



UNITY

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Unity: Introduction

The following short chapters were written as e-mail messages called *Day & Night* over a period of several years. Consequently, there are a few repetitions. Some of the repetitions have been removed and some have remained for emphasis or slightly different meaning.

The primary assumption is the authority and inspiration of the scriptures. The promises, prayers, commands, and narratives are not up for consideration. They are to be believed and obeyed.

The church is made up of individual members, separate parts of the Body.

This is written to the parts, not to the whole. The whole cannot obey. Only the parts can obey.

With few exceptions there will not be exposition of the text. I hope to draw attention to the commands so that we can realize that we are obeying them or not obeying them. If we realize that we, as individuals, are not in obedience. I hope that we would also come to repentance of our disobedience.

This seems to be hard for many of the saints. To make this simpler and maybe easier, I suggest you read or listen to *How to be Free from Bitterness* and *Continuous Joy* available on the web at ccmbooks.org or by mail at Community Christian Ministries, P.O. Box 9754, Moscow, ID 83843.

Chapter 1: Purity, part 1— Fellowship

You will read in the next few pages, the Lord willing, several thoughts on the unity and disunity of the churches. In any given community, the body of believers is made up of all saved people and no one who is unsaved.

“And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” Acts 2:47 (NIV)

The church was made up of people of both sexes.

“They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” Acts 1:14 (NIV)

“Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.” Acts 5:14 (NIV)

The church included Jewish priests.

“So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.” Acts 6:7 (NIV)

The church included other races, cultures and nations.

“And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.” Acts 8:38 (NIV)

“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.” Acts 10:44, 45 (NIV)

“The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad.” Acts 15:3 (NIV)

“After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for

he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.” Acts 15:7-11 (NIV)

“It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.” Acts 15:19 (NIV)

These people who believed, were saved, born again, and instantly members of the one body of Christ, the church. We also see the church included Jews, Greeks, slaves and free people.

“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” 1 Corinthians 12:12, 13 (NIV)

These people became members of the LOCAL church at the same instant they became members of the body of Christ.

There was an instant unity.

This unity is described in Ephesians 4:4-6.

“There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (NIV)

We start with unity. The unity is to be kept.

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:3 (NIV)

Ch. 1: Purity, part 2— More on Fellowship

When we believed in and received Christ, we were made righteous, made pure; we were justified (Romans 5:1). That was our start. We were made one with all other justified people. We became part of the body of Christ, the church (1 Corinthians 12:13). All of our sins were forgiven (Romans 10:43). We received a new nature (Colossians 3:10). We were born of the Spirit (John 3:5). We had eternal life (John 3:16).

We had fellowship with all other justified people. We had the fruit of the Spirit. All at once, we had purity, unity and fellowship.

Before this happened, we had received the proclamation of the good news.

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete. 1 John 1:3, 4 (NIV)

Notice the fellowship is with other believers and with the Father and the Son. It was not fun, food and inane conversation. It was deeper; it was fullness of joy, not pleasure and games. It was based upon receiving the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. John 1:12, 13 (NIV)

Ch. 1: Purity, part 3— Fellowship #3

Purity is a necessary ingredient for fellowship and unity. There are two causes of purity or, I should say, two biblical expressions of it. They are the words “righteousness” and “holiness.” They are not synonyms, but they have the same character, absolute purity. Righteousness is impurity that has been made clean. Righteousness is imparted to the believer when the believer is forgiven, cleansed from all impurity. Righteousness is the subject in this chapter

This purity is in heaven but is available on earth; in fact it is a requirement to be on earth. It comes from heaven to earth. “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere” (James 3:17).

Zechariah prophesied about the Lord Jesus and his own son John. It is recorded in Luke 1:67-79. In verse 74, Zechariah spoke of the Lord Jesus. “to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days” (Luke 1:74, 75). Jesus is going to enable us to serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness all our days. That is either true or false. It is a resounding truth.

“The words ‘it was credited to him’ were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death from our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 4:23-5:1).

The text uses a form of the word “justify.” That is a synonym for “to make righteous.” In other words, something unjust has been made just. Something unrighteous has been made righteous. This righteousness is from God. “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” (Romans 1:17). We receive this righteousness by faith. The result is that we are made pure in our hearts from our unrighteousness. We are made righteous.

Ch. 1: Purity, part 4— Fellowship #4

Purity, which is the basis of both fellowship and unity, started at the cross.

This unity is to continue. “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:2-6).

The continuing means of staying pure is walking in the light. “This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all...But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin...If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:5, 7, & 9). This provides continual cleansing and continual fellowship with each other. This is predicated on all of us walking in the light.

As we had all of our sins forgiven when we received Christ, now we must keep them forgiven; this happens by the faithfulness of God. He forgives the sins we confess and all other unrighteousness. If sins accumulate unconfessed and unforgiven, the fellowship is ruined and oneness greatly hindered. We are still in the body of Christ, but the body is sick all over.

Oneness is not based on everyone agreeing with each other; it is based on each part of the body staying healthy and caring for other parts of the body. “From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:16).

Ch. 1: Purity, part 5— Fellowship #5

Earlier we emphasized righteousness.

I have mentioned that unity and fellowship are based on 1) beginning purity, our justification, our entrance into the body, and 2) continuing purity, our walking in the light and being continually cleansed. Both of these have to do with being forgiven.

There is a better way. It is not getting dirty, not sinning. We see this in a number of places in scripture: It is in being holy.

