

# —UNITY—

By Don Rumble

## Introduction

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When the Scriptures refer to the fruit of the Spirit, they are speaking of Christ, dwelling in and manifesting Himself through His people. Jesus is the beginning and the goal of the race that we run. He is the author and finisher of faith, the Alpha and the Omega; He is ALL IN ALL. Indeed, He is our very life. He is the sum total of what God is doing on the earth, and as we see Him, we know that all is well. The primary reason why Paul wrote so forcefully and correctively to the Galatian churches was that he did not see Jesus in them, rather he saw their religiosity. He saw them caught up in the bonds of legalism and self-effort and his comment was:

*...you are turning away so soon from Him... (Gal.1:6).*

All true Christian ministers will labor and serve God's people with the goal of seeing Christ living His life in and through them. The Body of Christ must become in practical, tangible ways that which it is legally – the Body of Christ! A healthy human body is a precision instrument to carry out the desires and express the thoughts of the head. Even as Jesus was able to say, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn.14:9), so also the Church must come to the place where she can say, “He who has seen me has seen the Son”. For even as the Father has sent the Son, so Jesus has sent us. Ultimately, the goal is Christ.

Jesus has so identified Himself with His people that He speaks of us as a living body with Himself as the head. Thus, the result is not two separate, independent entities but one corporate being, Head and Body, which is Christ.

*For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, **so also is Christ.***  
(1Co.12:12)

However, when we view the Church today, we see many divisions instead of the unified body pictured for us in the Scriptures. However, little by little the Body of Christ is coming together in answer to Jesus' prayer.

*...that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that*

*Thou didst send Me. I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity [Lit. into a unit.]... (Jn.17:21, 23)*

Unity is presently a primary issue on the Lord's heart. We also recognize that it was a main topic of His prayer in Gethsemane just prior to Calvary. His intent was that through His death, resurrection and outpoured Holy Spirit, He would ultimately establish on the earth a people who would be an expression of the Godhead. Jesus did not pray that we would simply agree, but rather that we would be one even as He and the Father are one. There is a dimension of unity yet to be realized in the Church that has evaded us to this point. However, God's purpose shall be established.

## Embracing His Truth

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In His prayer, just previous to mentioning unity, Jesus prayed,  
*Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth. (Jn.17:17)*

God's truth has sanctifying power as it is received into the lives of His children. The word, "sanctify" means "to consecrate" or "to set apart". As His truth comes to us, areas of darkness within us will be confronted with His light. We will clearly see those actions and attitudes that do not line up with His word. At that point we have the opportunity to repent and turn from our ways or to reject His word. Of course, His desire is that we receive the word and allow it to fully sanctify us. We need to be "set apart" from many things. Some of the more obvious areas of darkness immediately come to mind – jealousy, envy, evil thoughts, gossip. However, God is after more than just these. There are many religious activities, traditions, and doctrines authored in the mind of man that are not from the heart of God. His truth, spoken in wisdom under the anointing of the Holy Spirit will confront men with what must be embraced and what must be laid aside. This "speaking the truth in love..." (Eph.4:15) produces a shaking effect in those who hear. We find ideas, opinions, attitudes, and even church structures being shaken as God's truth is proclaimed.

*See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking...His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven." And this expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude... (Heb.12:25 – 28)*

It is His anointed words that produce the shaking. Notice also that it is His intention to shake everything not of His Kingdom that can be shaken so that His work may be clearly seen. He is not the God of the status quo. He does not intend to leave us where we are. In His kingdom, change is the norm. However, it is in embracing change that we so often run into difficulty. Either we find it too painful to move on, and consequently resist what He is saying; or else we forge ahead without much tact or wisdom but with such zeal, that we alienate others. May He grant us grace to follow Him completely, and fulfill our callings without injuring others.

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## Settling For Superficiality

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Today there are believers who are willing to settle for a unity that falls far short of what Jesus prayed for. Somehow they believe that the world is impressed by large gatherings of Christians coming together for conferences on unity. However, we must acknowledge that Jesus has a far greater goal than ecumenism. The unity so often spoken of in these conferences is the unity of the Spirit. Sermons are preached, prayers are prayed, and songs are sung concerning this great theme. However, we do not see the abiding glory of God upon the Church. Let us ask ourselves this question – “Why does God pour out His glory upon His people?” Is it so we can revitalize our particular segment (movement, sect, stream) of Christ’s Church? Is it so our denomination, group, or circle of influence can be renewed and strengthened? Notice Jesus prayer to His Father:

*The glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as we are one. (Jn.17:22)*

He gives us His glory in order to establish the unity among His people that expresses the unity of heaven. Jesus and His Father are not divided on how to baptize. Neither are they confused as to what is truth, tradition or error. God has one Name, one purpose, one essence, one life, one goal.

