



—Unity in the Church—

Zucchini Bread Parable

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Parable of Zucchini Bread

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The raisin complained to the walnut, “You’re hurting me! Move over!”

“I can’t!” retorted the walnut. “And can I help if it you’re so thin-skinned?”

A Hot Topic

Here in the 2020’s, we hear a cry for unity in the church to withstand the onslaught of a godless culture. It’s become a hot topic, but we feel totally clueless as to how to attain it. We look around and things appear very dysfunctional. What is our part in the solution? The intent of this tract is to give you a different perspective and a clue as to your role.

Mystery of Oneness

The definition of unity is the “state of being united and joined as a whole.” This implies that a multiple of things come together and act as one. This existed from the beginning as we see in Genesis 1 and 2.

*Genesis 1 ²⁶ Then God said, “Let Us make mankind in Our image, according to **Our** likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the livestock and over all the earth, and over every crawling thing that crawls on the earth.”*

Yet in Deuteronomy it says, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is One.”

This mystery we label the “Trinity.” It is a mystery we cannot really put a finger on yet we know it is true. We know that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And yet they are One God. Although distinct, each of them are in agreement; they function as One. This describes unity.

Genesis 2 ²¹ So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. ²² And the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said, “At last this is bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called ‘woman,’ Because she was taken out man.”

²⁴ For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked, but they were not ashamed.

That is something not necessarily regarded in our cultures. When God brings a man and a woman together, they become something they are not when they are apart. They become one flesh, and yet we can visibly see there is a man

and a woman; who look and function differently. They talk and think differently and yet when they come together, they become one. That was God's intent. This represents God! We are one and yet we are two, because He created the man and the woman in the likeness and image of God. Jesus reiterates this concept in His ministry: *"for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh."* (Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:8)

That word "one flesh" is the same oneness that Jesus refers to in John 17 in His prayer to the Father just before he arrived in the Garden of Gethsemane.

John 17²⁰ I am not asking on behalf of these alone, but also for those who believe in Me through their word,²¹ that they may all be one; just as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me..

Such unity is a miraculous thing. As believers we are in Christ and Christ is in us! He does that because He wants us to be one with Him just as He and the Father are One. He not only wants me to be one with the Father, He wants us all to be one with each other just as He and the Father are One. Thus together, He and the church His bride, are all One. Then we are all functioning and understanding and moving with the same purpose and the same heart and the same understanding.

John 17²¹ that they may all be one; just as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.²² ... so that they may be one, just as We are one;²³ I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and You loved them, just as You loved Me.

The Apostle Paul makes it even more clear:

Ephesians 5²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church,³⁰ because we are parts of His body.³¹ FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND HIS MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.³² This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

God has called us all individually but He has also called us corporately to work together with Him. How does this come about? The following parable will give you a clue.

The Zucchini Bread

What makes this bread so special?

First, there is the combination of the ingredients: flour, sugar, eggs, shortening, raisins, pure vanilla, water, ground cloves, cinnamon, salt, baking powder, baking soda, chopped walnuts, and ground up zucchini. However, the ingredients by themselves do not make zucchini bread, rather it is the process in which they are transformed from a bowl of batter into a delicious bread.

But let's look back before they end up in the same bowl. Each of these ingredients have to go through a process before they come to the kitchen counter. Let's start with the flour. It comes from wheat. The wheat is an essential plant that grows in a field until someone comes along and takes a knife and cuts off the head. Then all these little heads are gathered, dried and beaten until the seeds pop out. Now think about that in terms of you and me. God takes us and proceeds to conform us into the image of His Son. He allows others to stomp on us, getting rid of all the chaff which He then blows away.

We end up as these wonderful little seeds. But God is still not done with us! He now takes those seeds and grinds them between a couple of stones until we become powder. Even then we're still not finished. Next God takes that powder and pours it into a little bag and closes it. The flour is now in the dark crying, "*Where in the world are we?*" Can you identify?