- My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. 1 John 2:1

- As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do. 1 Peter 1:14, 15

- Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:1, 2

- But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:44-48

One of the questions I ask Christians is:

- “Do you want to be holy?”

I get all kinds of evasive answers, like:

- “It is impossible, so it's not a good question.”
- “If it means being like so and so, No.”
- “I think legalism is wrong.”
- “I don't want to be out of step with the evangelical culture. If I were holy, I would lose my Christian friends.”
- “I like my distinctive doctrine.”
- “I want to be right in my theology more than I want to be holy.”

The question remains, “Do you want to be holy?” If the answer is evasive or “No”, then you are saying you do not want unity, at least not at your expense.

Ch. 1: Purity, part 6—Cleanness

“For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” 1 Corinthians 12:13

“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” 1 John 1:3

We started out both clean and in one body. It takes continual cleanness to stay completely one with each other.

“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.” 1 John 1:5

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” 1 John 1:7

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9

If we are walking in the light as He is in the light we cannot help having fellowship with one another. Along with that, the blood of Jesus keeps on cleansing from all sin.

If we are not being continually cleansed, then we have disunity, a spastic body.

Unity requires confession of sin.

See *Continual Joy* on our web site, www.ccmbooks.org.

Ch. 1: Purity, part 7— Worthy of the Gospel

“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God.” Philippians 1:27, 28

Standing firm in one spirit.

Contending as one man.

The real subject is the Gospel but notice the words attached to “one.” They are “standing firm” and “contending.” These are warlike words. It is necessary in war for all allies to be one, not enemies of each other.

Ch. 1: Purity, part 8— Purity of the Church

“I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked man from among you.” 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

Expel that wicked man from among you.

This looks like a command to break the unity.

No, the unity, fellowship, was broken when the sin occurred. He is to be removed for two reasons.

1. The acceptance of his immorality will infect the whole church.
2. So that he will repent and be saved on the day of the Lord Jesus.

Physically and spiritually, breaking fellowship with unrepentant immoral people preserves the spiritual purity of the church, the real cause of unity.

Ch. 2: Hindrances to Unity, part 1— Hindrances to Perfect Unity

Just being in Christ, makes us part of His body. It is an either/or situation.

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. Romans 8:9 (NIV)

However, being in the body does not mean we work well with other parts of the body.

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. Ephesians 4:16 (NIV)

Notice the last phrase, “grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” If the body is not building itself up in love; if each part is not doing its work, then the body does not function as it is designed.

There are two basic commands getting into the “body” and functioning as “a body”:

And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. 1 John 3:23 (NIV)

1. Believe in the name of His Son.
2. Love one another.

Number two is the basic problem in the body. It is very serious. If it is not happening, we have every reason to doubt we are in the body.

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. 1 John 3:14 (NIV)

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. 1 John 4:19-21 (NIV)

As you can see, this is serious. Not only do we know we are part of the body if we love one another, so does everyone else know we are part of the body.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:34, 35.

If we love, we build up the body. If we do not love, we are either not part of the body, or we are acting like we are not part of the body.

Ch. 2: Hindrances to Unity, part 2

On of the major hindrances to unity are teachers. They may be teachers of the truth with no differences with each other, as in 1 Corinthians chapters one and three. Their followers were spiritual infants because they were loyal to a single teacher. Or they may be teachers who are seeking their own following, as predicted in Ephesus. *“I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them”* (Acts 20:29, 30).

We see other occurrences in Scripture.

They said to you, “In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.” These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit. (Jude 18, 19).

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. (Ephesians 4:14).

But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned. (Titus 3:9-11).

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but

their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. (Romans 16:17, 18).

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! (Galatians 1:6-8)

These kinds of teachers are still around today. There is another problem—the followers of these teachers. *“A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way. But what will you do in the end?”* (Jeremiah 5:30, 31)

Christians love to follow new teaching with no idea whether it is true or false. They love to be unique, different from others. They are not eager to keep unity in the body.

Ch. 2: Hindrances to Unity, part 3

There was great disunity in the church in England and Scotland during the first half of the 17th century. There were three main groups—the Church of Scotland, the Church of England, and the dissenters (non-conformist congregational churches).

There were two unifying factors; all three were evangelical and all three were reformed (Calvinist). Why were they divided? State and Church government! The Church of Scotland was a state church with a Presbyterian form of government. The Church of England was a state church with an Episcopalian form of government. The Congregationalists wanted to have nothing to do with the state, Presbyterian, or Episcopalian forms of government. The Church of Scotland wanted to unite with the Church of England in a state church only if they had a Presbyterian form of government. And, of course, they wanted the dissenters to be in that church too. So they went to war!

The Puritans (dissenters from England) who came to Massachusetts during this time did not want to be in the state church in England or Scotland, but they immediately set up a state church where dissent was not allowed. Roger Williams was exiled from the Colony and founded Rhode Island.

There were three colonies of the thirteen that allowed freedom of religion,

even though they were founded by people with a definite religion. They were Rhode Island, founded by Roger Williams, who was a Baptist, Pennsylvania, founded by William Penn, who was Quaker, and Maryland, founded by Cecil Calvert, Lord Baltimore, who was Roman Catholic.

This disunity was not based on differences in doctrine, but on who is in control. To put it more simply—the pride of man and loyalties to other than God.

