

## **Christian Unity**

There are many kinds of unity in the religious world. Different people and groups identify diverse grounds for unity. These variations essentially reflect the differences in what those people consider to be important in the Christian life. For example, if one considers holiness to be the ultimate purpose of the Christian life, then holiness will become his "highest good," and his basis for unity. If he considers evangelism to be supremely important, then evangelism will become his basis for unity. Or if he considers correct doctrine to be the highest end of the Christian life, then that will be his basis for unity. Whatever we perceive as being the nature of the Christian life will influence our perception of unity, and how it is realized. So, in our search for the true nature and basis of Biblical unity, let us now consider some of the things that have become a basis for unity in the church today.

### **Unity Based on Leadership?**

Historically, one thing we can identify as having been successful in achieving unity in many groups is the presence of a strong or gifted leader. A strong leader is often able to produce "unity" within his church, sometimes through his personal charm or magnetism, and at other times through sheer "brute force." Some men are gifted speakers or teachers, and are able to build their church around that gift. Others may have gifts of power, such as healing or deliverance. Naturally many flock to see such demonstrations of power, and in this way church is established, built around the man's gift. There are many ways in which a church can be built around a particular leader, and to all outward appearances there may seem to be "unity." However this is often just an outward unity. Inwardly, the people may not be in agreement at all, but either they do not want to "rock the boat," or they are simply too afraid to voice their differences. Furthermore, when unity in a local church is based upon an individual leader, it is not uncommon to find division between that group and others. In the church at Corinth, for example, there were several groups in the same city whose identities as churches were centered on the men they perceived as their leaders, or at least their founders. Quite possibly each of these churches experienced unity within its own ranks, but between the various groups there were divisions. So although a certain unity can be achieved based upon leadership within one local body, this unity will be limited to that body alone, and will rarely extend outside its own limited circle. Moreover, what happens when the leader falls, dies, or moves to another place? Historically, this has produced much confusion, division and strife with churches of this kind. With the departure of the strong leader around whom the church was built, is a corresponding departure of the unity that was centered upon him. Thus the "unity" of such a church is somewhat short-lived. So we see that the true source of unity must be more universal and more enduring than on man's life and ministry---however commendable his life and ministry may be. True unity cannot be bound by time, place or human instrument. It must be bigger than one group, and more enduring than one man's life.

### **Unity Based on a Common Culture**

In our day there are many churches that are built upon the common culture of the people involved. For example, in the large cities of America we can find "black churches," "white churches," "Indian churches," "Greek churches," "Messianic churches," (I might add home churches, organic churches, simple churches---Grover) and a host of other churches based upon a myriad of distinctions that create a certain "unity" among those of a common cultural identity or heritage. However, the Scriptures teach plainly that there is "neither Jew nor Greek" in Christ (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11), and that "our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians

3:20). So while men may recognize national and cultural distinctions within the body of Christ, God obviously does not. Furthermore, where this kind of "unity" is present there is often found a corresponding "disunity" between the different cultural groups in the same neighborhood. So true unity within the Body of Christ must be based on something "trans-cultural." Our unity cannot be based on temporal culture, but must be built upon something much larger and more enduring. In fact, since unity should involve all true Christians of all time, it must be based on something eternal and trans-local. True unity is tied up inextricably in the nature of the Christian life.

