

Of One Accord

Unity

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I do not know whether you can recall what it was like whenever you left the Worldwide Church of God, but part of the controversy when I left was over Passover. But, historically Passover has given fewer problems in that regard than Pentecost has. Many simply cannot agree as to the interpretation of Leviticus 23:15. That is the one that tells you about beginning the countdown after a Sabbath day. Determining exactly which Sabbath day has caused a great deal of confusion. So much confusion that the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) even translated it differently from what the Jewish Publication Society did.

The Sadducees believed that the Sabbath that is mentioned in the verse was the weekly Sabbath, and thus they began counting beginning with the following day—always a Sunday—and then using the Hebrew way of (counting inclusively) began the count that day and always arrived at a Sunday. The date will vary, but it will always be a Sunday.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, felt the Sabbath mentioned referred to the holy day Sabbath, the 15th day of Nisan, the First Day of Unleavened Bread. So they began counting with the following day and therefore because of the way they did it, Pentecost always falls on Sivan 6, which is a fixed day regardless of the day of the week it falls on. In other words, it could fall on a number of days of the week, but it will always fall on Sivan 6.

Now to add a bit more confusion to it, the Orthodox Jews in Ethiopia interpreted the verse to signify that one should begin counting from the last Sabbath in the Days of Unleavened Bread. This way of counting also ends in a fixed date for Pentecost, but several days later than what the Pharisees would observe.

The Catholic Encyclopedia says that the Jews would not openly admit to the law even being given on the Day of Pentecost until as late as the second century AAD. All of this controversy is ironic in the light of the observation that appears in the Talmud. It says, "There are seven days of Passover; seven days of Tabernacles. Why only one day of Pentecost? Because Pentecost commemorates the day when all Israel was at one heart in accepting the law."

It is good to know that there was one day that they were all united. But it seems like that might have been the last time that they were all united because there is probably more

disagreement over Pentecost than any one of the other holy days. The Bible is somewhat vague about the day of Pentecost, but regardless, there is sufficient information to determine its correct date. But all the controversy ought to tell you something about whether these confused groups were really being led by the Spirit of God.

There is a reason for all this confusion; there is a reason why there is so much disagreement over what day that we are supposed to be observing it on.

Turn to Galatians 5 and you will see a basis for that reason.

Galatians 5:19-22 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

I do not know whether you were evaluating those words as we read through them—these ‘**works** of the flesh,’ these things that God intimates very strongly that we labor at producing. Very many of them directly divide. There is not a single work of the flesh that promotes peace and unifies. Now some of these works of the flesh like adultery, idolatry, hatred, variance (which means contentions, fightings), envy or jealousy, wrath, strife (more literally selfish ambition), seditions (dissensions), these directly promote division, and the other ones may not do it directly, but most certainly indirectly.

This is interesting in the light of how this all began. God breaks things down into very simple parameters for us. We see the story in various portions of the Bible. Acts the 17th chapter is one of those places where He breaks things down very simply. Paul says referring to God:

Acts 17:26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.

This all began with one man. Then one woman was added to that and so we have one family. All of this confusion and division began with only two people. But it was not long

before they began disagreeing about things and the disagreements spread out to their children and from them to their children. In Romans 5 we have another very simple statement with regard to the way things are.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.

We know the story from Genesis 3. The first man and woman were in the Garden and Satan moved in promoting division from God and from each other. So sin entered into the environment, into the hearts and minds of these two people, and therefore into the Garden of Eden. It entered into us through the same family and from the same blood from which all of mankind has spread and descended. From those two people, division, confusion, and separation began its implacable march toward the ultimate in division: death. That is where it is headed. Separation or division caused by sin is heading towards death unless something intervenes and turns us away from the implacable march into the grave.

Now today we live in a very badly divided world. Many of the world's leaders, especially those in the Western world, are striving to bring mankind into or under one supraworld government generally labeled as the New World Order, seen in the Bible as "the beast." We can see it; it is rising.

Satan has attempted this before. At the tower of Babel, he attempted to bring all mankind under one government: his own. We see various attempts at this down through history: the Roman Empire, before that the Greek, before that the Medo-Persian, and before that the Babylonian. Every one of them was an attempt to bring the world under one government.

