

Unity

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I promise this study will not be as intense as the sermon that I gave to you. Actually I prefer in this kind of setting to just talk, and it will not be so much preaching. But the subject is important. It is actually an outgrowth of the preparation that I made for the minister's conference that we had in December. When I say an "outgrowth," what I mean is what we talked about there is not exactly the same as what I am going to talk to you about here. But it is related.

We are going to begin in John 17—with Jesus' prayer—and we are going to look at four or five verses there. You remember that this is Jesus' prayer He made the last time that He was assembled with the apostles before His crucifixion.

John 17:11 Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, [Listen to this request:] keep through Your name those whom You have given Me [Here comes the reason], that they may be one as We are.

John 17:20-22 "I do not pray for these alone [meaning the men who were just before Him], but also for those who will believe in Me through their word [that is us]; that they all [those before Him, and those that would believe on the word of the apostles, which appears in the New Testament] may be one, [listen to this standard:] 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 [it is part of the purpose that He wants everybody in the family of God to be one. It is actually to make a testimony before the world of what Family we belong to]. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: [that glory that was given to them—the apostles—and to us was the Word of God.]

Incidentally, Jesus' reference to glory here is in reference to the Word of God, but the word glory is not always referring to the Word of God. There are other things that glorify God besides. But in this context, the glory is the Word of God—most specifically, the gospel.

John 17:23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one,

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and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me."

You may or may not know that the conference that we held there in Fort Mill in mid-December focused on unity. We did not do this because the Church of the Great God is all broken up by disunity, but simply because unity is so very important. Those verses that we just read point out its importance.

In these verses, Jesus is asking the Father for help to ensure that the church is unified. I am reading these verses because I want us to be reminded of how important unity is to our being in the Kingdom of God, because the quality of the unity that God wants in His family *cannot* be externally imposed. It is a unity that is produced by a multitude of choices by free moral agents who deliberately go in a certain direction to be unified with others who are also going in that same direction.

As we begin, I want you to understand that it is each member's responsibility to ensure unity through his own efforts. When I say "own," I am not excluding God from that—it will be with God's help. But it is each person's responsibility to ensure unity, and that is one of the reasons why Jesus is asking for help.

What this shows us is that the unity Jesus is asking for is something of extreme importance. I took the time to determine this: in this prayer (chapter 17) almost 20% of it is devoted to this request for unity. I will remind you of this from time to time: it is each member's responsibility to unify himself to the Body. I am going to show you one other step that it is involved in this that is very, very important.

The figure that I came up with was actually 19% of Jesus' final prayer is devoted to this one subject—by our Savior. It is so significant that at the time that He made this request, He was not praying for Himself, but He was motivated to pray for *us*, that we would be helped to produce unity with God and with the church. He was actually praying for our welfare there.

I want you to notice this too: in His request, He set a *very* high standard. There is no higher standard than the standard He set. He said, "I want my disciples to be unified with You, Father, to the same level—to the same degree—as You and I are unified." You need to let that sink in.

Unfortunately, we know that we are never going to reach that. But that did not stop Him from setting the standard. He really set the bar high! That is the way a good coach is.

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He sets the bar so high that probably nobody on his team is going to reach it. But he wants to do everything in his power to motivate those that he is coaching to try to reach it anyway—to give their time and energy over to that.

This is really a significant level of unity, and we are going to see as we move along that if we are disconnected from others in the Body of Christ, and apart from the Father and Son, we are not at one with Them either. In other words, we cannot be at one with the Father and separated from the brethren. It has to be one with the Father, and one with each other. That is where the bar is.

If we are not one with the Father—I think you will see illustrations of this as we go along—we are in effect telling Him how to run His family! That is really kind of astounding. If we are not agreeing with Him in the way He is running the family, and we separate ourselves from it (and the reason is always *somebody else's fault*—that is the way human nature is), we are not one with the Father either.

Turn with me to I Corinthians 12. I know I said some pretty astounding things there. That is what I found as I was going through this subject.

I Corinthians 12:12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

This is an easy illustration to understand. The body he is talking about here is the human body. But, we find out even before the verse is over, that this is the way the church is supposed to be, too. A smoothly-running machine, we might say, that compares to the human body.

I Corinthians 12:13 For [here comes the reason] by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

I Corinthians 12:24-26 [B]ut our presentable parts have no need [still on the same subject]. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism [no division] in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

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There is good reason God uses the human body as a type of His family. Christ is the Head of the spiritual Body, and those being created in the image of Jesus Christ fill out the Body's remaining parts.