### **Unity Based on Ethical Standards**

For some, the Christian life is the pursuit of outward holiness and righteousness; the pursuit of a moral and ethical standard. And for many of these Christians, ethical standards have become the center of church life and the basis of unity. It is certainly true that we are commanded by God: "ye shall be holy; for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44), yet outward righteousness is not all that the Christian life consists in. In Jesus' day those religious leaders who most exemplified the search for a consistent standard of outward holiness and righteousness were the ones most fiercely rebuked by the Lord. They had clearly not attained the "Christian life." The question is, can outward holiness ever be the basis of Christian unity? Would it not be possible to produce a certain "unity" of external holiness, and yet still not have true Christian unity? Indeed it is possible, and there are many churches in the world today who have achieved a certain unity of external practice, but who have not attained a true inward spiritual unity. Consider again the religious leaders of Jesus' day, who were preoccupied with the attainment of a standard of righteousness. They could not be said to have been in unity with Him at all, or with His church when it was birthed; they violently persecuted both Him and His church! Moreover, there are examples in church history of heretical teachers whose outward lives were of the utmost moral and ethical integrity. Their righteous manners of life actually made their heresies more plausible in the eyes of many. But could the true Christian assemblies have been in unity with these men? If their doctrines were doctrines of demons, and struck at the very heart of Christianity, how could "unity" with them be possible? For "what communion hath light with darkness" (2 Corinthians 6:14)? Finally, let us point out that some churches have achieved "unity" centered upon agreement on outward standards of behavior, and yet not everyone in those churches was even saved! Could this possibly be true Christian unity? God forbid! So it is obvious that, although holiness is unquestionably one of the fruits of the genuine Christian life in an individual and in the true church of Jesus Christ, yet there must be a higher basis of unity than the mere outward appearance of holiness, and the pursuit of a virtuous ethical standard.

### **Unity Based on Evangelism**

Since there is evidently more to Christianity than standards of outward behavior, and it would not be possible to have unity among people who have not yet found Jesus as Lord and Savior, then perhaps we should look to evangelism as being the central part of the Christian experience, and consequently the basis of unity in the church. It is becoming increasingly popular to make world evangelism the basis of unity in the church. The reasoning is simple: The vast masses of the world's population have yet to hear of the Name of Jesus. Furthermore, how can we expect the world to hear our message when we are so divided over matters of doctrine? Surely then it must be our responsibility as Christians to forget our past differences and come together as one, uniting our resources and efforts for the single purpose of proclaiming the Gospel to the ends of the earth before Jesus' return. But is this the Christian life, and could this be the basis of true "unity"? For Jesus not only commanded us to preach the simple message of salvation, but His command was: *Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...Teaching*

*them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you ... (Matthew 28:19-20, Greek)*  
Jesus did not command us to preach only John 3:16 to all men, but the entire Word of God. How can we fulfill His command to "make disciples of all nations" in unity, when we do not agree on what a "disciple" even is? Furthermore, Jesus commanded us to teach those disciples everything that He taught His first disciples. Again with a vast myriad of views and beliefs on just about every aspect of everything taught in the Word of God, how could evangelism, if it is going to be performed in true obedience to Jesus' command, possibly be the basis of "unity" in the church? So it is evident that although world evangelism is undeniably of a high priority, yet when it comes to defining the Christian life, and consequently the nature and basis of Christian unity, there will have to be more to it than the mere concept of "evangelism."

### **Unity Based on Abandoning, or At Least Neglecting, Doctrine**

In light of what we have said above, it seems that doctrine is the principal stumbling-block to "unity" in the church. It was doctrine that prevented us from attaining unity on the basis of outward works of holiness. And when we tried to make world evangelism the basis of Christian unity, again it was doctrine that didn't permit it. Since doctrine seems to be so divisive, perhaps we should just disregard doctrine in our pursuit of unity. Perhaps this would be the key thing that would by itself bring about unity---for us simply to forget the beliefs and doctrinal matters that historically have kept us apart. But of all the attempts at unity that have been made by religious man, this would have to be the poorest ever undertaken! For if we neglect doctrine, then what will be unified? Indeed what would the Christian life be? How could we have unity in the church? We would not even know what the church is anymore, if we have forgotten our doctrines! We would not know what the Christian life anymore if we abandon our doctrines! The Christian life would no longer exist in this scenario; it would have become one vague, amorphous mass of worthless, undefined, religious "hodge-podge." How could our lives exemplify a common standard of holiness and righteousness; if we no longer know what constitutes holiness, because we have forgotten our doctrines? Would we all just pursue whatever is right in our own eyes, with no single standard? Is that what God wants? Is that the spotless bride Jesus died for? Is the "unity"? How could we pursue the establishment of the Kingdom of God, since we would not even know what the Kingdom consists in, if we have forgotten our doctrines? How could we be unified in our efforts at evangelism, since we would not even know what evangelism is anymore, if we have abandoned our doctrines? Perhaps one should preach one thing and another something else---all in the name of Christ. Again, whatever is right in our own eyes! Anything goes! Dear friend, that is the logical extension of the notion of unity on the basis of disregarding doctrine. What unity is possible when we have no standard, when we have rejected all ultimate truth? Outwardly we may smile at each other and seem to "get along," but inwardly our hearts will be going in entirely different directions. That is not unity, but confusion; and it stands in bold, rebellious defiance of the clear admonition of the Word of God: *Now I beseech you, brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Corinthians 1:10)*