Let's look at the sugar. Same thing. The plant grows; they chop it off at the base. They bring it to a processing plant. There the workers take the sugar cane and put it into machines where it is shredded apart, its original shape destroyed. If that's not enough, then they press the liquid out of what's left. And we are still not done! After that, the juice is "clarified, concentrated and crystalized." But that's not the end. They say, "*Now we need to spin it.*" Then being spun at really high speeds, you think it's done. But no, this is now melted and filtered to further separate liquid (syrup) and sugar crystals. Once the crystals are dry, they put you into a bag, close it up in the dark and off you go to the market.

Are you getting the point? Every single person who answered the call of Jesus, "*Come and follow Me,*" unbeknownst to many, gave the Lord carte blanche to do with them whatever He wanted. This was to make you a part in this bowl of batter. Yet, it doesn't end there. I can look at my life as a Christian and for the most part the first couple of

years of being “born again,” everything was about me. I wanted to learn; I wanted to learn about God, me and God, God and me. But, one day I awoke to the fact that I was in this group of people in the same process as myself and now I needed to interact with them. I sort of liked that guy over there but that guy on the other side, I didn’t really want to hang out with him. I began to make choices.

It is like all of the dry products in the bread’s ingredients only like to hang out with the dry ones, and the wet ingredients only like to hang out with the wet ones. As a result, all the wet people are on one side of the room and all the dry people are on the other. Then God says, “*Now today I’m going to put you all into a bowl together.*” Can you imagine this *perfect* flour thinking it is finished with being changed, being perfected into the likeness of Jesus, now being dumped into a bowl and God starts pouring eggs on top of its head? “*What?! I thought I was done?!*” Then those nuts! “*Oh my God! Those nuts and those shriveled up grapes, I have to hang out with them, too? What are you doing to me, Lord? I thought the process was over?*”

Then God mixes us up all together and we are touching and feeling each other, not sure if we like being part of a batter. When we look at the church, that’s what we see. The body of Christ is this conglomerate of personalities. It doesn’t make sense. It’s supposed to be a unified church but it’s not. It’s yet to become one zucchini bread with many ingredients. The Bible speaks very similarly.

*Romans 12*⁴ *For just as we have many parts in one body and all the body’s parts do not have the same function,*⁵ *so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually parts of one another.*

*1 Corinthians 12*¹² *For just as the body is one and yet has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.*

...¹⁴ *For the body is not one part, but many.*

...²⁰ *But now there are many parts, but one body.*

God is forming a body for Himself. We are, in a sense, God’s Zucchini bread. Then to add to the mystery, we are not only the body of Christ, we are also His bride. These concepts are presented in the natural for our understanding yet must be spiritually discerned. For example, when we talk about the “weapons of our warfare,” we are not going around with swords and guns. God uses that analogy to give us an understanding that we are indeed fighting and tearing down things, yet it is in the Spirit. What God is forming is in the Spirit, not in the flesh. We need a change of mind in order to understand the process of becoming

unified. When we do get it, then we are able to go through the entire process, personally and corporately, until we become the unified Church giving glory and honor to the Lord.

An Attack on Unity: The Church at Corinth

After a dramatic conversion, the Apostle Paul, was commissioned to preach the gospel. He responded to the call and his missionary journeys began, eventually leading him to Corinth. A church was established and Paul spent 18 months with them – long enough to build strong bonds and the freedom to speak correction. In the very first chapter of his letter to that church (I Corinthians), we discover disunity is already evident and Paul pleads with them

I Corinthians 1¹⁰ Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. ¹¹ For I have been informed concerning you, ...by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you. ¹² ... that each one of you is saying, "I am with Paul," or "I am with Apollos," or "I am with Cephas," or "I am with Christ." ¹³ Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

It doesn't stop there. Paul has learned they have lawsuits with one another being judged in secular courts. (I Corinthians 6:4-6) He challenges the Church:

I Corinthians 6⁷ ...Why not rather suffer the wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? ⁸On the contrary, you yourselves do wrong and defraud. And this is to your brothers and sisters!

