

Understanding Unity

Living Like God

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I am not telling you anything new when I say that there is precious little unity anywhere on earth; and overall—worldwide—disunity is growing. Radical Islam is not only dividing East from West, but it also is dividing their own homelands even more. Here in America, great tragedy is taking place in divorce, which is far more common today than it was 50 years ago. There is vicious bickering between political parties regarding personalities and election issues as well. It is wearying to live with the constant wrangling of city, county, and state governments about to whom tax revenues should be allocated.

Nations unify with one another and then divide over some issue, only to form a new coalition as leaders see a national advantage in a new coalition with different nations. These, too, live out their usefulness, and once again split. "Politics makes strange bedfellows," as the cynics proclaim. In America, our national unity is being impacted through a very large influx of Latinos illegally streaming across the border in search of what they think will be a better life.

Unions and management rarely have a peaceful solution to common problems. Even the church is scattered to the four winds, with hundreds of small groups all claiming to be part of the true church; and we are one of them.

Disunity has been a way of life from the very beginning, when Adam and Eve divided themselves from God through their disobedience. Then Cain and Abel split through Cain's murder of Abel. The evidence is irrefutable. Unity is almost always short lived; and it exists, it seems, only when people see an immediate personal advantage.

I want you to take note of something regarding unity of which I became aware only last spring. It appears in John 17. I think it is very interesting that the sermon yesterday ended with the very scripture that I had down in my notes with which to begin.

John 17:11 "And now I [Christ] am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You, Holy Father, keep through Your own name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one, as We are."

I have read that verse many, many times. However, for the first time, what came to my mind as I continued to read is what it says in verse 21:

John 17:21-23 "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 have sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them, as You have loved Me."

He either asked or made a statement five times about us becoming one. I want to reinforce this with something that Jesus also said:

John 11:42 "And I know that You hear Me always..."

God heard Jesus' prayer in which He asked or stated five different times in what might very well have been the most important prayer Jesus ever made for the church—that is, in the church's behalf.

"I know that you always hear Me." To the best of my knowledge, He did not ask for anything else—in that most important prayer for the church—any more than one time. Unity is mentioned five times!

The very fact that He asked so frequently lets me know that unity is going to be very difficult to achieve; and, ultimately, God is going to be the major factor in producing it. Jesus directed this at God; therefore, He is going to be the One.

However, although this is true, it does not excuse us from striving to be united because we, too, definitely play a role in deciding whether or not we are committed to God's will for unity. We have a part to play in this, even though God is the major player in producing the unity, just as He has been the major player in driving the church apart and scattering it.

This chain of thoughts resulted in my, for the very first time, looking at unity from the angle of its relative importance to other aspects of Christian life. Just how important and difficult to achieve is it, when Christ would ask five times in the only recorded prayer of this sort of length?

Let us make this a bit more impressive (to my way of thinking, at least): This request is also the very first request that He made in our behalf in this most-important prayer. Go

back to almost the very beginning, to Genesis 2.

Genesis 2:18 And the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet [or a companion suitable] for him."

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

I think that it is another indication of the relative importance of unity that, even at the beginning of God's plan, the very first institution that He created to aid mankind in fulfilling our part in God's quest to create us in His image is marriage. One of marriage's most important purposes is learning and producing oneness in the most intimate of environments.

Do not be misled by the word *flesh*, thinking that it applies only to a physical union. When this command is combined on a broader scale with teaching from other parts of the Bible, "becoming one flesh" also implies unity in all aspects of life, purpose, and pleasure—including spiritual areas.

It was not until the church was created by Jesus Christ that a comparable spiritual institution to marriage existed. This is because the church is God's Family. Its purpose for oneness is expanded beyond flesh and blood relationships to encompass spiritual realities necessary for God's Kingdom among peoples so diverse as to be of different nationalities, cultures, and races. Like marriage to one special person produces a family, the church is a very special group.