### **Unity Based on an Outward Confession of Christ**

"Well," someone replies to what we have said above, "maybe there are a few doctrines that really do matter. So perhaps we should define and hold to those few fundamental doctrines --- those few essential truths --- and let the rest of them ride? After all, isn't the most important thing that everybody who names the Name of Christ come together --- ignoring their differences --- to work together and present a common unified front to the world?" But there are several problems with this idea. First, who is going to define those few doctrines that are "important"?

If we have been unable for hundreds of years to agree on much of anything, how could this standard of the "few important fundamentals" ever be set up in the first place? Second, and vastly more important, where is the justification in the Word of God for this kind of thinking? While Jesus certainly recognized that some matters are indeed "weightier" than others (Matthew 23:23), yet He did not thereby intend that we neglect or ignore the "less weightier matters," but He charged us to teach "all things whatsoever (He) commanded." Are we now to abandon this as "impossible"? Do we really want to stand before Almighty God on the last day as unfaithful and unprofitable servants who quarreled with the propriety and appropriateness of His own commandments? Paul also stressed the importance of correct doctrine; not just concerning a few "fundamentals," but his command was that "there be no divisions among you" (1 Cor. 1:10). Furthermore, if we were to define just a few "important" doctrines, and effectively neglect the rest, what would we produce in the church anyway. Someone says, "We would produce Christians! Because the most important thing in someone's life, and the thing that we should strive for above all other things, is the confession of Christ." But, dear friend, a Christian is more than someone who "confesses Christ." The Christian life involves far more than a mere confession of t\faith. Jesus' own words were, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven" (Matthew 7:21). If we have forsaken all notion of what the will of God might be, how can our efforts at evangelism produce anything other than children of Gehenna? Moreover, the role of the church toward the world is not just to present a common, unified front, but it is to reveal the Person and character of the Lord Jesus Christ. The church is to show Him to this world --- not just His Name, but Himself --- in His fullness. Christianity does not consist in the mere outward confession of Christ, but in the inward subjection to His lordship and the experience of His manifest Presence. To have a church filled with those who have outwardly professed Christ, yet who do not know the reality of His inward transforming power is to propagate a false and aimless Christianity. Again, this is not unity, but an invitation to confusion.

### **Unity Based on Doctrine**

It seems from all we have said that the only possible basis left for "unity" in the church is doctrine. Since doctrine seems to have been the missing element in all the above, perhaps it should be the one thing we must concentrate on, in order to come into unity with each other? When we all agree with the other then we'll have unity, right?

Wrong!

Dear friend, centuries of experience should have taught us that the moment we finally hammer out the last fine point of doctrine, and copy down the last period in the creed that we all eventually agree upon, someone will think up some new issue about which we can disagree and be divided!

If this is the kind of unity that we must strive after, then our lives are destined to be spent in the exhausting pursuit of agreement concerning every "jot" and "tittle," and in the never-ending melee of constant debate and academic discussion over matters great and small. Is this the Christian life? Is this the glorious church of Jesus Christ? Is this what Jesus died to establish? Is this the bride He will soon return for?

Furthermore, dear friend, even if we could, after decades spent in the finest and most erudite of minds beating out the most intricate of theological arguments, come to the place where we agreed on everything --- and by that I mean everything --- even if we could conceivably come to the place of one hundred percent, total, absolute agreement on every doctrine in existence --- we would still not have unity! Because after all those years of brilliant mental exertion and exhausting theological and scholarly gymnastics, our hearts would still not have been dealt with! Our hearts would still be full of dead men's bones, and of pride, rebellion, and self-will. We

would still be living our own independent, self-centered lives. We would have failed. We would not yet have achieved unity!