Ch. 2: Hindrances to Unity, part 4

In the early church the creeds that were put together by the church (the catholic [universal] church) were formed to separate Christians from non-Christians (the Apostles' Creed) and to separate Christians from Christian heresies (the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed). Some of these “heretics” in the Councils were probably saved people. Later on, some of the church councils included heresies in their pronouncements. The Second Council of Nicea, the First Vatican Council and the Council of Trent are three examples. After the reformation, the whole church no longer got together to form the creeds. The separate groups no longer met with each other. They met separately and wrote confessions differing from or reacting to the confessions of other groups. These confessions now separated Christians from Christians. Even when there was agreement there were still factions among the churches.

Let me quote from the autobiography of Richard Baxter, who lived in the middle of the 17th century.

“I am more deeply afflicted for the disagreements of Christians than I was when I was a younger Christian. Except the case of the infidel world, nothing is so sad and grievous to my thoughts as the case of the divided churches; and, therefore, I am more deeply sensible of the sinfulness of those prelates and pastors of the churches who are the principal cause of these division. Oh, how many millions of souls are kept by them in ignorance and ungodliness, and deluded by faction as if it were true religion! How is the conversion of infidels hindered by them, and Christ and religions heinously dishonored!...I am more sensible that most controversies have more need of right stating than of debating; and, if my skill be increased in anything, it is in that in narrowing controversies by explication, and separating the real from the verbal, and proving to many contenders that they differ less than they think they do” (Richard Baxter, Autobiography, pp. 157-158, 161).

Ch. 2: Hindrances to Unity, part 5—Unconfessed Sin Leads to Disunity

Forgiveness of sin by God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit are the major causes of unity in the believers.

Sin of any kind is the major cause of disunity and breaking fellowship.

Unconfessed sin is the continual cause of disunity.

Moral sins like stealing, murder, rape and lying are easy to recognize but still may not be confessed. Result, disunity. Moral sins like borrowing and not returning, hatred in the heart, lust and exaggerating the truth are harder to recognize as sins and thus less likely to be confessed as sin.

Result, disunity.

Moral sins in the abstract like envy, jealousy and bitterness are still harder to recognize and less likely to be confessed.

Result, disunity.

Please read *How to be Free from Bitterness* on our web site, www.ccmbooks.org.

Ch.2: Hindrances to Unity, part 6—Quarreling

“He who loves a quarrel loves sin; he who builds a high gate invites destruction.” Proverbs 17:19

“Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.” 2 Timothy 2:23, 24

There are people even among Christians, who love to quarrel. They love sin and disunity. The servant of the Lord must not quarrel.

Day & Night: Unity—Hinders of Unity

We have recognized some of the unconfessed sins in the body which hinder unity.

Here are a few more causes with sin in them which I will amplify.

Tradition
Knowledge (true & false)
Seminaries
Teachers
Followers
Opinions
Pride
Denominations

Some of these are combined with each other.

Ch. 2: Hindrances to Unity, part 7—Questions

I received the following question:

Thank you so much for these lessons. But, one question, is it possible, and if so how, to tell if someone else is not a part of the body, as opposed to someone “acting like” they are not a part of the body (as in your last paragraph).

A person who is or at least calls himself a Christian, but is not acting like one, may be assumed by the saints and sinners alike that he is not a Christian because:

1. He does not show love to the brothers.
2. He does not obey God in moral commands.
3. He has the works of the flesh and not the fruit of the Spirit.
4. He may make blasphemous statements about God.

However, he may call himself a Christian. He may even remember when he was converted and you may have remembered years when he had the evidence of a Christian.

I start by assuming he is a Christian even though present evidence is lacking. In that case, Christian friends, and elders should seek to get him to repent and confess every sin that he committed since his conversion. If he comes back into the joy, peace and obedience, then we know he was a Christian all of the time.

If he does confess and there are no results, or if he does not confess, we should treat him as an unbeliever who needs Christ. However, since he says he is a Christian and is not repentant, then we should bring church discipline upon him.

But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. 1 Corinthians 5:11 (NIV)

Ch. 2: Hindrances to Unity, part 8—Divisions and Subdivisions

Denominations are divided and subdivided seemingly on the following major subjects.

List 1: Tradition

- Theology
- Ecclesiology
- Eschatology
- Worship
- Sacraments—ordinances
- Evangelism
- Holiness
- Loyalty

Local churches are divided also on the following:

List 2: Liking and disliking the pastor

- Which family rules the church
- The color of the Nursery walls
- Bitterness
- The Choir and or Praise Team
- Should the pastor wear an earring?
- Jealousy, envy
- Personal Opinions

The truth that unites the churches are the Gospel, the Deity, the death, the burial and the resurrection of Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believers.

Everyone in the first list, with all of its combinations, would have to change his mind and his practice in just about everything in order to have complete unity in the body. The difficulty is that everyone thinks he is right in everything so it is everyone else who must change in order to have complete unity.

Here is another difficulty. Suppose complete unity happened in all believers everywhere. No one differed with anyone else at all. No one would like it! Why not? No one would be most right. We all want to be most right.

Ch. 2: Hindrances to Unity, part 9—Divisive

“I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.” Romans 16:17

“Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.” Titus 3:10

This may sound contradictory but we must have nothing to do with (break the unity) with those who break unity, those who are divisive.

Divisive people are of several kinds.

1. Those who love controversy. They love to quarrel. The quarrel may be on any subject.
2. They deliberately want to divide believers from each other. They may use slander, gossip and flattery.
3. They seek a following of their own.

