



UNITY OF THE SPIRIT  
Or  
UNITY-IN-DIVERSITY

- Unity of the Spirit is a desire of all disciples – Ps. 119:63; 133:1
- A Longing for fellowship existed from the beginning of church – Acts 4:32; 1 Pet 2:17; Heb. 12:23
- Thus, the purpose of this lesson:
  - ◆ To emphasize our desire for unity
  - ◆ To promote an understanding of the Unity of the Spirit
  - ◆ To Distinguish between it and Unity-in-Diversity
  - ◆ Open doors of communication and encourage brotherly respect and sharing of spiritual ties.
- We Have A “Common Salvation” (Jude 3) which includes
  - ◆ A common Savior
  - ◆ A common hope of eternal life
  - ◆ A common respect for scripture
- Which is made possible by the Holy Spirit – Romans 8:14; 1 Cor 12:13
  - ◆ It is “of” or “from” the Spirit
  - ◆ It is not brought into existence by man
  - ◆ Divinely created to weld “brothers” into a “brotherhood”
  - ◆ Also to bind “brothers” to God in a spiritual kingdom.
- Thus, Unity of the Spirit is controlled by God, even as the tides of the sea – Job 38:10-11. Man cannot change its parameters. It is an “objective” relationship, as compared to a “subjective” (“what I feel”) relationship – Romans 14:4
  - ◆ Man Cannot Change the parameters of fellowship
    - To limit unity when God extends it
    - To extend unity when God denies it
  - ◆ Our subjective decisions do not change or alter God’s will
  - ◆ Our fellowship with one another may not coincide with God’s fellowship.
  - ◆ Man cannot extend God’s Fellowship unilaterally
    - No creed can extend unity beyond God’s stated will
    - No pronouncement of man can be more inclusive: “He is a child of God in prospect and my brother indeed.”
    - No exaggerated generosity will effectively broaden fellowship as “circles” are extended: “If you draw your circle smaller and exclude me, I will just draw my circle larger and include you.”
  - ◆ Man cannot limit God’s fellowship unilaterally

- No creedal barriers or walls
  - No sectarian or party associations
  - No “yellow tag of quarantine”
  - No church overlord – as Diotrephes – 3 John 9-10
  - True Fellowship with God is particularly and exclusively the privilege of God.
- Unity of the Spirit Reflects Godhead - “Oneness” – Eph. 4:4-6
- Unity-in-Diversity Reflects Sectarian “Division”
  - ◆ Historical Identity of the concept rooted in denominational platform
  - ◆ Phrase is an “oxymoron” – “contradictory terms brought sharply together”
  - ◆ James 3:9 – Can “blessings and cursings” proceed from same mouth?
  - ◆ Can Unity-in-Diversity be true unity?
- But We Are Told They Are The Same
  - ◆ Effective device of the Devil
  - ◆ Unity-in-Diversity is inclusive of error without distinguishing from truth
  - ◆ Error is “trivialized” and efforts to oppose error are “demonized”
  - ◆ Truth would be forced into a union with error – 2 Cor. 6:14-16
  - ◆ What fellowship does light have with darkness? Isaiah 5:20
- True Peace (Unity) Comes By - -
  - ◆ Preaching the whole counsel of God – Acts 20:27
  - ◆ There can be no peace (unity) where truth is left out!
  - ◆ There can be no peace (unity) where error exists!
  - ◆ Unity-in-Diversity is peace that the world gives, not which Jesus gives – Jn 14:27
- God Creates Unity of the Spirit - Man is to maintain it – Eph 4:1-3
- It is realized in a 3-fold relationship
  - ◆ As a single Christian – Acts 8:38
  - ◆ In a local congregation – Phil. 1:1
  - ◆ In the brotherhood – Heb. 12:23
- As a Single Christian
  - ◆ I have fellowship with God alone (“vertical fellowship”)
  - ◆ Through the message preached by the apostles – 1 Jn. 1:3
  - ◆ As the Ethiopian – Acts 8:26-29
  - ◆ This is the unity of the Spirit on an individual level
  - ◆ In this relationship,
    - We should “do good” – Gal 6:10
    - Grow in God’s grace – 2 Peter 1:3-11
    - Teach others – 2 Tim 2:2
    - Find other saints – Acts 9:26