The hindrance to unity is not in your head, dear friend. It is in your heart.

This is not at all to belittle doctrine or its importance. Doctrine is very important. We must simply understand that unity of doctrine is not the cause of true Christian unity --- it is the result. The basis of unity is something far greater, something far more glorious.

Once again, our problem is that the fundamental issue has not yet been addressed; the nature of the Christian life.

The Christian life is not found in academic pursuits; it is not found in scholarly ivory towers. It is not found in endless philosophical debates and subtle strivings about words. The Christian life is found in Jesus. The Christian life is found in fellowship and union with Him. The Christian life is Jesus Christ. And here we come at last to the true basis of unity in the church...

## **The Biblical Basis of Unity**

We have said before that whatever we perceive as being the nature of the Christian life will influence our perception of unity, and how it is realized. The basic fault of all the above attempts at achieving unity is that they do not adequately define the Christian life. Their definition of the Christian life is less than what it should be; therefore their attempt at producing the unity of that life in a community of believers is on the grounds of things far less than what God has ordained; and so they will inevitably fail to bring about lasting unity.

To find the basis of unity within the Body of Christ, we must first adequately define the nature of the Christian life, and the nature of corporate church life.

In John 17:3 Jesus very simply sets forth the nature of the Christian life:

*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, who thou hast sent.*

Jesus died on the cross to restore fallen man to fellowship with God, to the experience of union and communion with his God; and out of that experience --- out of that life --- issues the whole of the Christian life, and the whole of the life of the church.

That is what the Christian life essentially consists in --- experienced union and fellowship with God. And that is what church life essentially consists in --- experienced union and fellowship with each other, with Him. The church is being "builted together for an habitation (or dwelling place) of God through the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22).

The life, Presence and fellowship of Jesus Christ within His people is the Christian life --- and is church life.

And this life will manifest itself. If life is truly present, it will express itself. And the expression of Divine life with the people of God will always be love, faith, truth, holiness, power, humility and so forth. We are not referring to the outward appearance or mere confession of life, but its reality. Vital, organic life will produce fruit.

So now that we have adequately, albeit briefly, defined both the Christian life and church life, let us return to the question of the unity of the church.

That They May Be one

The passage most frequently cited by proponents of church unity (on any basis), is Jesus' prayer to His Father in John 17, and the verse most often quoted is verse 22:

...that they may be one, even as we are one...

We shall now look at these words in some depth.

First, let us consider for whom Jesus was praying. Was He praying for everyone who would ever belong to any church, for everyone who would ever happen to call himself by the name of Christian; or was he, in fact, praying for a much smaller group of people?

At the beginning of His prayer Jesus defined which group of people --- out of all humanity of all time --- He was praying for; which group, alone, is the intended subject of Christian unity: I have manifested thy Name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world...and they have kept thy word...I have given unto the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me...and I am glorified in them. (verses 6-10)

These are the people, the only people, who are to be “one”: those who were given to the Son by the Father in eternity; those to whom God has manifested Himself; those who have received and kept His words; those who have believed; those in who Jesus is glorified. The group who are to be in unity are only those who have received Divine life.

This is of vital importance: to identify, in the first place, the group who are to be in unity. It is only of this group, and not of the religious world or “Christendom” in general, that Jesus prayed “that they may be one.”

This thought is echoed in Paul’s instruction to Timothy to pursue the Christian life “...with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22).

Then let us ponder the marvelous parallel that is drawn in Jesus’ prayer in John 17, between the unity of believers and the unity within the Godhead between the Father and the Son.

*...that they may be one, even as we are one...(John 17:22)*

We are to “be one, even as” the Father and Son “are one.” We are to “be one” in the same way that God is one. So the obvious question is: How are the Father and the Son “one”? What is the basis of their “unity”? Because the nature of their unity is the same as the nature of true unity between Christians.

How are Jesus and His Father “one”?

