

That They May all Be one

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Preface

We had better believe it! Our nation is under the judgment of God.

Since America's birth, the hand of God has been upon her for good. The 18th and 19th centuries saw supernatural revivals establish America in righteousness. As a consequence, great has been the company of believers who have published the gospel from these shores.

However, unto whom much has been given, much will also be required. It is one thing to preach salvation to the heathen, it is quite another to be a nation living the gospel as an example of righteousness to other nations.

There has not been a great revival in the 20th century, apart from the Charismatic renewal, and our nation has left its Christian moorings. God has been taken out of our schools, courts and from our social conscience. His ways are now dishonored by our leaders and in the public media. The result is a spirit of lawlessness throughout the land; violence is common in the streets and in schools, the sins of homosexuality and abortion are encouraged, while the values of godly family life are discounted. Revelation of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man is not emphasized. Unbelievers are encouraged to receive Jesus as their Savior without having to accept Him as their Lord. Church ministry is promoted like a carnal commercial enterprise with programs, advertising for money, professionalism, etc. Religious organizations, built around the message and marketing charisma of strong leaders, compete for members. Mega-churches largely made up of recycled believers are seen as signs of success. There is little evidence of churches working together in unity. Individual programs are emphasized more than joint prayers. Denominational pride and sectarian emphasis of less than essen-

tial doctrines are used to point out how groups differ from one another, rather than emphasizing their oneness in Christ.

It is within the context of such sin and failure, which have weakened and divided the church, that God's judgment is upon our nation and why He is dealing with His people. Earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, AIDS, economic distress, terrorism, world-wide ethnic conflicts that drain our national resources, are all instruments of God to call His people to repentance and to intercede for our land.

The one essential truth that must be possessed by the church if she is to repent and become a redemptive influence in the present situation is unity. Not unity at any price, but unity centered around Christ and anchored in righteousness. Jesus was very clear concerning the one quality whereby the world would recognize those who represent Him.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. by this all men will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)

What is needed is not simply revival in isolated localities, but a revival that establishes unity across the body of Christ, a revival which will restore and prepare the church to gather in the great end-time harvest. This is the message the Lord is bringing to His church today, and it is the theme of this tract.

The Prayer that will be Answered

What do you think? Would Jesus pray earnestly to His Father for something to take place; something He had been sent to earth to accomplish, and for which He was about to lay down His life, and then not have His prayer answered? Never! One thing is certain, the prayer of our Lord, recorded in John 17 will be answered before He returns. It is an essential part of church restoration that will yet be seen!

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. (John 17:21)

Correct church government, cell groups, apostles and prophets are not enough. The Lord will not release the fullness of His authority and power to a church that is not united in Him and His purpose. Unity is essential for the spiritual warfare and harvest that lies ahead.

God is Building a Bridge

God is building a bridge to reach between the hearts of men and churches. It is a bridge that will carry believers over the barriers that men and tradition have erected between them. This bridge has great strength and cannot be destroyed. It is supported on four giant pillars of truth that have sovereignly been placed by God Himself. Man had no part in their construction; we are only responsible to keep our eyes on Him as we walk by faith and obedience on the bridge, knowing that it cannot be moved.

The following are these four pillars of truth.

1. Who we belong to and who keeps us. We are united in our family identity; we are kept in one name.

*And I am no more in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, **keep them in Thy name, the name which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as We are.** (John 17:17)*

There is one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:6)

We are one covenant family, we have one Father, and there is only one name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved. We are redeemed in that name, kept in that name, and all that we do in service for Him, is to be done in His name (Colossians 3:17). God has highly exalted the Lord Jesus Christ and bestowed upon Him the name which is above every name.

The Holy Spirit bears witness of our identity, for God has sent Him into our hearts to cry, “Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6)

Believers fail to walk on the bridge when they create strife, jealousy and competition by exalting the identity of their leaders or organizations and thereby dividing the body of Christ. The following scriptures describe such failure: 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:3-7. God has determined that only one name will be exalted in His kingdom (Philippians; Revelations 3:12).

2. What we have become in Christ.

*There is **one** body and **one** Spirit. (Ephesians 4:4)*

*For by **one Spirit** we are all baptized into **one body** . . . and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:13)*

Now you are Christ's body; and individually members of it. (1 Corinthians 12:27)

*So we who are many are **one body in Christ**, and individually members one of another. (Romans 12:5)*

It is very simple; all who belong to Christ are collectively one spiritual body and individually they are members of one another. We are spiritually one new man in Christ!