- In a local congregation
  - ◆ Fellowship with God and local brethren (both “vertical” and “horizontal” fellowship)
  - ◆ Knit together – Eph 4:11-16
  - ◆ This is also unity of the Spirit
  - ◆ “Oneness” is still the goal – 1 Cor 1:10
  - ◆ Doctrinal unity – Acts 2:42
  - ◆ “One heart and soul” – Acts 4:32
  
- In the brotherhood
  - ◆ Fellowship with all brethren and with God – beyond the local church
  - ◆ Right hand of fellowship – Gal. 2:9
  - ◆ Active participation – 2 Cor 9:13
  - ◆ Concurrent, not corporate action
  - ◆ Some deny this aspect of fellowship
  - ◆ It enables some to evade the responsibility for addressing sin in brotherhood!
  
- It is needless to omit any aspect of the Spirit’s unity
  - ◆ Each relationship has its own blessing
    - As individual relates to God
    - In building intra-congregational strength
    - In recognizing inter-congregational soundness or apostasy
      - “Them” or “us” – 1 John 2:19
      - Reputation – 1 Thes 1:6-7
      - Exchange of teaching – Col. 4:16
      - Testing the spirits – 1 Jn 4:1
  
- Misconceptions have created a demand for unity-in-diversity
  - ◆ Some find the unity of the Spirit too restrictive
  - ◆ Some claim it is impossible to have unity in doctrinal matters
  - ◆ Some claim a “lack of clarity” in scripture inhibits unity in doctrinal matters
  - ◆ Some want to tolerate differences in doctrinal and moral matters
  - ◆ Thus, a redefinition process has sought to turn the unity of the Spirit into Unity-in-Diversity.
  
- Unity-in-Diversity is clearly advocated :
 

**“Some of those who mistake conformity for unity appear to be startled when they first learn that we suggest there may be unity-in-diversity. Actually we go much further than that. We assert that if there is any unity at all it must be unity in diversity.” (Carl Ketcherside, *The Twisted Scriptures*, p. 71-72)**
  
- Unity in Diversity has been defended historically by various means:
  - ◆ The Gospel-Doctrine Distinction -
 

**“The implications of all this to unity and fellowship are weighty. It means that the gospel itself, not our doctrinal interpretations, is the basis of our being one in**

**Christ and in fellowship with each other ...That is, when one believes in Jesus and obeys him in baptism, he is our brother and in the fellowship... this is oneness and this is unity...That fellowship is strengthened and made joyful by doctrine, but it is the gospel and not doctrine that determines fellowship... In doctrinal matters there can be and will be diversity of opinion and interpretation. It was so with the apostles themselves. But this is good, for we stretch each other's minds and help each other to grow in knowledge in our mutual search for truth..." (Leroy Garrett, *Restoration Review*, Ch. 17, pp. 42-46).**

◆ Romans 14

**"The good news is that God "is able to make [the person] stand" who is wrong in his doctrinal conclusions but who is trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation. That is the only hope any of us has, since not one of us has figured out the truth on every subject and none of us ever will on this earth. Any religious system which speaks otherwise is contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ and ought to be rejected. (Edward Fudge, "Gracemail" ([www.edwardfudge.com/home.html](http://www.edwardfudge.com/home.html)))**

We can compare this with Ephesians 3:4 and John 8:32.