The answer is that God is one eternal, infinite, indivisible Spirit, who eternally manifests Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The unity of the Godhead is a unity of nature, a unity of being. It is the unity of a common life.

The unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is their participation in a single life. God is one eternal Spirit.

*I and my Father are one. (John 10:30)*

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)*

This is the nature of the unity of the Godhead: participation in a single life --- the reality of a common life.

Now let us draw the parallel between the unity of the Godhead and the unity of believers. The basis of the unity of the Godhead is participation in a common life. And this is the basis of the unity of the church: the reality of a common life --- a single, shared, indwelling life. “Christ in us” --- corporately.

Without the manifestation of that indwelling life, we will never know unity. We may be able to work some “politics” and produce an outward appearance of unity, but it will not be real, it will not last, and it will never satisfy. The only way the church will ever have true unity is through Him.

Let us again read the words of Jesus as He prays to His Father in John 17:21-23. Here the cause of church unity is specifically set forth. There are many other results of unity set forth elsewhere in the Bible, but here is its cause, its basis, its origin, its nature:  
*...that they also may be one in us...*

It is only “in Christ” that we will find unity. It is only in fellowship with Him that we will find true fellowship with each other. It is only as He abides in us, and we in Him, that we will “be one” with each other.

*And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one...*

The source of our unity is the eternal glory of God. It is God’s Presence --- His fellowship --- the reality of His indwelling life \_\_\_\_ that will produce unity within His church in the likeness of the eternal unity of the Godhead. He is the source of our unity.

*I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one...*

The source of church unity is the manifest Presence of Jesus Christ in the midst of His people. Participation in the life of Jesus as He participates in the life of His Father, union with the life and eternal glory of Jesus as He is united with the life and glory of His Father; Jesus abiding in us, as the Father abides in Him; fellowship with Jesus as He has fellowshiped for eternity with His Father --- that is the nature of the unity of the church: corporate union and communion with God.

## **The Expression of Unity**

The basis of the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is participation in a common life --- a single, shared life. And it is the same with the church. The unity of the church is found in its possession of a common, indwelling, Divine life. And that life will express itself.

All life demands activity, or expression. Life must have expression, or it dies. And the natural expression of Divine life --- as it has been for all eternity within the Godhead --- is fellowship. The expression of the unity of life within the Godhead is fellowship. And the life of Jesus in His people will be expressed in the same way. Fellowship is the very nature and being of the church. Just as the eternal life of God is fellowship, so the expression of Divine life with His people is fellowship. The life of Jesus’ church is fellowship --- fellowship with Him and fellowship with each other.

This is the life of the church: union with God, with one another. Fellowship with God, with one another.

The church is not a collection of independent lives. It is the living union of the saints --- with God, and with one another.

When a person receives salvation, it is not just a transaction between God and the individual, with the individual going on to live his own self-centered, individualistic, isolated “Christian life.” Salvation brings men into a new bond of relationship with the saints.

*For by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body... (1 Corinthians 12:13)*

If you have been restored to union and intimacy with God, then you have --- at the same time --- been brought into a place of union and intimacy with His body, His church, His people. In Christ we are bound not only to Him, but to each other.

In the New Testament, spiritual maturity and the fullness of the manifestation of the Spirit are not ultimately personal matters, but shared experiences.

Paul, the great “Apostle of Church Life” does not speak so much of the maturity of the individual believer, as he does of the maturity of the entire body of Christ. In Colossians 1:27, where Paul writes of the revelation of the mystery of the Gospel among the Gentiles, “which is Christ in you,

the hope of glory,” the word he uses for “you” is plural. Christ is not so much in you (singular) as He is in you (plural). The fullness of Christ is in His church (Ephesians 1:23).

In Ephesians 3, we find that it is only “with all the saints” that we will ever be able to apprehend the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ (verses 18-19). And when Paul says that the final purpose of God is “that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God” (verse 19), the word translate “ye” is plural once again.

Our relationships with each other are more than just a part of our Christian lives --- they *are* our Christian life. It is only in true union with each other that we will experience the manifestation of true union with God.