Why did Jesus not ask five times for love, or wisdom, or other gifts of the Spirit? Why did He not ask five times for faith, patience, courage, or truth? I will tell you why. I believe that He asked so frequently and so intensely for God's help in order to achieve the most difficult of all goals for individuals within a group. All those other things—love, wisdom, courage, faith—are tools to achieve the end result of oneness. As we go along, we will see major reasons why unity and oneness are so difficult to achieve and what it takes to achieve them.

Living in a badly divided world is not new or unusual; Jesus' world was fractured, too. Since people in His time had human nature, what else can we expect? The scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes were not of one accord—except, perhaps, in their dislike of Jesus. The Jews, just a few decades earlier, had been freed from a tumultuous 250-year relationship with the Greeks. However, then the invader Romans

came and overruled the nation, and the Jews certainly were not at peace with that, either. This same force is still driving the world, and it has not changed at all.

Ephesians 4:1-6 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you [plead with you] that you walk worthy of the vocation [the calling] wherewith you are called, with all lowliness [with humility] and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring [notice the strength of that word *endeavoring*—striving, working hard] to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

It is very easily seen that God's plan is being worked out in order to produce unity, but we absolutely cannot excuse ourselves from doing our part. It is required that we cooperate; there is no escaping it. We are going to be held responsible for doing our part within this work that God is carrying out.

Philippians 2:1-2 If there be therefore any consolation [or encouragement] in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfill you my joy, that you be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

We have our work cut out for us in this regard because God has charged each of us, individually, with the responsibility of working towards oneness with Him and each other—whether or not anybody else appears to be making the effort. Jesus never deviated from His course. Every word, every action was aimed towards oneness.

Unity, brethren, does not happen by magic. It is made. It is created. Every married couple ought to understand that. Even as both husband and wife, father and mother have to work at producing unity, it must be done in God's Family, as well. Mother and father can be working reasonably well at creating unity between the two of them, but what if they have a teenager who rebels? "Something else is more attractive than old Mom and Dad. They are just old deadheads. They are not with it." The kids have to contribute to the unity of the family. too.

Everybody is responsible. We cannot justify ourselves before Him using the excuse that we just got carried along with what everybody else was doing, especially in regard to being at one with God. The first step toward unity is to be able to recognize what it takes

to produce it. The second part is harder: Doing it!

I think that this sermon will provide some simple, uncomplicated food for thought. However, there is only one overall principle regarding how our responsibility can be met. In one sense, it is so simple to grasp. We are also going to see that there are many factors that are beyond our control that make unity quite difficult to achieve.

What are some factors that, whether strongly or weakly, induce working toward unity or to destroy unity? There is one overall principle that answers that question, but many specifics, elements, or qualities that work either to unify or to divide.

The overall principle that advances unity includes sameness, similitude, similarity, likeness, resemblance, commonality, and cooperation. There are other words which we will get to somewhere in the course of the sermon. On the other hand, difference, variation, dissonance, diversity, and competition serve to produce disunity.

There are more specific terms than those I have just named, but this general principle applies to any institution requiring unity, whether it is a marriage, family, team, company, fraternal organization, church, or nation. The more qualities, concepts, goals, religion, education, race, nationality, language that one has in common with another, the stronger the unity.

Earlier, I mentioned America's immigration problem. We are being flooded by a seemingly uncontrolled and largely illegal mass of people moving across the border. It is allowing people of different cultures, with different languages, to gradually dilute the American unity built over the previous centuries. In the first 200 years or so, the immigrants to America were overwhelmingly European. That in itself is at least a weak unifying element, because those immigrating to America from Europe already had much in common with those who had arrived earlier. Now, however, the immigrants are not Europeans.

Most coming here do not intend to destroy unity. That is not what is in their minds in motivating them to come, even taking the chance on its illegality. However, what is happening is, nonetheless, dividing us. It is all over the place! Everywhere you go now, you see signs in two or three different languages. If you are in Los Angeles, it might be five, six, or seven languages in which signs have to be put up. That ought to tell you something about Babylon and what divided it. What is happening is dividing us.