Ch. 3: Love

“of those who hate me”

“of those who love me” Exodus 20:5&6

“Hate” and “love” are not the key words. The key word is “me.” The statement is not that we love, but whom we love.

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” Matthew 22:37

This statement is not only about whom we love, but how much we love Him.

What does this have to do with unity? Much! Because, our love for God is evidenced by our love for our brothers.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. John 13:34, 35

Real unity shows itself in love for each other.

Ch. 4: Humility

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:2, 3 (NIV)

Notice how humility and love keep the unity of the spirit. Complete humility is shown in Jesus Christ in Philippians 2:6-11:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (NIV)

We are to have the same humility as Jesus.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Philippians 2:5 (NIV)

Humility is before God.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. 1 Peter 5:6 (NIV)

Humility is also related to others.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Philippians 2:3, 4 (NIV)

When love for God and brothers, and humility before God and brothers are more important than our differences with the brothers, then there will be unity.

Ch. 5: Knowledge

Love and humility are the greatest virtues and means of unity in the body.

Knowledge and pride are causes of disunity in the body.

It is easy for knowledge and pride to go together. We see it in 1 Corinthians 8:1:

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. (NIV)

“Knowledge,” when it appears in the Bible, is almost always speaking of the knowledge of God, truth, His will, the Son of God, etc. In other words, it is a good thing. So, is this “knowledge” the cause of disunity? Yes, this is the kind that puffs up. Here it is three verses later:

So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 (NIV)

That is a good kind of knowledge. However, I can sin against Christ depending on how I hold on to and use this knowledge:

So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 1 Corinthians 8:11, 12 (NIV)

This knowledge is taught in many evangelical churches. We hold this information as very precious. However, do we hold it in love for the brothers?

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:2 (NIV)

If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness,

peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, Romans 14:15-17 (NIV)

Knowledge is also one of those things that will pass away:

... where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 1 Corinthians 13:8b (NIV)
Love is one of those things which does not pass away:

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:13 (NIV)

Love is and must remain senior to knowledge.

Ch. 5: Knowledge— A Response, part 2

Thank you for taking time to put these e-mails together. This one is particularly clear to me, as it is a real danger for this time of life. My concern is that I don't have love even as I have become convinced of certain truths in scripture. "Knowledge danger" seems to sum up the root cause for much of the unity focus you have written on.

We spend many hours a day in classes from the age of five on, either getting more knowledge or obtaining the means for getting more knowledge. We get graded on our knowledge. We get promoted because of our knowledge. It is one of the causes of, and one of the results of pride. It is difficult not to have it as the highest priority.

We do not spend very much time learning about love, receiving it, or giving it. Here are three passages of prayers combining knowledge and love:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:14-19 (NIV)

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is

best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. Philippians 1:9-11 (NIV)

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:9-14 (NIV)

Ch. 5: Knowledge, part 3— Knowledge Puffs Up

In the scripture knowledge is associated with truth and wisdom. They are not synonyms but they are all good words.

In this world “knowledge” takes a different course. It is a great amount of information acquired. Some of this information is true but not important, trivia. Some of it is true but used in such a way that it becomes false. Over the centuries such “knowledge” in “science”, “religion”, and “economics”, has turned out to be false. Those in the “know” at that time did not know that it was false, not true.

There is another problem with knowledge, in addition to its questionable veracity. People with it become proud. Even if it is true people who hold to it in a superior way become less like the Lord Jesus.

“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” 1 Corinthians 8:1

Within the body of Christ there are divergent views of “knowledge.” In each case the holders of this different knowledge think that what they hold is revelational truth. They think that what they hold is “sound doctrine.”

Here are a few of these different knowledges about God. “Reformed, Lutheran, Baptist, Pentecostal, Holiness, and Dispensational.” There are

many subdivisions of each of the above. It is possible that one of them is truth. It is not possible that all of them are truth. They could all be wrong but they cannot all be right.

So most of the holders of these knowledges are not being eager to maintain the unity of the body.

They each have schools, colleges, and seminaries where in part they teach the distinctive rightness of their knowledge. They are eager to maintain the distinctives, the disunity.

They may not know how to maintain the unity of the Spirit. They certainly know how to maintain the disunity in the church.

Either their knowledge is false, in which case it must be confessed as sin, or how they hold to this knowledge is sin, or both.

In each case something has to be confessed as sin before unity can even be considered.

Ch. 5: Knowledge, Question & Answer #2

I received the following question:

“Salvation is a free gift from God, but does man have any part in our salvation? Some preach no; however can’t a man refuse this gift? If that is true, then is it not also true that man must actively accept the gift? I understand the confusion because actively accepting could be interpreted as being saved by works, but it’s not really what the Scripture meant.”

Receiving a gift is never paying for it or working for it. Some people pray hard to receive the gift. They are then working for it. However, if that were the case, God would not save them. If people were, in fact, saved by God when they received the gift, then receiving wasn’t work. “Hard” makes it work. “Hard” is not faith. Trusting prayer is never “hard.”

Neither Reformed, Arminian, nor Dispensational Christians believe man has any works in his salvation. They all hold to the finished work of Christ as the only payment. They preach that grace and belief are the current active events that are happening when a person is saved. They all believe works has nothing to do with our salvation.

However, Reformed Christians think Arminians preach “works” in that, in their view, any willful act of a sinner in repenting, receiving and believing is works because sinners cannot repent or believe until after they are born again.

The Dispensationalists believe any one who preaches repentance for salvation is preaching works, because “repentance” in their view is cleaning up your own act. If repentance is a synonym for faith, then it is O.K.

