he did so many wonderful things for God. But notice, they are all individuals. By the time he gets to verse 29 after talking about Moses keeping the Passover (interestingly there



were millions of Israelites who also keep the Passover, but he only mentions Moses), he writes:

**Hebrews 11:29-30** By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land whereas the Egyptians attempting to do so were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days.

He did not even mention the people in verse 30. It was by faith the walls came down, but there were obviously people involved in this corporate act of faith. Here are two examples in a row of corporate faith. After going through the list of individuals who exhibited faith, he goes into these two acts of corporate faith. Perhaps he realized in going through the history of Israel that the time of the wilderness wandering produced these two sterling examples of Israel, as a people, as a nation, doing a faithful work for God. They went through the Red Sea in faith and they also marched around Jericho, and the walls came tumbling down. The reason this would strike him is because these were really rare occurrences in the history of Israel—for them to have done anything in faith, but here only forty years apart are two big incidences; the Red Sea and the fall of Jericho. He highlights these two acts to bring to our remembrance that there was a time when Israel got together in unity as an entire nation and did something really good, which resulted in taking God's purpose and moving it forward.

Go to Exodus 14 and we will look at the Red Sea crossing. Israel had left Ramses and travelled to Succoth, wandered around east of the Nile, and by the time they arrived at the Red Sea six days had passed. This then was the eve of the last holy day of Unleavened Bread (although we do not know this for certain, but it is believed to be the time that it occurred. It could very well be the exact time and God's timing is perfect. He puts things in where they need to be so that we can have an example). They had come to the Red Sea and now they were trapped with the Red Sea in front of them, mountains on either side, and Pharaoh and all of his horsemen and chariots quickly approaching from the rear. Even though they did this wonderful work, they at first were not very faithful, as we will see in verse 10.

**Exodus 14:10-22** And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord. [At least we can give them credit that they cried out to the Lord.] Then they said to Moses, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us alone that we

may serve the Egyptians?' For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness." And Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace." And the Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward. But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. Then the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gained honor for Myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen." And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them. So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

**Exodus 14:27-31** And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and when the morning appeared, the sea returned to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it. So the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained. But the children of Israel had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. So the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Thus Israel saw the great work which the Lord had done in Egypt; so the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and His servant Moses.

The Israelites complained because they feared for their lives, but Moses put a bit of steel in their spines by pointing to God's power to deliver them from the Egyptians

despite them being caught in what appeared to be a trap with no escape. Moses pointed them to God and assured them that He would save them. They were to stand still and witness God's intervention. After that great speech then God commanded that he continue on and get going, and so he did. As much as we look at this and think what a wonderful thing God did, it took faith to walk between those walls of water. This was something that had never been seen before. Now to you and me we have seen the movie and they walk right through. I have been to Universal Studios and done it myself. But to them this was something that they had never, ever conceived of, that God would divide these waters and open up a passage for them through the sea, and it was not even wet where they were walking. I believe the movie shows quite well that the walls were fairly high and the people were thinking that if they were to come crashing down they were goners. They were probably also wondering what was holding them up. It certainly was not the staff of Moses because it was just an object. It was not the power of Moses, what did Moses have? This was God's power, but all they could see was the water, and maybe they could see the fish in there swimming about. What is allowing this to happen? This is against all laws of nature, but they had to put down their human inclinations to run the other way and to go through the sea, and they all did it. They did not leave behind a single one of them on the west side of the sea, they all walked on dry ground to the other side. Obviously it worked out to their deliverance.

In the antitype, it works out to our salvation when God brings us out of the world and from the clutches of Satan. We have all been called out, had to walk in faith behind that cloud and through the walls of water as it were as a kind of baptism and to come out on the other side knowing that God saved us. What did it result in for the Israelites? Notice in verse 31:

**Exodus 14:31** So the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord.

This great corporate act of faith produced the fear of God. It showed them who was in control and made them not want to displease Him. Because He had the great power to save them when He could have squashed them like bugs, it says they believed Him. However, it did not last for very long because they were carnal. But for us who have the holy spirit, it works so much better. When we see the changes that God has made in us and separated us out from the world and given us so many blessings we see that He is right. We begin to examine what other things He is right about by studying the Bible, and we believe His word and we apply what He says. We can see how this corporate act of faith produced a great deal of good, and we can see it in our own lives as well.