When the European immigrants came here, they strongly attempted to blend and become American as quickly as possible. Today's immigrants are much less likely to do

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this. They strongly attempt to retain the culture, language, and religion of their homeland. As the immigrant element of the population grows, it can do nothing else but divide the American culture.

Now we are beginning to see or perceive another aspect of this unity issue, which is that the intention to divide or unify is not needed for an event or concept to do one or the other. Whether the event or concept does one or the other depends upon how the event or concept impacts on those affected by it. This is completely out of the control of the person who creates the event. Go back to the beginning of God's Word again, and we will see this in stark clarity.

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, "Yes, has God said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'"

Genesis 3:23-24 Therefore the LORD God sent him [Adam] forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

Contained within this chapter is how the intention principle works. Everything was fine between God and His creation until somebody with a different thought and approach showed up. Adam and Eve foolishly believed that different thought or approach, put it into action, and immediately produced a division that has not healed to this day. In this case, the difference produced two separations. The first was that it separated Adam and Eve from the presence of God and the Garden of Eden. Less immediately noticeable is that it separated them from life itself. That second one is sobering to consider because it strongly suggests that a separation may be created that is not immediately seen.

We know that, in that event, the serpent fully intended dividing Adam and Eve from unity with God and with life. On the other hand, there is no evidence that Adam and Eve intended the same. However, their conduct nonetheless created a division. There is no evidence that Adam and Eve conspired, saying, "Let us sin, so that we can escape Eden, the necessity for contact with our Creator, and having to deal with Him." They did not intend that. The serpent's proposal hit them, impacted on their minds in an acceptable manner. It seemed reasonable to them, and even enjoyable. Thus, they went along with it.

We are only a few minutes into this sermon, into this subject, and five things regarding

unity and division are already clear:

1. Oneness with God and man appears to be the most difficult of all challenges God has given us.
2. Similarity, commonality, and cooperation tend to unify.
3. Difference, variation, and rivalry tend to divide.
4. The intention to unify or divide is not necessary for one or the other to occur.
5. The fruit, whether to unify or divide, may not immediately appear.

Let us look at this a bit further, because this episode continues in chapter 4.

Genesis 4:8 And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.

How long after the original episode this occurred, I do not know. Cain, in a fit of anger, of envy, nurtured a spirit of rivalry over the different ways these two men perceived God's requirement—and thus His acceptance—until he took action to immediately separate Abel from his life. There are at least two elements that we want to consider here. We are going to leave this scripture and go back to the book of Proverbs to pick up something in chapter 15.

Proverbs 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

The first of these two elements is what I will call "negative qualities." They have a powerful tendency to separate. This would include qualities such as anger, jealousy, envy, hatred, pride, resentment, bitterness, suspicion, covetousness, abhorrence, conceit, arrogance, antipathy, sullenness, impatience, a spirit of rivalry, and many more. Every one of them divides.

Conversely, the second element is "positive qualities." These have a healing, unifying tendency: delight, tranquility, serenity, optimism, buoyancy, humility, modesty, cheerfulness, confidence, joy, generosity, kindness, gentleness, sympathy, self-control, compassion, patience, and, again, many more.

I do not know whether you watched the funeral of former President Reagan, but

Margaret Thatcher said during her eulogy of Present Reagan, "One of his outstanding traits was that he had taken on himself the responsibility of making everybody happy." She then proceeded to explain that the result of his approach to life was that, though people may not have agreed with his policies, they still felt drawn to him as a friend.

The second quality was enunciated by those who were moderating, or holding the funeral cortege and everything together: the people in the media. This second quality was provided by President Reagan himself and quoted several times by those commenting on the funeral proceedings. He said, "There is room to disagree, but one must not be disagreeable." In other words, his approach was "Let us control these negative qualities. Let us remain friends, though we disagree."

There is yet another element that impacts on unity that we will consistently see as we proceed, and it is so etched into the Garden of Eden episode that I want to cover this. It is that **every** sin ultimately separates. One cannot create unity by lying! A person may tell a lie, and it appears to smooth things over; but it is still a lie. The wages of sin is death—the ultimate in separation. Besides this, good relationships are not built upon lies.