Now we are in the midst of seeing the greatest or strongest attempt at this ever being done. We know from the Bible that it is going to succeed for a short period of time. It is being allowed, permitted, and maybe even promoted by God. It is going to bring all the world into a warfare against Christ and against His church. We know—it has already been written—who is going to win that battle so we can be confident if we are on the right side.

So we know what the outcome is going to be. We know that it will not be successful. The beast is symbolically composed of iron and miry clay. It is both strong and weak. It has the strength of iron but is composed of people who have the same problem that Adam and Eve had in them, and this is going to drive them apart eventually. It is even

prophesied that the beast is going to turn and rend its main partner in crime—the great false church—in order to make sure that it ends up with the big end, the long end, of the stick, so that all power falls into its hands. But, even while it seems to have all of this strength, it is actually going to be weak because of the divisions in the hearts of those who briefly unify it into a common evil purpose.

History is a chronicle of mankind's divisions and those divisions are highlighted by warfare that has been perpetuated in every generation since Adam and Eve. Even when there is not a shooting war going on somewhere in this world, there is still the prejudice, intolerance, lust, jealousy and the greed, dividing us and creating anger and resentments—the very circumstances for the next round of outright retaliations in the murder that we call war. What do wars end up with? Death!

This is intriguing, maybe especially so, because many of the nations involved in the wars are those who are supposed to be following the commandments of Jesus Christ since they call themselves “Christian.” Yet it was in Jesus' final recorded prayer, while His disciples were still with Him, where he prayed that we might be one with the Father and each other. That is implied because if we cannot be one with each other, how can we ever be one with the Father? I will not go on to prove that but you can see the proof of that in I John. How can a man say, if he hates his brother, that he loves God?

John 17:9-11 "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me [Why?], that they may be one as We are.

There is the thrust of the final prayer Jesus Christ made in our behalf. That we might be *one*! Not divided, not separated, not confused, and not dead! But one in life eternally. If we understand it, this was *the* major reason for His ministry. People sometimes go as far as the death of Jesus Christ, and they stop there. The reason He died, brethren, is so that we could be one, so that all of these divisions, confusion, quarreling, fighting, offenses, anger, murder, deceit—would stop. His prayer was that we might be one.

If we cannot be used by Him to create one, even in this small group—a small group that is one with each other and the Father—how is He ever going to bring us into His Kingdom? We are talking about serious business here. It is not something that we can take lightly; we cannot turn our backs on the very purpose of Jesus Christ's ministry. His

entry in this world, His perfect life, and His death were all aimed at bringing everyone into one with the Father and each other. As long as we are not one, what we see in this world is just going to continue right on.

John 17:20-22 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word [that is you and me] that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one:

The glory that He gave to the Son was His Word and His Spirit, and it was given for that purpose. It is the same reason that Jesus Christ came, lived, and died; the same reason that God gave Christ His glory and gives it to you and me is so that we can be one.

John 17:23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect [whole, complete] in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

Obviously Jesus' prayer is not fully answered, and it is ironic that the greater church of God is more divided than it has been in a long, long time. But God never gives us something that we cannot do. Even if we lack on our own, by His Spirit He enables us. He gives us grace; He gives us the gifts whereby we can carry out what He has set before us.

II Chronicles 15:1-2 Now the spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded. And he went out to meet Asa [king of Judah], and said to him: "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. [Now listen to these words carefully. And I want you to think of this in relation to the church right now.] The Lord is with you while you are with Him."

Do you see? There are conditions for God being with us, and there is a reciprocity demanded by Him in our relationships. We have to return His love to Him. And we have to give out of the gift of His Spirit to others. As far as He is concerned, that is returning His love to Him when it is used in that manner.

II Chronicles 15:2 If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.

Does this not remind you of scriptures you have undoubtedly heard since the breakup of the Worldwide Church of God, which began in earnest in 1991 or 1992? I know that I have used scriptures like Jeremiah 7 where it parallels the feeling, the idea, the concept that we had in our minds regarding our safety and security within the WCG. It says in verse 4, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord [is here]."

In other words, "if we are in the church, we are safe." And then it goes on to say, "you people believe that we are delivered to do all these things." God was not pleased with our thoughts about the church and our thoughts about our own security. Not at all. We thought we were really comfy there, and that we were going to go right into the place of safety in a hop, skip, and a jump.