I want you to consider this: if any part of our human body—it does not matter whether it is an eye, an ear, a gallbladder, kidney, liver, arm, hand, or foot—is not functioning in harmony with the rest of the body, it pains, it weakens, and depending on which part of the body is out of sorts, it renders the whole body less effective and efficient. Is not that true? Sure it is. I do not care which part of the body hurts—the whole body is affected.

The major difference between the church and the human body is that each part of the human body responds automatically as it is programmed by God to function. However, each member of the church must deliberately *choose* to function in the right way, according to love and wisdom. This is where the rubber meets the road. God can use the illustration, but each member of the Body—the church; the spiritual Body—has to deliberately choose to do what produces unity.

You can see that the analogy with the human body breaks down at a certain point, and that certain point is in the area of choosing to do the right thing. The very fact that the specific request for the Father's help in producing unity in and through the disciples is made by Jesus Christ Himself, and that it is made at such a significant time and place, is strong evidence that we have a very important responsibility to carry out.

So here comes my SPS: I am going to show you that deliberately choosing to unify is no minor matter to God, and that if you want God to be in a positive frame of mind when you pray—surely you want that!—so that when He responds He does so positively, I want you to listen up to what the scriptures tell us.

I also want you to understand that this study is limited to showing the seriousness of working to create unity. Therefore, one of the remaining issues involving the solution to the problems that divide us will have to be given in another sermon or another study.

What I am going to tell you is not hard to understand at all. It is just a matter of getting the scriptures in the right sequence so that it makes our responsibility understandable.

John 8:29 And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.

Jesus said, "I always do those things that please Him." Now I am going to make a little

change: "Therefore, He never leaves Me alone." I will explain that. Jesus is saying, "God never abandons Me. He is always there for Me." It is an action-reaction, if I can put it that way. Because Jesus dedicated Himself to obedience to the Father, the Father was **always** there whenever Christ asked Him to do something! I do not know that He ever had a request turned down, except, "Father, I wish this cup would pass from Me"—but He already knew the answer that He was going to get.

That is so interesting, what Jesus said here. The opposite side of His statement is that if we are careless or lazy about carrying out our responsibilities to God, we are going to see that He does not respond to our prayers. You are going to be shocked when you find out what I just said—when I give you the explanations from the scriptures. Being united with the Father and the Son is of very great importance.

I am going to take you to another writing of John, back in I John. I am pretty sure that if you are like me, you read these verses in the past—but I really did not understand what John was saying here until this thing about unity came up. I did not go into this with the ministry.

I John 3:18-24 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure [have confidence, like Jesus did: "The Father is *a/ways* there for me."] our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. [He knows what is going on.] Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment. Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. [In a way, this is almost a repetition of what we just read in John 8.] And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us.

When we come to understand what we just read there, we find that John really nails what I am saying to this point. John is *not* saying that whether a person is right or wrong is simply a matter of how he subjectively feels about himself. Remember (from the sermon today), people can feel "good" about murdering their firstborn! So is it *right* that they should feel good about putting their child to death? And yet they would! See, that is a subjective feeling that is based on wrong knowledge.

So John is *not* saying that whether a person is right or wrong is simply a matter of how he subjectively feels about himself. You might wonder, "How can this be so?" It can be, because our nature is fully capable of deceiving us into feeling justified in regard to our conduct and attitudes. The reality is whether a person *is* literally obedient to God in carrying out his responsibilities to Him. This is not an easy concept to grasp right away, but it is something that we will learn as we go along. I do not mean "go along" just in this Bible study; I mean as we are going along in our Christian life. If we *are* truly obeying God, something begins to change within us internally.

When you see the term "commandments," do not be lured into thinking that John is writing only about the Ten Commandments. They are most certainly included. But John's use of the term is much broader, including commands that may seem to have nothing whatever to do with unity!

It was beautiful the way the sermon ended this morning, where the psalmist was writing all these things down about *all* the commands of God. It does not matter whether it is called a precept, whether it is called a judgment, whether it is called an ordinance, whether it is called a statute, whether it is called a commandment, whether it is called a law, or whatever—if God said it, it is part of His Word, and it should be looked upon by us as something that we need to obey and make a part of our life.

What am I saying? When we get to the place where we are consciously choosing to do whatever God says, John is telling us here *that* is what changes the reality of our judgment. God *really is* with us, because the idolatry is being eliminated. We are showing on the outside, by our obedience, by our submission, that "I am becoming *one* with *Him!*"

What does God do in return? He gives us a right, realistic sense of what we really are. That is His blessing—that is His gift to us. Our evaluation of ourselves is really *truth* then. It is not something subjective. It is not a lie. It really is true.