You probably have heard of the cliché, the expression about people being "partners in crime," which illustrates that crime—or sin, as we might say—can unify people for a time, but its final act is always to part, to break up. That principle is etched right into the very fabric of clear statements made in regard to sin's effect. God said to Adam and Eve, "In the day that you eat thereof, you shall surely die." Right at the very beginning, He told them this.

This is one of the most important principles that all of us can learn at any time of life. Sin always divides. We are, of course, reminded in Romans 6:23 that the wages of sin is death.

Proverbs 1:8-19 My son, hear the instruction of your father, and forsake not the law of your mother: for they shall be an ornament of grace unto your head, and chains about your neck. My son, if sinners entice you, consent you not. If they say, "Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily [secretly] for the innocent without cause: let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: we shall find all precious substance [Oh, is this getting good!], we shall fill our houses with spoil: cast in your lot among us; let us all have one purse." My son, walk not you in the way with them; refrain your foot from their path. For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. Surely in vain the net is spread in the

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sight of any bird. And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily [secretly] for their own lives. So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which takes away the life of the owners thereof.

Many are lured into going along with the crowd in a united but evil cooperation. Sometimes, conspiracies form because of the need for the assistance of others to successfully achieve their evil ends. Often the lure, the bait, that entraps the conspirators is to make a large amount of money quickly, to "make a killing."

Whether one unites with another individual or a group for the purpose of highway robbery, to pillage a bank, to cook the books, to embezzle, to involve oneself with a partner in a scam to bilk unsuspecting people of their money, or even if a nation joins a conspiracy with other nations to war against a third, they are doomed ultimately to failure, or, as verse 18 states, "they lie in wait for their own blood." Any seeming gain from uniting with others for the purpose of sin is at best only temporary.

As things roll along in conspiracies, sometimes God, in His mercy—because of the repentance of the sinners, or sinner, who may come to himself, realizing what he has done—will blunt sin's full divisive effect. However, always will there be a painful separating effect.

David and Bathsheba's sin illustrates this. Even though David repented, there was still a separation: the baby died. God could have claimed everybody's life involved in that conspiracy—separating them and the child from each other, and separating them from life. We begin to see a principle here: There is no such thing as a victimless sin, even though God forgives. Sin's separating effect is even yet more clearly shown.

Proverbs 5:21-23 For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and He ponders [considers] all his goings. His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be held [entrapped, snared, caught] with the cords of his sins. He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.

Any sin is suicidal and separating because the sin entraps the sinner, thus catching the one in his own folly, holding him apart from others. It reserves him for death. The leavening principle is always at work in sin, and it always affects more than those directly involved in the sin.

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You might recall when Amnon, David's son, "got the hots" for his half-sister Tamar. He lured her, partly through her simplicity, into a place where he was able to rape her. Of course, her full brother Absalom did not like this at all, and he began to plot. Do you see how leavening was reaching out and pulling him into this? He began to conspire with friends of his to create a circumstance in which Amnon would be invited to Absalom's house, where the murder would take place; and it worked! However, it did not stop there. It kept building up, and eventually Absalom himself ended up dead because he rebelled against his father, David. These things just keep reaching out. That is not the way to create unity. What in the world was Absalom thinking? He was a handsome young buck, but there was something missing in his head in the way of character and wisdom.

Brethren, how many people have been separated from their lives because they were innocent bystanders at the wrong place, at the wrong time, in somebody else's sin of carelessness? All of these are aspects of why unity is so hard.

We are going to go off on a somewhat different angle here. We are going to go back to the book of Genesis again.

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

Genesis 11:3 And they said one to another, "Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.

Genesis 11:5-7 And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And the LORD said, "Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let Us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."

One of the instructions of this episode clearly teaches how much more effective oneness is regarding what is produced by it. There is a three-way unity shown in this chapter: There was unity under the leadership of Nimrod; there was unity of language; and there was unity of mind regarding their collective goal.