The Arminian Christians teach that the Reformed believers do not teach “faith” for salvation because the Reformed belief is that they were saved before the foundation of the world.

In order to arrive at the above conclusions each of these groups have preached about the other group’s belief, they had to change or alter the definitions of grace, faith, and repentance. This is either willful or in ignorance. In any case, it does not help unity. Whether people were saved by God under the preaching of the Wesleys, Whitefield, or Billy Graham, God knew it was not works or God would not have saved them. If they were saved, then by definition, it was by grace and faith.

In each of these groups there are people who have not been saved because they have succeeded in changing the doctrine of faith into something else. It is amazing but true. They make “faith” an intellectual agreement in truth rather than teaching the finished work of Christ or they make “faith” itself the end instead of the means as reflected in the statement, “It does not matter what you believe, as long as you believe.” Or, the word becomes hollow, empty, meaningless as stated in 1 Corinthians 15:2:

“By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.” (NIV)

Ch. 6: The Pleasantness of Unity

How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! Psalm 133:1 (NIV)

Amen!

If we do not understand this verse, then think of the opposite.

How bad and unpleasant it is when brothers live together in disunity!

That is clearly true. What is the world's solution? Quit living together! That is the major reason we have so many denominations, but not a right reason. The next two verses tell us what unity is like.

It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. Psalm 133:2 (NIV)

This is like being anointed with the Holy Spirit with all of the fruit of the Spirit. If we think of oil being poured on our heads so it runs down our face and onto our clothes, we think that would be very unpleasant. That is not the image! This is the image of the first high priest being anointed with oil, perfumed and precious. Messiah (Hebrew) and Christ (Greek) both mean the anointed one. This is a prefigure of the real anointed one, Jesus. The high priest was anointed with holy oil, Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit. There is an older word in English, "unction." It is an oil that is used for anointing. When a man speaks with unction, he is speaking in the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore. Psalm 133:3 (NIV)

Mount Hermon is over 9000 feet high, snow capped. This unity is as if the rainfall on Hermon had fallen on Jerusalem. For there (Zion, Jerusalem) the Lord will rain down His blessing. What is this blessing? Everlasting life, filled with the Spirit, is the good and pleasantness of unity.

Ch. 7: Fellowship

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 1 John 1:5 (NIV)

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 1 John 1:7 (NIV)

God is light! We are to live in the light as God is in the light. He is the light. We are to be that close to Him. If we, you and I, are living in that light, two things happen:

1. We have fellowship with each other. If you are in that light and I am in that light, it would be impossible not to have fellowship with each other. The clear solution for unity is to walk in the light as He is in the light.

2. He purifies us from all unrighteousness.

The key instruction that teaches us how to walk in that light is in verse 9:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9 (NIV)

Two things happen as the result of confessing our sins:

1. He forgives us our sins.
2. The blood of Jesus, His son, keeps on purifying us from all sin.

The way to perfect fellowship with each other is to have all sin and all unrighteousness in us purified. That is done by the faithfulness of God and the blood of Jesus Christ. We receive this by confessing our sins.

If I am not doing this, I may not hold anyone else responsible for our lack of unity.

Ch. 7: Fellowship, part 2

“...for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.” 1 Timothy 1:10-11 (NIV)

Sound doctrine is that which conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God. When the Bible speaks of sound doctrine, it is speaking of the gospel. It is not speaking of the fine tuning of interpretation of different denominations.

The next question is what is the biblical definition of the gospel?

“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” 2 Corinthians 4:4-6

“Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.” 1 Corinthians 15:1-6

Let me enumerate.

The gospel is:

- Light of the Glory of Christ
- Christ is the image of God
- Jesus Christ is Lord
- Light of the knowledge of the Glory of God
- This gospel saves
- Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures
- He was buried
- He was raised on the third day according to the scriptures.

“It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.” 1 Corinthians 1:30

“He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Luke 24:46, 47

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16

“That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9

What are the results of the gospel?

- Wisdom from God
 - Righteousness
 - Holiness
 - Redemption
- Forgiveness of sins
- Saved
- Everlasting life
- Born of the Spirit

Truth: Everyone who is in the body of Christ has received and believes in Jesus Christ.

Truth: Everyone who is in the body of Christ has received the fruit of the Spirit.

These two truths provide the unity in the body.

The unity in the body is broken when members of the body add to the gospel and call the addition sound doctrine. Sound doctrine is the gospel only.

The unity in the body is compromised when “apparent members” have not received Christ and, therefore, do not have the fruit of the Spirit. Since they do not know the Head of the body, they are not real members of the body, but they wish to interact as if they were members.

The unity of the body is broken when some members of the body are no longer walking in the light as He is in the light.

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” 1 John 1:7 (NIV)

Unity means deep and close fellowship. This happens only when all in the body are walking in that same wonderful light.

Ch. 8: The Body

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. Ephesians 4:14-16 (NIV)

The body builds up the body. The believers in the body build up the body.

How?

Notice, “the whole body” is the church. “Every joint and ligament” are all the saints in the body and the body grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

The pastors build up the body only in that they are to train all parts of the body to build itself up and that they themselves are part of the body.

Truth and love are the ingredients in this growth into unity.

At present, the church at large is a dismembered body. The fault is in the lack of truth and the lack of love by the members of the body. The evangelists, pastors and teachers are to give very much truth with very much love to the members of the body which the members, in turn, then give to each other.