What John is saying here, applied to this subject, is *all* of God's commands have to do with unity, because who are we becoming unified with? *Him!*

Do you get what I am saying? It is unity with Father that produces unity in the body. Which comes first: the chicken or the egg? God is telling you that unity with *Him* is what produces unity in the church. It is that simple.

What John is saying, in simple terminology, is that keeping His commandments and doing those things in God's sight produces two things:

- (1) It makes for effective prayer, because for anybody like that, God will never leave that person alone. He *will* respond. The Father never leaves him.
- (2) It produces an internal, spiritual assurance by means of the Spirit of God that corroborates the external testimony of true faith and love of God and the brethren.

It is that connection with God that makes the connection with the brethren possible. All good things—every good and perfect gift—come from the Father of lights, and unity in the Body is one of the greatest gifts He can give us. You know He is never going to abandon His own kids.

We are going to go back to I Corinthians again. This will knock your socks off when you realize what Paul is saying. At least I hope it knocks your socks off.

I Corinthians 1:10-12 Now I plead with you [I beseech 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 judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ."

Here we are in verses 10-12 of chapter 1, and it is this that declares the real intention for the whole epistle of I Corinthians. There were divisions in the congregation. The subject matter of the epistle covers many areas of attitude and conduct that will divide people away from God and each other. But just in case you might think that division is a rather minor affair, I want you to turn to I Corinthians 11:

I Corinthians 11:17-19 Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. [Here we have a reverberation from chapter 1. Actually, when you begin to understand what the main theme of this book is, there were reverberations through every chapter.] For [this is really a verse you need to think on] there ***must also be factions*** among you [you have got to think—this is God speaking. He is saying that He is ***going*** to make sure that the church becomes divided by heresies—or at least the threat is there],

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that those who are approved may be recognized among you.

It is a test from God that divisions are allowed to occur within the church. Do you know why? I will spell it out: God wants to see who is really loyal to **Him**. "There **must** be..."

I Corinthians 11:20-27 Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. [This took place at a service.] What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you. For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." [That is once a year, at Passover.] For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

Why? Because they are sinning. They are throwing Christ under the bus, as we would say.

I Corinthians 11:28-34 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.

This is especially timely because Passover is not all that far away. It was this time of the year that Paul wrote this letter, and he was getting information from people in the

congregation that there was an awful lot of disunity there over quite a number of things.

This instruction was written to a congregation that was divided along a number of lines, but—and here was the problem—not very many people in the congregation realized that this was really a *serious* problem. The exact issues dividing them (in I Corinthians) are not my concern here. But the principle of unity and personal responsibility toward Christ and Christ's Body—the church—is my concern.

In this chapter, Paul is charging the Corinthians with examining themselves by giving deep, respectful consideration *first* to Christ's personal sacrifice for each of them individually. He was willing to die for every member of the Body, even before they became a member of that Body—even while they were His enemies, and actually putting Him to death. I said He set the standard high; He really did. He set the example.

Paul said, "OK, Corinthians. Are you willing to give *this*—as Christ did—for each other?" He warns that if one does not do this, and thus not repent and change, that this one may be eating and drinking damnation *to himself*. Boy, you talk about shooting yourself in the foot!

He is saying, "If you do not do this, you are bringing condemnation"—that is what the word 'damnation' means—"down on your own heads!" That word "damnation" is derived from the Greek *krima*, and it means "a judgment; a sentence, as handed down in a case before a judge." What makes this one serious is that in this case the judge is God.

Paul then states—here is what I meant when I said this will knock your socks off—the kind of judgments that have *already been handed down by God* is shown by the fact that so many are *sick*. That was God's judgment—"I am going to let that person get sick"—and He means physically, psychologically, and emotionally. All of those are encapsulated within physical liabilities. To make it even worse, many had already *died*, "not discerning the Lord's body." Then he warns them again to take care before it is too late. This ought to let you know that what we are reading of in this chapter—actually in the whole epistle—is serious business, when health and even *life* is on the line, as Paul so plainly said here.

Listen to this: what was the problem that these people were having that he refers to right in this chapter? Do you know what they did? It took place at what we would call a potluck. Do you know what this 'big' sin was that they committed? It seemed like almost everybody in the Corinthian church wanted to be first in line, and get the best—and the most—of the food. They were taking care of themselves before they took care of the elderly, of the infirmed, or maybe the kids, or whatever.