Go to another scripture that reinforces this. In Ecclesiastes 4, Solomon writes:

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Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falls; for he has not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

One of the major benefits of unity is that greater accomplishment, strength, and safety can be produced. You might recall that during the War for Independence there was a banner that read "United we stand, divided we fall." In Babylon, great things were done; because of their unity, they had the awesome potential to do even greater things. However, those accomplishments were all evil. They were united in sin.

When God destroyed their ability to communicate through one language, the entire project fell apart into many pieces; and the people scattered over the face of the whole earth. The removing of the common language devastated their project. Their sin divided mankind over the earth. However, there was still a lingering unifying effect in that those who could still communicate through a common language joined together. Whether for good or evil is not the point at this time. We can see it as a matter of survival.

What we can see from this is that sometimes separation—scattering, division—is good and desirable; at other times, it is bad and evil. Therefore, unity is not always good and separation is not always bad. Their moral quality depends upon which—unity or division—occurs to whom. Remember I said earlier about how the manner that something hits you is of great importance. In this case, I think you have to see that, because God produced the event that caused division and separation to evil people bent on producing more evil, He did a good thing in greatly inhibiting their ability to produce greater evil things by means of their unity.

Go back to the New Testament again, to the book of Acts.

Acts 2:1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

The church began in unity. Shortly thereafter, as God announced the beginning of the church, He gave the gift of tongues to a variety of members. The purpose of that gift was to unite others with the church. That would have been good, and it was good. It did just that, but by the time one reads through I Corinthians 12—14, which was written

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around 20 years later, what do we find? We find a far different result was being produced by the use of tongues.

I Corinthians 14:32-33 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

What was happening here? The abuse of a God-given gift was creating confusion, disorder, and separation within the congregation. Thus we can see yet another principle: The wrong use of even something good produces disunity.

Let us summarize again:

1. Oneness with God and man appears to be the most difficult of all challenges God has given us.
2. Similarity, commonality, and cooperation tend to unify.
3. Difference, variation, and rivalry tend to divide.
4. The intention to unify or divide is not necessary to do either.
5. The fruit of unity or division may not immediately appear.
6. Sin always separates. Even though the sinner repents, there is no escaping its diverse leavening.
7. People unify under a leader, common language, and common goals.
8. Unity produces greater accomplishment, strength, and safety.
9. Events may unify and divide at one and the same time.
10. Neither unity nor separation is inherently good or evil.
11. The immature and foolish use of even a godly gift will separate.

Go to the chapter where we started, John 17.

John 17:17 Sanctify them through Your truth: Your word is truth.

The key word here, for us in this message, is the word *sanctify*, which means "to cut out," or "to separate." Jesus is deliberately and strongly requesting of His Father that He separate the disciples from others by means of His truth. This is the separation fully intended, thus creating a different unity of overwhelming importance to all concerned.

Take this separation process back one step:

John 6:44 "No man can come to Me, except the Father which has sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day."

Like Jesus' prayer in John 17:17, God's calling is carefully thought through and fully intentioned. Note the words *draw him*. This clearly implies that the called one is drawn closer to God, and therefore away from someone or something else, through a deliberate action of God. God's calling is clearly implying a separation and a change of relationship. That calling begins a process on which we are expected to follow through. Back in Revelation 18, this is carried a little further in the road to conversion; but it begins as soon as the calling is realized.

Revelation 18:4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, My people, that you be not partakers of her sins, and that you receive not of her plagues."

Thus, we are called upon to participate in the separation. We cannot just stand there, waiting for things to happen. That is what I intended earlier. When God begins the process of separation from the world and uniting with Him, it requires of us to do things to aid in the separation. Separate yourself, or divide yourself, from the attitudes, conduct, and ways of life that are not in agreement with God.

