

## Introduction

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is  
For brethren dwell together in **UNITY!**  
It is like the precious oil upon the head,  
That ran down upon the beard,  
Even Aaron’s beard;  
That came down upon the skirt of his garments;  
Like the dew of Hermon,  
That cometh down upon the mountains of Zion:  
For there Jehovah commanded the blessing,  
Even life forevermore.  
— PSALM 133 —*

- ➔ Brotherly unity is like “*precious oil upon the head*” (1,2).
  - The *sweet-smelling anointing oil* poured over the head of the high priest.
    - Contrasting the rank, foul-smelling odor of animal carcass, etc.
- ➔ Brotherly unity is like “*the dew of Hermon*” (3).
  - *Mount Hermon* = **one of highest peaks on earth**.
    - So massive, the daily morning dew it provides is so abundant, it has been said to *pour* off of tents!
    - We can imagine, then, how “sweet” “the dew of Hermon” is to those in that part of the world...
- ➔ In our last session we looked into the word of God to see what we could learn about the church of the NT.
  - One of the things one will realize very quickly and easily is that there is only **one** church.
  - We concluded that any church which matches the marks of identification of the NT church is, indeed, the NT church.
- ➔ But one might very well ask the question:
  - “Yes, there was only one church at *first*, but **does it necessarily have to be that way today?** I mean, just **how** ‘united’ does God desire us to be? Isn’t their strength in diversity?”
  - Let us open up God’s word and discover His will regarding **religious unity**.

## God Desires Oneness

- ➔ The word “*unity*” as used in NT means **ONENESS**, which really bears down on the *special significance* of the word.
- I. **JOHN 17:6ff—Jesus Pours Out His Soul Shortly Before Crucifixion**
  - A. Included in this earnest prayer was the urgent request for **absolute ONENESS** among His followers (20,21).
  - B. The simile of vv. 20,21 is illustrative and powerful:
    1. The Lord wants those who “believe in” Him to be **ONE**—but just *how* “one” does He want us to be?
    2. As “**ONE**” as *He and the Father are one!*
    3. Well, just how “**ONE**” are God the Father and God the Son?—**Absolutely, perfectly ONE in every way.**
  - C. This prayer alone shows us one thing, at least: **The Lord desires unity among those who believe in Him.**
- II. This is sufficient for *honest* souls, but it lacks any straight-forward, *specific* ideal of the **kind** of oneness He desires.
  - A. Some claim that Jesus was simply praying that *all* the thousands of “churches” would stop being antagonistic towards one another over their respective “doctrines” and would join hands under the banner of *Jesus Christ*.
    1. **But is this what the NT teaches? Is this what God wants?**

## God Commands Oneness

- ➔ Not only did Jesus express His desire for His professed followers to be one, but it is a **divine command**.
- I. **EPH. 4:1-6—Instructions Concerning the Importance of Unity in the Body of Christ**
  1. The book of Ephesians is about *the church of Christ*, and includes much about *how it is to operate*.
  2. One thing commanded is to be “eager to **maintain the UNITY of the Spirit in the bond of peace**” (4:3).
  3. He goes on to mention seven “ones” to illustrate the *oneness* of God and all things relating to Him.
- B. Yet, there are **two different aspects of oneness** in this passage:
  1. **PRACTICAL** Oneness
  2. **DOCTRINAL** Oneness