And in verse 3, think about the church in relation to this.

II Chronicles 15:3-4 For a long time Israel has been without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without law; but when in their trouble they turned to the Lord God of Israel, and sought Him, He was found by them.

That is very encouraging. Even though we may have drifted away—maybe we did not drift away, but walked away, marched away, ran away from God, and so much so that He spit us out. But if we turn, we have this promise from His Word that He will respond.

II Chronicles 15:5-9 And in those times there was no peace to the one who went out, nor to the one who came in, but great turmoil was on all the inhabitants of the lands. So nation was destroyed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every adversity. [So Azariah says:] "But you, be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded!" And when Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and removed the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin [I want you to watch what the process was producing.] and from the cities which he had taken in the mountains of Ephraim; and he restored the altar of the Lord that was before the vestibule of the Lord. Then he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those who dwelt with them from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon, for they came over to him in great numbers from Israel when they saw that the Lord his God was with him.

A unifying process began. Even though Israel and Judah were separated, they began to come together; people came singly or in families or maybe clans right out of Israel, and came to Judah. And God began to unify them.

II Chronicles 15:10-15 So they gathered themselves together at Jerusalem in the third month, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa. And they offered to the Lord at that time seven hundred bulls and seven thousand sheep from the spoil they had brought. Then they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul; and [listen to how serious these people were] whoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel was put to death [Man! These people were on fire.], whether small or great, whether man or woman. Then they took an oath before the Lord with a loud voice, with shouting and trumpets and rams horns. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart and sought Him with all their soul; and He was found by them, and the Lord gave them rest all around.

This chapter shows that non-Christians can be in harmony. This was a very remarkable occurrence in the history of Judah. I do not know if this ever occurred with the same intensity either before or since. What this shows you and me is that when a person is in harmony with God, he begins to become in harmony with man. But it is first things first. God is the priority, and our relationship with Him comes first. Then as we begin to become more unified with Him, the natural course of this is for it to begin to spread out toward our brother in good works, in acts of love, kindness, and service because that is the way that the love of God moves a person to go.

There is an interesting parallel between this account and the church of God's condition right now, and it helps to give us direction as to what each individual (who cares about the splintered and scattered condition of the church) needs to do now. Each person needs to turn himself to seek God and not to wait for some leader to do it. If we seek Him, He will be found of us.

Listen to this: Unity occurs when a group of diverse people come to believe in and willingly submit themselves to a common cause, which in turn gives to each person a common focus or goal for their talents, skills, time, and energy. And more often than not, there is one person—a leader—to whom the group looks for direction.

You need to understand very clearly that the scattered condition of the church indicates that we do not have this kind of focus now.

Luke 24:44-49 Then He said to them, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me. [He has got the whole Old Testament covered there. All things have to be fulfilled.]” And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you; but tarry not in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power on high.

The leader that I spoke of through whom unity occurs is Jesus of Nazareth. Not some man—Jesus of Nazareth. Not John Ritenbaugh, not Rod Meredith. The leader is Jesus Christ of Nazareth and is not the head of any particular group.

In Luke 24, He is giving these disciples at this time their marching orders. Now suppose that they had disagreed with Him, with His commands as to what they were supposed to do with their time. Suppose one of them had said, “I don’t think I’ll stay here in Jerusalem. I think I’ll go to Tel Aviv.” What if another one said, I think I’ll go to Hebron.” Suppose another one said, “I think I’ll go to Jericho.”

Is it possible that they were counting while this was occurring? What if they disagreed as to how long they should count, how long they should wait, or even perhaps even if they should gather together? We know what they did because it is recorded in the book of Acts.

Acts 1:3-4 to whom also He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days [*somebody* was counting] and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from me:”

Acts 1:12-14 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey. And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room [not only did they return to Jerusalem, but they went to the same room] where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew;

James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Luke wrote this quite a number of years later from eyewitness accounts. So we know that they listened to their leader, did exactly what He said, and that they not only listened to what He said, but they remained there in that room (I do not mean they never went out. They may have had to go out to do some shopping or something similar to that.) But they remained there in one accord. This is the important part of this sermon. **In one accord!**

Each person voluntarily and willingly gave himself to following their leader's instructions. This was not a unity imposed by external control, but rather one generated from within each person based upon his belief in the leader and the authority and His doctrines.