Spiritual life is found only in fellowship with God. And true fellowship with God is found only in the context of fellowship one with another, with Him. In that fellowship --- that fellowship with one another, with Him --- is life, the fullness of life, the fullness of His life and fellowship. This is the nature of God, the nature of the Christian life, and the nature of the church.

## **Unity Between Churches**

Up to this point, when we have spoken of the church, we have been referring to the local assembly. But true unity in Christ goes beyond the local church. When we talk about unity in Christ, we are not just talking about “our group” --- our own little local body. Naturally it must start there, because if we cannot find unity within our own churches how can we hope to find unity with others?

But the ultimate purpose of God is much larger than unity within the local body; it extends to all true churches as well. Jesus’ prayer in John 17:21 is “that they all may be one.”

Paul, in Ephesians 4:13, speaks of the time when “we (shall) all come unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Obviously he has reference to a much larger group than the local church. This is primarily what Jesus was praying for in John 17 --- unity within local churches and between churches. This is also what He will be returning for: “the glorious church” (Ephesians 5:27, Greek) Jesus is not returning for many churches, but for one church. He is not betrothed to many brides, but to one.

So, on the basis of Jesus’ prayer of unity in John 17, and Paul’s statements in Ephesians, we know that the will of God is unity, not just within churches, but also between those churches who collectively form the true Bride of Christ.

Again we must carefully specify to whom this unity applies: Jesus was not talking about any or every group that calls itself a “church,” but He was only referring to those whom the Father has given Him; those to whom God has manifested Himself; those who have believed; those in whom Jesus is glorified --- those who have received Divine life.

Just as the basis for unity within local churches is participation in a common indwelling life, so the basis for unity between churches is this same, shared, indwelling Divine life. True Christian unity will never be achieved beyond the limited circle of those who have received Divine life --- it simply will not work! Jesus prayed “not for the world.” He prayed only “for them which thou hast given me.”

But within the ranks of those who do possess it, Divine life will inevitably and irresistibly produce the Divine nature of fellowship.

Just as the expression of Divine life within local churches is fellowship, so the expression of this unity of life between churches is fellowship also.



Just as there is fellowship within the Godhead, and there is fellowship in the individual Christian life, and there is fellowship within the local church, so there is to be fellowship between local churches.

## **The Nature of Fellowship**

What, then, is the nature of this fellowship, this unity, both within and between churches? Again we must look at the nature of the Godhead, because it is a picture, not just to be our example, but our very means of bringing this to pass:

*That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee... (John 17:21)*

The parallel drawn here is between the unity and fellowship of the Father and the Son, and the unity and fellowship of all true saints.

We are to be one in the same way that the Father and the Son are one; and so we are to enjoy fellowship with each other in the same way that the Godhead has enjoyed fellowship for eternity. How did Jesus fellowship with His Father in eternity, and be one with Him? The answer is that He lived with Him. He beheld Him. He loved Him. He experienced Him. He knew Him. He enjoyed Him.

There was no denominational structure within the Godhead. There was life. There was no imposed organization --- just living fellowship.

And it will be the same within and between churches. What God is going to do, and is even now doing, is to bring to pass living fellowship. He is not going to initiate another pattern of ritual and religious ceremony. He is not going to establish another denomination, another set of formal systems of leadership, another structured religious organization. He is bringing about fellowship.

This is not one group swallowing up other groups to form some “mega-church.” This is fellowship. This is participation in the Divinely-imparted life of one another. This is fellowship. This is fellowship with Jesus in one another. And this is what God is doing in this hour. God is not building another formal, binding ecclesiastical structure; but He is building, by His Spirit, living organic fellowship. He is building together a fit habitation for Himself (Ephesians 2:22).

Christian unity is not a unity of structure, but of fellowship. It is not an outward identification with other Christians or churches or movements. It is a living, spiritual union.

When we speak of “fellowship” in this context, we do not mean superficial relationships, but Divine fellowship. We are not referring to mere friendliness or co-operation, or just doing things together. We mean a living, spiritual fellowship; participating in the life of Jesus in each other; beholding Him in one another; touching Him, and being touched by Him, through each other. It is a fellowship that proceeds spontaneously from the overflowing reality of the indwelling Presence of Jesus Christ in our hearts and lives.