Love without truth is a body without bones. Truth without love is a body of nothing but bones. It is also possible to have “pretend love” and falsehood mixed with truth. We see all of this in the church today.

Here is a clear sequence towards unity:

1. It was He who gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers;
2. to prepare God’s people for the work of the ministry;
3. so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV)

The key words are, “so that.”

The direct cause of unity is God’s people doing the work of the ministry. The body of Christ builds up the body of Christ. It is not the pastor’s job. His job is to prepare God’s people to do their job.

Ch. 8: The Body, part 2

I received this question,

There are two statements I don't understand: 1) "At present the church at large is a dismembered body", and 2) "We see all of this in the church today." How do you substantiate these? Where is the evidence? Is "the church at large" and "the church today" made up of believing churches only, or does it include unbelieving (apostate) churches as well?

I am not sure who invented the term "the invisible church", but I am glad it is not a biblical term. The church and its members should be very visible.

Local assemblies that deny, add to, or ignore the Gospel of Jesus Christ as found in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 are apostate or unbelieving churches. They are not dismembered parts of the body. They are not members of the body of Christ at all and should not be considered Christians. We are not to be in unity with someone who does not belong to Christ. There may be real Christians in the apostate churches. They are not functioning with other believers, but should be.

The church at large is made up of all Christians everywhere:

To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours: 1 Corinthians 1:2 (NIV)

These believers should be meeting in local assemblies. However, the local assemblies may be quarreling within them and between them.

The different parts of the body are to be immediately obedient to the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. In many cases, the believers are obedient to the pastor or the rules of the "church" assuming that it is the same as being obedient to Christ.

If one hand represents one denomination and the other hand represents another denomination, and the head says to the hands "clap your hands," and the hands immediately swing toward each other and miss each other, either one or both hands have paid more attention to the arms or wrists than to the head. They are disobedient.

The body of Christ may not be dismembered, but it is disobedient and spastic. If our own bodies functioned like the body of Christ, we would all be in hospitals.

Ch. 8: The Body, part 3

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. Ephesians 4:15, 16 (NIV)

We see some repetition of words. Two of them are “love” and “grow.” Two other phrases are “the whole body” and “each part.”

This is how the body works after it has been prepared by the pastors for works of service.

Ch. 8: The Body—Question & Answer #1

I received this question:

“Thank you so much for these lessons. But, one question, is it possible, and if so how, to tell if someone else is not a part of the body, as opposed to someone ‘acting like’ they are not a part of the body?”

There is no absolute way because they both look alike. It may be more likely that unbelievers pretend to be believers. These are hypocrites. However, the Christians may act like the unbelievers while assuring us they are believers. These are compromisers.

In a loving, gracious way, we should tell the compromisers and the hypocrites we do not think they are saved. They may be offended and tell us not to judge.

“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God”. Galatians 5:22-24 (NIV)

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.” Galatians 5:22-24 (NIV)

Ask them which list describes them best. When they say, “the first list,” tell them you agree with them and that Jesus Christ does a better job of saving than that. When we are saved, we are transferred from the first list to the second list. If they say they are in both lists, tell them when they get out of the first list you will believe they are Christians. The hypocrites must turn and be converted and the compromisers must confess their sins.

“Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them” Matthew 7:20 (NIV).

“What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?” 1 Corinthians 5:12 (NIV)

If they are not part of the body, we want to help them find out.
If they are part of the body, we want them to look like they are.

Ch. 8: The Body, Question & Answer #2

Recently, I received this question and would like to include my response as part of the series on Unity.

“We’ve enjoyed your Unity lessons. Thank you. Jim, why is there such emphasis on being a member of a church corporation? There appears to be a lot of weight placed on being a “member” of a local church corporation than on being a member of Christ and obeying his commands. I understand being subject to your leaders but I’m having problems with signing on to a corporation with a constitution and by-laws. I’m not at peace with the whole concept. Could you give some insight for me?”

It is difficult to answer and make the answer sound positive for all the reasons that churches and people have.

First, I will give what I think the Bible teaches.

1. If we are born again, we are members of the body of Christ. It is impossible to be members of the body of Christ without being members of the local body. If we are immoral and unrepentant, we can be disfellowshipped (1 Corinthians 5), but we start out in fellowship at our new birth.

2. To have requirements to be a member of a local church over and above regeneration does not have a biblical basis.

The following are reasons given for “incorporation”:

1. In order to have the Internal Revenue Service recognized the church as a legitimate 501 (C) 3 corporation so that tax deductible receipts can be given. This is not a requirement. Any church can give IRS recognized receipts, incorporated or not.

2. In order to own property. Most states have laws that recognize who owns the property, private ownership, partnership, corporation, non-profit corporation. A church is an assembly of Christians. They can meet in private homes, rented buildings, etc. The states have laws because many people in many churches have cheated and stolen. The state wants to protect its citizens even if the church will not protect them. However, we should not look to the state for government in the body. “If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know the saints will judge the world? And if

you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and this in front of unbelievers! The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers” (1 Corinthians 6:1-8).

The following are reasons given for “non-incorporation”:

1. There are many churches which are not incorporated which still have distinct membership requirements. The awful part of this is the proponents think this is a good thing.

2. They want their members to believe in “sanctification”, or the “baptism of the Holy Spirit”, or “eternal security”, or “believers baptism”, or “infant baptism” or “predestination” or “pre-tribulation rapture” or “free will”, etc. The new Christian does not know anything about any of these things. He is enrolled in new members’ class where he is taught what is right. He has no basis to disagree with what he is taught so he agrees. He is now qualified to be a member. In the same new members’ class there is an unsaved man. He also agrees and is now made a “member” based on his agreement with these teachings.