However, there are times when division is necessary. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul addresses the report he had heard of a man living with his father's wife. He demands that they need to remove this man from their congregation. There can be no unity with a "so-called brother" and Paul declares he will stand with them in publicly denouncing this person, turning him over to Satan. To attempt unity with wickedness, Paul says, is like forgetting that "a little leaven leavens the whole lump." One speck of mold on zucchini bread quickly invades the whole loaf!

Paul's intent was to come back and visit the Corinthian church but circumstances never allowed him to do that. It appears critics challenged his integrity for not returning, so Paul writes to defend himself. (See II Corinthians

1:15-19; 10:1-11) But he concludes Chapter 1 by complimenting them: “we are workers with you for your joy, for in your faith you are standing firm.” However, in Chapter 3, we can see Paul is still pained at the thought the Corinthians had criticized him. Did he need to commend himself to them again? No, he declared, “You are our letter; written in our hearts, ...revealing ...that you are a letter of Christ...” We will not desert those whom God has redeemed through his message.

We get a little glimpse in 2 Corinthians 5 as to why he did the things he did.

¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; ¹⁵ and He died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose on their behalf.

In other words, Paul is saying, “I know what Jesus did for me. What He did for me was glorious. Because of that, I am now motivated by that same love and I am going to press into you guys. I am going to press into you because we are one in the Lord. You may be criticizing me, saying things behind my back, but I am pressing in because God has called us to be one!”

¹⁶ Therefore from now on we recognize no one by the flesh; . . .

In other words, I am not recognizing you for the things said or done wrong. No. I’m going to recognize you in a different way.

¹⁶ Therefore from now on we recognize no one by the flesh; even though we have known Christ by the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore if anyone is in Christ, this person is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

God is at work in you in the process and in me in the process. We are having a conflict in this process and I am going to press into you because that is the love of God. We’ve been through years of being pruned and trimmed, ground up and beaten. “Will it never end?” we wonder. Then all of a sudden God throws us in together with someone else who’s going through the same transformation process and before you know it you say, “I’m out of here!” But Paul encourages us; press in.. Look at each other according to the Spirit.

¹⁷ Therefore if anyone is in Christ, this person is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. ¹⁸ Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, . . .

Paul knew, God had reconciled him through the cross. So now that's the ministry he has, reconciliation. It is reconciliation that brings us together as one. That was the ministry of Christ. He brings us together and now we have that same responsibility toward one another.

¹⁹ . . . *namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their wrongdoings against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.* ²⁰ *Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

This is not just the responsibility of the elders or deacons! It is for every person that is in Christ. We each have the ministry of reconciliation. Does it always happen and have a good conclusion? No. Yet, if we are compelled by the love of Christ, we will press in and do what we are able – as far as it is possible – to be at peace with all men. (Romans 12:18) Do that, even if it doesn't always work. It takes two people to have a relationship. God doesn't force us to love Him. He just says, "Follow Me."

Points in Maintaining Unity in the Body of Christ

1) Love is what motivated Paul. He was not out for personal gain nor was he prideful. It was the love of Christ and he knew that love. Paul had been a wicked, evil man. But Christ had mercy on him and broke his heart. Love is what motivated Paul to press into this congregation of people who were being critical of him. It was the love of Christ, that reconciled Paul to the Lord Himself, that gave him the strength and the faith to do this for others in order to preserve the unity of the congregation. Since it is not for selfish gain, we too should do the same in any situation and hope to maintain unity with the body of Christ. We no longer live for ourselves but for Jesus who died for our sins. That means we relinquish our own will, our own desires so that we receive the Lord's will and purpose for us.