Now to the other example in Joshua 6: There is no biblical indication when this

particular act of faith was accomplished, but the last time marker we have was the beginning of the Days of Unleavened Bread in verse 11 of chapter 5. They had just kept Passover, and in verse 11 it says:

**Joshua 5:11** They ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day.

The event that we are going to read could have happened on the last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread or maybe even into Pentecost or sometime in the summer. Regardless of the specific time that this occurred, it is a sterling example of a corporate act of faith.

**Joshua 6:1-10** Now Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out, and none came in. And the Lord said to Joshua: "See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor. [listen to the following instructions, they are very important in this particular corporate act of faith] You shall march around the city, all you men of war; you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days. And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. It shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him." Then Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord." And he said to the people, "Proceed, and march around the city, and let him who is armed advance before the ark of the Lord." So it was, when Joshua had spoken to the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the Lord advanced and blew the trumpets, and the ark of the covenant of the Lord followed them. The armed men went before the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard came after the ark, while the priests continued blowing the trumpets. Now Joshua had commanded the people, saying, "You shall not shout or make any noise with your voice, nor shall a word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I say to you, 'Shout!' Then you shall shout."

Now drop down to verse 15.

**Joshua 6:15-16** But it came to pass on the seventh day that they rose early, about the dawning of the day, and marched around the city seven times in the same manner. On that day only they marched around the city seven times. And the seventh time it happened, when the priests blew the trumpets, that Joshua said to the people: "Shout, for the Lord has given you the city!

**Joshua 6:20-21** So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.

We see here an example of corporate faith. They did something as a work for God. The people of Israel shouted, the men of war marched, as well as everybody else, the priests blew trumpets, carried the ark, they all worked together with God to capture and destroy Jericho. Of course, this was an accursed city so they destroyed everything according to the command. The corporate act, the faith they showed, is a bit different here than at the Red Sea, which gives us another facet of this subject. There at the Red Sea, it was a matter of trust, and it was a life or death situation. They either went across on dry ground through the avenue God opened up or they were killed by the Egyptians.

They had to trust that God would see them through to the other side, holding up the walls of water so that they would not be killed. However, at Jericho it is a matter of obedience and following instructions to the letter. This is why I went through all of these instructions. Each day for six days they were to march, blow the trumpet, bear the ark, circle the city once, and then they were to return to camp. Then on the seventh day, they were to march, blow the trumpet, bear the ark, circle the city seven times, and when the trumpet sounded with a long blast and Joshua instructed them, they were to shout. Lots and lots of instructions and they were required to do it properly, as God commanded, in order for the miracle to be done and the wall to fall down flat.

There was no *give* in these instructions; they had to do it precisely as God commanded. The following of these commands under Joshua's direction shows a unity of purpose, but more importantly, a unity of obedience. To put it in Paul's language, "they all spoke the same thing." They all did it together the same way, and God responded. It also

showed teamwork and cooperation because each Israelite was relying on another Israelite and all the other Israelites to do this work properly. We will not go into it in detail but there was one man, Achan, who after this event did something wrong. He did something that no Israelite was supposed to do. Evidently, every other Israelite did it right except him; and as a result, they lost a lot of people the next time they went to conquer the city of Ai.

There is a great lesson here about following God's way of life to the letter, not just as individuals, but as a church. In this case, of the people of Israel coming into the land and doing this great work, they pulled together like a well-matched and trained yolk of oxen, proving that if they were obedient, God could use them to conquer the land. They could work together to do what needed to be done.

It is interesting to consider that both of these acts—the crossing of the Red Sea and the circling of Jericho—were both done at the beginning of a great undertaking. The Red Sea was the beginning of the wilderness wandering. They had 40 years before them to get to the Promised Land, which they did not know at the time, but here at the beginning of this great adventure they do something wonderful as a group.

The same thing happens at Jericho where in the beginning of the conquest of the land they did this great thing together. Do you know that when we get into the wilderness wandering there are maybe no other examples of them doing another comparable act, unless possibly the generous giving that they did for the building of the tabernacle. It is a rather rare occurrence otherwise that they did anything together at all. The same thing can be said after this initial beginning of the conquest of the land. They started out well, but things deteriorated over time.

It is interesting to note that it was only Joshua and Caleb that were present at both of these occurrences, and maybe a few others were there as well. What we have here are two instances of entirely different groups of people except for Joshua and Caleb and a few others that were present at both events. Those who took part in the crossing of the Red Sea died in the wilderness. Ultimately their great act of corporate faith did them little good because they did not fulfill their obligations. They did not follow through on their individual acts that God obligated them to do. God brought them out of Egypt and saved them at the Red Sea, and then they stopped right there. They might as well have all died under the sword of the Egyptians for all the good it seemed to have done them ultimately, which shows you how important following through is.