The problem is, in a sense, not what they *did*; it was *what was in their heart and mind*. It showed—it revealed—the pride that they put themselves above the other people in the congregation. You know what? We, in most cases, would think that was *nothing!* But the Great Judge of all of mankind, He put people to *death* for doing that.

Do you know what this teaches us? Our ideas of what is a "big" sin and what is a "little" sin are so far off the mark in any case, unless God straightens us out. He said at the root of the problem is maybe the worst sin of all: it is pride. We may think that what pride did to those people was nothing; all they did was run to the head of the line. But to God, pride is a *big* sin. That is what motivated it.

You know when that thing happened in Acts 5—Ananias and Sapphira? God put them to death in the blink of an eye because of their covetousness. He did that as a witness to the church: "Look, I am not fooling around." Because we have been brought up in the world, we might think that what Ananias and Sapphira did was really not all that bad. All they did was commit a little white lie. Instead of giving the whole price of the sale (as they had promised to the church), they lied about the amount and said, "Well, this is really all we got." So their total contribution was a lot less than it should have been. It was not the amount of contribution; it was the deceit and the hypocrisy that was in their heart that was the problem.

I Corinthians 11:29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

I am not going to ask for a show of hands, but I can guarantee that what almost every one of us, when we look at that verse, thinks about Jesus of Nazareth's body, as He was beaten before He went on the stake. Do you know what? That is only partly right. In this context, the primary meaning of "the Lord's Body" is *the church*. "Not discerning the Lord's body"—do not really understand; do not really get the importance of the church and its unity *to God*.

How do I know that this is true? It is because the entire context demands that what Paul means here is the church primarily, and Christ's own literal body secondarily. All we have to do is go right into chapter 12, and he picks up on it again in those verses that we read at the very beginning of this Bible study: "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ." (I Corinthians 12:12)

When Paul wrote this letter, he put chapter 12 in there so that we would understand the

Lord's Body in what is now chapter 11. He did not mean Christ's body primarily; he meant the church! People do not understand the importance of the church to God. Maybe I can make it more important to you if I tell you that the important thing to God is His family! He is the Father of His family, and He does not want it driven apart. So, boy, He reacted when people in the congregation treated one another in an evil way, putting themselves in front of everybody else.

I Corinthians 12:13-15 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body [that is the church]—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?

Of course it is part of the body! Paul's instruction is, "I don't care who this person is—if they are part of the Body of Jesus Christ, whether they are black or white or pink, male or female, or whatever, if they are a slave or a free person, whether they are rich or poor, it matters not. They are in the Body. They are your brother. They are part of my family, and I want you to treat them with the utmost respect, and to honor them." God so demanded it of these people in Corinth that He put some of those people to death. *Many*, Paul said, had died because of that. And many were sick and *they were not being healed*, because they were a source of disunity!

Paul does not stop on this subject, in one way, until chapter 15. But in chapter 13 he says, "Look—I am going to show you a better way." What is the better way? It is love. That is the solution to disunity. You go down that list, and Paul gives every one of us instruction on how to create unity, whether it is in our family, or whether it is in the church. Every one of you who are the head of a family, you know that in a family there is a great deal of pain because of division that is created within a family, some of which sometimes leads to divorce.

What God did through Paul is He succeeded in chapters 11, 12, and 13 in moving beyond the issues that were the immediate cause of the division. So Paul actually does this: He is making a direct connection between unity and divine healing. The godly conduct in the members that work to produce unity is the cause, and divine healing is the fruit of godly unity.

Let me go back to what Jesus said: "I always do what My Father says. I do what pleases Him, and He never leaves Me." When He prayed, God responded, because They were one with each other. Jesus showed it by His submission and obedience, and

God responded.

When the instructions of chapters 11 and 12 are taken together, the healing includes both physical healing of our bodies and—more importantly—spiritual salvation itself. Spiritual salvation is referred to in the Bible in exactly the same terms as physical healing. It is a healing—a healing of the spirit. It is a healing of the mind. It is a healing of the attitudes, and it will be a healing of the conduct.

We have to think about this. Passover is coming on. I have no idea how much "flexibility" God will allow each of us. I just want you to understand that God's own Word is showing us how He responds when His people are *disunited* from Him. It will produce disunity in the church, and it will produce a failure of response from God, and people get sick, and people die.

Ephesians 1:15-23 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

I said earlier that when we have issues with the brethren that are dividing us, and maybe them, away from one another so that maybe some measure of division is created—I do not know whether you understood that this is also the beginning of the process of rejecting God Himself. How is this possible? This series of verses tells us. God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, is the Head of the very Body that we might be creating division in. So it is His Body that fills Him out, and therefore a rejection of our brethren is a rejection of Jesus Christ. The Head cannot be separated from the rest of the Body.