It is through true spiritual fellowship with each other that we are touched by Him; and when His hand touches us, we are changed. This is how the saints minister to each other for the building up of the body of Christ. This is how “the whole body (is) fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth.” This is the operation of the “effectual working in the measure of every part.” This is what “maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:12-16).

This is the process of corporate spiritual maturity. This is all the saints coming to the experiential knowledge of the fullness of His love. This is the church which will soon be “filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:17-19). And it is through fellowship.

Again, by “fellowship” we do not mean shallow friendships, but intimate, spiritual friendships; spiritual communion; the expression of Divine life within God’s people.

Christian fellowship is a heart to heart, “deep calleth unto the deep,” intimate spiritual communion. It is a profound perception of Jesus Christ in one another; enjoying Jesus in each

other. It is a receiving from Him through each other; a giving of Him one to another. It is fellowshiping with Him --- together. It is participation in the eternal fellowship of the Godhead --- together. It is participation in the everlasting love of the Godhead --- together.

Think of the eternal fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Think of the joyful, loving, living, abundant fellowship within the Godhead. That is the life of His church.

Jesus gave us a new commandment:

*...That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. (John 13:34)*

Our love to each other is to be “as” Jesus loved us. How could we love one another with Jesus’ love, unless He Himself were abiding within us to love? And how could our brother be worthy of such love, except Jesus were abiding in him to receive it?

*...Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. (Matthew 25:40)*

As we love one another, we love Him. As we enjoy one another, we enjoy Him. In caring for each other, we care for Him. In opening our hearts and lives to one another, we invite His Presence. In serving each other, we kiss His feet. In pouring our lives for one another, we pour out His love back to Him. As we prefer one another, we give Him the pre-eminence. As we behold each other, we perceive His beauty. As we embrace one another with self-giving love, we taste His sweetness. As we wash each other’s feet, we smell His fragrance.

Jesus dwells in His church --- to love and to be loved. As we love one another, quickly and imperceptibly the on love passes over into the other, and we love Him. As we fellowship with each other, quietly and almost unnoticeably we come in contact with Him. And the loving fellowship with which we embrace our brother ascends to that with which we love God, and we are united together in the eternal love and fellowship of the Godhead.

If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us. (John 4:12)

Church life is both a foretaste and a beginning of everlasting life. As we love one another, we participate in the eternal love and fellowship of the Godhead, joyfully awaiting the fullness of this union, in the realm which is to come.

## **The Restoration of Church Life**

Christian unity is not something we can ever “decide to have.” It must be produced by the Spirit. It is born of life. It comes through corporate participation in Divine life.

The “unity of the Spirit” is produced by the Holy Spirit, and by Him alone. Christian unity cannot be produced by man’s efforts, but only by the operation of the Spirit.

Christian unity is not an organizational, external unity. It is the unity of a common life. It is the unity of a single, shared life --- His life. The church of Jesus Christ is the lives of His saints inextricably woven together in His Divine love.

This is something God is now restoring, and it is beginning with the recovery of personal fellowship with Him in individual lives. Across the country, and across the world, saints are returning to the simplicity of a true fellowship of love with their God, and as they do this, a cry is birthed in their hearts for true fellowship with each other. Dissatisfaction with choreographed religion quickly follows in their hearts, and the cry is even now ascending to the heavens: “Lord restore your church...restore church life...restore the New Testament pattern of the church!”

Since the Dark Ages, God has restored many things. He has restored the great truths of the New Testament: justification by faith, holiness, evangelism, anticipation of the imminent return of Jesus, the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, praise and worship, Divine healing, the gifts and ministries of the Spirit, Scriptural theology, personal intimacy with the Son of God. But there is

one thing that has not yet been restored on a large scale, and which must be restored before the catching away of the Bride: corporate fellowship with Jesus.