This pillar of truth points us to our service. Just as a person's mind gives his body direction and all parts of his being cooperate to obey the will of the head, so also the church, being the body of Christ, is to perform His will. To the extent that believers follow the dictates and programs of men or organizations, rather than the will of God, they fail to walk on the bridge. Thus primary requisites to be the body of Christ in practice are to seek Him, learn His purpose, find our place of service in a local body, hear His voice and then obey Him. We have been chosen in Him to do His will, in the bonds of relationship with other believers.

3. Who God has placed over us.

*There is **one Lord**, one faith, one baptism. (Ephesians 4:5)*

*And He put **all** things in subjection **under His feet**, and gave Him as **head over all** things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:21-22)*

A Lord, without an expressed will, is not truly a Lord. The phrase, “one faith” is the gospel of Christ which expresses His will and purpose. Those who wholly immerse themselves in doing His will are said to have clothed themselves with Christ.

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (Galations 3:27)

We will wander off of the bridge of unity to the extent that we fail to walk obediently under the Lordship of Christ. We are not our own; we belong to Him.

4. What God has personally given to us so that we may be one and live as one in Him.

*And the glory which Thou has given Me I have given to them; **that they may be one**, just as we are one; I in them, and Thou in Me that they may be **perfected in unity** . . . (John 17:22-23)*

The glory of God is His character or His nature. This is evident from God’s answer to Moses who asked to see His glory (Exodus 33:18-19; 34:6-7). God placed Moses in the cleft of a rock and passed by him in glory declaring the qualities of His Person (compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and truth, one who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgive iniquity, transgression and sin and yet one who preserves justice). Very simply, there is perfect unity in the Godhead; and the same unity will be present among believers who have been conformed into the image or character of Jesus. The virtues mentioned above are precisely the qualities that will bind believers together in unity.

Christ in us is our hope of glory. We can never reform ourselves enough to produce unity. The life and nature of Christ Himself must be evident in our hearts and in our relationship with one another. Many of the painful experiences that we go through have been ordained by God to develop qualities of godly character in us. He has given us His nature so that we may be united without discord arising because of character flaws. One Father with one family of sons who share His nature. When the world sees this, they will believe our gospel message.

Where does the Bridge Lead?

*You are called in **one hope of your calling.** (Ephesians 4:4)*

God has a purpose that He is bringing to completion, one that He set in place before creation (Isaiah 46:9-10; Psalm 33:11). This is where the bridge will lead us; it is toward the fulfillment of the call God.

*He has made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention **which He purposed in Him** with a view to an administration (i.e. order of a house) suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, **the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth.** In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, **having been predestined according to His purpose . . .** (Ephesians 1:9-11)*

Each one of us who God foreknew would be saved, have been called and given grace to fulfill a unique role and service in Him. We are responsible to seek Him and find His purpose for our life.

*Who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our words, but **according to His own purpose and grace which was granted to us from all eternity.** (2 Timothy 1:9)*

We can never fulfill the one hope of our calling unless we remain on this bridge. We need others to help us. No one is called to be a Lone Ranger! The purpose of God, and our unique place in it, will be fulfilled in the body of Christ. Problems, circumstances, business associates, persecution, friends, distresses, brothers and sisters in Christ, are all used by God to work together for our good and help us to fulfill His call on our life (Romans 8:28-32). There will always be sufficient grace for those who so commit themselves.

How to Walk upon the Bridge

When we come to Jesus, we have found the way, the truth and the life. However, how are we to walk as members of His body so as to fulfill the one hope of our calling? God has provided the bridge

and given us instruction in His word on how to walk together united in His love.

Five specific commands, found in Ephesians chapter 4, verses 1 through 12, instruct us how we are to walk. Let us examine each one.

1. . . . *I . . . entreat you to walk in a manner **worthy** of the calling with which you have been called (Ephesians 4:1)*

We have been saved from sin; thus to walk worthy, we must walk free from the practice and condemnation of sin.

. . . if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. . . . If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all righteousness. (1 John 1:7, 9)

There can be no unity where lawlessness and the practice of sin exists.

2. . . . *with **all humility and gentleness, with patience** . . . (Ephesians 4:2)*

The body of Christ is made up of members whose abilities, personalities and ministry graces are all diverse; in addition, each member is an imperfect vessel. The Lord commands us to accept one another while recognizing these differences.

*Wherefore, **accept one another**, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. (Romans 15:7)*

We need each other and we are called to serve one another in the body of Christ. However, it will be difficult to receive from others if we only see their imperfections or how they differ from us (1 Corinthians 12:21-25).

For this reason, we must cultivate humility, gentleness and patience to walk together as members of Christ's body.

*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with **humility** of mind **let each one of you regard one another as more important than himself.** (Philippians 2:3)*

Vanity and self importance will disappear when hearts are melted by His love. Being right will not be as important as doing the will of the Lord.