The fact that it says, "These all continued. . ." shows that the one accord was not a snap decision quickly forgotten, but rather it was their constant employment. Now the whole effort that we are speaking on here right now was done in complete harmony of their views and their feelings. There were no splits, no divided interests, no divided purposes. For whatever length of time they remained, they continued in this manner until the events of Acts 2.

Acts 2:1 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

Again, Luke notes that they were unified perfectly. In the studying I did in preparation for this sermon, the best comment that I came across in regard to "one accord" came from Adam Clarke.

The word is very expressive. It signifies that all of their minds, affections, desires, and wishes were concentrated in one object. Every man having the same end in view and having but one desire. They had one prayer to God, and every heart uttered it. There was no person uninterested, none unconcerned, none lukewarm. All were in earnest. And the Spirit of God was sent to meet their united faith and prayer.

Can you see what began to happen whenever they were that way? Boom! Things

began to happen. Power to do the work of God. But brethren, so much of it depended upon the fact that each person was willingly giving of himself. He was not coerced into it, not forced into it by a leader whipping him with a whip or threatening. They gave themselves because they believed in the leader, in His authority, and in His doctrine. And that leader was not Peter, that leader was not James. It was Jesus Christ. But, they recognized that these leaders were also in harmony with the same thing they were in harmony with.

What I am aiming at in this sermon is that I hope that you will understand that unity of the church of God is *your* problem. It is not that you need to unify anybody else, but that you need to unify yourself to God first of all! And then to each other in this little group; and it begins to spread out like a ripple. The weight of this is on *your* shoulders. The weight that falls on the shoulders of the ministry is to encourage you, exhort you, teach you so that you have the tools and the means to communicate with God through His Spirit, to do your part in it. But if you are depending upon us, you are depending upon frail men. Your faith is in the wrong thing. It needs to first go directly to God.

This was undoubtedly one of the high water marks for unity in the history of the church because it was not very far down the road of time that cracks began to appear. We find in Acts 6 that a murmuring arose because the Hellenistic Jews felt that the Orthodox Jews' widows were receiving better treatment (people's feelings getting involved here), and there also may have been a fact involved in this as well. But that seems to have been settled fairly quickly and not a great deal of disagreement arose subsequent to that.

However, a more serious problem followed—much more serious. We find that this serious problem began after God led Peter to visit the house of Cornelius, a Gentile, to baptize them and also to eat with them.

Acts 11:1-3 Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended [disputed; the word there is a lot stronger than it appears in English] with him, saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!"

Wrong ideas brought into the church regarding holiness and defilement. This eventually led to the most serious problem in the church at that time. It is covered in a great deal more depth in Acts 15. This occurs after the dispute had been settled.

Acts 15:25 it seemed good to us, being assembled *with one accord*, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul.

This is the same word that appears in Acts 2, and following that counsel in Jerusalem, there was accord and harmony, at least in the Jerusalem church. But the problem did not end because we find in the book of Galatians (written a bit later) that they were still plagued by division over this issue. All of the epistles with few exceptions reveal issues that were plaguing individual congregations and destroying their harmony. But no epistle expresses this more clearly or more thoroughly than I Corinthians.

Perhaps it is fitting that even as we usually begin this holy day season in I Corinthians that we should end it here as well.

I Corinthians 1:10-13 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. [Again the word is not strong enough. They were quarreling and as we find out later, not only quarreling, they were taking one another to court. The heat was so strong between them.] Now this I say, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Paul makes this statement, "is Christ divided?" in the form of a question, but it is also somewhat rhetorical as well. It states what should be. It is in ideal, but unfortunately in actual practice it is not a reality.

I am virtually positive that I know what was going on in Corinth, because something very similar is happening in the church of God today. It has hit this group sometimes very hard.

Paul was well enough aware of what happens within a local congregation, understanding the deceitfulness of human nature. It still hurt him very deeply because it was happening. He was undoubtedly hearing of friends who were, as we might say, diving off the deep end or getting into water way over their heads or making mountains out of molehills. He appeals to them that they should all be speaking the same things.