3. They want their members to believe in the same church government. They also have to be taught.

4. They want their members to have the same view of the ordinances or sacraments. They must be taught.

5. They want their members to have the same view of liturgy or church music. Now they have to be taught and trained.

6. They want their members to be of the same ethnicity or race or culture or wealth.

7. They want members in order to get them to tithe to their church.

8. They think they have to have members in order to exercise church discipline.

Do I have strong views about all of the above? Yes, very strong views,

but I recognize what is of first importance.

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,” 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4 (NIV)

The church I am pasturing has unbelievers and believers attending. All of the believers are members just by being believers. We have no written membership. We take no offering. Our ethnicity, at present, includes Chinese, Nepalese, Korean and Americans. Our age span include babies, pre-school, elementary school, high school, college, graduate school, middle age, old age, more than one in their seventies and more than one in their eighties.

Our doctrinal span includes believers who hold the position of infant baptism and believers who hold the position of believers' baptism, as well as believers in sprinkling and in immersion. We partly support missionaries in Malaysia, China and Jordan. We have the uneducated and PhD's in attendance. With all of this diversity, we have a maximum attendance of 50. Because we have no two birds of the same feather, that may be one of the reasons we have a maximum of 50. People like to be with people who are just like they are. Being in Christ should be the common feather.

How do I handle the membership views of other churches? I do not debate or argue with, or even bring up the subject. If it is a church made up of Christians, I just assume I am also a member because I am part of the body, even if the church does not think so. This paragraph is an exception to my policy of not talking about it.

Ch. 9: Sarcasm

In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. 1 Corinthians 11:17-19 (NIV)

In chapters one and three of Corinthians, Paul hit divisions in the church hard. The church had all of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 1:7), but that did not make them spiritual. Paul said the church was still worldly; infants in Christ.

Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men? 1 Corinthians 3:1-4

In chapter eleven he is still on the subject of divisions. Now in sarcasm does he approve of their differences? No! The sarcasm is a strong denunciation of their differences. He is saying all of them are wrong. All of them need to repent.

Does this include me? Yes! And I am repenting.

Ch. 10: One Mind, part 1

“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.” 1 Corinthians 1:10

“Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.” 2 Corinthians 13:11

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.” Acts 4:32

The first two texts are appeals, the first in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. An appeal is a very strong request just short of being a command.

1. agree with one another
2. so that there be no divisions among you
3. so that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

Aim for perfection and

1. be of one mind
2. live in peace

This third text is an example of being in one heart and one mind.

Apparently, this oneness in heart, mind, and thought is not only a possibility, but is a requirement. It was in effect in brand new Christians. This is not something we grow into; it is something we start with that causes us to grow to maturity.

We have had hundreds of years of practice where “maturity” gets more divisions, not fewer.

This is sin. Obedience cannot happen until sin is confessed and forgiven.

Ch. 10: One Mind, part 2

I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. 1 Corinthians 1:10 (NIV)

This is an appeal of Paul in the Name of the LORD Jesus. He is calling in the highest authority, and then makes it very clear what he is urgently requesting.

When we see texts like this and look at them long enough so that we cannot slide by them, we come to one of several conclusions:

- Let's be real!
- Paul is overstating the requirements.
- "All" doesn't mean "all."
- Let's make it a process.
- There have to be divisions among us to show which of us is right.

In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. 1 Corinthians 11:17-19 (NIV)

- We are in sin and need to repent.

Ch. 11: Disunity—Bad Pastors

You may have noticed the last three Day & Nights are focused on Ephesus. The first two were from Ephesians 4 and the last was written to Timothy who was at Ephesus selecting pastors. This is Paul's teaching to the elders at Ephesus in Acts 20:28-30.

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.”

Good pastors contribute to unity. Bad pastors contribute to disunity “So be on your guard.”

Ch. 11: Pastors—Good Pastors

Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. 1 Timothy 3:1 (NIV)

Desiring to be an overseer, (pastor, elder) is a good thing. However, there are qualifications to be met.

Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. 1 Timothy 3:1-7 (NIV)

Ch. 11: Pastors—Teachers

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Ephesians 4:11-13

In between the words “teachers” and “unity” are the people prepared for works of service to build up the body.

There are teachers, who may teach the truth, but who prepare the people to listen to and follow the teachers; the Christians are not prepared for works of service. The result is the body is not built up into the unity of the faith.

There are teachers, as in Ephesus, who distort the truth to seek to get people to follow them.

“Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.” Acts 20:30

There are teachers who teach true information, commands and promises but who do not teach obedience to the commands and trust in the promises. It is easier to teach information than it is to teach belief and obedience.

There are teachers who teach distinct theologies which do not agree with many other taught distinct theologies. These teachers are eager to retain disunity in the body. This kind of teaching is thought to be a virtue. There are teachers who do not practice what they preach.

The followers imitate the teachers.

Ch: 11: Pastors— Pastors-Teachers-Evangelists

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV)

We all know, or think we know what pastors, teachers and evangelists are and do. Here is something that may surprise you.

They are to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Pastors, teachers, and evangelists are the prime movers; God's people are the secondary movers. The result is unity, knowledge, maturity, whole measure, and fullness.

Pretty neat, huh?