Scripture speaks of having a love for truth (2Thess. 2:10). Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit’s ministry is to guide us into truth, and that He is the Spirit of truth. With all the doctrines and opinions that exist in the Church today, someone has to be wrong. The problem is that few of us want to admit that we might need some adjustment. But if adjustment is what it takes for me to know truth, then I must adjust. May we not be found defending our opinions and traditions when Jesus returns, but rather loving and embracing His truth, whatever the cost.

## The Cross and God's Purpose

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Jesus had to embrace the cross before entering into His glory. Indeed this is God's method of bringing all His children into the fulfillment of His purpose. There is no easy way into maturity in the Kingdom of God. When Jesus set His face toward Jerusalem, facing suffering and death, He turned to His disciples and said, "follow Me".

*From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer..., and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If any one wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it." (Matt.16:21, 24, 25)*

His heart cry before Calvary was that His people would be one as He was one with His Father. He saw the necessity of His own death that they might be a redeemed people. He also saw that they would have to follow His example and embrace death if they were to become a truly united people. Unity does not require compromise, or diluting our beliefs. Rather it requires our death. Unity will be achieved by having such a love for His truth, that when it is encountered, we will willingly turn from doctrines, traditions and activities that are not supported by His word.

Part of our problem in America is that we love instant results. We press a button and we have instant light. We mix powder and water and have instant lemonade. If there was a way to grow instant fruit, I am sure we would find it. However, fruit takes time to grow. Similarly, for spiritual fruitfulness there is no substitute for denying ourselves and picking up our cross on a daily basis.

I wish there was an easier way. But there is not. True spiritual unity will require us to turn from traditions, doctrines, and practices that are unsupported by the word of God. Again, compromise with other believers is not the answer. Rather, we must have a teachable attitude that enables us to admit that we might need some adjustment. Since the Scripture tells us that the wisdom from above is both reasonable and unwavering (James 3:17), we must also be reasonable, having a teachable spirit while at the same time remaining firm in our commitment to what He has already revealed to us.

## Unity of the Spirit

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The Bible speaks of different types of unity. The first is found in Eph.4:3 where Paul instructs us to “...preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Unity of the Spirit cannot be engineered by man, organized, or produced ecumenically. We can either destroy it or preserve it. Unity of the Spirit is a gift from God to everyone in His family.

When I came into relationship with the Lord Jesus, I found a love in my heart for all of His children. Every time I met one in whom Jesus was living, I found that it did not really matter to me what all his beliefs were. As a matter of fact doctrine did not seem to be an important issue. I just wanted to love my brothers and sisters in Christ.

*Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another. (1Thess.4:9)*

However, as I grew in the Lord, I occasionally found in my heart a temptation to withhold love and fellowship from some who differed from me. In viewing the Body of Christ, I began to see many who would not have fellowship with others because of doctrinal differences. I also could see verbal wounds. Paul tells us that it will only be with much humility, forbearance, and patience that we can preserve this precious gift of spiritual unity.

## Unity of the Faith

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*And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith... (Eph.4:11 – 13)*

The second kind of unity is the unity of the faith. Clearly, the Church has not as yet come to unity of the faith. Since Jesus has ordained that there will be apostles and prophets until this unity is attained, I must conclude that apostolic and prophetic ministry is as valid and needed today as it was in the early Church. As a matter of fact, restoration of the five-fold ministries listed in Eph.4:11 is an important part of God’s plan to bring about unity of the faith. Apostolic teaching and prophetic revelation uniquely unveil Christ as the foundation of the house which He is building in every region (Eph.2:20). It is important that assemblies in a locality recognize and receive those traveling ministries sent by the Lord to assist in building His house.

When the Bible speaks of “unity of the faith”, it is not implying that each believer is in total agreement on every point of doctrine. For example, Eph.4:11 lists a very diverse group of men. Apostles and pastors differ in their burden and emphasis of ministry. While the pastor’s concern is primarily for the local flock, the apostle’s burden is more extra-local. He is concerned with what God is doing in other cities. His vision is more global, seeking a visible corporate expression of Christ’s life in every place. As a builder, his burden is to reveal Jesus as the only foundation for personal and corporate life and to see new assemblies birthed and established upon Him. The pastor is involved with the lives of people in the local fellowship and gives himself to counseling and caring for them. When he is not traveling, the apostle sits with the other elders in the local church and brings his perspective to the meeting. He will find however, that his “outward look” in contrast to the inward focus of other brothers will express a healthy God-given tension.

The focus of prophets and teachers may also generate very real tensions. The prophet will often be more subjective, moving in spontaneous revelations that sometimes may appear disorganized. The teacher will tend to explain the Scriptures in a logical way so as to bring forth an ordered understanding to the people. Indeed tensions can be expected to exist between brothers with different ministries. Unity is not uniformity; it is diversity in submission.