His Body, as we read at the beginning of this Bible study, is intended by God to be one

with Him, as the Son is with Him. Another dumb illustration: if, by any chance, your foot—way down there on the ground—decides that it does not like the way that your hand is behaving, and it rears back and attacks the hand, injuring it greatly, do you think that does not affect the head? Oh yes it does. The head is "attached" to that hand, even as it is "attached" to the foot. Any damage to any part of the human body is going to affect the *whole* body!

We know this from actual experience. Paul is using this as an illustration so that we will understand the same essential things are taking place in the *spiritual* Body. The Body is *one*, and a part cannot be separated away from it without it affecting the whole Body to some degree. Every analogy breaks down, and this can be taken too finely as well. But the principle is there in God's Word.

Every part of the Body—every member of that Body—is loved by the God who *died* for that part, and it pains Him when somebody in that Body is attacked by somebody else in that Body. When that occurs, His prayer in John 17 in a sense is not being answered, because He wants every part of the Body to love the Father as He does.

This study on unity and forgiveness does not contain the answer to every question that might come up in a circumstance that might arise, whether it is in a marriage, on the job, or in an organization, such as the church. However, it does contain some overall definitions and guidelines regarding our responsibilities to God.

The major, foundational cause of division, broadly stated, is differences. That is very broad, but differences produce division. You can see this in a family. Father has a different opinion than mother; mother has a different opinion than father; both have different opinions than the children, or whatever. So wrangling can begin, and things can be said and done that might inflict a great deal of damage to the unity of the family. All kinds of hurts could be handed out.

So "differences"—without defining it any further—cause division. What produces unity? Here is another very broad term: commonality. The more we have in common, the more likelihood we are going to have unity. I will prove this to you as we go along.

If there are differences, it has effects. One of the effects (again, just think about family differences) is that the differences cause us to focus on ourselves. We are moved by human nature to defend ourselves—our position, our perspective, the way we look at things, the way we want things to be done. We defend ourselves, and that automatically focuses our attention on ourselves. It happens to everybody. 'Yours truly' is not excluded from it.

The only one that it did not ever affect like this was Christ, and He had spiritual help from the Father all the time! He was able to perceive what needed to be done. But it still pained Him, nonetheless. He cried over Jerusalem, because they did certain things and they would not listen to Him. So they were separated from Him. Here is the One who had all the help that they needed to really produce a good civilization—a good culture—and they rejected Him. There were differences between them. The problem was in *them* in this case. Yet He did not lash out and damage them further. He *bore* it.

James 3 is important in this regard:

James 3:16-18 For where envy and self-seeking exist [differences produce self-seeking, or strife], confusion and every evil thing [who is the author of confusion?] are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. [Verse 18 is exceedingly important:] Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

One of the things that James is teaching us here is a fundamental of Christianity that has to be understood and driven toward. Producing the fruit of God's Spirit requires peace. Do you think you grow in warfare? No, you do not. Do you know why? Warfare causes human nature to defend itself. You see, the focus becomes on the self. That is not good. So if we are going to produce the fruit of righteousness, it is going to be done in peace—where we have the opportunity to make the choice to get our mind *off* ourselves (much better).

The fruit of righteousness—the fruit of God's Spirit—requires peace. This is why unity is so important to God. If everybody is fighting for their position, and to do their kind of thing, it makes it impossible for *His* fruit to be produced in those people because it cannot be produced where people are paying attention to themselves. God's Spirit is one of outgoing concern—*away from* the self. Warfare is the very antithesis of what God is. He is the author of peace, and He wants peace in His church because it creates the environment in which the fruit of His Spirit can be produced.

This is the very reason why Satan is always making efforts to stir up controversy, and he must never be discounted when controversy erupts—never. There is a *cause* of controversy. God is not the author of confusion. He will create calamity that brings confusion, but not the kind of confusion that comes up as a result of controversy. It is Satan that does that. He does this for the simple reason that he knows that by controversy, he can make people think about themselves—and that becomes the focus

of attention.

In Luke 4:3-4, we have three classic examples of how Satan attempted to destroy the unity of the Father and the Son, and all of them were by means of attempting to lure the Son into focusing on Himself, and the things that Christ very easily could have perceived as *needs*—most especially right then—thus leaving the Father and His way out of the picture.