It is the hearing, understanding, believing and acting upon God's truth that produces the exact opposite effect of Adam and Eve's sin in Genesis 3. Their sin separated them from God and unified them with the world. Thus, you see this process again. Sin unifies and separates at one and the same time. Obedience to God also unifies and separates at one and the same time. However, obedience and sin are moving in opposite directions. There is one that God wants; there is another that He detests. We stand in the middle, in charge, bearing the responsibility of which way we are going to go. That is our burden. Are we going to unite with God, or are we going to unite with the world?

Obedience to God unifies and separates at the same time: it unifies one with God and separates one from the world. It begins separating us from relationships with idolatry; and it may also separate one from loved ones in our family and friends. That separation depends upon how they react to our acceptance of the calling. We will see this in a message that Jesus gave in Luke 14.

Luke 14:26 If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sister, yes, and his own life also, he

cannot be My disciple.

Note the words *come to Me*. If we are moving toward Jesus, there is every likelihood that we are moving away from something else. The context here involves relationships with those of our own flesh and blood—the ones with whom we are most likely to want to remain united.

Sometimes a very difficult choice or choices must be made. Which way will we go? With whom will we be united? You can see that God's intention is clear. He does this on purpose. He wants us to be united with Him, but we bear the burden of making the choice or choices to move away from those to whom we have been so close all of our lives.

To all outward appearances, this may even seem to be cruel, we might think. Do you know what? Because God is involved in this, God's calling stands a very high degree of chance to make the relationships with those other than Christ even better than they had been before. It may take a while; but as we begin to live in unity with God, He blesses!

In this case, this is something that is largely out of our control. Sometimes we can do the very best we possibly can do, and still they still are upset to the point that maybe they do not want to have anything to do with us. I am talking about father, mother, sister, brother, aunt, uncle, children. In many cases, this depends upon them and not us. It is one of those things that are beyond our control. It depends upon their reaction to your acceptance and conduct within God's calling.

We can see very clearly, at least in this portion of the sermon, that truth divides as well as unifies. I do not want to limit *truth* to God's truth, because whether any truth unites or divides is determined by how a person hearing the truth reacts to it. We have a saying that he or she just does not want to hear the truth. That can be a true statement. What causes it? Many times it is nothing more than stubborn pride.

Jesus was asked by the disciples, "Why do You always speak to them in parables?" He answered by quoting to them what Isaiah said. He said, "Their eyes they have closed." What He is implying is a stubborn, stiff-necked, prideful, deliberate rejection of truth that keeps them united to the world and separated from God.

Let us summarize again:

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challenges God has given us.

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4. The intention to unify or divide is not necessary to accomplish it.
5. The fruit, whether to unify or divide, may not immediately appear.
6. Sin always separates. Even though the sinner repents, there is no escaping its divisive power.
7. People unify under a leader, common language, and common goals.
8. Unity produces accomplishment, strength, and safety.
9. Events may unify and divide at one and the same time.
10. The immature and foolish use of even a godly gift will separate.
11. God's calling and our acceptance of His truth separate us from the world but unite us with Him.
12. Both unity and division frequently depend upon one's reaction to truth.

I think that we can begin to see that unity with God and another person, and separation from this world, is a formidable mountain to climb. There is so much working against the accomplishment of even the right kind of unity because our knowledge and the scope of our own perspectives are very limited. There are a great many factors in our own character of which we must learn. Then, after learning of them, they must be overcome so that we can make a right use of our knowledge. In addition to that, there is much over which we have absolutely no control. However, there is hope. If God be for us, who can be against us?

What do I believe is the most important factor in this whole picture that will enable us to successfully work towards producing unity? Assuming that we have truth to guide us and with which to work, I believe it is what I will call leadership. As I begin this section, recall that I said very early in this sermon that everything Jesus said and did was aimed

at producing unity. How much unity did He produce as a man? Precious little!

However—and this is important to us—He took the long-range view that people will be unified to Him when God is good and ready. When the knowledge of God comes to them, they will never, ever be able to accuse Him of doing something that drove them away from God. That is the kind of leadership we need to follow!