- Grace covers active sins

**" The present frontier is the frontier of a grace-based fellowship with all our brothers and sisters in Christ. A truth began to dawn on us in the 1960's and 70's and increasingly through the 1980's. That truth is that God's grace extends not only to our moral imperfections but also to our doctrinal short-comings" (Gary Person, *Image Magazine*, Sept/Oct, 1993, p. 32)**

**" There should be room in the Christian fellowship for those who believe that Christ is the son of God, but who differ on eschatological theories such as premillennialism, ecclesiological matters such as congregational organization, on soteriological matters such as whether baptism is 'for' or 'because of' remission of sins" (Carrol Osburn, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 1993, pp 90-91)**

But please notice:

- ◆ If fellowship includes those who are baptized "because of" remission of sins, why not extend fellowship to *all* those who are in the denominational world who hold to any view of baptism – why limit fellowship to only members of the church of Christ?
- ◆ In fact, Unity-in-Diversity has in view all those who accept the deity of Jesus regardless of baptism or not.
- ◆ This is an accurate picture of unity-in-diversity and must be remembered when some of our more "conservative" brethren began to advocate unity-in-diversity!

- “But,” some say, “Those are radicals, not us.” But let us look at brethren closer to home who are making the same argument.
  - ◆ **“What is the basis for one’s hope before God? Is it not that we sustain a right relationship with God through Christ?... In other words - if one is right about Christ, then that one can be wrong about some doctrinal instruction without being lost, can he not?” (Arnold Hardin, *The Persuader*, XI:16)**

But what doctrine can we be wrong about and be right (2 Jn 9-11)? Worship? Work? Organization? Can we be wrong about Jesus?

- ◆ **“On what basis do we establish the bounds of Christian unity? Are individual fellowship and congregational unity based on total agreement? Historical reality denies that unanimity existed in New Testament congregations or that it exists today. Is there, then, a scriptural basis for maintaining unity when brethren disagree? If so, what are the limits of the concept of unity-in-diversity?” (Ed Harrell, “The Bounds of Christian Unity, *Christianity Magazine*, March 1989, 6)**

Can he be right that “historical reality denies that unanimity existed in New Testament congregations?” See Acts 4:32; 1 Cor. 1:10; 4:17

- ◆ When we see that some are concerned about the “limits of the concept of unity-in-diversity,” we note that most advocates recognize the danger of this position and try to issue disclaimers
  - If there are no limits on unity-in-diversity, universalism would be true.
  - So, to be in unity, one must accept the deity of Christ.
  - One must not allow moral turpitude.
  - One must not be factious or dogmatic.
  - One must be honest.
  - One must allow for a lack of clarity in the biblical text.
- ◆ But, once the gate is open – There is no stopping place!
  - If one horse is allowed through the open gate, how can the others be stopped?
  - If one doctrine is allowed through the open gate of unity-in-diversity, how can other doctrines be stopped?
  - If unity-in-diversity includes error on the divorce issue, how can we avoid fellowshiping those who are willing to put eons of time in the creation week of Genesis 1-2, or make a pagan myth out of the serpent in Genesis 3, or teach that sinners are annihilated, not sent to eternal hell? What is next? There is no stopping place! It is better to oppose error in its inception than to wait until it is full grown.
- ◆ But the essence of unity-in-diversity is toleration.

**“Within certain limits, God grants to Christians the right to a private conscience in matters of ‘faith.’ I believe that right is discussed in Romans 14. However,**

**whether or not one accepts my exegesis of that passage, honest minds must acknowledge the reality of a past and present Christian world that tolerates contradictory teachings and practices on important moral and doctrinal questions.” (Ed Harrell, “The Bounds of Christian Unity,” May 1990, 134)**

Again, if “contradictory teachings and practices on important moral and doctrinal questions” are going to be permitted, what are the limits of unity-in-diversity? If we are willing to put the soul-destructive doctrine of Homer Hailey into this category and fellowship him and those who hold similar views, where do we draw the line – or do we? Where is the stopping place – or is there a stopping place? Can we have fellowship with other error on Genesis 1-2, and Genesis 3, and on eternal punishment? Yet there are those who continue to defend unity-in-diversity:

◆ **Traditions of the Elders**

**“Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, ‘Why do your disciples transgress the traditions of the elders?’”**

**Mt 15:1-2. Jesus answered this false argument in vv. 3-9.**

- Some say it is not our “tradition” to split over divorce question. Brethren did not split during the restoration movement over this, and brethren did not split in the last generation over this issue, so we should not split over it either.
- **“How Shall We Treat Brethren With Whom We Disagree?” by Earl Kimbrough distributed by Bob Owen at Temple Terrace, Sept 1993**