This does not mean that we have to have exact opinions on things to be of one accord. But it does mean that doctrinally, at the very least, we should be all speaking the same thing. In Corinth, the problem was primarily one of quarreling about emphasis. I will explain. People were inflating concepts of lesser importance into a greater importance than the overall issue.

The overall issue is salvation by grace through Jesus Christ. This is why Paul made that landmark statement there in I Corinthians 7:19 that circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but what is important, what is everything, is in keeping the Ten Commandments.

If you have any awareness of what is going on in the greater church of God today, you will understand that the church is rent asunder, it is being torn, cracked, because that is what that word “divisions” means (in verse 10) by all kinds of deviations into doctrines emphasizing things that were not given or not emphasized under Herbert Armstrong.

The same thing happened in the first century, only the primary attack against the church then was by means of Gnosticism. Gnosticism was not a religion, but was instead a movement of intellectual thought *applied* to religion. It was coming from the Gentile areas. It means “we know.” Right out of the blue in chapter 1, Paul mentions baptism. So I think that it was undoubtedly an issue that these brethren were arguing over and causing division.

In an overall sense, we have our instructions as to what we are to do at a time like this. Jude 3 tells us that we are to “earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.” Faith in this sense means body of beliefs, doctrines. We are to go back to them because that is what unified us in the first place under Jesus Christ. If we are ever going to be unified again, it is going to be partly because we go back to that. Also, we are to go back to the love that we have lost and recapture that devotion that we had to Jesus Christ then.

There is a second factor shown at work here that is likewise affecting the church today. People were arranging themselves according to some popular figure. I think this is interesting, because I am absolutely certain that the popular figures mentioned there in I Corinthians 1 were hardly promoting the division, but rather another well-known educational fact was working. That is this: Everybody in the congregation does not learn at the same rate or at the same time. Therefore, certain knowledge hit, and *it* made an impression upon the mind so that *it* made an impression on people’s minds rather than something else—rather than some *idea* that someone else had. This is a fact of life. It is something that every pastor has to deal with.

You would be surprised the things we hear coming back to us that we supposedly said in a sermon, because somebody colored something that we said with their own perspective and fed it back to us completely out of the ballpark from what we said. One minister was almost shocked about a week ago when he got a letter from somebody who had completely gotten the opposite meaning out of his sermon. The person hearing it did not apply it in the right way. That is something that we have to deal with.

What was happening in Corinth is that the people would hear a sermon of Peter's or Apollos' and they would catch something in it that really stimulated their thinking. So far so good. But the most serious problem was that the people had so much vanity that they felt that the knowledge that *they* had was more important than anybody else's and they contentiously pushed it on everybody within hearing range of them. There is hardly anything that will divide a congregation like that because it subverts the centrality, the unity of the teaching.

Now I do not need to go into the things that are stirring up the church of God today. The overwhelming majority of them are false. They are not part and parcel of the faith that was once delivered to the saints from God through Herbert Armstrong to His church at the end time. But boy, people get a bug in their mind about something, and the first thing you know they take off on it and begin dividing people away from the congregations.

You know how it is when things like this are passed from person to person. Truth gets distorted, and vain and impatient people were aligning themselves into cliques opposed to one another. If a person comes up with something that seems quite important to them—let us say they give it to the ministry, and after honest inquiry it is rejected because it does not fall in line with the faith once delivered, they just get up and leave, taking people with them.

Paul met this head on. So we find even before he leaves:

I Corinthians 1:25-26 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men [things that are revealed often look silly, stupid, unacceptable, base, too simple to the intellectual], and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.

Paul is really sticking the pin into the vanity of these people by telling them that in reality

they think themselves to be so wise and intellectual. Knowledge puffs up. In reality God was calling the base of the world.

I Corinthians 1:27-31 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are [the reason:], that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.”

We could go right on through, but in chapter 2, Paul shows that the truth of God is *revealed*. The things that were the subjects of what was breaking up the church in Corinth were not things that were revealed, but things that were dug out through the intellect of men, that Paul calls the wisdom of men, men’s intellectual powers, but they were not part of the revelation of God.