What were those three temptations? Number one was food. Christ could very easily say He really needed food, because He had been fasting for 40 days, and He needed that food for physical strength! Ah, a justification. "I'll take the food—forget about the strength. The circumstance *demands* it." No, Christ did not do that, because He knew the Father says, "I'll provide all your needs. You don't need it from this guy. He's just doing what he is doing to divide You away from Me."

The second temptation was power, wealth, and honor—at a time when Christ was greatly humbled. "Ah, here's an answer to My problems. I really feel down and out right now. Look, I don't have a *thing!*" He could have justified, "Just give Me the power, and look and see what I'll accomplish." But He did not.

The third one was the comfort of knowing, ever more fully, that the Father really knew Him personally, loved Him, and would intervene to save His life. "Go ahead, Christ, jump off the side of the building. After all, the scripture says He'll not allow you to dash your foot." Christ saw right through that, too.

The whole thing was done to divide the Son away from the Father, by luring the Son into believing that He had to get satisfaction by taking care of Himself.

I am going to quote something from Herbert Armstrong again. Jesus did not allow Himself to be lured, enticed into that trap:

During controversy, while under that stress, vanity drives one to the feeling that they have just got to win—they have got to be justified in their position. Controversy really stirs the competitive juices in human nature. But if one wins, at the cost of not producing the fruit of God's Spirit, one may discover they did so at the cost of not qualifying for God's Kingdom.

Which is better? Where do the solutions lie?

Let us go back to the book of Ephesians once again, because the main theme of the book of Ephesians is unity. Paul makes a very important statement that we often do not pay enough attention to. Remember that this was written to a Gentile congregation. They could very easily feel put on by the Israelites, because the Israelites—the Jews of that day—had a lot going for them. Notice what Paul said:

Ephesians 2:11-17 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands [that epithet "Uncircumcision" was intended to put the Gentiles down. The Jews were saying, "Hey, the Messiah is of our family. We are better because of it." No, they are not.]—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world [Remember, he is still talking to Gentiles]. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace [connect this with James 3, where peace is the kind of environment we need for producing the fruit of God's Spirit], who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself 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.

These verses teach us that *in the church* the instrument of our unity, our oneness, is Jesus Christ. He is *the* one thing we all have in common—and any more commonality is going to come to us *through* Him. It all depends, brethren, upon our relationship with the Father and the Son. It is Jesus Christ who creates unity, because we give Him the opportunity to do it.

Do you understand what I am saying? If there is *disunity*, it is because the members of the Body are not one with the Father and the Son. Therefore the blessing does not come.

I will give you the outstanding example of this to every one of you who were ever a part of the Worldwide Church of God. When the people—the members—of the Worldwide Church of God declined in their godliness, what happened? God blew the whole thing apart as a witness to you and me. We cannot be separated from the Father and Son

without the whole Body being threatened by being blown apart, because Christ is our peace. He is the *means* of peace. Through Jesus Christ, God gives us the opportunity to have a relationship with Him, and the fruit of that relationship is to be united in a body of which He is the head. You think He does not take disunity seriously? He does, because that is His own Body—His own family that is being blown apart.

We have that verse in I Corinthians 11 that warns us that God is going to allow it to happen. He wants to see what our response is going to be. Are we going to repent? Are we going to draw ourselves near to Him? Or are we going to allow Satan to drive the wedge even further in? You see, the choice is ours. God is going to try, in His inimitable ways, to get us to repent—even to the point of making us sick, failing to heal us, or even putting people to death as a witness. That is how far He is willing to go. That is right in His Word!

This is necessary because we have to be prepared to live with Him for all eternity. Of course, we will be living with those who also made the effort to be one with the Father and the Son. Do you know what? Those people who succeed in doing that are going to have the same mind, the same character, as the Father and the Son. They are going to really get along.

This is what I meant when I said at the beginning that the unity of the Body is every part of that Body's individual, personal responsibility. But you have got to get the order of things right, because when you are one with the Father, the blessing is peace and unity. The Body will be one. Even if others are not getting that blessing, at least you will have it. You will be one with Him.

I think that principle ought to be pretty clear. Let us go to Mark 10:17. This is a very interesting example. It is a really familiar story:

Mark 10:17-27 Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'" And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth." Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me." But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

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Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."

We have a telling example here of human nature's proclivities that inhibit unity. The first thing I want you to note is this: there is no doubt whatever that the rich young man's intentions were good. I know that because verse 17 tells me that he *ran* to Christ, and knelt before Him—good intentions! I dare say that probably *none* of us would yield on the first meeting to someone who was known, but was still essentially a stranger.