◆ **Inconsistency**

- The argument is made that “some of you disagree on the divorce-remarriage issue and you fellowship one another, so why can’t you fellowship others with whom you disagree?”
- It is falsely charged that some of “us” disagree with one another or that we fellowship those who teach error.
- We all believe the teaching of Christ: “one man, one woman, for life, with one exception” (Mt. 5:32; Mt. 19, etc.).
- Areas of judgment, however, are not bound on one another: who gets to the court house first, what is stated in the divorce decree, etc.
- But, if someone could prove me inconsistent, would this change the truth?
- What is meant by the “inconsistency” charge? Are you saying that we should be “consistent” and fellowship others who teach error on divorce and remarriage such as Olan Hicks, Harold Dowdy, Jerry & Don Bassett, W. L. Wharton, et al?

◆ **“You Practice What We Practice”**

- **“It would be less than honest to argue that scriptural local churches always exist without imperfections and, indeed, without some diversity of belief. At least two chapters written by the apostle Paul, Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 10 speak in detail of the proper approach to disagreement.”**

**(Ed Harrell, “The Parameters of Fellowship,” Christianity Magazine, March/April, 1997, 20).**

- In other words, it is charged that every church practices unity-in-diversity.
- Contention: Every local church has error in it, and every church practices fellowship with error. Romans 14 is said to authorize unity-in-diversity in contradictory teachings and practices of moral and doctrinal error.
- It is true that a growing church may have brethren of different levels of maturity and faith.
  - Babes in Christ
  - Ignorant and untaught
  - Deliberate teachers of error
  - Rebels and heretics
- But Romans 14 does not authorize fellowship with sin! It refers to matters that are:
  - “clean” – v 14
  - “good” – v 16
  - “pure” – v 20
  - Nothing inherently sinful
- Romans 14:1-15:7 cannot violate its immediate context
  - Romans 13:12-14 condemns moral sins
  - Romans 16:17-18 condemns doctrinal sins
  - How, then, could the intervening verses authorize fellowship with moral and doctrinal sins?
- But this is exactly what some are teaching!

**“Now the fellow who thought it could be a sin to eat those meats had to look at the other fellow and think he was sinning. Had to. In Rome, the fellow who thought it was a sin to eat any kind of meat would have thought you sinned if you ate a piece of meat. And yet Paul taught them that they should accept one another” Bob Owen, “We Differ, Can We Fellowship?” Concord, NC, Feb 19, 1995)**

- ◆ How, then, do we handle sin in the local church? This is a fundamental truth that should be understood clearly.
  - Matters of authorized liberty are described in Romans 14
  - Matters of sin and error (whether babes, ignorant or rebels) are handled in such passages as:
    - Eph. 4:11-16
    - 1 Thes 5:14
    - 2 Thes 3:5-6
    - Jude 22-23 (and similar passages)
    - Godly elders, shepherding the flock, and faithful preaching and teaching will bring babes in Christ and the ignorant to maturity, will teach the gainsayer and confront the rebel and false teacher. If they are not brought to repentance, discipline will be enforced to keep the

church pure. This is not the same as never-ending, continual fellowship with sin as unity-in-diversity proposes.

➤ Notice three charts which illustrate the difference:

<u><b>Unity-in-Diversity</b></u>
<i>“contradictory teachings and practices on important moral and doctrinal questions”</i>
<p><u>The Practice</u> Open-ended, never-ending fellowship; toleration</p>
<p><u>Things Considered</u> Inherently sinful practices; things commanded or things forbidden</p>
<p><u>How To React</u> “Receive one another” (Rom 14:1)</p>
<p><u>Result</u> Sin Continues; leaven influences all 1 Cor 5:6-7 <b>UNITY IN DIVERSITY</b></p>