So Paul reminds them that these things are revealed. To whom were these things revealed? They were revealed to the apostles, and the apostles in turn passed them on to the church. That is the way it was in this period of time, too. It was revealed to Mr. Armstrong and then passed on to the church. No member, no minister, had things revealed to them in the way that Mr. Armstrong did.

God revealed the package to the apostles and not to individual members or ministers. It is our responsibility to follow what was revealed.

I Corinthians 4:6-7 Now these things [the things he is referring to here is what precedes this statement], brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. For who makes you to differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

Again, here is proof that these people were puffed up in their emphasis of certain things. They were supposed to follow the things that they had received. I will remind you again, this same thing is taking place in the church and it continues to help blow it apart. You

have got to be careful because our marching orders have been given to us: Go back to the faith once delivered. People were going off in their own direction, right within the church, vainly believing that they knew better.

I Corinthians 3:9-10 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.

Again I want to emphasize, "Let every man take heed." It is your individual responsibility. In this era Mr. Armstrong laid the foundation; and then those who followed, the ministry, built up on what he gave us. I heard Mr. Armstrong express two or three times to the ministry, "My responsibility is to give you the foundation. Your responsibility is to build upon what I give, expand it out, spread it out, make it understandable, make it practical so that the people can live it." And he said that with the intention of chastising us because we were letting him down. We were not doing our part the way we should have.

By the time I heard him say this, there were those in the ministry who were pushing hard to go to the world's seminaries. Some of them were already doing so. They were getting deeply involved in things that they thought had to do with the ministry, but in reality it had to do with psychiatry and psychology which had a humanistic base to it. It had nothing to do with the Bible, with the Word of God.

We wonder why the church went awry? Instead of building upon the foundation that was revealed, psychology and psychiatry was coming into the church in the name of the truth of God and weakening the people. This created a famine; and they did not have the strength to stand up when Satan was finally allowed by God to attack. God removed the wall of protection, and we did not have spiritual strength. Our strength was in the wisdom of man. The wisdom of man cannot stand before Satan the Devil.

I Corinthians 3:11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

I Corinthians 3:13 . . . each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it [day of trial and testing], because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

Each of us is judged according to what he produces. These people were producing division by emphasizing secondary areas, things that were carnal, things that had little or nothing to do with the truth of God and what had been revealed. God expects us to be faithful stewards of what we have been given. That is why we have to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered; what was given is the foundation of the teaching that we have to work with. It is the teaching that will produce the faith that saves.

I have run into a very interesting thing about Romans 10:17 because the intimation, the implication of that verse is that not only do the words have to be right and true—the message has to be right and true in order to produce the right faith—but the messenger, the one who delivers it, has to be one of God's true ministers or it will not produce the right thing. Let that sink in because that is a bombshell.

We could go through all kinds of things in I Corinthians that were dividing the church: toleration of sin. In chapter 7, he speaks on marriage, divorce, and remarriage so you know that marital and sexual problems were present. In chapter 8, he returns to the vanity issue again stating that “knowledge puffs up” so you know they were using their liberty to produce a stumbling block for their brother (a major means was by flaunting the eating of food offered to an idol). In chapter 9, he speaks of a lack of self-denial and service to one another. In chapter 10, using Old Testament examples, he speaks of their idolatry and abuse of their liberty in Christ. In chapter 11, he talks about government, the abuse of Passover and the resulting abuse of poorer brethren.

Chapter 12 is about spiritual gifts and undoubtedly it is intended to teach us that nobody but nobody is to feel elevated because they have a visible position in the body. Everybody is a servant in the church. Chapter 13 is about love, which is the solution to all of these problems. Chapter 14 is about the abuse of gifts, most specifically tongues, and the resulting confusion because everybody is trying to get ahead of everybody else. Chapter 15 corrects misunderstandings about the resurrection. Some apparently thought that they were going to right into the Kingdom of God exactly as they were. Chapter 16 concerns the famine relief collection and Paul's final exhortation to the church.

It is kind of interesting that in chapter 15 Paul mentions firstfruits twice. It is possible that it was on his mind because I Corinthians may have been written during that time or perhaps leading up to Passover; and of course the season ending at Pentecost at the feast of first fruits. On Pentecost two wave loaves were offered to God for His acceptance; and those wave loaves represented us. James tells us that we, the church of God, are a kind of firstfruits. They were loaves that had leaven in them, loaves with sin symbolically in them, in their midst, causing problems.

