

The Ideal: The Biblical Pattern Of Unity - Response to A Paper Presented by Dr. William Turner

By Dr. Ray H. Hughes

First, I would like to respond to the title, The Ideal: The Biblical Pattern of Unity. The Psalmist probably expresses the ideal best, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (Psalm 133). He exclaimed, "How good and how pleasant!"

The word which is used for pleasant is used also in the Hebrew for the harmony of music, as when all the strains of an instrument blend together in one harmonious sound. It is also used for the sweetness of honey. He compares this unity to the precious ointment that was used in the anointing of the high priest. He also compared this unity to the dew of snowcapped, tri-peaked Mount Hermon. When the cool air of the snowy peaks of Mount Hermon meets the warm air of the desert, the clouds dispense a copious dew that is saturating, penetrating, and soaking. Therefore, it is no wonder that at the base of Mount Hermon there are gardens, orchards, and fertile fields. The dew of Hermon penetrates to the roots of trees and plants. It is not just a surface moisture.

Likewise, unity is not just a surface experience. It is not diplomacy or display. It goes much deeper. Unity is a heart experience. Where unity prevails, there is a penetrating, saturating love that reigns.

The writer mentions that we are overrun with forces aimed at dissension and chaos and that unity will not come without a struggle. There are forces without and within which fly in the face of reconciliation. The prognosticators of our time do not paint a bright picture for racial reconciliation. There are some loud voices stirring racial hate. The rap artists blatantly drive a deeper wedge between the races, and our youth are called upon to be militant in this respect. While the forces on the outside seem to be formidable, I am of the opinion that the greater enemies of reconciliation are from within--division, disunity, and strife. The Word of God says, "For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work" (or disorder) (James 3:16). God is not the author of confusion.

Possibly the greatest hindrance to evangelism and church growth is the division in the body of Christ. Those who would come to Christ stumble over the lack of the fulfillment of our testimony and the church itself becomes an obstacle of its own message. In this we oppose ourselves.

The writer points out that keeping the unity is an endeavor. While it is true that the Spirit is the author of unity, the Word admonishes us "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). We must guard it, maintain it, and cherish it. As the Scripture says, this is an endeavor. It takes strenuous effort on our part. In keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace we must be in submission to God, to those over us in the Lord, and to each other. In fact, submission is a prerequisite to maintaining unity.

First, our submission must be to God: "Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). This does not mean the destruction of one's will, but it does mean that we allow Him to take our wills and make them His. It is a recognition of His complete and full control of one's life. We are no longer our own; we are bought with a price.

Secondly, we must submit to leadership. Everyone, regardless of his stature, has someone who is over him in the Lord. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you (Hebrews 13:17).

There is a general resentment against restraint, restriction, and discipline in our day. While we are to submit to those over us in the Lord, there is a corresponding responsibility of every leader to follow the guidance of the Spirit and not to be lords over God's heritage.

Thirdly, we must submit to each other. "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" (Ephesians 5:21). This submission entails concession and cooperation. At times it will mean the surrendering of our own preferences and esteeming others better than ourselves. It means putting our own interests aside in order to serve others. It is at this point that we seem to have our greatest difficulty. Therefore, we must lay aside pride because "only by pride cometh contention" (Proverbs 13:10).

We must also be willing to forget the past as it relates to our hurts and offenses. Some of us hang on to historical reports with a passion, not considering that history is not always absolute. Many things written by historians are written according to their perspective and that is not always the full truth. We must deal with "hearsay" and "it is reported that" within the context of the matter. In other words, we must seek to know the whole truth and reject rumor. We must always allow the Spirit to have full course in us because He is in the process of bringing us to full Christian maturity--"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). And it will take Christian maturity to bring about true reconciliation.

The writer underscores that the Bible pattern of unity is by the Spirit. Unity has its origin in the Spirit. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we

be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13). The Spirit is the chief administrator of the church and where He is Lord, unity is His objective. It is His power that brings us to oneness. The Spirit works through various gifted ministries to bring us into the full unity of the faith. Therefore, true unity is not manmade and cannot be forced. Men often form unions, amalgamations, and structures to present a united front, but the Spirit forms a body based on love to fulfill His redemptive purpose in the world.

The writer says, "There can be no contentment in our souls or our churches until the Spirit has full control." God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think," but we must not forget that this is "according to the power that worketh in us" (Ephesians 3:20). "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). The Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance which assures us of our heavenly inheritance. For it is the Spirit who will translate us and we shall be caught up TOGETHER with Him.

The calling of this meeting is in itself a declaration of unity, but all of us are aware that we must go beyond the declaration. Our love is not to be "in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). The changing of the name from Pentecostal Fellowship of North American to the (proposed) name Pentecostal Churches of North America to include all Pentecostals is a noble purpose. The reconstitutionalizing of this fellowship to reach out to others is commendable, but all of this effort will not fulfill the intended purpose unless there is a change wrought in us by the Spirit who makes believers to be of "one heart and one soul" (see Acts 4:32). It was this type of unity and a spirit of togetherness that made the New Testament church so effective. They experienced the unity of prayer and prayed with one accord until the Spirit descended upon them. "All that believed were together" (Acts 2:44). They experienced the unity of worship: "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple" (Acts 2:46). And when they were persecuted, "Being let go, they went to their own company" (Acts 4:23). They had fellowship together.