The second thing I want you to note: he was eager to know what he had to do to achieve what he desired. Right away there was a question: "What do I have to do?" He received a direct and true response. Christ said, in effect, "You must submit to God in the most basic way: you've got to keep the commandments." The young man was pleased with Christ's answer, and that is shown by the fact that he quickly asserted that he had done this—like it was already in the past: "I've already done that!"

The next thing: Christ was initially pleased with the young man's enthusiastic display of submission, but at the same time He perceived that there was more that the young man needed to know—needed to understand—about keeping God's commandments. How do I know this? Because Jesus very quickly gave the young man a test by naming the commandments—all of which had to do with one's relationship with other men. The young man's quick response to Jesus' answer regarding the keeping of the commandments showed Jesus that the young man's knowledge was really on a very basic level.

Answer this for yourself: has anybody ever kept the commandments to the level that this young man's reply implied? He said, "*All* of these things I have done since my youth!" In one sense, he "didn't know from nothin'!" The young man only thought of them in the sense of outward duties that he owed to other men. But what Jesus was telling him was, "Hey buddy—the problem is in your heart."

First of all, the young man revealed a pretty fair measure of pride—in the evidence that

he gave out of his own mouth to substantiate this: "Oh, I've already done that." Oh? A humble person would not say that. A humble person would say "Oh man, I'm in trouble here!" because he would know better. He would see a mountain of failures, along with little hills of success. So there was a great deal of pride that was evident here.

What contributed to this in the young man was that his luxurious wealth and his self-righteousness—"Oh, I've already done that"—blinded him to his real weakness that was in his heart.

What was the real problem? He loved himself and his wealth more than he loved his neighbor. He came there to be one with Christ, yet because of what was in him, any hope of unity with Christ was destroyed. He went away sad, because even within himself he knew he could not do it. He came there full of himself, and confident.

He wanted to be one with Christ. He walked away without the unity with Christ, because he refused to obey Him—because his love for his wealth was greater than his love for Christ. If he had been willing to put that aside and make the sacrifice, he would have been united with Christ because he would have, in effect, been repenting of his sin of covetousness.

Do you see how this works? This is why our relationship with the Father and the Son comes first, and unity flows from that relationship.

This was so amazing to the disciples that they reacted the way they did: "Oh, man! Who can be saved?" They were blown right out of the water. Do you know why they were blown right out of the water? They understood a great deal more than the young man did. They had spent about three years with Christ by that time. They said, "Who can be saved?" They saw their weaknesses. Compared to the young man, they were really humble men. Their response admitted their humility. The young man's response admitted his pride.

This is such a clear illustration: pride, brethren, is at the foundation of almost every cause of division. Humility is a healer. Do you want to know how humble Christ was? He said, "I always do that which pleases *Him*." He did not say, "I always do what pleases *Me*" or "I always do that which pleases *the church*"—or the Roman government, or the Sanhedrin. He always did that which pleased the Father, and that is why He was one with the Father.

Let me say it again for the *umpteenth* time: Unity within the Body flows from the individual members' unity with the Father and the Son. It is that which produces unity in

the Body.

In Ephesians 2:14 is where it says that "Christ is our peace." The proper translation of what the Greek says in that first phrase is, "He Himself is our peace," and it means in English, "He *alone* is our peace." It means, in practical application, that regardless of what we might think that we might do to accomplish peace, peace comes only through Christ. This is why things like money, wealth, power, beautiful homes, the best part of town, furnishings, clothing, an automobile, a name of renown, fancy scholarly arguments, good health, and the feeling that one is absolutely right and justified in his side of a cause cannot bring peace except on a very temporary basis.

People who have those things may have less anxiety than others, but they cannot produce "peace that passes all understanding," and they cannot produce unity with others. In fact, they may actually produce more disunity and division.

Billy Graham is a famous name in American evangelical Christianity, and he had a saying. He said, "Christ is the answer!" You know what? Billy Graham is right! Christ *is* the answer. But can we make Him *our* answer?

Jesus Christ is able to mediate both sides of any given issue. I do not care what it is. He can do it, at one and the same time, spiritually working in and changing the hearts of all concerned. The heart and core of any issue dividing God's family is whether we truly do see God, and are willing to let go and patiently let *Him* do the judging and the acting. He will act because He loves His kids! He loves His purpose. He will not fail to respond to those who are working to be one with Him.

If there is disunity in the church, it is because the members are not as close to God as they think they are. My number one example: the Worldwide Church of God.