Now, brethren, how can the disunity problem be solved?

I have already given a major portion of that. This is that every single one of us has to be motivated by himself from within to take whatever steps are necessary to get himself in alignment with God because the self may be disjointed and out of unity with God. If you are out of unity with God, then the church of God is out of unity with God because you are a part of it. Not totally out of unity, maybe, but if you would get yourself in unity with God, the church would be that much more unified with God. So God holds each and every one of us individually responsible for taking care of the disunity problem.

We cannot point the finger of accusation and say, "It's his fault." No, it begins here. You read the chapter there in Isaiah 58 about fasting. One of the things God says is: "Quit pointing the finger. Draw it back. Turn it around. Look at the self because that is where the problems begin."

In an overall sense, the entire book of Ephesians is about unity.

Ephesians 2:14-18 For He Himself is our peace ['Our' refers to Jew and Gentile; the church as a whole], who has made both one [one body], and has broken down the middle wall of separation [that which divided us] having abolished in His flesh the enmity [the enmity is the carnal mind against the law of God], that is the law of commandment contained in ordinances, [this is the reason why] so as to create in Himself [Christ is the central figure] one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one spirit to the Father.

There are the unifying agents. (1) Jesus Christ. Because we all have something in common. He is our Savior, He is the payment for our sins, He is our Redeemer, He is the One who bought us back from Satan, and He is also our High Priest, working in our behalf before God in order that we might be accepted by God. He is working on our behalf to strengthen us, correct us, and prepare us for His Kingdom.

(2) The Holy Spirit, which carries with it the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by which, using faith, we can make these things work. The power is there. We are already enabled to do it if we have the Spirit of God.

But the question remains, **will** we do it? Will you do what you need to break down any barrier between you and God first? To root out some sin that is being practiced in your life or something that you are not doing that you know that you should be doing. Are you are letting it out of your life or only coming at it every once in a while? Like prayer, like study?

Brethren, can you have a good relationship with somebody if you never communicate with them? Impossible. We cannot have a good relationship with our Father unless we are making that a real, active, daily part of our life; talking over things with Him about your life, about your family's life, about the church's life, whatever is needed.

Did you hear what I said earlier in the sermon about what Adam Clarke said about "one accord"? These people were so in tune with God, so in tune with each other, that the Greek indicates that they were all giving the same prayer! I do not mean that they were all saying the same words, but the sense of their prayers was all pointed in the same direction. They were of one accord with God as well.

So, following what happened in II Chronicles 15, every single one of us has to actively seek Christ as our Savior, Redeemer, High Priest, Lord, and Master. He is our Boss. We have to do everything in our power to submit to Him and please Him. He said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." He was so obviously referring to the Ten Commandments that it cannot be avoided. This is the way that you seek Him: through prayer, through study, and by submitting in obedience to Him. It does not mean to literally look for Him because He has already revealed Himself to us. To seek Him means to be like Him.

Now if each of us would do that, we would love as Christ does. The problems of offense, the problems of incivility, the problems of confusion and division within His body would begin to go away, just like we saw there in II Chronicles 15. Unity began to occur between Israel and Judah who had become blood enemies of one another. God had that recorded so that we would understand that when we seek Him, this is what happens. People begin to become of one accord.

So we would begin—if each on each one of us would give maximum attention to things that matter, like overcoming our sins, not giving a lot of attention to the petty and vain judgments on lesser things that I Corinthians shows that those people were doing.

We will begin to add a little more to this. It begins to become so plain.

Colossians 3:1-5 If you then were raised with Christ, seek those things

which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind [your love, your passions] on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Put to death [kill, crucify] your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry [keep the commandments].

The book of Romans is sometimes called the constitution of the church of God. There are eleven chapters on doctrine, on what a Christian believes and why he believes it; and this is followed by four chapters giving practical advice on how to serve Christ and fellow man, especially the brethren. It is advice on how you put the first eleven chapters to work in your life. Now it is very interesting that Romans 12 begins with virtually the same principle that the Sermon on the Mount begins with, except that it gives a practical application of it.