2) Each of us have been given the ministry of reconciliation. Therefore, we each have a part when it comes to the unity of the body of Christ. Don't just say, "*Well I don't see the church in unity.*" Instead take a look and say, "*Where am I out of unity with those around me?*" Sometimes it's as close as a family member: a parent, a sibling, a spouse or child. If unity is not a reality there, how can it be expected anywhere else in our lives. So consider those relationships which are before us

each and every day. Remember too, the process of maintaining unity of those relationships is often ongoing. It takes work. It takes sacrifice, but the end is going to be glorious!

3) We are to no longer recognize one another in the body according to the flesh. We no longer count their trespasses against them, whether in the past or a present struggle.

4) If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature. All things have passed away, behold new things have come. In faith, we can look at one another in this way. Faith is the evidence of things *not* seen! However, if we have not seen this new creature emerge in our own life, it might be the reason we've not moved forward in the love that Paul moved in. Our own lives should be a totally new life. It is not Paul Brennan or you walking with Jesus in our back pocket, or Jesus on our bumper sticker, or with a little cross. No! No! It is a totally transformed life. Does it happen instantly? No. However it does happen. *He who began a good work among you will complete it.* (Philippians 1:6) We become new creatures in Christ. As we become these new creatures, who are we going to be like? Like Christ Himself! His intent is that we would be reconciled to Him and transformed into His image by the renewing of our mind. As we begin to look, act and speak more like Jesus, we find ourselves more motivated to reconcile with one another. So why does it seem as if the church, the body of Christ does not reflect Jesus' prayer about us being one with each other, or one with the Lord and in unity with the body of Christ? (John 17:11,21-22)

Closer than We Think

I think we are closer than we realize. At the moment we are like those ingredients for the zucchini bread in that bowl on the counter. If we lick it, it tastes pretty good. But we are still in the process of being put together, just a bowl of batter, still not bread. What has to happen next?! We need to go *into the fiery furnace together!* Together we are going into the oven!

Here we are the flour, the sugar, the egg, the raisins, et al, all squashed in this rectangular tin and placed in this "room" that is heating up! But then there is a sweet aroma beginning to come forth. A fragrance is rising and so are we. We are beginning to rise. The moment finally comes, when we are taken out of the heat. We realize, "*Oh, we never even got burned!*" We realize something is different. We are here and still together but, something has radically changed. We have been bonded together as if we are all one! We have become something new, something

beautiful to set before the King. And it all happened in what seemed to be a moment!

I don't know how far away the church really is from being put into the fire. But we are going to go through it together. I'm not predicting but it won't take long when God is ready to do that, ending in a quick work. Poof, the bride of Christ, beautiful, fragrant. Don't look at the things around you. Don't look in the natural. Look in the Spirit. You can look at almost every person in your congregation and know the grinding and the stretching and the pounding and the beating that so many have been through. Yet they are here and you are together. That should encourage you. Now God is going to put you all in the oven.

You may have questions about your part: like maybe you don't see things the way they have just been presented, or you don't feel like you are a part of the ingredients. However, you need to know as a member of His church, you have a part in the Spirit and it is just important as the rest of its members. No one greater than the other. God doesn't see it that way. If you have the Holy Spirit and I have the Holy Spirit, praise the Lord. It is not what we do; it is who we are in Christ. We all have things to do, some more than others but that doesn't matter. It is WHO we are in Christ. If you have questions, just ask the Lord. He said we don't have because we don't ask. He says, "*Ask and I'll give it to you. If you need understanding ask for understanding.*" "*Lord show me my part in this. Lord is there somewhere in my life where I need to restore a relationship? Show me what to do. Show me my part in this bowl of batter.*" Because what's coming forth is going to be really awesome.

Let's pray: Father I thank You for Your body. I thank You for what You are doing. I thank You that we can have confidence in You. Lord, even when all the nations are falling apart, coming apart at the seams, we remain confident because You are the One doing the shaking. Continue to shake, O Lord, because that which remains will be from You. Lord, as we go through this process together, we recognize You are forming and placing and building Your body. Lead us, Holy Spirit, in a way that's everlasting. Show us our part in Your army, in Your Zucchini bread. I ask in Jesus' name. Amen