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. (1 Peter 4:10)

This second command means there can be no spirit of unforgiveness, elitism, racism or sectarianism in our hearts. Godly service comes from hearts that esteem those they serve as more worthy than themselves. Such service bonds believers together.

*3. Showing **forbearance** to one another in **love** . . . (Ephesians 4:2)*

The word, forbearance, means to control one's self when provoked, "to hold one's self back" or to "refrain from enforcement." It speaks of restraint and patience.

Practically, it means that because of the love of God in our hearts, we will obey the following three commands:

a) We **will not judge** one another on nonessential issues (i.e. food)

But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God . . . Therefore let us not judge one another anymore . . . (Romans 14:10, 13)

*b) We **will not speak evil** of one another (Ephesians 4:29-31).*

But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another. (Galatians 5:15)

Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law . . . (James 4:11)

c) We **will forgive** one another (Colossians 3:12-13)

And to be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:32)

Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven . . . so shall My heavenly Father also do to you (i.e. not forgive you) if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart. (Matthew 18:21-22, 35)

Because these three commitments are often lacking today, it has been said that the Christian army is the only one to kill its wounded! When a believer stumbles in his walk, so often the attitude of other Christians is to expose and condemn rather than to restore the individual.

Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. (Galatians 6:1)

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8)

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (1 John 3:16)

4. *Being diligent to **preserve the unity of the Spirit** in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4: 3)*

We are very diverse individuals and all of us are imperfect vessels. However, he who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him (1 Corinthians 6:17). Since each of us are in union to our Lord by the same Spirit, it is clear that as we allow Him to rule in our hearts, we can walk in unity and be at peace with one another.

And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. (Colossians 3:14-15)

The issue, in practice, is to be ever watchful and diligent to avoid unwise or ungodly words, deeds or attitudes that could hurt others in the church.

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

. . . sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness. (Proverbs 16:21)

Finally, if we are truly committed to unity, we will pray for one another to have victory over our faults and problems.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed . . . (James 5:16)

5. *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, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)*

This fifth requirement is rightfully listed last because it is based upon the previous four. Men who have one of the five ministries listed in verse 11, whether they function in their ministry gifts or as elders, are responsible to equip believers in character and service until there exists a mature unity under the headship of Christ. The equipping process will be by both instruction and example. The goal in equipping is not to produce highly capable individuals, but members who know how to function together in a local expression of the body of Christ. They must also develop character and build strong relationships by going through testings, trials, difficult circumstances, tribulations and even persecution. Gold is refined by fire.

However, if leaders do not practice or walk in these truths, they will never be able to equip the saints to do so. Thus, unity in the body of Christ must begin with leaders! Unity is not cheap; it will cost much and require great humility for those in places of oversight to humble themselves and to embrace these truths.

The following are some of the obstacles and issues that leaders may face as they seek to bring forth unity in a church or between churches in a locality.

- Prayer! Leaders praying together is the first step. It is important for them to recognize that Satan's greatest threat against the church is as the accuser of the brethren.
- When there is competition between leaders, it is usually a sign of uncertainty and insecurity in God's calling. Each one must resolve this issue; a pastor is not an apostle nor is a prophet an evangelist. Competition will cease if each one seeks only to fulfill his call in God.
- In churches with only one or two ministers there is an inadequacy of ministerial resources to properly equip the saints. The answer can lie in the spiritual resources of neighboring churches.
- As leaders pray together, trust and relationship will be established so that they will know to receive, or not to receive, an individual who is running from a problem or discipline in another assembly. The goal is always for restoration of the person.
- In contending for truth, leaders must be careful to not equate their understanding of the word with the word itself. This will always be divisive and intolerant. Truth is not expressed so much in our doctrinal statements as it is in how we walk it out in conduct, heart attitude and intercession for others. "Being right" is an attitude that will disappear as we intercede and pray for those that disagree with us. Differences become lost in the love of God.

Conclusion

The great harvest that lies ahead is not the work of a committee of any one church organization. It can only be gathered in through the grace and power of God demonstrated through a united church where members walk in righteousness and are equipped to serve, and

where the love of God is pervasive. When we consider the love of God expressed on the cross, how can we not love one another? To see the Lord in all His glory and magnificence makes us aware of our unworthiness, and how much we need the mercy and grace of God. It also helps us to look beyond the unworthiness of others in Christ.

I believe that the Lord will continue to bring increasingly difficult catastrophes upon our nation to bring his church in America to repentance. I also expect Him to deal with leaders everywhere concerning the need for unity in the house of God. This is very likely the greatest remaining need in church restoration. It does lie ahead and we had better prepare for it. A time of revival will come as we respond in obedience to Him. God will accomplish His purpose in the earth. The question for each of us is, "What part will I play in this?"

Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity. (Psalm 133:1)

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