Romans 12:1-3 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 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. For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

So the underlying attitude we need if we are really going to seek Christ is that we need to be willing to sacrifice what we have and what we are. And the reason is because spirit of this world, the spirit of Satan, and the Spirit of God are at war with one another. They are struggling within the bosom, within the mind, of each and every Christian. Those ingrained habits that we brought with us into conversion from the world—these ways of thinking, these attitudes, inclinations, perspectives on things that we learned in the world—are still very much a part of us and are struggling to dominate our life.

The only way that the Christian is going to be able to overcome them is that, as God gives us the power, we have to be willing to sacrifice in order to overcome. Sometimes that is daunting because our vanity does not want to give up on them. We are very comfortable with what we were. To sacrifice that is something that we do not want to do.

No doctrine of God is intended to be merely theoretic speculation. We are called upon to dedicate ourselves without reserve to God and His purpose. This is an intelligent, determined act of commitment done daily with no double standard and no playing church while at home running amok in the muck of materialism, vanity, greed, hatred, holding grudges, and carrying petty jealousies.

Some of us get the cart before the horse. We fume and fret about what God wants us to do. We are yet spiritually unprepared to do whatever it is. All the while the job that He wants us to do is right in front of us. He wants a guarantee first. Remember II Chronicles 15:1-2? If you are with Him, He will be with us. He wants a guarantee first that He really has you. That is done through personal sacrifice to overcome, because it reveals the seriousness of our dedication to His way. It requires an honest estimation of ourselves.

But first and foremost, you are so valuable to God that Christ died for you. The greatest ransom ever paid for all time was paid for **you**! You are just that valuable. That is hard for us to get across because we have a tendency in our vanity to look down on ourselves, to think that we are nothing, that we are worth nothing, that we cannot do anything right, that we are less than the least, that we are only good to walk on top of. We cannot do anything right, it seems. Everything we do is wrong.

That is not the problem, brethren. The problem is recognizing that you are so valuable to God that Christ died for you. He knows that you have those problems. But you and He together can overcome them.

That is one side of it. The balance of it of course is that we are what we think of ourselves. So on the one hand we have to understand that God is for us. If He is for us who can be against us? The biggest problem we face is ourselves.

He shows in Romans 12:4-5 that every part of the body is needed for it to function at its best. This is really a reflection back on verse 3 because so often those considered weak are also thought to be less important. Those who think of themselves as being weak and unimportant need to adjust their opinion because God does not make mistakes. You are in the body because He **wants** you there. That ought to be encouraging. You are needed in the body. If you use your lowly opinion of yourself for not overcoming, it does not hold water with God.

Let me give you a little synopsis of Romans 12. In the chapter (which contains probably the most succinct instruction in the whole New Testament on how to take care of the problems within the church), Paul is saying that we cannot serve God and self equally. What divides is when we try to do this or serve ourselves at the expense of God. God

either comes first in our lives, or we will find ourselves as being promoters of confusion and division. We cannot go around with the Bible in one hand and our personal bill of rights in the other.

Very frequently we have to ask ourselves this question: "Am I really crucified with Christ? Do I take people's guff, their accusations, calmly, and let them wash off? Do I overlook faults, refuse to retaliate in what I might say, playing sophisticated games of cutting conversation?" Boy, we are really good at that. Genuine Christian love, the kind that unifies, means that we sincerely offer ourselves as living sacrifices daily. God proves, tests, and tempers our sincerity by sending us out among our fellow man to see if it really there.

Romans 15:5-6 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That is a prayer that has to be made. We ask to be of one mind. Ask God to help us to overcome whatever it is that is separating us from Him.

Acts 4:23-31 And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: 'Why did the nations rage, and the people plot a vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ.' "For truly against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and all the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

Brethren, this is what happens whenever people can be of one mind with God and with

Of One Accord by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

each other. God unleashes His power for those people to do His will.

Brethren, what I want you to understand is that you should not wait for anybody to point the way. The way has already been pointed. It is in God's Word. It is up to you. It is on your shoulders.

It is your responsibility to do everything in your power to remove any impediment between you and your God. If you will do that, then unity will begin to break out more solidly in this group than ever been before. Maybe the rippling affect will spread out to the greater church of God. Let us commit ourselves to do that.