If men of different temperaments, personalities, and ministry graces will humble themselves and consider each other more important than themselves, then united corporate action can be taken. “Unity of the faith” could be defined as people of diversity moving as a unit. Faith involves action, not just passive belief. As the apostle James has said:

*I will show you my faith by my works. (Jas.2:18)*

A group of believers who are independent, unrelated, and unaccountable will not express faith in unity, but rather faith in disarray. Jesus has a solution to this problem. He has given apostles, prophets, evangelists, etc. to equip us, so that we can minister in such a way that the Body of Christ is built. Too often, it is men’s names and ministries that are being built up. How easy it can be, once God has anointed me, to go wherever I feel led: being answerable and accountable to no one, I am free to follow the Spirit anywhere. For years, this has been the way in which many have ministered for the Lord; and He has blessed them. Today, however, God is speaking clearly that He is not simply bringing forth mature individuals but rather “...a mature man...” (Eph.4:13 NAS).

In every city, there is to be a corporate man emerging. This man, made up of many members, shall move and speak with the authority of God. Every city shall see the answer to our Lord's prayer; a people moving in the same unity that Jesus has with His Father. Jesus did not function independently from His Father, but only as He saw Him act. So also, we are to move as part of the Body, seeing our ministry contribute to the whole. We are not to be independent of each other any longer: free to do and go wherever we please. We have been "...baptized into one body..." (1Co.12:13). We can no longer say, "...I have no need of you..." to our brethren (1Co.12:21). Rather, we must declare how much we need each other as functioning members of the Body of Christ.

*It is only as we are joined and knit to others, moving in conjunction with them, and hearing the Lord through them (as well as personally), that the term "Body of Christ" makes any real practical sense. When many can move as one, this is truly, "...unity of the faith, ...a mature man..." (Eph.4:13).*

## Unity of the Knowledge of the Son of God

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*...until we all attain to the unity 1) of the faith, and 2) of the knowledge of the Son of God... (Eph.4:13)*

Knowing Jesus is our great quest. While we already know Him as Savior, we are not satisfied. We know that there is so much about Him that we do not really understand. Our hearts cry out, "O Lord, reveal Yourself to us. Open up your word to us and speak to our hearts. How we need to hear from You and know You." Every one of us would agree, this is what we all hunger for.

Eph.4:20 indicates that we are to "...learn Christ...". Learning is progressive knowledge. If I am learning mathematics, I am progressively growing in knowledge of that subject. So also it is with Christ. We are to not only learn about Him; we are to learn Him.

When the Bible speaks of a unity in knowing Him, it refers to a corporate understanding of Him. It is many people together agreeing as to what is Christ and what is not. Jesus said that in the last days, many would come in His Name, and yet be false. This tells us that people using the Name of Jesus may not necessarily be an expression of Christ. It will be through knowing Him intimately that we will be able to corporately look and identify what is Christ and what is merely an imitation. Most people cannot tell expensive jewelry from inexpensive imitations. To distinguish what is authentic and what is not, we go to an authority on jewelry. The rea-

son jewelers are sought out for advice on such matters is that they spend much more time than the average person working with real jewels. Those who know what the real thing looks like are able to spot the phony without much difficulty.

Ultimately, it is how well we know Him that will preserve us from falling for the imitation solutions, answers, and messiahs that Satan will offer the world. Knowing Jesus is not just a secondary benefit of being born again, it is the very essence of salvation. There shall be a many membered man preserved through the time of trouble coming upon the earth. It will be through the corporate knowledge of Him that this one mature man shall be distinguished from all the religious imitations that will emerge. Indeed, not only can we be preserved from deception but we will find our identity in the corporate Body of Christ as Jesus is revealed to us and as we come to a unity in understanding Him. Those pressing in to know Him in all His glorious character and power will indeed be on solid ground in the last days.

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## Conclusion

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God intends to reveal His Son to the nations. He has chosen to do so through His Church. For too long we have settled for the concept that God's purpose will be accomplished through many spiritual but unaccountable individuals. However, Jesus has chosen to reveal Himself through a living corporate body. The greatest hindrance to the implementation of this apostolic vision is the pride of our own hearts. The key is that we must humble ourselves and yield to the sanctifying power of God's word. When we do so, we will increasingly be set apart from our own opinions, agendas and religious traditions. Then together, we will notice the increased revelation of the mind of Christ in our gatherings.

The unity Jesus prayed for will never be attained if we continue to define ourselves by what denomination, sect, or "apostolic movement" we come from. Defining and then defending our "turf" will only perpetuate our present condition. Simply stated: we need Christ revealed in His house. We need His mind made manifest in our midst. Consequently, we need the commensurate decrease of the visibility of men and their plans, visions and agendas. The answer to Jesus' heart cry in John 17 is not a movement, a sect, or many highly gifted but disconnected individuals. "To live is Christ." And Christ is revealed in a body.



All Scripture quotes are from the NKJV

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