<u><b>Unity of the Spirit</b></u>
<i>“contradictory teachings and practices on important moral and doctrinal questions”</i>
<p><u>The Practice</u> No fellowship (Eph 5:11; 2 Jn 9-11; Rom 13:12-14; 16:17-18)</p>
<p><u>Things Considered</u> Inherently sinful practices; things commanded or things forbidden</p>
<p><u>How To React</u> With love and patience, bring to maturity, repentance, knowledge or withdrawal – Eph 4, etc</p>
<p><u>Result</u> Sin is purged, knowledge increased, church purified <b>Unity of the Spirit</b></p>

<u><b>Unity of the Spirit</b></u>
<i>Matters of Authorized Liberty, Personal Conscience; Indifference to God</i>
<p><u>The Practice</u> Open-ended, never-ending fellowship</p>
<p><u>Things Considered</u> Practices that are clean, pure, good</p>
<p><u>How To React</u> Receive one another; do not judge; be fully convinced in own mind; do not violate conscience; do not bind where God has not bound; respect brethren</p>
<p><u>Result</u> Personal conscience respected; peace continued <b>Unity of the Spirit</b></p>

- ◆ **Accentuate the Positive – Eliminate the Negative**
  - *Thematic for Christianity Magazine*
  - No dissension or differing voice allowed
  - False teachers used constantly in articles
  - Editor Ed Harrell used 17 articles to defend Homer Hailey
  - No other editor resisted or opposed
  - Legacy of Christianity Magazine is it Unity-in-Diversity approach to error
  
- ◆ **Demonize Those Who Oppose**
  - Under banner of unity – vilification
  - Personal attacks on brethren
  - Destroy by slander and prejudice
  - Note: This has been one-sided and will continue that way
  - There remains a willingness to meet and discuss differences as brethren
  - We will not answer in kind

**“A pack of snarling curs, suspicious and paranoid, biting, snarling and snapping in all directions...” “...a paranoid frenzy of biting and devouring one another..” “..slander in the name of the gospel...” “journalistic and pulpit jingoism..” (Paul Earnhart, “Watch Them Dogs,” CM, July 1995; With All Boldness, Dec 1996).**

**“Extremists who have their own cause to promote..” “..reckless and irresponsible...” (Editor’s Report, CM, Nov 1992).**

**“Unrighteous and dishonorable...” “...sectarianism,” “jingoists” (Harry Pickup, Jr., University Heights, Lexington, KY, July 14, 1998; Forest Hills, Tampa, FL, Dec 1998, Q&A Session, audio tape)**

**Most common appellation: “watchdog”**

**“Scavengers” “looking for carrion,” “perennial gossips and fault-finders (often ‘nit-pickers’), “vultures” “unreasonable scrupulosity,” “witch hunters” and “brotherhood inquisitors” (James Adams, *With All Boldness*, July 1996, 5; *ibid.*, August, 1994, 1-2).**

Such language has never been retracted

- Serves as impediment to fellowship
- Such language violates unity of Spirit
- Regardless, we want doors to be open

- If “we” are doing it all wrong (too unloving and unkind)
  - ◆ Who is going to deal with the problem of unity-in-diversity
  - ◆ It is a growing problem and must be met or it will engulf brotherhood
  - ◆ We recognize that Jesus was the only perfect teacher

- ◆ If “we” have made mistakes, please step forward and deal with it better
- ◆ But, if “we” all died today, divorce, unity-in-diversity, soft preaching, compromise and error will still be here.
- ◆ What are those who oppose our approach going to do about it?

### **Conclusion**

**What are you going to do about it? If I, and my brethren, have done it all wrong, will you take up the challenge and do it right? Where is your voice speaking out against the evils of divorce and those who advocate it? Where is your voice crying out against unity-in-diversity? Where is your voice speaking out against fellowship with “contradictory teachings and practices on important moral and doctrinal questions”? If you do, you may find yourself vilified as we have been. To be sure, there is room in the kingdom of God for different voices, different styles, who, at different times, deal with sin and Satan. If it is a matter of judgment as to how and how much sin is opposed, why is your judgment better than ours? But if your judgment is better, we will not strive about methods and details. You will gladly be received as you as your voice to those already in the battle.**

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