Where is the breakdown? Probably the pastors, teachers, and evangelists, are doing the works of service instead of preparing God's people to do it.

Ch. 12: False Unity

There is a unity that is not the unity of the Spirit. It is not a real unity. It may be a unity of co-belligerents. They have a common enemy. An example of this is Russia and the U.S. at war with Germany. Or Roman Catholicism, Mormonism and Evangelicalism united against abortion and gay marriages.

Here are a few positive words that pertain to unity:

Purity: The wisdom that comes from Heaven is first pure; then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. James 3:17 (NIV)

Gentle: A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Proverbs 15:1(NIV)

Humility: Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Ephesians 4:2 (NIV)

Peace: Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.
Colossians 3:15 (NIV)

Patience: Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Colossians 3:12 (NIV)

Forgiveness: Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Colossians 3:13 (NIV)

Fellowship: We write this to make our joy complete.... But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

I John 1:4, 7 (NIV)

Righteousness: The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.
Isaiah 32:17 (NIV)

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.... Romans 5:1(NIV)

Peace loving at the expense of Purity is false unity. We saw this with Neville Chamberlain's agreement with the Nazi Germany before World War II. It was "peace at any cost."

The opposite is true. It should be, "righteousness at any cost." The cost was the death of the Son of God. This event, the cross, broke down the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles and made them both one. It breaks down all other barriers.

Ch.13: Tradition

“You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.” Mark 7:8

Traditions normally do not exist in the first generation. They do exist only because the event was done before.

Back in 1954 I was asked to preach at a new Baptist mission church in Seaside, California. On the Wednesday before the first Sunday Service I suggested that we decide on an order of service. The members thought it was not necessary; we would use the same order of service that was used at the home church. I objected. They asked why I did not want to use that order of service. Was there something wrong with it? My objection was that we should not do anything just because it was done before. However, we did follow the tradition.

We can recognize certain traditions easily. Here are a few. Amish, Black capped Mennonites; White capped Mennonites and Quakers. Unity will never occur until the tradition is broken, forsaken and confessed as sin. This is not just quaint culture; it is deadly to the Gospel even if some of the members of the tradition are truly saved.

There are many other traditions in historic Christian churches in which the tradition is more important than the Gospel. Here are examples. In 1948, I got closely acquainted with a Disciples of Christ Chaplain in the Navy. He held very strongly to his church’s tradition of baptism by immersion and the Lord’s Supper every Lord’s day. He held to them, not because he thought they were biblical but because that’s what his church always did. As I remember, he did not believe in the inspiration of Scripture, the virgin birth, and the resurrection of Jesus. In 1973, I was on a panel of Washington State University where a Lutheran theologian was the speaker. He was an ordained Lutheran pastor who served communion. In his talk he said that the only thing we definitely knew about Jesus was that he was baptized by a man named John and he had fellowship with people who were down and out. It did not bother me that he did not believe in Jesus. It bothered me that communion was important to him. It was tradition.

Tradition is sin.

Isaiah said in Isaiah 1:

“The multitude of your sacrifices— what are they to me?” says the LORD. “I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if

you offer many prayers will not listen. Your hands are full of blood;” Isaiah 1:11-15

God was anti-tradition. 700 B.C.

Jesus was anti-tradition.

Ch. 14: Reader Comments, #1

I received this additional comment and insight with regard to the series on “Unity” and am passing it along to you.

Jim, you are probably going to deal with this, but I think the greatest incentive for unity is Christ’s “Highest Priestly Prayer” in John 17; especially verses 22-23.

“I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are on: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” John 17:22, 23 (NIV)

The unity of the Body is one of the most forceful apologetics for the divinity of Christ. Conversely, disunity is Satan’s most successful tool.

I think I mentioned on our visit that the Greek word from which we get “heresy” has the root meaning of division.

In Him,

Otto Helweg

Amen!

Ch. 14: Reader Comment, #2

I received this comment:

“Personally, I have never understood how any professing Christian can be a racist. I am sure you have known some as well as I have. The passages referenced in this devotional make it obvious. If the twelve Apostles had been racists, then no Gentile would have ever been saved!”

Not only have I known a few, but we find them in the New Testament as well. Peter was a racist at the beginning of Acts 10 and in Galatians 2:11-13:

“When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.”

Paul was writing to racists in Rome and Ephesus in their respective letters. These churches were international churches with attendant problems. There were teachings and commands to correct the problems. In order to avoid the problems and the requirement for teaching, we find it easier to be in separate churches. We can then hang on to our prejudice while thinking we do not have prejudice.

Postscript

Before we can apply anything from the Bible there are a few basic truths that just are. Believing they are true does not make them true. They are true anyway. Here are a few describing Christians.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” 2 Corinthians 5:17

“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.” Romans 6:22

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20

“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,” Ephesians 1:13

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.” Galatians 5:22-24

The above scriptures are true for all people born from above. If they do not describe you the answer is very simple; you are not a Christian, not saved. Even though you are a church member, it is impossible for you to apply the teaching on unity. You are not part of the body of Christ.

See the appendix on further assurances of salvation. If they do describe you, than it is possible and imperative that these scriptures on unity be applied. You, as an individual member of the body cannot act as if you were the whole congregation. However, as a part of the body of Christ you must obey as an individual even if your church does not obey.

1. Admit that you are not obeying. Confess this disobedience as sin as if it were a lie or adultery or murder.
2. Confess all other sins you have not confessed since you were saved.
3. Choose to obey. Ask God for an opportunity to obey and the grace to do it.