## God Commands Practical Oneness

- ➔ The less controversial aspect is the **practical**—walking in *humility, meekness, patience, forbearance, and love* (Eph. 4:2).
- I. **PHP. 2:2,3—God’s Standard of Religious Unity**
  - A. The key to practical oneness and peace within the church is **individual humility and meekness**.
    1. The former “is a low estimate of self...and a...disposition to be low, unnoticed, and unpraised.”<sup>1</sup>
    2. The latter is “that unresisting, uncomplaining disposition of mind which enables us to bear without irritation or resentment the faults and injuries of others. It lays hold on the sovereign will of God as our supreme good, and delights in absolutely and perfectly conforming itself thereto.”<sup>2</sup>
- II. I am commanded to **count others as better than myself!**
  - A. This means that I should choose *you over me*—**period**.
  - B. *I know \_\_\_\_\_ would benefit my brethren, but I really just don’t feel like it... What should I do?*
- III. Paul goes on: “...not looking each of you to his own things, but...to **the things of others**” (4).
  - A. This is not an ambiguous reference to “caring about” others.
  - B. We are commanded to “**look to**” the things of others.
  - C. To “look to” something implies an **evaluation**, a *conscious effort*, and, indeed, a **pursuit!**
    1. *How can I better serve my brethren?*
    2. *Is there anything I can do to benefit \_\_\_\_\_?*
- IV. When people step out of their **self-absorbed** lifestyles and start “looking to” the things of *others*, the world starts to look a little bit brighter—and the **church** is no exception!

## God Commands Doctrinal Oneness

- ➔ Almost all would agree that **practical** oneness should prevail.
  - However, *most* would also suggest that we should do this **in spite of doctrinal differences**.
  - *Does the NT speak about doctrinal unity? Just how deep does the NT concept of religious oneness go?*
- I. **1 COR. 1:10—God’s Five-Point Checklist for Acceptable Religious Unity**
  - A. **All Speak the Same Thing**
  - B. **No Divisions**
  - C. **Perfectly Joined Together**

<sup>1</sup> Lipscomb, David & J.W. Shepherd. *Commentary on Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1963. p. 70. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pp. 70-71.

- D. **Same Mind**
- E. **Same Judgment**
- II. The modern-day claim to fame is thus: “Christians [so-called] need to stop bickering over ‘doctrine’ and unite under the banner of Christ! Let us put our petty differences aside, agree to disagree, and join hands!”
  - A. This sounds so politically correct and so full of wisdom—but such a concept is **utterly unbiblical!**
- III. 1 Corinthians was written at a time when there were **no “Christian” denominations**—therefore:
  - A. *If we are all to “speak the same thing,” we cannot “agree to disagree.”*
  - B. *If we cannot “agree to disagree,” we must figure out what we are to speak!*
  - C. *But there are thousands of denominations with so many different teachings—Whose do we choose?*

## Conclusion

- ➔ Referring to the day when the church was established, Luke makes an extremely significant statement:
  - “And **they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ teaching** and fellowship...” (Acts 2:42).
  - For a time, there was only **one** “Christian” church—i.e., there were the Christians, and there was everyone else.
- ➔ But somewhere around the middle of the first millennium, the very first denomination was established.
  - **When/how did it happen?—SIMPLE:** When men **stopped “continuing stedfastly in the apostles’ teaching”!**
- ➔ Thus, this “*same thing*” that we are all to speak is **the apostles’ teaching, under authority of Christ**—i.e., **the NT!**
  - MATT. 28:18-20—“*All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations...: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you...*”
  - 1 COR. 14:37—“*If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are the command of the Lord.*”
- ➔ Any body of people who are **not** “continuing stedfastly in the apostles’ teaching” are, thus, not disciples—not “Christians”—and therefore they are not **God’s!**
  - 2 JOHN 9—“*Everyone who goes too far and does not remain in the teaching of Christ does not have God. The one who remains in the teaching...has both the Father and the Son.*”
  - 1 COR. 4:6—“*...that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written...*”
- ➔ Those who **do**, however, are **the church of God in Christ** (1 Thess. 2:14)—i.e., the **only** church that is “*of God in Christ*.”
  - Let us all, therefore:
    - ▶ “**be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**” (Eph. 4:3);
    - ▶ “**continue stedfastly in the apostles’ teaching**” (Acts 2:42);
    - ▶ “**learn by [the apostles] not to go beyond that which is written**” (1 Cor. 4:6)!