These are days of final restoration, and across the world a clear trumpet call is being sounded by a multitude of different voices: "Return to your first love, to the simplicity of Christ --- individually and corporately. Return to the New Testament pattern --- yet not just to its pattern, but to its life." Will God restore things just as they were in the Book of Acts? The answer to that is both "Yes" and "No." The answer is "Yes," in that the church of the last days will be as spontaneous, as powerful and as living as the Early Church. Furthermore, while the church of the last days will be as living, as organic and as compelling as the Early Church, yet it will be greater in all those regards:

*The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former... (Haggai 2:9)*

This is what God will soon restore. Indeed, He is restoring it now.

## **The Glory of True Church Unity**

The nature of the Godhead is fellowship --- for all eternity. The Christian life is fellowship --- fellowship with God. Church life is fellowship --- fellowship one with another, in Him, with Him. And church unity is fellowship --- fellowship one with another with the living God.

This is true unity. This is the unity of the Spirit. It is called "the unity of the Spirit" (Ephesians 4:3) because it is wrought by the Holy Spirit whose work is to reveal Jesus to us, in us, and through us.

This is not a contradiction of true doctrine, because the true unity of the Spirit will produce true unity of doctrine. The unity of the Spirit will produce true unity of doctrine. The unity of the Spirit will be in perfect accord with the Word of God, the Author of which is the Author of this unity.

True Christian unity proceeds from life --- from corporately-indwelling Divine life. From this life flows everything else: unity of thought, unity of judgment, unity of purpose, unity of doctrine, mutual love and forbearance, and every other good and necessary thing our churches are striving for.

This unity will be the wellspring of world evangelism. Burdened with His burdens, consumed with His passions, our cry for the salvation of the lost will no longer be an academic, theoretical agreement with a scriptural need, but it will spring from the Divine heart and Presence in our midst. This was the evangelism that touched the entire known world in a few short years in the beginning of the church, and it will be the church's evangelism in the end.

This unity will be the foundation of true holiness and righteousness. It will be the cause of true obedience to Christ. This unity will transform the hearts of men, bringing each into loving subjection to one another and to the Lord of the church. This unity will unite the hearts of the saints in the bond of Everlasting Love. In the midst of this unity God will command His blessing of Life (Psalm 133).

Envy will not spoil this unity; suspicion will not diminish it; ambition will not dissolve it; harshness will not weaken it; guile will not corrupt it; deceit will not defile it.

This unity will draw, as a Divine magnet, those who were elect before the foundation of the world. Of those who dwell in this unity, it will be said that they "have turned the world upside-down." Those who have found this unity will be hated by religious men, and fiercely persecuted. But they will joyfully endure all hardship, persecution, trial and tribulation, for the promise of life that is to come, and even now is.

This unity will know no division. It will know no distraction. This unity is the glorious and all-inclusive fountain-head of all Christian virtue and fruitfulness in our lives and assemblies. This unity will bear no compromise, tolerate no defilement, allow no mixture. This unity will know no defeat. This unity will know no failure.

This unity is fellowship. This unity is life. This is true unity. It is found in Him. It is His life. Any other attempt at achieving unity on whatever basis --- if it is apart from Jesus; If it is apart from a living, corporate union and fellowship with Jesus --- will never succeed.

After hundreds of years of confusion and division, we must learn our lesson, and redirect our energies away from seeking His fruits and His works, and instead humble ourselves, and seek only Him.

When He comes --- in reality and in truth --- He will bring unity. Unity is found only in life --- only in Him. He is our unity. Let us seek Him.

We will never find unity by seeking unity, but by seeking Him.

We are to be one as the Father and Son are one. God is not trying to achieve unity within Himself. He is not struggling to resolve division within His own eternal triune nature. By nature He has unity. He is One. He is unity. In the same way Christian unity is not something we must endeavor to produce. In a sense it already exists, by virtue of our corporate union with Christ. As the fruit of our union with Christ is manifested and matured in our lives, so true unity among believers also will be manifested. And enjoyed. Inevitably and irresistibly!

Our unity lies in Him --- in His life.

In Him is life.

My life, your life.

Our life.

And our unity.

In Him.