They just did not know enough yet, because God had not opened their minds. This must be our approach, too. The Father and the Son, who are already one, are our leadership in this greatest of all challenges. Here is what we must do: We must follow Their examples. Both have already shown what one must do to create unity.

Notice this very clear pattern of life exhibited by both of Them. We will start with the Father. He showed His leadership in that He gave His only begotten Son. He loved us while we were yet sinners. Since that same love is shed abroad in our hearts, we have the gifts with which to work—because love is only one of the major positive qualities that work to produce unity. In other words, we need to seek Him for more.

God is fully capable of giving, and greatly desires to give us, wisdom and any additional gift, such as knowledge, understanding, sympathy, compassion, mercy, and more and more and more. If we will make the effort to use them, they will be there as needed. Because of the Father's gifts, we are already equipped to follow through on this challenge—if we will! Here is our challenge: Are we willing to be the leadership in our own little individual area of influence?

The Son—who is the closest, most responsible, most intimate leader for the church—has already demonstrated His leadership. He emptied Himself of all His heavenly prerogatives and set us a perfect example of leadership in God's giving way, sacrificing Himself to the uttermost to produce oneness; and He has already prayed to the Father in our behalf.

Together They have provided the church to be the teacher of what our attitudes and conduct must be to produce unity in a godly way. Jesus has given gifts within the Body—primarily apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers—for the perfecting of the saints and for the work of ministry (or service, as that word means) until we all come to the unity of the faith.

Why has He done this? Ignorance of truth divides. The history of the church clearly teaches us that nothing divides like false doctrine—as God clearly established through the Garden of Eden incident, and as we have had practical witness of in the Worldwide

Church of God. We have the truth—not all truth, but we have enough to create unity.

The picture is clear. Leaders sacrifice themselves as living sacrifices to God's cause of reproducing Himself in us and for the membership, which in this case is the Family of God. Why do I say that leadership is most important? I know how the Bible shows that God produces unity.

It is a simple process. God first separates a human leader by converting that person, thus uniting that human leader with Him. He has followed the same pattern with the kings, the prophets, and the apostles. He then brings scattered individuals under the leader, thus uniting them with Him through the leader, who is already united with Him and following His way. Do you see a pyramid beginning to be built?

The uniting occurs as each individual sacrifices himself to God through voluntary submission to the governance of God. God is actively involved, but He does not force the issue. Each individual member of the group must make his own decision to sacrifice himself by being what God intends His children to be. It is that simple.

I John 4:20-21 If a man say, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God, whom he has not seen? And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loves God loves his brother also.

What ultimately unites is being what we should be, through removing the differences between what Christ was and is, and us. In the church, brethren, unity with God precedes unity with man. Do not get the cart before the horse. The first of the two great commandments is what? That one comes first. It is not until the first one is being fulfilled that the second one becomes possible.

Is each of us willing to be a leader in our small area of influence—seeking truth; controlling ourselves to follow the instruction given in God's Word; walking in the steps of Jesus in attitude, conduct, and goals for life, whether others (even in the church) are doing so? We do not follow the crowd, even if that crowd is the church. We follow Christ.

Are we truly seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness first in every family relationship, work relationship, community and church relationship? God's truth, if submitted to, indeed will separate us from associations of lesser importance but, at the same time, bind us to the greater.

Understanding Unity by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Brethren, there is absolutely no other way to create unity within the church that is acceptable to God for entrance into the Kingdom of God. Unity with God must first be achieved. It is, after all, His church, His Family, His Kingdom. All things within it flow from Him and through Him. If we are not pleasing Him, all else is useless in terms of His purpose.

Let us conclude in Ezekiel 33; and, as we do this, let us remember Genesis 1:26, where God said, "Let Us create man in Our image."

Ezekiel 33:10-11 Therefore, O you son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus you speak, saying, "If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?" [How should we live?] Say unto them, "As I live," says the Lord GOOD.

That is the answer. In John 17:3-4, Jesus said that eternal life is to know God. Do you know who it is that knows God? The only ones who really know Him are those who are striving to live the way He lives. Then they know Him.