God had an entirely different opinion of the membership of the Worldwide Church of God than the members had of themselves. He showed His displeasure—He blew it to smithereens. Rather than kill us, He divided us so that He could work with us, in a sense, and we could work with Him, one on one—far better than we did in the Worldwide Church of God that was filled with hypocrisy, from the top to the bottom. We were not kidding Him at all. We still have, I am certain, a great deal of repenting to do.

One more comment on the Worldwide Church of God: Satan was involved. I have absolutely no doubt about it, because he had enough chutzpah—hubris, pride; he really thinks a lot of himself, and he does not care what people think of him—to try to get *Jesus* to fail. You think he is not going to try to get *you* to fail? When he attacked the Body of

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Jesus Christ at *God's* suggestion—I am certain—back in the late 80s and into the 90s, he was doing the same thing as he did in Matthew 4 and Luke 4 to Jesus Christ Himself. He became the instrument in God's hand to blow the Worldwide Church of God out of its hypocrisy, thinking that they were close to God. When the Tkachs got in there, they just made the hypocrisy evident to everybody—to more people. That was actually a gift from God, so that people could see it more plainly.

So here we are now: we are divided into the United Church of God, the Living Church of God, the Philadelphia Church of God, the Church of the Great God, and—somebody told me that there are around 400 little bodies here, there, and everywhere, scattered throughout the United States of America, Britain, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, and so forth. This is God's doing—and it is an act of mercy.

We got a good spanking. Rather than kill us, He spanked us. We lost the strength and power of the Worldwide Church of God—a gift that He had given. It was not Herbert W. Armstrong; it was God who did that (built it up; provided for it). God, in His mercy, blew it apart so that we would have a chance to be in His Kingdom.

If there is any disunity in the church of God today—and it does still exist. . . .I know that I personally am trying to get rid of that disunity. I send people to United. I send people to Living. When we cannot take care of them, I *want* them to go there, because they need to be one with God and we cannot serve them right now. So we send them there so that they can be taken care of.

There is another headquarters for the church of God in the city of Charlotte. I give our kids permission to go over there, so that they can date the girls, so that they can date the fellows—so that they can meet one another who are of the same basic religion, and maybe have a greater hope for a better future.

Do you know what? Their young people never come to the Church of the Great God—I will not go quite so far as "never"—because they are afraid. They do not look on the church the same way that I do. I do not care where the church is. I do not care whether it is the International Church of God—that is part of my brothers. If they want to go there, that is their responsibility before God to make that choice. The people do not belong to me; they belong to Christ. They have the right to be able to make that choice—to make that decision in their life.

I will tell you right now—I do not think the church of God is ever going to be united again in the way that it was in the Worldwide Church of God. I believe that these different corporations that we have are going to continue right on, and it is going to be that way

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on the basis of Scripture. When I put together Revelation 2 and 3, and Christ addresses 7 different groups of people, they are different congregations—different corporations, I will call them today. Yet Christ called every one of them His church. He gave them correction—He said, "This is where you are going to have to repent." So those who are truly united with Jesus Christ could be in any one of those groups. It does not matter. In reality, His church is still united. They are just in different groups.

I am not saying that everybody in those other groups is really a part of the Body of Christ. That is for Him to judge. Yet it is possible, because when I put Revelation 2 and 3 together with the book of Zechariah (especially chapter 4), we find that the Two Witnesses are feeding their oil into a bowl at the top of that candelabra. The oil in that bowl that is coming from the two trees—that is coming from the Two Witnesses—is going to *all seven* lamps. So God's church is in all seven of them—those who are part of the Body of Jesus Christ. In one sense, they will be united under the Two Witnesses, under Jesus Christ, but corporately they are different. Each one of them is a little bit different in their structure; a little bit different in their beliefs; more different in their attitudes. It is the attitudes that are really addressed by Christ in Revelation 2 and 3.

The sum and substance of this is this: Unity is created by God in response to Jesus' prayer. However, since Christ is our peace, there is a formula there. It goes from us to Him to the Father, and the Father's gift is unity that passes all understanding. In order to keep that unity, He has to do things to us. He increases our faith. He gives us gifts, so that unity can become ever more powerful.

That is what He is aiming for—until we are one with Him the way Christ is one with Him. That is the goal. So it begins in your bedroom when you get down on your knees to pray, or you go out walking and meditating in prayer with Him. When you go walking, looking for the things that God has made, and see their beauty, and the character of Him—the Creator—that is reflected in them, that is where unity is because those things draw us to the One who produces unity, and that is the Father.