The fact that both of these great acts were done at the beginning of two significant time periods illustrates that at the beginning of a task we tend to work well with others and

get along, but over time our enthusiasm and our unity wane. We are all gung ho and excited when we are going to start something new. We all pitch in at first, but after a little while we start seeing chinks in the armor and cracks in the dike.

We start to think “This person is not who we thought he was.” “He has strange ideas.” “I do not want to be around him.” Suddenly we are separating and drawing away from each other, and we begin to have trials. Those trials begin to wear us down and we lose our zeal. Many of us crawl into a shell and get a little depressed thinking “It was so good back then when we were all doing great things for God, but nobody wants to do that any more.” We develop the attitude of “woe is me.” We then divide, split up and go our own way and some fall away altogether. Great undertakings seem never to end with the same flourish as when they began.

It does not have to be that way with us. Actually, there is a church mentioned in Revelation 2 which had this problem, the church at Ephesus.

**Revelation 2:1-5** To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands [Notice the way He begins. He identifies Himself as present among the churches holding the seven stars in His hands and walking among the lampstands. He has not gone away, even though things may seem dark, He is still there.] I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. [Here He gives them a bit of a history of their church and points out that they have done a lot: they have been patient, persevered, done a lot of work, and faced up to those false apostles and resisted them as apostates. But then He goes on with what He has against them.] Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

The problem here is that in all their fighting, resisting and hard and heavy labor they had lost site of the goal. They were great in facing all those bad guys, and they were willing to pitch in whenever there was a job to do, but their focus had left their first love, Jesus Christ. Their fervency and zeal for Christ had waned alarmingly over the years. Notice what He tells them to do. He tells them to repent, change, turn around, go back to your

first works and your enthusiasm when you were all willing to work together. What He is talking about here are the works that are pointed to in the Bible in Acts 2:42 right after Peter's Pentecost sermon.

**Acts 2:42** And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul [Remember in Exodus 14, where the great works that they performed in the beginning produced fear and belief. There is a parallel here.], and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed [there is that other word] were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord [they were all in unity] in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Jesus says in Revelation 2 to get back to that spirit, that attitude of working together, of belief and fear of God. They had lost it and lost it so badly that He threatens to remove their candlestick if they do not repent. Had they all become individualists who were in it only for themselves? That church became scattered and when the apostles finally died out about 100 A.D., that church blew apart. Mr. Armstrong said that when the curtain was raised on the second century church, it was entirely different from the apostolic church, because those people in the Ephesian era of the church lost it; they lost their zeal. They lost their ability to work together and to do great works for God. As you go through the Bible and look at what happened early on and then march further toward us in our time, through the 40s, 50s, 60's and later and then reflect on those works of the church in the first century, those great works petered out. Jesus says to go back to those first works when all were together in one accord, doing things together, worshipping Him together, praising Him together, praying together, doing those things that show they were all in it together as a body.

We will end in Ephesians 4. You can call this Paul's great anthem and plea for unity in the church. In this passage, there is a kind of point/counter point between the individual and the corporate but he begins and ends with the corporate.

**Ephesians 4:1-8** I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you [I beg you] to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in



love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace [be unified, walk together in the spirit]. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith [one set of beliefs], one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. [He has established that there is one body, but he goes on to the individual] But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men."

He is saying that even though we are unified, we were all called individually, given grace individually and also given other gifts individually to do things in the body that other people cannot do. Compare this to I Corinthians 12 where it talks about the foot not being the head which has to do things the foot cannot do, and the foot has to do things other than what the head has to do, pointing out that though we are individuals we are within the body and each part is vital to the whole.

**Ephesians 4:11-16** And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers [He is pointing out how this all works out in the church. Now notice what those individual gifts were designed to do], for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ [He is coming back around to the body and though we have individual strengths and skills these are to be used for the benefit of the entire body], till we all 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 [we are supposed to be working together and growing so that all of us become like Christ in one body]; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro [Remember I said an individualist is like a child who says "I want to do it my way."] and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

In reading through this, by the time we get to verse 16, He is telling us that if we do not work in unity we are not going to grow because it is what every joint supplies, what we all put in together that causes growth of the body. If we are all off doing our own thing

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individually, the body is going to suffer. Remember the words that are said in Psalms 133:1.

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

If this is what we want, if we want to be part of the Bride of Christ and marry Him at His coming, we must bind ourselves together in faith and do works for God.